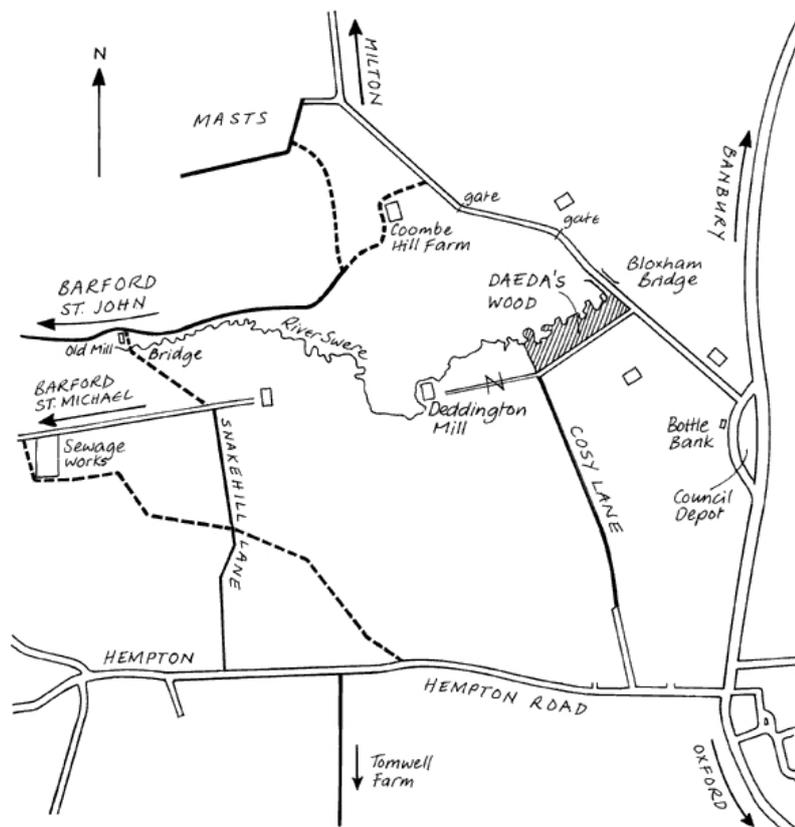


Ralph Elsley's Walks: The Quiet Waters By



This is a very pleasant though long walk which I had not envisaged originally and so is not on the map first issued with the series. It was inspired by Nan Harris's reassuring comment that Snake Hill was adder-free; it also involves making good use of the Hempton footpath.

Setting out along the Hempton Road you go almost to the bend at the end of the footpath before the newer houses of St John's Way. On your right is the opening of a broad track, known as Snake Hill Lane but you must take my word for it. This is about half a mile long, and quite steep. There are inviting views as you descend and half way down openings in the hedges on either side. These provide access on the left, rather circuitously via the Sewage Works, up to the Hempton crossroads, and on the right back to the road from Deddington, the access point here being the corner of the field adjacent to the last big new house on the way out. I propose, however, going to the bottom of Snake Hill where you come out onto a wide roadway with Blackingrove Farm on the right. The road on the left will take you into Barford St Michael but that is not my destination today.

Just across the road is a metal gate and a track diagonally to the left over the two fields which will take you via two wooden stiles and a little footbridge hidden away in the corner, on to a new metal gate by the tumbledown old mill. Here you come out onto another broad lane. To the left it goes on into Barford St John but, if you go right, you have before you a charming walk by a

spectacularly meandering stream with grazing cattle alongside. After a while you will see looming ahead of you on the hill-top the extensive derelict buildings of Coombe Hill Farm. Before you get there, having crossed a second cattle grid, you have the choice of ascending to the left through a steep sided lush meadow in which there may be cattle and horses. There is a wooden gate at the top and then you bear right and come on over a concrete pathway to an angle in the gated road to Milton. Alternatively you can continue on the winding path, through the farmyard. At the back is a large wooden gate. You then have to cross a cultivated field to the stile in the hedges opposite, which brings you out on the Milton Road a little nearer home. Between the gates on the Milton Road you have some of the finest views in the area.

Your way home can be up to the Oxford Road by the lay-by, but if it is not too wet underfoot I would strongly recommend branching off to the right after crossing the bridge over the river. The pathway through Daeda's Wood will provide a pleasant route back to the foot of Cosy Lane (described in 'North and South'). It is a formidable ascent but just pause a couple of times and look back! One advantage of this walk is that you have such a variety of choices; overall you are likely to cover five or six miles.