

Memories of the River Ver - Redbourn

Memories and stories associated with the River Ver north of Redbourn.

David Scott writing in 1987: "By 'Verlam End' beside a tree is a hollow reported to be the friars washing place; I remember seeing water here often in the late 1960's. The river bed has been ploughed in down to the next hedge, however its course has remained evident from there to Luton Lane. This stretch, Verlam End to Luton Lane, was the site of the Friars Wash Point-to-Point races; the course crossed the river twice, up by the cottages (Verlam End) and lower down some 200 yards before Luton Lane. There is a black-and-white film of this event kept in Redbourn – it shows horses jumping a 6-8ft wide river in 1953.

"There was a ford at Luton Lane for many years, even after it was culverted several times I had to raise my feet to clear the water flowing over the road; this was part of my daily cycle ride to work at Luton 1946-55."

Mrs King lived as a girl in New Cottages, Harpendenbury. In 1928 "there were watercress beds in front of the house as far as Luton Lane. At the footbridge downstream where the path from Harpendenbury to Flint Cottages (Porridge Pot) crossed the river, we watched trout under the bridge. We skated on the pond nearby (now part of the golf course), and caught newts although the pond dried out sometimes. In the Osiers, which was forbidden ground for us, there were kingfishers; kingcups grew among the willows.

"Father was a drover of sheep and cows. One time on his way to Cambridge, he was told to get his sheep off the road as the King was coming. This he did, his dog running up and down to keep the road clear. The King threw a shilling to my father, this I still have, a George IV 1896 [?].

"Father used to say that on his journeys if he came to three trees together by water he was allowed to water his animals; if there were five trees then it was permitted to rest them overnight."

Mr R.S. Drew lived in Ver Road, Redbourn. "Having worked on the railways, living at Watford and travelling to Euston each day, then we had to pay our fare out of about £3.10s a week wages. It was a bit much so I left and came to Redbourn to live in 1937 to work with my father-in-law, Bill Simpson, in the watercress beds. I worked for him for eight years until 1945.



“When Tommy Sansom suddenly decided to give up watercress my father-in-law and his brother Jack took it over. Jack with Bobby Vise worked the top pond by Waterend Lane, the beds by Arnolds and further down from Dolittle Mill to Redbournbury, and on down almost to Bow Bridge. Bill worked the upper beds by Luton Lane, the ‘Big Head’, the ‘Little Head’, the ‘Main Beds’ – from Taylor’s Farm (Harpendenbury) down to Harpenden Lane – ‘Bottom Pond’ by what is now

Redbourn Industrial Estate, one by Chequer Lane and another down by the Prè; seven beds covering about seven acres altogether.

“As the spring waters dried up so the upper beds were left and given up until only Bobby Vise was producing cress. He finally gave up in 1984.

“There were gravel bottom beds and mud bottom beds, the latter needed a runner platform down the centre of the bed to support a plank from the bank, this was worked along the bank of the bed and the cutter knelt on it to cut the cress, as he finished cutting within reach so he moved the plank to a fresh area. The mud in the beds could be as much as 4ft deep. The river from Luton Lane ran by the side of our main watercress bed; it was about 2ft deep and 5ft wide, with 4ft banks.

“The water from our beds flowed into the river making it deeper and wider. Spring water was abundant until the pumping station started working at Friars Wash. Then the river started drying up and we had to abandon the beds causing me to find another job. It also caused the drying up of our beds near Harpenden Lane. We had to keep the river free from weeds to allow the water to run away from the beds.



“The watercress men wore high length leather waders which were so heavy and stiff that the men were unable to straighten up and walk away; they walked with bended knees. These waders were completely watertight but so heavy.”

Mr H. Dunckley was brought up at Scout Farm, on Watling Street. “My first recollection of the River Ver would be the drying up in 1927, of the trout splashing in the puddles, one in particular of 3-4 pounds. This was in the Osiers near the footbridge. The Osiers at that time did not come under Scout

Farm but was in Major Sidebottom's 'shoot' who I learned later had stocked the river once but never repeated.

"One thing I remember was the crystal clear water; many a time have we quenched our thirst directly from the springs. We made two swimming spots in the river meadows, the first being close to Harpendenbury Farm, we had to dam the river to get a depth of 4-5 feet, and in this pool we learned to swim. About 1935 we moved our pool lower down just above the Osiers as the first pool had become very muddy, the second being a bed of sand. I remember rushes making a good changing-room; of course we had to dam the river again.

