

STEPPING OUT

Rights of Way in the Parish of East Leake.

At present my own “Stepping Out” is considerably restricted. Whilst out walking with the Ramblers on New Year’s Day I fell heavily on some ice and broke a bone in my pelvis. So now instead of being out in the fields and footpaths I am hobbling around on a Zimmer frame! So my walk descriptions in the next couple of months will have to rely on memory. I won’t be able to check them out on the ground.

You might remember that last month I set myself the task this year, in this series, of describing every one of the 27 rights of way in the parish of East Leake.

Rights of way are footpaths, bridleways and byways and they are called rights of way because the public has an absolute legal right of passage. Anyone who obstructs a right of way is breaking the law. Each right of way is given an official number and because of duplication in the original numbering East Leake’s numbers go from 1 to 25. There are two number 19’s and two 25’s. They range in length from the shortest No 18 of only 20 yards to the longest, No 11, which is nearly two miles long. Altogether they total nearly ten miles.

Throughout the year I shall describe the paths in roughly numerical order. So I shall begin this week with footpaths 1 and 2. These two footpaths take you from Burton Walk to the old St Peter’s churchyard on the way to Rempstone.

Footpaths Nos 1 and 2 to St Peter’s Churchyard via the Animal Centre – 3km return (2miles)

Walk up the Nook into Burton Walk and go up the steps between nos 36 and 38. Follow the footpath to the left and then through a kissing gate. This is the start of **Footpath no. 2** which goes to the left along the ridge of the hill behind the houses on Potters Lane. The path to the right going down the hill is No. 5 and will be featured next month. Footpath no.2 emerges onto the road at the top of Castle Hill.

Whilst walking along footpath No 2 in the two fields before you get to the road you will have noticed the corrugated nature of the surface of the land. This is the remnant of a type of cultivation from mediaeval times. It is called ridge and furrow and it survives in those fields that have remained pasture since the land was enclosed. The East Leake Enclosure Act was 1798 and prior to that the land was cultivated in open fields by strip cultivation. There were three vary large open fields in East Leake: Hill Field to the north; Woodgate Field to the south and Brickcliffe Field to the east. Village farming families did not have land of their own but were allocated strips in the open fields. It was the way these strips were ploughed that resulted in the corrugations of the ridge and furrow pattern. It is possible that an added bonus was the better drainage that resulted. The crops were grown on the ridges and the

water drained away in the furrows. You will have noticed that if you walked along footpath 2 in the rainy season.

On reaching the road at the end of footpath 2, you cross the road and walk along Mill Lane. You are now on **footpath no.1** which you can follow to the parish boundary just before you get to St Peter's churchyard.

At the end of the lane the footpath leaves on the right to go round to the left of the Animal Centre.

Once round the other side of the Animal Centre make sure you take the public footpath with the hedge on your right rather than the farm trail down the other side of the hedge. This footpath brings you down to a stile and a bridge over the Sheepwash Brook. Cross the bridge and turn left and in a few yards you arrive at the parish boundary and cross into Rempstone. The footpath continues alongside the brook to the ruins of St Peter's Churchyard. The Sheepwash Brook at this point is the parish boundary between Rempstone and Costock, Costock being on the other side of the brook. So there is a meeting here of the three parishes of Rempstone, Costock and East Leake.

From St Peter's Churchyard the path carries on through a very large arable field to Rempstone. This footpath is one of the few paths that keep the same number when they cross the parish boundary. It is still footpath no.1 (Rempstone) as far as the "new" church at Rempstone.

The churchyard of St Peter's in the Rushes

Before leaving the old churchyard of St Peter's it is worth having a look around some of the old gravestones which are mainly from the eighteenth century – though the last one is dated 1820. No one really knows what caused the settlement around the church to decay. The church itself was apparently in good condition until about 1730 but by 1760 the main settlement was further away to the east and in 1766 a brief was obtained to build a new church. Many of the stones from the old church were incorporated into the new building which was completed in 1771. This explains why very little of the old church ruins are now in evidence. The two substantial tombs in the old churchyard of John Davys and Robert Marsden were both **inside** the old church. The foundations of a square tower, about ten metres to the west of the Davys tomb, were excavated during an archaeological investigation in 1962.

Dennis Fox