

A gentle meander *John Holder*

Porridge for breakfast and a cup of green tea. The old Anglo-Saxon is ready - a 1947 post officer's Hercules bicycle. A gentle meander ensues, down Cocksparrow Lane, Cat and Kittens lane, and on to Moseley Old Hall.

I am persuaded to alight here - it is a fine 17th Century house with formal gardens and herbal sanctum with orchard and roses, a delight. The staff dress in period costume and willingly share their knowledge of the hall and its interesting history. Should you wish to seek out this treasure, the hall rests approximately 2 miles west of the M6 junction 11 at Featherstone.

Shareshill village is on the way and hosts the parish church - itself a gem with its ceiling, a Wedgewood Jasperware masterpiece. Down the King's bridal path - Charles I road this way - I am cycling vigorously when suddenly ping! ping! Two spokes give way.

I have four sisters nearby, and when I visit they indulge me, so I call in. Whilst my bicycle is rested and repaired I notice daisies in the hedgerow - *Bellis perennis* or Day's eye, Chaucer's choice to pleasure the spirit. If your affliction be boils, bruises, varicose veins or a tight grip, this will ease your plight. And just a stride away, mugwort, *Artemisia vulgaris*. It stated in the Great Herbal of 1539 that 'Beith this herb in in house or stable, your stock will submit to a more manageable goodly nature'.

My stead now repaired, I hopped on and away, only to halt a little way further on, noticing lords and ladies (*Arum maculatum*). It is said to have grown on Robin Hood's grave, being called through the ages 'arrowroot' or 'Robin's arrow'. Starch was made from its roots for collars and ruffs, and it was used as a face cream in Elizabethan times. The monicker of arum comes from the Greek for poisonous - beware that all that is pretty can also be cantankerous of spirit!

The sound of church bells, and I must be away. Shareshill church beckons - I attend to enjoy a jolly good sing song, and the joy of being underneath that Wedgewood Jasperware ceiling.

John Holder hails from South Staffordshire.