"'Taylor's Lane' was granted as a concession to Harpendenbury Farm on payment of £2 per annum and the upkeep. This was usually maintained when the river dried up, gravel from one spot above the farm was used, and this eventually became 6ft deep.

"Below the Osiers a watercress bed was producing during WWII. In the river meadows we had for several seasons curlews and sandpipers although I cannot recall any nests being found. In the Osiers we had plenty of moorhens and kingfishers. In the rushes below the Osiers we found mallards, teal, snipe, reed tits and quite a few cranes or 'mollerns' were frequent visitors".

The Osiers as it was, and compared with the present day.





David Scott writing in 1987, “The Osiers’ for the benefit of those who never visited it, was an area from Taylor’s Lane westwards including the river, about 150 yards by 200 yards plus, up and down the river. Sloping down from Taylor’s Lane hedge it was a self set spinney and thicket with a small fenced clearing for bee hives. Towards the lower river level the spinney thinned to more open wet ground with many alder trees and tree trunks, quite a few had fallen over but were still growing. Through this ran a skein of ponds of varying sizes and depths, all overgrown and linked by the meandering stream. At the northern end near the barbed-wire fence were the red brick abutments of an earlier footbridge, the southern end opened out with a shallower ponding and fewer trees. One predominant fallen willow reached over the water; one stood looking south west to Harpenden Lane with the straight parallel ditches of the river and the cress bed in front, the hedge, Taylor’s Lane and the hill to the left and on the open rising ground to the right stood three or four straggling, youngish Scots pines.

“Behind was the Osiers and the hazards of chest high nettles, thorns, boggy ground and dung, for it was much favoured by young bullocks; an area loved by all youngsters, much less ‘private’ in later years although you might still be ‘reminded’ occasionally.

“In the laying of the bypass (1981) the route chosen was through the least productive land north of Harpenden Lane, the Osiers, the haunt of naturalists, albeit on private land. The bypass designers, in order to get rid of the spoil from hill cutting created an artificial bank, for this the river was moved and the new river bed was cut 2 metres below the Osiers in order to allow a farm track culvert under the new road, a trap for road surface sludge mixed with cow dung which cannot get away because of a lip downstream, such a far cry from the haven of two years earlier.”

Brian Waters (from ‘**Thirteen Rivers to the Thames**’, Chap. 8, pub. 1964)

“When I first explored the River Ver, which is the true source of the Hertfordshire Colne, it rose by Markyate, not far from the source of the River Lea, and ran like a gutter to Watling Street towards Redbourn, straying here and there form the great highway among the Hertfordshire meadows.

“When I first came to Redbourn in the early spring of 1956 the river bed above the village was dry and the water jump for Hertfordshire Hunt Point-to-Point was grass grown. Even at Redbourn the channel of the river ran uselessly through a market garden, with a little bridge over the dry bed in a timber yard, where a man told me that the river had disappeared in the previous year and added: ‘I don’t suppose it’ll ever run except when where’s a lot of snow or rain.’ The Ver dried up when they sank the wells at Flamstead”

Further notes on Redbourn Common and the River Red (or the ‘reed-bourne’):

Redbourn Common or Heath is a substantial area of open rough grassland lying to the west of Roman Watling Street, and to the east of St Mary's Church and Church End. In medieval times it was owned or claimed by St Albans Abbey as Lords of the Manor of Redbourn, but villagers had common rights of pasture, turbary etc.



After the Dissolution, ownership of the Common eventually passed to the Gorhambury Estate in 1629. In 1947 the Earl of Verulam handed ownership of this most treasured village asset to the Parish Council. At the formal ceremony to mark the occasion it was rightly, and proudly, stated that "the village had always possessed one of the most lovely commons in the country" and that "cricket and the Common were inseparable."

The Common's most notable feature, the tree-lined 'Avenue' and footpath was previously made up of ancient elm trees, but these have now been replaced

with limes (*Tilia x vulgaris*).

The River Red – in a field to the east of the ancient Aubrey's fort or enclosure (occupied now by the course of the M1) lies 'Seven Spring Field'. From time-to-time these springs come to life and, augmented by waters flowing down the line of Gaddesden Lane form the area of Great Revel End, would form the head of the River Red.

