

Mortimer Heritage Trail

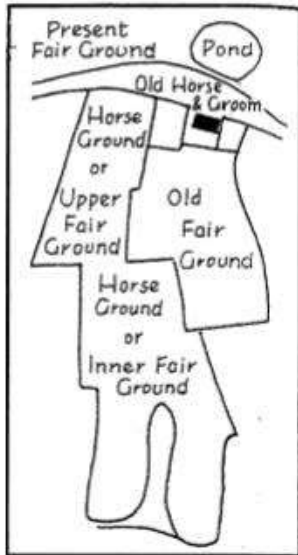
Walk 2: Mortimer Common 3km (2.25 miles)

This second of two moderate walks identifying interesting properties and places covers Mortimer Common, the newer part of the village, with homes being built mainly after 1880. Until then it had grown gorse and birch but not much else, the gravel soil being useless for agriculture. The Enclosure Acts from earlier that century had put the Common into private ownership. Housebuilding started slowly with existing 'squatter' cottages in Longmoor, Groves Corner and Summerlug being joined by a few more. West End House and Briar Lea House were the only sizeable properties by 1840. After land sales in 1870-71, house building started in earnest from about 1880 including in Windmill Road, Victoria Road and King Street (named after Mr King the baker), the population growing rapidly from the early 1900s.

We start at the **Fairground Hall car park**, marked (1) on the red route on page 4, in the Fairground. The Fairground is designated as an open space amenity. Today this is where travelling fairs and circuses come and village events are held. In the past, it has been used for gymkhanas, which have attracted Royal participants. Earlier still cattle and horse fairs were held there with animals being driven along Welshman's Road allegedly from Wales but more likely from the railway sidings at Padworth. The Horse and Groom pub opposite would have been the oldest pub in the village had it remained in its original 17th century half-timbered building. The present pub was built adjacent, the original becoming a butcher's shop. The pub and the fields behind were the centre of fairs and social activity until the current fairground was set aside in 1802. Take the **footpath** (23) opposite the car park, next to Green Gables and Dudley House. To the right stood a water tower, removed in the 1960s, that supplied piped drinking water to the village. Every morning Jimmy Jarvis would cycle down the hill to the pumping station by Foudry Brook near the railway station. There he'd turn on the pump to take water already in store, from the borehole, up to the tower. Then he would cycle back up the hill. When the tower was full, it would overflow into the pond. He'd then need to cycle back down the hill to turn the pump off. This method of piped supply started in 1913/14 and finished after the war in 1919/20. Before that, the villagers drank well water.



the water tower



the 18th century
fairgrounds

Continuing along the footpath, you pass the old fairgrounds on your right, now new housing planned through Mortimer's 2017 Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). Continue to the bottom of valley. Take the footpath across the field until reaching the road. Turn right into Drury Lane. You will shortly reach the **Old Methodist chapel** (24), now a home, and graveyard which is still in use. Continue and turn right into **Summerlug**, once a bridleway for transporting the mail between Basingstoke and Mortimer. Take the third turn to the left into St. John's Road. Continuing to the end you reach West End Road. This area was the commercial centre of the new settlement. A **sub-post office** (25) was created (closed October 2016, now 'The Baobab'). There was a grocer, butcher, baker, garage and hardware shop all within the first 50 metres of West End Road. Some of these remain, some were redeveloped and others have disappeared. St. John's Road and St. Mary's Road were the main residential developments.

To your left the cottages on the left side of West End Road are some of the earliest on the Common. In **Harness Cottage** (26), Topsy Thwaite had a harness making business; it was not so long ago that horse power was a primary source of energy. A little further along is the **Red House** (27), one of Mortimer's big houses and once the home of Dr. Ian Crichton whose definitive work was on the caddisflies (a water born insect) in Millbarn Pond in Wokefield. Its garden was sold in 2012 to create a small estate named after Keith Lock a long-serving district councillor for Mortimer. On the opposite side of the road is **Glenapp Grange** (28) now flats for the elderly but previously the home of Dr Hill, both he and his son being Mortimer GPs. The present surgery in Victoria Road is built in what was the back garden of the house. Continue over the mini roundabout along West End Road. The **Alfred Palmer Memorial Field** (29) on the right-hand side was given to the village by Gordon Palmer of Huntley and Palmer the biscuit makers as a public area for recreation for use by the residents of Mortimer and Wokefield. It's now also the home of Mortimer FC. Continuing further west is the **Turners Arms** (30), a reminder that in the early 20th century Mortimer was a centre for the small wood trade where tools such as brushes, brooms, rakes and scythe handles were made.



Laneswood

A little further on the right is **Morden Close**, named after parish councillor John Morden. The original house here was **Laneswood** (31) which was in the 1940s a safe refuge for Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands when her country was overrun by the Nazis. This corner of Mortimer was until about 20 years ago part of Hampshire and the residents regarded themselves as a bit special! The county border was then changed to bring the whole of the built-up area into Berkshire.

