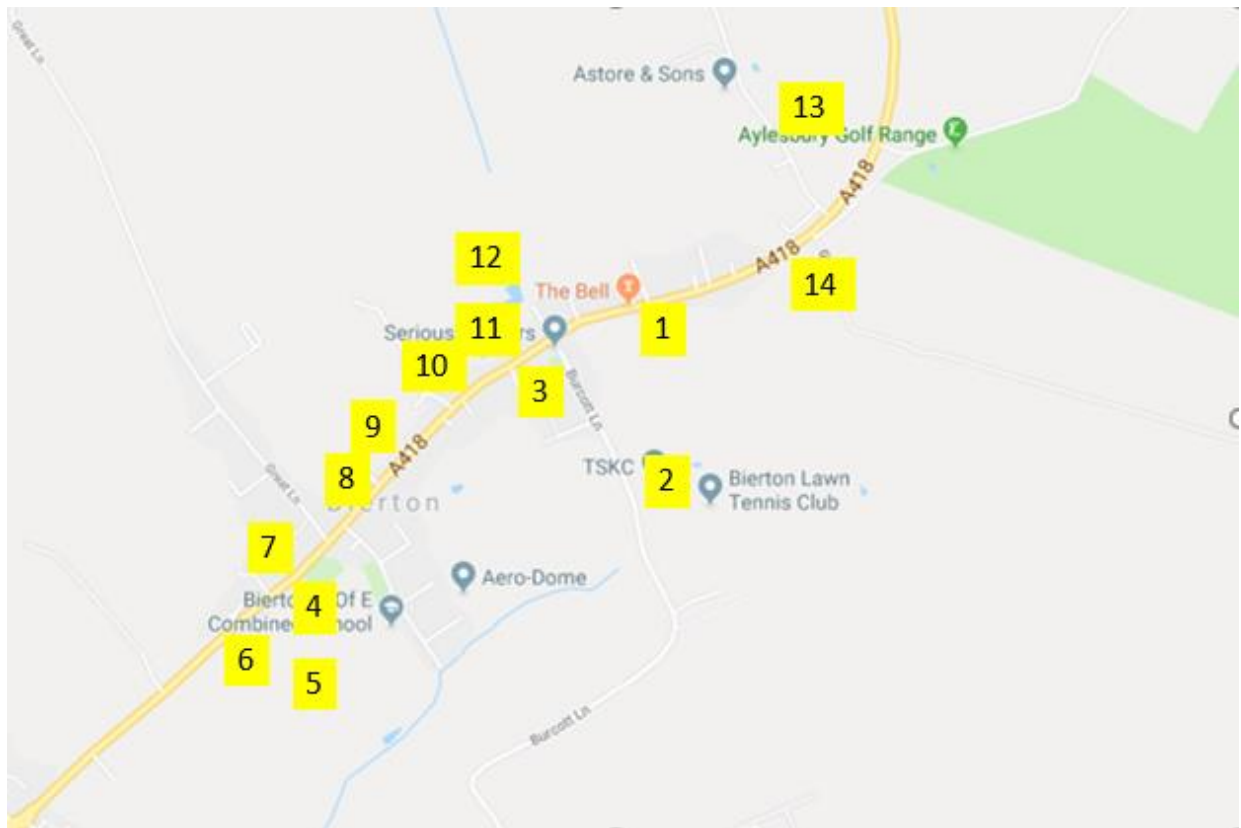


## Bierton historical walk

Distance: 1-2 miles  
Terrain: Good  
Interesting points: Everything!  
Difficulties: None  
Not suitable for: People who are easily bored by history



Bierton was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as Bortone, meaning farmstead near a stronghold. The village has also been known as Bortone, Berton and Bearton. There is evidence of farming in the area well before the Romans arrived and the remains of a substantial Roman Villa have been found on the site of the present churchyard and school.