The bungalows to the north of the junction of Gaddesden Lane and Hemel Hempstead Road were flooded in January 2001 with these waters.



Therefore the ancient enclosure of the Aubreys would have been protected by open water and a wide expanse of marshy ground to its north, south and east.

The former 'Wagon and Horses' PH was situated on the northern side of Hemel Hempstead Road between St Mary's and Gaddesden Lane. It was entered via a small footbridge spanning the little stream, which ran in or alongside the road. Its lobby and gardens were sometimes flooded.



At St Mary's Church local lore has it that the south-east corner of the churchyard, alongside the Hempstead Road, cannot be used for burials as the ground is too wet.



The sale particulars of the former Redbourn Workhouse building, opposite the Hollybush PH in Church End, in September 1837 stated that the 'Estate' also contained "Two yards, in which are a range of sheds, a boarded and thatched barn, a wood house and a pump of water; there is also a good garden, with a small running stream at the end of it."

Springs in 'Mansdale Meadow' flowed down the bottom of Flamsteadbury Lane to the Moor – "these regularly rose and flooded every 7 years".

In the mid 19th century James Feary was fined two pounds with 13s.6d costs for poaching an eel from the river near Fish Street Farm.

Friars Wash Point-to-Point Races were first held in 1890, and the last on 21st March 1964, although it was not a constant annual event, and there were sometimes years between meetings. From 1929

there were usually two meetings held at Friars Wash. The races started at Annables Cottages and went in a mile and a half circle, firstly on the north side of the River Ver to Watery Lane, then across a hedge and the river back towards Redbourn, turning to recross the river just short of Northfield Spring and so back to the starting point; the course was run twice, and had jumps constructed of birch twigs as obstacles at various points.

Although both Flamstead and Redbourn 'claimed' the races as their own, spectators (rich and poor) and bookmakers came from far and wide.

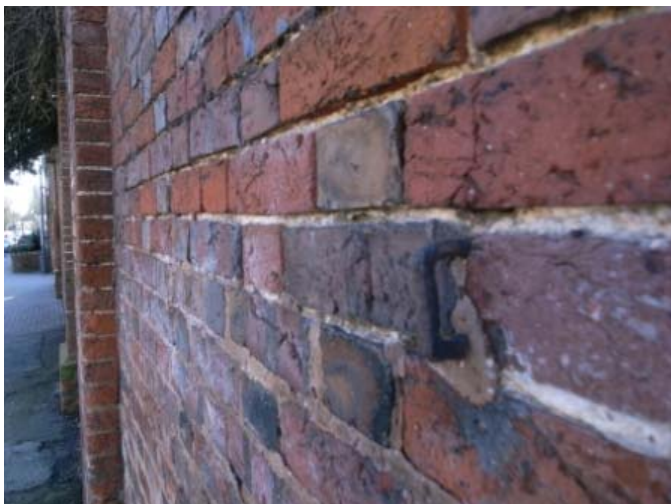
Friars Wash Temples Our Roman, and earlier, ancestors often worshipped various water and river deities. A 1976 aerial photograph revealed what was interpreted as a possible temple site in this area. Archaeologists dug over the site in the summer of 2008 for the Channel 4 television programme 'Time Team' and it was declared so special as to be "of national importance".

In a sense local people, and the Ver Valley Society, continue the tradition of 'worshipping' the river today.

A golden-calf is said to be buried somewhere on the Aubreys enclosure/fort site. A similar legend has it that another such object is buried amidst the complex of Iron-Age ditches in the vicinity of Gorhambury and Prae Wood House, west of St Albans.



Redbourn Market and Fairs were held in the High Street for 250 years, from 1638. Most notable were the 3 animal fairs held each year, each day being allocated to different trading:



Sundays	-	Racehorses
Mondays	-	Hunters
Tuesdays	-	Cart Horses
Wednesdays	-	Cattle
Thursday	-	Sheep

The hooks where the animals were tethered can still be seen in the wall of 'Cumberland House' on the west side of the High Street.

Redbourn Pumping Station is situated at Northfield Spring a mile north of the village, between Watling Street and the River Ver. It was opened in 1938, and supplies a licensed 1 Ml/d to the village via a large water tower to the west of Watling Street. Until that time all water was supplied by surface wells in the village itself.

