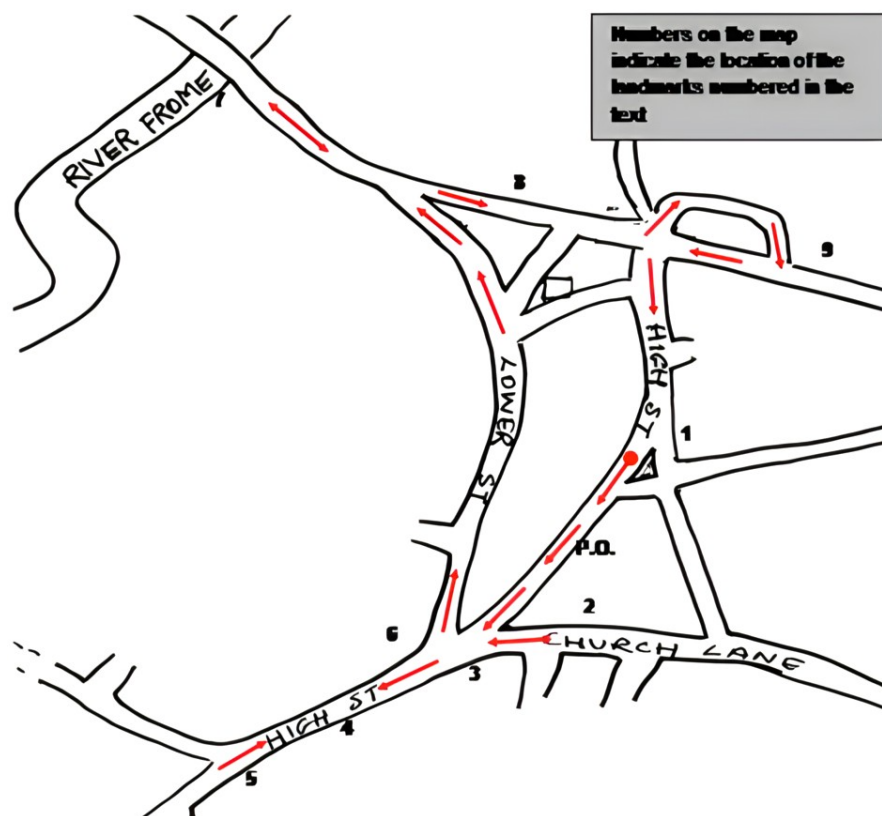


## A walk around Rode [Peter Harris]

### MAP



### INTRODUCTION

The attractive village of Rode, which until 1937 lay partly in Wiltshire and partly in Somerset, was a thriving cloth production centre and market place throughout the Middle Ages and into the 19th century. Although the local textile industry had by and large failed by 1860, Kelly's Directory records a wool dying business at Shawford Mill until 1894, and fulling and dressing continued at Scutt's Bridge Mill as late as 1906.

The Domesday Book records that the Bishop of Coutances had three manors here, held by seven tenants, and Reinbold the Priest had an additional separate manor of 1 hide, held by Richard the Interpreter. The Bishop's manors possessed an unspecified number of mills which together were valued at 27 shillings - more than the three mills of Frome. There are today several distinct areas of settlement in Rode, and this may be a reflection of the complex historic manorial arrangements; close to

the old church of St Lawrence are the earthworks of buildings said to have been abandoned following a fire. It is possible that there may have been a church in Rode by 1086, especially in view of the connection with Reinbold the Priest. The ancient custom known as 'clipping the church' may have pagan origins.



## THE TRAIL

*The Trail starts at the village green, the grassy triangle where the War Memorial is situated (1). This area was once part of where the annual fair was held. The village pound, for keeping stray animals was also here*



*Leave the green and walk SW along High Street towards the centre of the village.* On the left you will notice Rode Baptist Chapel, which bears a date-stone of 1786; inside this attractive building the congregation is partly accommodated in galleries supported on wooden columns; the chapel was said to have seated 300 persons. The building next to the chapel was the Baptist's Sunday School, built in 1839.

