



## Walking with giants

Steve Davison leads the way on this 5½ mile walk, with shorter 2½ mile option, through the rolling countryside around Aldworth – a place where giants sleep

**T**he picturesque village of Aldworth, known as Elleorde, meaning ‘old farm or enclosure’, at the time of the Domesday Book, has several interesting features including the Bell Inn and an old canopied well, said to be one of the deepest in England at 111m (365 ft). However, it is St Mary’s Church for which Aldworth is famed. Inside the church, which dates back to Norman times, are the ‘Aldworth Giants’, nine larger than life effigies of the de la Beche family, dating from the first half of the 14th century. The influential family, many of whom were warders to the Tower of London and Sheriffs of Oxfordshire and Berkshire, had come to England in the wake of William the Conqueror and built the

long since vanished ‘castle’ of de la Beche nearby.

According to tradition four of the giants were known by other names; the largest was known as John Long, and the three others as John Strong, John Never Afraid and John Ever Afraid. The latter, which has disappeared, is said to have promised his soul to the devil, whether he was buried inside or outside the church. However at his death he tricked the Devil, by being buried in the wall, neither in nor out of the church. The arch where the statue lay is on the outside of the south wall.

Although the effigies have suffered some damage over the centuries, probably during the English Civil War, they are still an impressive site and constitute the largest number of

medieval memorials to a single family in a parish church.

The area also has connections with two poets: Alfred Lord Tennyson married Emily Sellwood, whose family home was Pibworth Manor and her parents are buried in St Mary’s churchyard, and the ashes of Laurence Binyon are also buried here. He is especially remembered for the lines from his poem *For the Fallen*, quoted at Remembrance Day services:

*They shall not grow old,  
as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them,  
nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the  
sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them.*

## Walk Summary

**Start/finish:** The Bell Inn, Aldworth, 3 miles west of Streatley; grid ref SU555796 Map: OS Explorer 159 and 170

**Distance:** 5½ miles (8.8km) or 2½ miles (3.9km)

**Terrain:** stiles and gates, some climbs, field paths, tracks and country lanes

**Time:** 1½ or 3 hours

**Refreshments:** Aldworth – The Bell Inn (08719 170007)

**1 (SU555796)** – From the front of the Bell Inn head south-west past the old canopied well and follow the lane slightly downhill to reach St Mary's Church. Just past the church turn right along the track, passing to the left of the church. Keep straight on to pass Dumworth Farm and follow the track as it bends right heading north and rising slightly. Turn left along the hedge-lined lane for 250m to reach a byway sign and track junction on the right.

**2 (SU550804)** – Here the short and long walks go their separate ways:

**Shorter route:** turn right along the track for 150m and, at the left bend, turn right; now follow the longer route from Point 4.

**Longer route:** continue straight on along the lane, later becoming a gravel track, and pass a couple of houses at Starveall. Ignore the path off to the right and keep straight on at a track junction, heading north-west gently downhill. Later, a track joins from the right, go straight on for a few metres, ahead is a cross-track junction, and fork right up along a track for 650m to reach a Ridgeway signpost. The return route goes right here, however, before that continue along the track for 150m to visit Lowbury Hill. Fork left through a gate and continue alongside the fence following a permissive path to another gate. Go diagonally left to reach the trig point on Lowbury Hill, once the site of a Roman temple.



Looking west from the trig point on Lowbury Hill



The old canopied well in Aldworth



St Mary's Church, Aldworth

**3** (SU540822) – After admiring the views, retrace your steps back to the signpost passed earlier and fork slightly left following the old boundary line between fields. On reaching a track bear left (straight on) along the Ridgeway, keep ahead past the entrance to Warren Farm and fork right at the junction, leaving the Ridgeway. Continue along the track with great views to the left out across Streatley Warren with the Chilterns beyond. Where the track bends right, fork left; *the shorter walk comes in on this track from the right and turns right.*



The statue of Sir Nicholas de la Beche at St Mary's



**4** (SU551805) – Follow the grassy track (byway) through a gate and continue along the narrow field towards Bower Farm. Go through a gate with a thatched cottage ahead and immediately turn left through another gate following a track clockwise round the farm. Continue through the gate and along the farm track (byway) for 800m, ignoring a path to the right and another to the left. At the footpath sign turn right following the grassy strip between the fields, go through the hedge and keep ahead towards Aldworth. Continue along the enclosed path and shortly turn right along back to the Bell Inn.

#### MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Steve visit: [www.steve-davison.co.uk](http://www.steve-davison.co.uk)  
For more challenging walks in the Thames Valley see *Walking in the Thames Valley* by Steve Davison (Cicerone £12).