Memories and stories associated with the River Ver south of Redbourn.

'Highways and Byways in Hertfordshire' by Herbert W Tompkins, pub 1913

"I have seen something of those pleasant dales and trout-streams since I set out upon my way and need but to ramble around Redbourn for a while to know that hunting, shooting and fishing are not neglected arts hereabouts. Was not snipe-shooting, as practised by many a sportsman in the valley of the Ver, discussed an hour ago at the 'Tom-in-Bedlam Inn'? (formerly in High Street, from at least 1760 to c.1920). Water-rails, too, were very plentiful a few years back at Redbourn Bury, and must have sorely taxed the patience of local shots; for few birds, even among the 'Grallatores', are so shy, so fond of creeping quietly in and out of the densest herbage by the water's edge". (Chap 7, p.150)

Mr M Webb wrote in 1989: "I am 76 now – my Grandfather John Sansom came to Redbourn in 1885 and started watercress growing in the Redbourn area; his cress beds ran from Friars Wash to 'Watercress Hall' near Shafford Mill (the site is shown on some old maps). My uncle, Tom Sansom, used to take me with the horse and wagon to see the men cutting the cress and to bring it home. At that time there was a great flow of water in the Ver; the river ran high and so did the carrying ditches beside the cress beds. There was enough water to run two 'breast' mills; at Dolittle Mill there would be 12 foot head of water where at present it is all lawn.

"Between Chequer Lane and Dolittle Mill on Watling Street, were numerous springs, with one swimming-hole six feet deep with a diving board; it had numerous dabchicks and from here to Hawkins (Redbournbury) Mill, swans bred every year, and that stretch was full of trout".

Mr Roy Cutler was born at 'The Runners' (the 'Running Horses Inn', was the Green Man from at least 1692 , to c.1889, situated on Watling Street, half a mile south of Redbourn, now a house). Their cellar flooded every 2-3 years and there was a real flood during WWII with 5-6 feet of water in the cellar.



The Little Mill or Do Little Mill millpond as it was and below as it looks today.



Dolittle Mill ran until about 1930; there has been a mill here since the 14th Century. "We used the clear river water in the house whenever the well went wrong (about 1944)".



The Jolly Gardeners and the Moor. These pictures span nearly 100 years.



His mother remembers watching the butcher washing 'chitlings' in the Moor by the 'Jolly Gardener'. There was a pub called 'The Sheep Wash' in the last houses in East Common by Chequer Lane, so-called because sheep were washed in the nearby River Red.

Geoff Webb ('Redbourn Commoner' pub. 1982) "Before this luxury (owning a car) we weren't deprived of going out, because on Sundays it was traditional for families to go for a walk after tea. There were recognised walks in any direction from the village. It wouldn't be long before we met another family, when all local topics and occurrences came under discussion by the adults. These walks encompassed all aspects of country life such as the railway cutting and the field, with the river always a favourite to produce something of interest for everyone.

"The river was a constant attraction for our prying eyes, where moorhens and dabchicks were flushed, and water voles – water rats to us – just had to be chased, only to see them disappear under water to reach their nesting chambers, via a river bank hole. One of the wider bends was used as a swimming pool by a lot of us, with nearby reeds acting as our changing room. We were able to run along the bank and dive into the deepest part, often to emerge draped in duck weed or some other river vegetation. Near the cress beds, where the water was shallow, our fishing nets captured minnows and sticklebacks, displayed proudly on the banks in water-filled jam jars. Fish could clearly be seen through the crystal water, moving in shoals over the rivers' smooth muddied bottom, but in the breeding season male sticklebacks acquired an iridescent sheen of silvery green on their upper bodies, in contrast to their tummies, painted in a striking scarlet. If anyone was lucky enough to catch one of these giants he was the envy of all those 'tiddler' anglers along the bank, for we watched goggle eyed, as the 'red throats', or 'firery-cots', circled strands of water weed in their glass prisons. I used to take my catch home and give them their freedom in a horse trough by the back door, but I could never fathom out why they were floating belly-up next morning."

(Mr Webb's family ran a dairy business from their home overlooking the Common and War Memorial for a hundred years up to 1958).