- 1 Starting at the Bell Pub, walk towards Aylesbury and turn left walking down Burcott Lane to the Sports Centre/Recreation Ground on the left of the road.
- 2 Here you can see the pavilion and football pitch which were dedicated to the memories of the people of Bierton who fought in WW1. The left-hand side of the pavilion has a dedication on it.



The dedication plaque reads “1914-18. In remembrance of those from this village who in their country’s hour of need responded to her call. Especially of those who returned not whose names are recorded in Gods acre. The pavilion was erected, and this field given by the Rothschild family for the recreation of the people of Bierton and Broughton.” A little later, we’ll see the village war memorial and find out more about them.



Leaving the Recreation Ground, walk back up Burcott Lane to the top of the road.

3

The building on your left is the old Wesleyan Chapel which was built in 1877.

The chapel stands on the same site as a Methodist School and chapel which was built in 1835.

It was taken over by the Elim Pentecostal Church in the late 1970s and was finally closed as a place of worship in 1994 and now houses Serious Readers, who sell specialist lights

The photo above shows the Chapel around 1900.

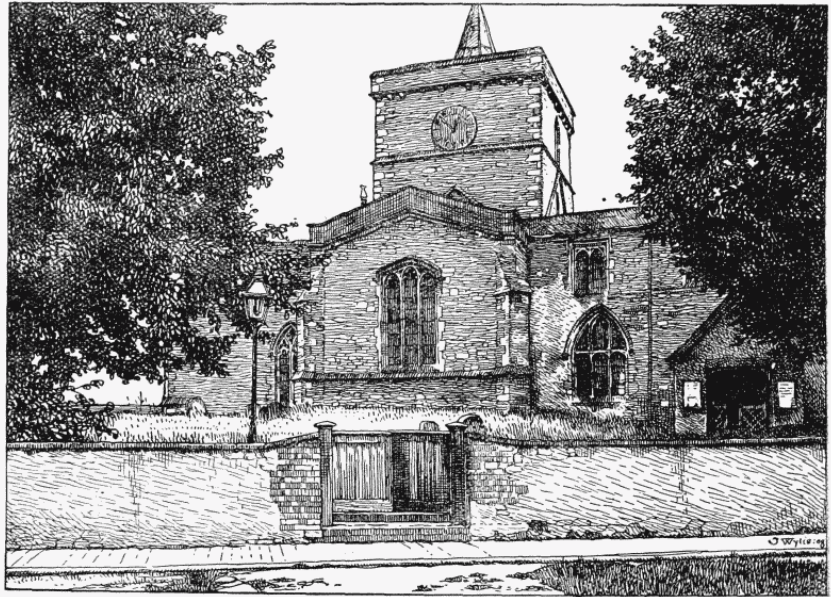
Turn left onto the Aylesbury Road and continue walking towards Aylesbury until you reach St James Church on your left.

4

The first records for the church are in 1294 when Robert de Thame was appointed vicar.

There is evidence that a church existed here even before this as the font within the church dates to the time of the Saxons.

British History have kindly given permission to use their image of St James. The above sketch was drawn around 1908 as the WW1 war memorial and cross aren't yet erected.



The current building is thought to date back to 14th century and the main structure has changed very little since then. In the 15th/16th centuries the walls of the north and south aisles were raised and extra windows added. The present roof and the stained-glass windows are 19th century. The church has 7 bells, the oldest dating back to 1678. The bells and bell frame were refurbished in 1972.



Near the main entrance to the church is the WW1 war memorial which commemorates the 17 Berton residents who fought in the war and didn't return.

Inside the church is a stained-glass window commemorating resident who fought in WW2.

Just after the church is the old vicarage, take the path just after this house to St Osyths Well.

5

Historical photos of the well show a house (possibly a school at one time) where there is now a kissing gate leading to the field behind the school.