Retrace your steps and walk through Ravensworth Road until reaching Catherine's Hill. Here turn right and continue until reaching a crossroads. There, in the trees on the left,



Tumuli

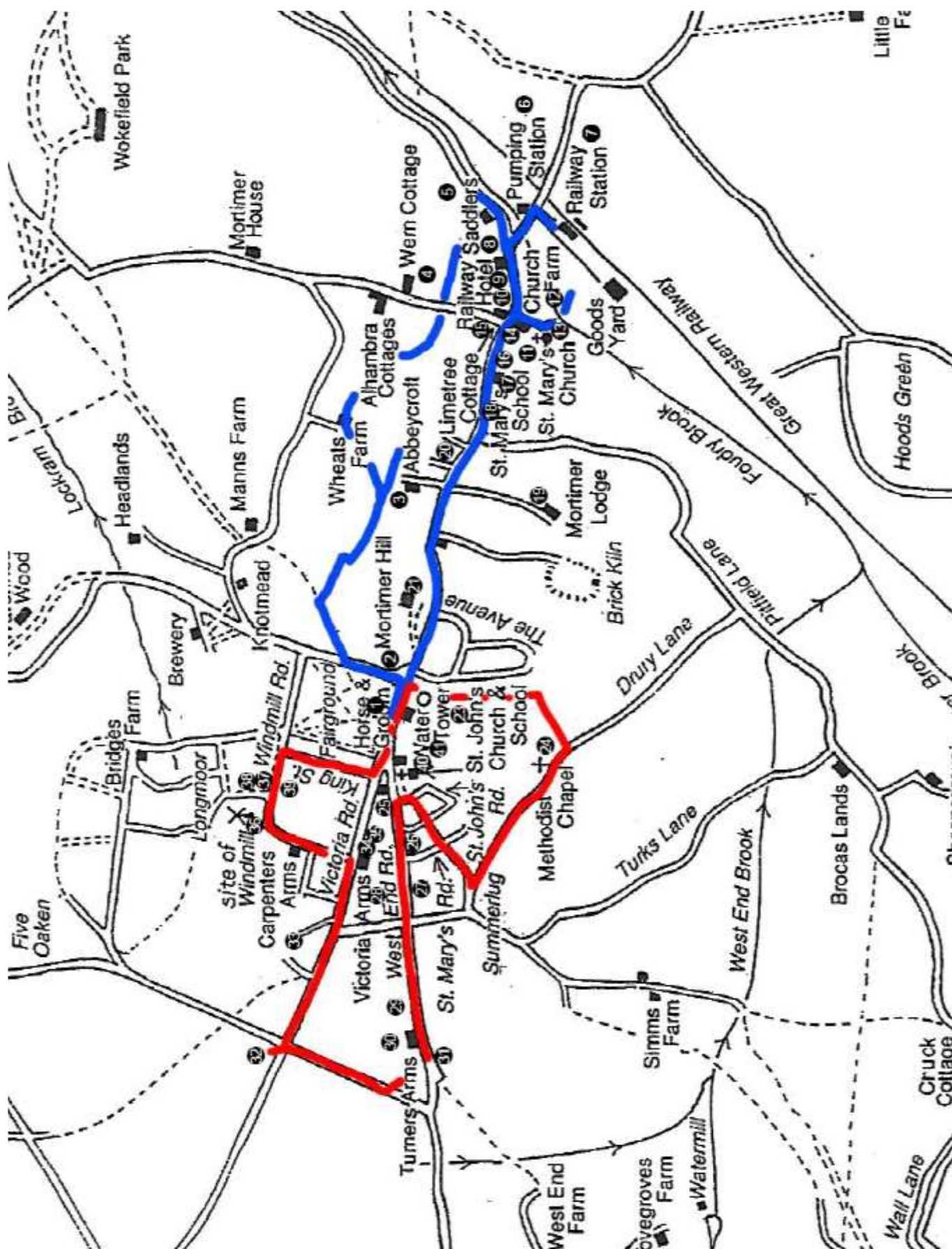
are ancient **Tumuli** (32) (burial mounds) from when the site was occupied by Stone Age people 3,500 years ago. Worked flint tools may still be found in the fields around the village. There is a pathway from the junction to the Tumuli and a board provides more information about the history of the mounds.

The housing estate on the left, **College Piece** (33) was constructed about 1965 on land that once belonged to Eton College, which it acquired during the enclosures of common land in the early 1800s. Interestingly, the parish church of St. Mary's was given by Henry VI to Eton College in 1444 and Abbeycroft was once a prep. school for Eton – see walk 1, stops 3 and 11, for more details. Take Victoria Road back towards the village.

Continuing past **Spratleys** (34) garage, which started life as a bicycle shop in a shed in King Street before moving to the current site in 1920, you reach the **Victoria Arms** (35). In the yard at the rear were the steam chests that were used to soften up staves of ash before they were bent to shape for tool handles. Turn left into Windmill Road. The Carpenters Arms, another local pub connected with the wood trade once stood on the corner of the Crescent. Continue around the right-hand bend of Windmill Road. On the left is **Windmill Cottage** (36) that was once three cottages - look at the brickwork on the front and the height of the chimneys to avoid setting fire to the thatch. The next house was where the windmill once stood, see the **weather vane** (37) on its top, until the pine trees grew and kept the wind off. Windmill Road and King Street were developed at the same time as St John's and St Mary's roads. Passing the pair of **Benyon cottages** (38) on the left is a gravel track which splits into two. These were the roads to the Longmoor settlement. At the rear of the cottages, the outbuildings are a one-cow dairy. Take the right into **King Street** (39), where many houses were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Turn left by the Coop and you see **St. John's Church** (40) on your right, originally built as a 'chapel of ease' to save the mile walk down to St. Marys Church. **St John's School** (41), almost opposite the fairground, was built in the 1880s. This completes walk 2. The **Fairground Hall** (1) car park is on your left. Walk 1 also starts here, covering Stratfield Mortimer, the original part of the village.

Note: All access is by public roads or footpaths. NO private land consents have been obtained. Some properties on the map have changed name or no longer exist.

This trail is produced by the Parish Council with thanks to Mortimer Local History Group who provided most of the content. There is more information in their book "Mortimer in the Nineteenth Century" available in the Library. If you have any feedback or suggestions to enhance this guide please call the Parish Council office on 07436 807543 or email admin@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk



Walk 1 –blue route (nos. 1 to 21). Walk 2 –red route (23 to 41)

Map provided by Mortimer Local History Group. Route artwork:James Carter