At the start of Ver Valley Walk 4 we head south, across Redbourn Common. Here, at the foot of the slope we cross a narrow, shallow but clear stream; this is the River Red or reed-bourne (ie: reed-stream) from whence Redbourn derives its name. It is the Ver's main tributary, and its catchment covers an area of approximately 10 m² to the west and north-west of Redbourn.

Flowing, open water is usually to be seen on Redbourn Common (here known as the 'The Moor') from its exit from a culvert beneath Hempstead Road. In the past the stream flowed on the surface for some distance to the west (from about the area of the road junction of Gaddesden Lane and Hempstead Road) but this section is now piped underground. Nevertheless, as the River Red catchment has none of its water abstracted this little stream often keeps the Ver flowing from its confluence southwards, whilst the main river channel to the north is dry.



The expanse of water and river margin used to be much greater than now; during spring and summer months, especially, it must have been a rich place for wildlife with its lush green vegetation spreading out on the valley floor. The Moor was partially in-filled during the middle of the 20th century, but it still possesses some of that old character, including small, dense stands of reeds at its margins.



[Insert image R0010966]

The Punch Bowl Public House is on Watling Street 2 miles to the south of Redbourn. It is known from at least 1633; it was much enlarged in 1901. New owners changed its name in about 1990, and subsequently it has been 'Spritzers', 'Fudge', 'MetroBar' and is currently '24/7'. It now operates as a 24

hour licensed nightclub and runs private parties, DJ nights, as well as some single-sex events (June



2011).

The old name lives on in the name of the lane opposite and in the lovely watermeadows to the south-east. It remains a significant landmark on Walk 4, on Watling Street hereabouts, and in the Ver Valley.

To the east the path proceeds across an arable field, and then Redbournbury Watermeadows. The River Ver is crossed via a structure called an 'Irish Weir' (stepping stones). Its main purpose is to divert some of the river water along the natural, sinuous channel on the valley floor; when the Ver is enjoying higher flow water passes over the concrete sill, as well as under through 2 or 3 pipes.



The watermeadows here, between Redbournbury and Shafford Mills are designated as a County wildlife site.



The 'Irish Weir' and subsequent bridge, is a lovely spot. Rest a while.



Redbournbury Mill and Farm occupy an important and significant, position at approximately the mid-point on the Ver's course.

The suffix 'bury' is derived from OE 'burh', a fortified place, stronghold, variously applied to Iron-Age hillforts, Roman and Anglo-Saxon fortifications, and fortified houses, later to manors and manor-houses and to towns and boroughs.

Around 1042/7 the Manor of Redbourn and its two watermills were given to the Abbey of St Albans by Aegelwine le Swaste. Redbournbury Mill and Farm were at the heart of the medieval manor of Redbourn. The Abbey Chamberlain resided here, and regulated the everyday working of the manor. Sadly, the great tithe-barn which occupied the northern part of the farm complex burnt down in 1944. Parts of the farmhouse date from the 14th century.

Although a watermill has occupied the site of Redbournbury Mill



from at least Saxon times, the buildings have been altered or rebuilt many times; the Mill has burnt down at least twice, most recently in 1987 shortly after the current owners, the



James family, had taken up residence. The restored and working watermill we see today is a testament to their vision and determination.

Flour is again being milled from local wheat and the craft bakery adjoining has proved a success. It is open to visitors on Sundays, and at other times, as a 'working-museum'.