St Osyth was a local Anglo Saxon princess born at Quarrendon Palace. Reputedly beheaded in the woodland at St Osyth Priory by the Danes after having earlier drowned in a stream and been revived by nuns, It is not known why the well at Bierton is dedicated to the saint, only that ancient Bierton was on the route that her body was taken from the priory to her final resting place, and it is said that they made a stop off at Bierton and laid her body down at the wells current spot and it is for this reason that the well is dedicated to her.

As you walk back to the main road, notice the old vicarage garden on your right, this featured in at least two paintings by artist Rex Whistler during his visit to his parents in 1940, just 4 years before his death. One painting is entitled 'two ladies taking tea in the vicarage garden' and the other is 'Canon Elliott in the vicarage garden at Bierton.' (see below)



Return to Aylesbury Road and turn left.

6

The houses by the bus stop are the old school house and school masters house. The first national school in Bierton was built in 1848 on land behind the school, prior to this classes were held in a house close to St Osyths well. The school served Bierton, Broughton and Hulcott until a separate school at Hulcott was opened in 1855. Bierton school moved to its current location in Parsons Lane in 1963.





Walk back to the church and on the opposite side of the road is the Red Lion pub. This is one of 7 pubs which used to be in the village.

**7** The Red Lion public house is a 16th-century inn, and was significant during the English Civil War.

Bierton was a Royalist stronghold, opposed to its larger Parliamentary neighbour of Aylesbury, and the Red Lion was host to many Cavalier Officers, and rumours have it to Charles I himself. A minor battle was fought northwest of the village towards Weedon.

Keeping the church on your right, continue to the crossing and cross the road. Turn right and walk towards the Rowsham end of the village.

**8** On your left just after the crossing is Jubilee Hall which was built in 1935 under a scheme whereby villagers bought (paid for) a brick. 1935 was the silver jubilee year for King George V and Queen Mary. Have a look at the plaques and names on the bricks on the front and right-hand side of the hall.

**9** Immediately after Jubilee Hall is the old Eagle Brewery – you can still see the glass in the door with the pub name.



The photo on the left shows the Eagle Brewery around 1908.

Continue along the Aylesbury Road towards Rowsham.



10

Compare the view from this photo taken c1900 which shows the pond near the current location of Barnett Way.

The pond was often used to soak the wheels of carts and provide a drink for horses.



11

Further along, on your left you'll see the former Baptist Chapel which was built in 1831 and enlarged in 1835. The chapel was used by a Society of Particular Baptists.

Their Articles of Religion declare they were Protestant, Calvinistic Baptists.

The chapel was closed for worship in 2002, after all the former members died, and it was eventually sold in 2006 and is now a home.

Across the road is Old Forge Gardens which was the site of the Birston Blacksmith until c1940/45.

To the right is a photo taken from the other side of the road. It shows the cottages on the left which face towards Burcott Lane.

The tree on the right is near the old Wesleyan Chapel.



Continue to Brick Kiln Lane on your left, as you turn into Brick Kiln Lane look round at the building on the left corner and you can just make out the writing on the wall which shows this used to be the local baker and butchers shop.

12

Walk to the end of Brick Kiln Lane and take the footpath on your left, through the fence you can see the old clay pit ponds. Which gave Brick Kiln Lane its name. Brick making was a major industry in Bierton. The ponds are private property.



Return to the Aylesbury Road and turn left. Walking to the far end of the village and turn left into Rowsham Road.

13

Around 100 metres on your right you'll see the old stone steps used to store milk churns to make it easier to load them onto horse drawn wagons.

Return to the main road and turn right.

14

On your left you will see Gib Lane this was the location of the last public execution in Buckinghamshire, where a chimney sweep called Edward Corbet from Tring, was hanged in 1773 in irons on a gibbet at the corner of the lane which is now called Gib Lane. If you want to read more about this – please see the appendix at the end of this walk.

Continue towards Aylesbury and on the other side of the road you will see the mile marker. This was place in c1810.



As you walk back towards the Bell Pub, see how the view has changed since c1900.



