

## Walk 2

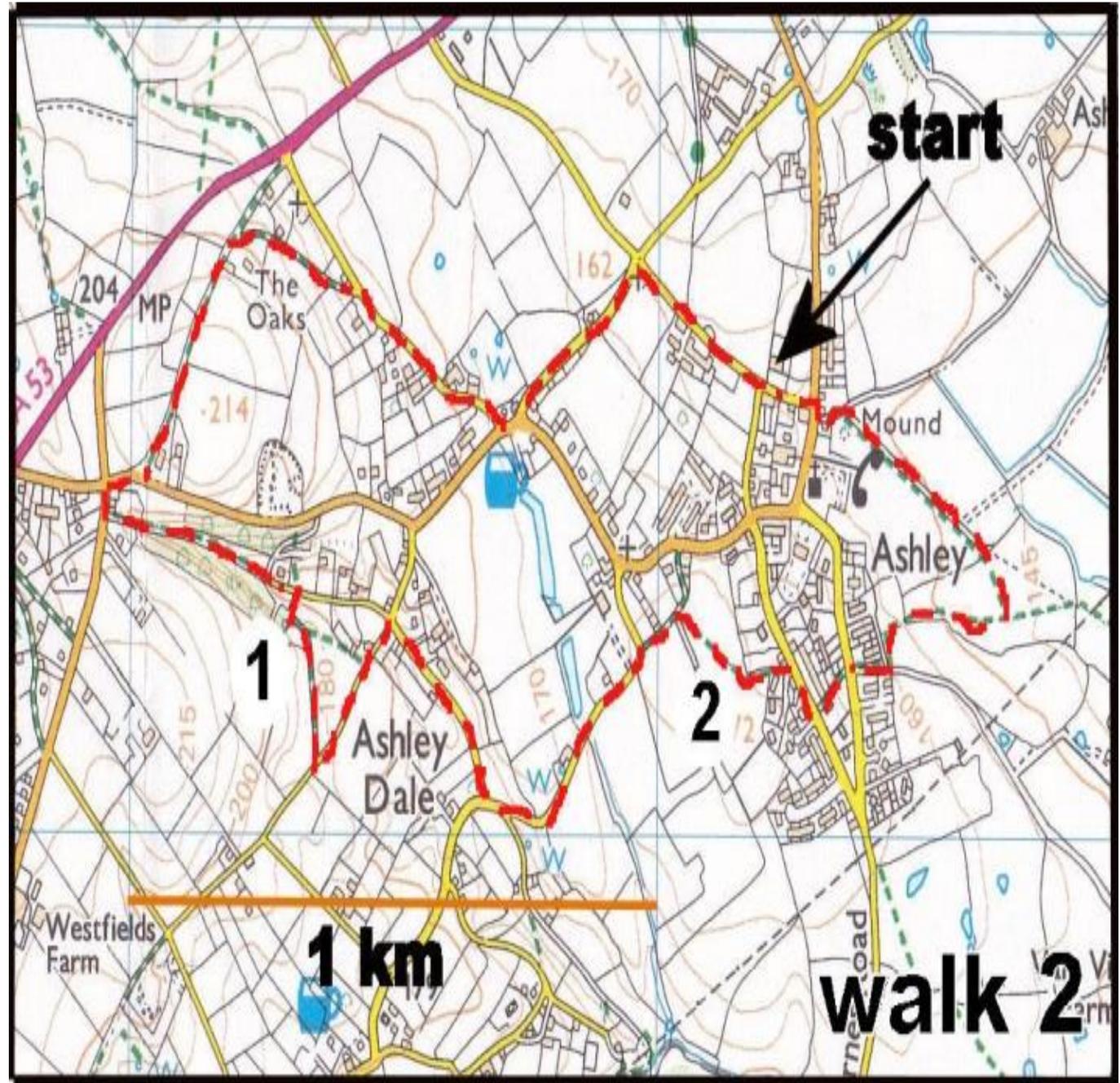
About 2 ½ miles

Allow 1 ½ - 2 hours

Another short walk taking in Ashley Dale and Ashley Village. It is surprising how peaceful the countryside can be so close to roads and houses. To emerge into Ashley Dale from Pinewood Road for the first time can be breathtaking. A stop en route is hardly necessary but there are two pubs both near the starting point, The Peel and The Meynell Arms. The walk starts at the Meynell Arms. Alternatively you can start from the Memorial Hall.

Turn right out of the car park into SCHOOL ROAD and walk up to the crossroads, turning left by the old Congregational Church into CHAPEL LANE (not signed). In 300 m, turn right into WESLEYAN ROAD and walk up this road for 300 m to fork left up an unmade gravel lane just after a white house. Carry on to the top of this lane, (noting the fine views to the right) to what appears like a junction of 3 tracks. Go straight ahead. This grassy lane climbs between hedges to a high point, affording fine views to the right towards Beeston Castle and the Mid-Cheshire Ridge.

Soon, pass to the right of Ashley Memorial Hall and at the road, turn right. At the crossroads turn left into PINewood ROAD and in 30m turn left over the stile by the footpath sign, to pass between hedges and over another stile. This is Ashley Dale – a tranquil spot at any season. Walk down the dale.



1

When you reach a house, cross over a stile and onto a metalled road. Just before the second house on the left is reached, go through a gap in the bushes on the right by the finger post marked 'Public Footpath to Hookgate.' Follow this track, keeping to the left at the top of the bank and in 150 m, turn left into BACK LANE. Walk down the hill and at the bottom at the crossroads turn right into the Dale. Fork left at the next road junction and keep left up the steep hill (HOWARD HILL). In about 300m, some metal railings are seen on the left on a bend in the road – our route lies through a gap in the bushes on the right, marked with a footpath sign. The path now leads through bushes and in 100 m crosses over a stile on the right and into a field.

2

Turn half right and walk straight across the field to the right-hand end of the hedge, which can be seen ahead. Go left down the side of this hedge and follow it to a stile in the field corner. Cross the stile, walk to the tarmac road, turn left and then immediately right into SOVEREIGN LANE (this commemorates the fact that King Charles first marched through Ashley at the head of his soldiers on his way South in 1645). At NORRIS CLOSE on the right, turn left between hedges to cross over a stile into CHARNES ROAD. Cross over and go down the road opposite, turning left at the bottom (in 50 m) into GERRARDS WAY.

In 40m, go through a gate on the right by a footpath sign.

Carry on to cross over a stile into a field. Walk on, keeping the hedge to the right and in about 150 m go over a stile then turn left along the grass track towards an iron farm gate. Go over the stile seen straight ahead, turn left and follow the track to the end.

3

Ahead to the left you will see the Parish Church of ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST. The tower, over 700 years old, is all that remains of the original building. The church contains several monuments including the massive alabaster tomb of Sir Gilbert Gerrard who died a year after Shakespeare. It is said to be the largest tomb of its kind in a parish church in England.

At the end of the track there are two gates and stiles. Just before the 1<sup>st</sup> stile is reached, look over the hedge to the left and note what is marked on Ordnance Survey Maps as a 'mound'. There are many stories about this, no doubt embellished over the years, but it is believed to be the mass grave of victims of the Great Plague. Turn right and then left into SCHOOL ROAD and back to the starting point.



St. John the Baptist Church, Ashley