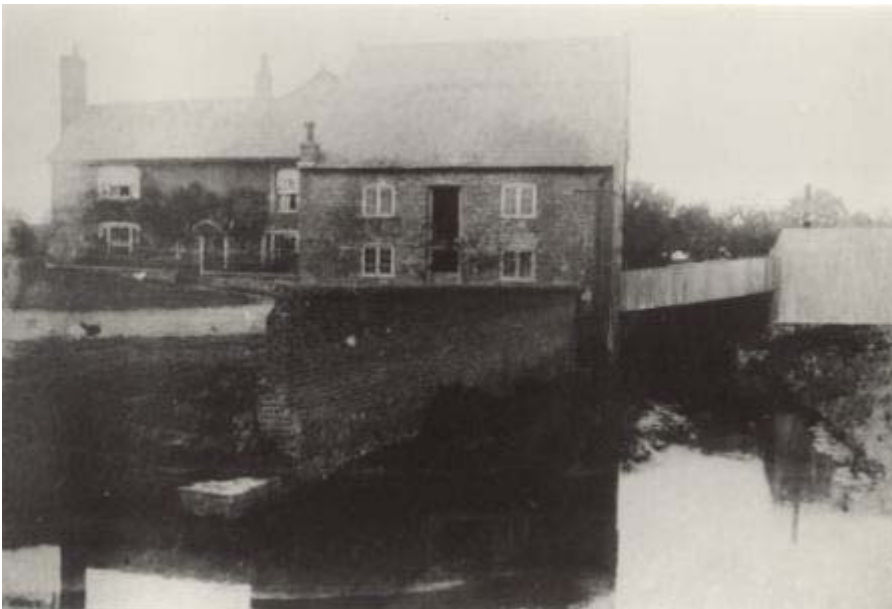
See www.redbournmill.co.uk

The James family, and the countless volunteers who assist with the running and working of the Mill have once again placed it at the heart of village life.



Ivy Hawkins was the last of four generations of that family who were tenants of the Mill. She was born at the Mill and after 1932, following the death of her father, ran the business jointly with her mother. She too passed away in 1944 leaving Ivy to run the Mill on her own until the 1960's.

In 1959 'The Times' newspaper stated that "she is believed to be the only woman in Britain to run a mill of this type". This lengthy article (including some fascinating pictures) and the resulting notoriety brought about a sudden increase in visitors to the Mill. Apparently Ivy made them less than welcome!



From 'The Mills of Redbourn' by Alan Featherstone, sometime in 1956 "Ivy had climbed inside the large waterwheel to do some maintenance work, but this accidentally set the wheel in motion and Ivy had to escape quickly or be carried round inside the wheel. Unfortunately she was not quite quick enough and became trapped between a spoke of the wheel and the axle support on the outside. In this perilous position her body was taking the weight of the water in the now stationary wheel, but she was unable to move further.

“After being thus trapped for nearly an hour, her cries eventually brought help from the farm. It took several workers, using crowbars, to turn the wheel backwards and thus free Ivy. Not surprisingly, subsequent hospitalisation prevented her from working and the Mill had to be closed, probably for the first time in centuries. However, it is reported that it was not too long before she was back at Redbournbury, milking her herd of cows and operating the Mill again”.

Standing between the two Redbournbury fords, facing upstream it is possible to see the man-made embankment which channels the water to the mill wheel – this is the mill leet, and takes the Ver here further to the west than would naturally be the case. Prior to the establishment of the mill site the Ver would have flowed across the valley floor to the west ford making the Farm site even more of an ‘island’ in the river.

Facing upstream/north it is possible to discern both the mill-leet embankment, and the original course of the river which would have divided at the bottom end of the Fishing Club (formerly watercress) ponds.

For many centuries the first mill on the River Ver was half-a-mile upstream where Watling Street crosses the river north of Beaumont Hall. This was the site of Redbourn (Little) Mill, corrupted by local humour to Do-Little or Dolittle Mill.



Almost the same view, the probable site for milling since 1300, this mill ran until the 1930s, demolished for trunk road widening.

In 1344 “a certain five year old girl fell into the water at the mill of Bettespole (the medieval name for the mill) near Redburne and was quickly submerged. At the time the mill was grinding and the wheel was being rotated on its course all the more powerfully by an abundance of water. Thus the girl’s body passed under the wheel, yet, as it was believed, although ground and tossed about by the wheel, it remained whole and unscathed, at least by the mangling of the wheel. Many people rushed to the scene and when they saw the girl’s mother clasping her daughter in anguish they poured out a prayer to the blessed protomartyr, Alban; and lo and behold, while they were measuring and flexing the girl’s body, she began to revive and after a short time to show that she had fully returned to life”.

Unlike the gradual embankment of the river along the valley side above the mill at Redbournbury to form a ‘leat’ to drive the millwheel, Dolittle Mill had a mill pond on the west side of the road formed by a dam across the Ver. A two-sluice system in the dam would be closed prior to operation to build up a large volume of water which was then released over the millwheel to power the mill gear.

The Roman highway leading north from Verulanium would originally have crossed the river through a ford, but it is possible that they later provided a causeway and small bridge; this would later have been used to develop the dam and, with some subsequent alteration, this can still be seen today.