## Appendix – Gib Lane

Edward Holt was a chimney sweep and rat catcher who lived in Tring. He had an excellent dog, a terrier who was an excellent rat catcher. He was employed by Richard Holt, a farmer and widower to clear rats from the farm buildings that Richard owned. Sadly, Richard's daughter, Mary was seriously ill and died.

During the night of 7th June 1773, Edward snuck back to the Holt farmhouse and saw Richard praying beside the coffin of his daughter. Edward waited until Richard had retired to bed, then climbed onto the roof of the farmhouse and climbed down the chimney into Richard's bedroom looking for items or money to steal. He knew that Richard had a pocket watch and gold chain.

Cruelly, Edward bludgeoned Richard to death as he slept, then scoured the house for valuables which he put in his sack. He left by the front door, closing it behind him and returned to his own home in Tring.

Early the next morning, the milk-boy arrived. He had a key that Richard had given him so that he could let himself in. He was surprised to see the door unlocked and even more surprised when a small, distinctive terrier trotted out of the house. The dog belonged to Edward Corbet and had entered the house as his master had opened the front door to leave.

The milk-boy alerted neighbours that there was something amiss and they found Richard's dead body in the house. The neighbours recognised the terrier and encouraged the dog to 'go home' and the dog led them straight to Corbet's cottage where the stolen goods were found.

There was a lot of clear evidence about Corbet's guilt, his dog inside the house, the stolen property and the fact that he'd been working at the farm. On



19th July 1773, he was found guilty by the court of assizes and sentenced to death on the gallows and then to be hung on a gibbet. Corbet was one of three people to be executed in Buckinghamshire that year, Samuel Lamb and Francis Mortimer were found guilty of highway robbery and executed on 17th March. There hadn't been any public executions in the previous two years in the county. This was one of just 3 'hanging in chains' executions in England in 1773.

The location of the gibbet was traditionally as close to the site of the murder/crime as possible.

Francis Smith, an Aylesbury blacksmith made the ironwork for the hanging and the 18-foot-tall gibbet was erected in the corner of a field not far from where the murder was committed. He charged the following for building the gibbet.

£			s.	d.
"July 23, A.D. 1773.	To 6lb. Spikes	0	2	3
"	"	Iron for Gib-post	0	16 4
"	"	Nails for the Gib	0	4 0
"	"	3 hund'd tenter Hooks	0	3 0
"	"	The Gib	5	0 0"

The 23rd July 1773 was a very busy day in Bierton as hundreds of people gathered to watch the hanging. The spectacle of a hanging would have been a form of entertainment as well as a deterrent, especially when the dead man was then put into a metal gibbet to be left until his body rotted and just a skeleton was left. Locals would have gathered to see the spectacle, enjoying food and drink sold by vendors – it would have been a fair or party atmosphere, unless your name was Edward Corbet.

We're told that Corbet was left rotting inside the gibbet for around 20 years. The hanging took place in July, warm, sunny, July, followed by warm and sunny August and September, so you can only imagine the stench. There are stories that cottages nearby had to keep their windows closed. A new footpath that ran from the Chalkhouse Arms along the back of a row of cottages was created to avoid having to talk too close to the rotting corpse.

More than 20 years later, in 1795, a visitor to Bierton noted, "...the gibbet was still standing, and to the irons was attached a human skull, which was the skull of the man who had committed the murder."

Edward was left in the gibbet for so long that villages incorporated him into directions they gave to strangers.

'Aye, the Hulcott Road? Pass the Chalkhouse Arms, turn left by the horse trough, keep going until you see Corbet's Piece, then turn right.'

The last remains of the Gibbet, which had been used as a gatepost for the rickyard belonging to Mr Dockens of Bierton, was taken down on August 15th,

1860. The post was about six feet long, and had been cut from the upper part of the Gibbet, and was about six inches square; in it were two mortise holes, the one eighteen inches below the other; there appear marks of the rubbing of chains. Mr Watts, chairmaker, of Bierton, bought the piece with a view to work it up into various fancy articles

#### Sources:

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