However, the mill pond did lead to problems on the highway at times. In 1622 it was reported “that William Norkett, miller, who hath suffered the watters to stand in the Mill Pond above ye height it ought to bee, whereby passengers hath not beene able to passe over at the sayd mill without danger, doe reforme and amend the same under the penalty of forfeiture for every tyme hee offends five shillings”.

Dolittle Mill was closed in 1927, and demolished in the early 1950’s when Watling Street was widened here.

Andy Webb: People and Places in the Ver Valley

An unfortunate (but unforgettable) encounter in Punch Bowl Lane: whilst walking out

Walk 4,

Sunday 2 August 2009 (written soon afterwards)

Half way down Punch Bowl Lane, heading for Watling Street, I came upon a parked up 4x4 (old) and its driver (older). Just behind the stationary vehicle, I knew that the hedge was broken here, around an old oak tree and a splendid view opens up south, down the Ver Valley towards St Albans Abbey perched on its promontory. I stopped momentarily to take a photograph, not really paying any attention to the man or vehicle in the adjacent ‘lay-by’ of the narrow lane. I don’t think he had noticed my approach at that stage, which is relevant to what happened next.

I took my photo and turned to my left to head on down the lane; as I did so, and faced the back of the vehicle, it seemed to me that the said gent (in his 70’s?) had made a jerky or throwing movement with his right hand, as he was standing at the front and left of the vehicle. This didn’t register immediately, but in the few seconds it took for me to walk to the front of the old banger (gent and vehicle!), I saw that dumped in a long line against the bank of the lane were numerous items of wood, bin bags, a small sink and other items of recent DIY-ing.

He, by now, was reaching up to the roof-rack and, remember, I was still walking away down the lane. Without thinking – it just came out – I asked, nodding at the debris, “Did you put that there?” His reply was shockingly crude and our subsequent exchange of views took no more than a few seconds:

Him: "Does it look as if I've just put that f*****g stuff there?"

(Well yes, in hindsight it seemed that way to me, and he was immediately on the defensive)

Me: "There's no need to swear – I'm just asking you a question".

Him: "Of course I haven't put that there you f*****g ****, I'm just taking some of the f*****g stuff away".

Oh dear, what have I started?! I am continuing to walk down the lane (away from confrontation?)

Me: "I asked you not to swear. All I'm doing is asking you a sensible question; have you just put that there?"

Him: "What do you take me for, you f*****g ****?" Why don't you just piss off?!"

Me: "Goodbye".

By now I am ten paces further on, and I left him ranting up the lane. It crossed my mind to wind him up even further by taking a photo of the dumped items and his number-plate, but I wasn't sure of his guilt and why should this incident overshadow what was a lovely walk on a beautiful day?

So I moved on and two minutes later I was approaching the junction with the main road. I was half expecting him to come tearing down the lane behind me to try and run me down, but he didn't. In a moment I had crossed Watling Street and passed through the hedge beside "24/7" bar (sometimes MetroBar, Fudge, The Punch Bowl). As I did so, the 4x4 pulled out from Punch Bowl Lane, right, towards St Albans.



In the middle of that golden wheatfield, beside a wooden pylon, I disturbed a dozen red legged partridges; in a great flapping of their wings they arced up and away and came down again about thirty feet distant. The knee-high wheat was ripening fast; its ears were popping open in the sun as I made my way towards the water meadow.



I had forgotten my recent encounter immediately; the view across the wheat field, and up the valley to Redbournbury Mill, down to Shafford and Childkwickbury on that golden afternoon bewitched me.



I spent a little time at the 'Irish-weir', stepping-stones



and bridge across the Ver in Redbournbury water meadows and then made my way to the Mill, where I spoke to my friend, the owner, Mandy James who was tidying the yard. Back in Redbourn an hour later I paddled briefly in the river at the ford in Waterend Lane before crossing the High Street



and The Common, back to my start/finish point near The Cricketers. I opted for a couple of pints and a bag of nuts in



The Holly Bush in Church End



though.

The sun continued to shine and a cricket match was proceeding on The Common as I re-crossed back to the High Street to catch my



3.50 pm bus back to St Albans, and home. So much had happened in just a few hours – what will you see in the Ver Valley today?