*Further along the road you arrive at an attractive open triangular area.* This was once the site of the market cross, where traders gathered for the weekly market. No. 24 has a stone over the fireplace bearing the date 1697. **Turn left into Church Lane,** and you will find a delightful row of small alms-houses, with a date-stone of 1755 (2).

*Walk back down Church Lane, turn left, and continue to walk along High Street.* On the left-hand side of the road are the 19th century Assembly Rooms (3), provided by Mr R P Batten-Pooll, local J. P.; the fine clock commemorates Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. In Kelly's Directory of 1914, this building was described as the United Counties Reading and Newsrooms and Public Hall, which at that time contained reading, bagatelle and chess rooms, a library of over 300 volumes, and a large hall for meetings capable of holding 200 persons.

Connected with the hall were flourishing rifle and cricket clubs. The building is now used as a restaurant for the adjoining Cross Keys Inn. The Inn, like many of the

buildings in Rode, appears to date from the 17th century, but may contain earlier work. The iron gates, stone façade and the brick and wood clad buildings at the rear are all that remain of Fussell's Brewery, the major employer in the 20th century.

Set back from the road, the handsome building of the Methodist Church is dated 1809; it is now used as a private residence. Southfield House (4), close by, is said to have been built in the 17th century; its present classical facade was added in the early 19th century. Further along on the left, nos. 6 and 8 High Street are thought to be part of an old priory. No. 8 has beams embossed with a Tudor Rose and the head of the devil. The Wesleyan Day School was built in 1860 and endowed by the Pooll family. Now much expanded it still retains the separate entrances for boys and girls. ***Walking past the school***, you will see the fine building of 18th century Mayfield House (5) with its adjoining early 19th century textile mill; the land on the opposite side of the road was once the formal garden of this property. John Wesley preached beneath a walnut tree here in 1746. The interesting building on the other corner of the road was once the lodge to Merfield House.

***Wend your way back along High Street, branching off left along Lower Street.*** The large building on the left just before the fork was formerly the Red Lion Inn(6), one of the several inns in this area which served refreshments to the busy market day crowds. ***Lower Street contains many attractive houses, several of them listed buildings, which you can admire as you walk along, bearing left at the main road, to reach Rode Bridge (7).***

The area around Rode Bridge has much of architectural interest, and is enhanced by its delightful natural setting. The bridge itself was built for the Black Dog Turnpike Trust when the road was improved and added to the turnpike system in about 1777. An unusual feature of Rode Bridge is the way the cutwater on the south side has been continued upwards, to form a refuge for pedestrians. The refuge contains both county and parish boundary stones, the latter showing that the east side of the river was once part of N. Bradley.

Rode Mill is one of the many mills which were once powered by the River Frome, and may stand on the site of one of the valuable mills mentioned in the Domesday survey. Rode Mill House is an 18th century house of exceptionally fine proportions, and its charming gazebo and stable block are unspoilt by modernisation. The Mill now operates as a gastro-pub (see Local Amenities, below).

***From Rode Bridge walk back along the road, this time walking straight on up Rode Hill.*** On the left you pass Langham House (8), once known as Rode Hill House, the scene of a tragic child murder in the 19th century. ***Just past the top gates to Langham House take the second of two left turnings, and walk around Langham Place, a***

pleasant, quiet road with several pretty houses and gardens to admire. At the junction of Langham Place and Rode Hill stands Christ Church (9). This church was built in 1824 for the Rev. Charles Daubney, Archdeacon of Salisbury Cathedral, who had a home nearby. He is said to have built the new church because it grieved him to see Wiltshire men from his diocese attending a church in a Somerset diocese. The twin stepped spires of the church, now a private residence, are most distinctive, and are a notable landmark in the area.

*From Christ Church, walk back down Rode Hill a little way, and turn left into High Street. This leads you back towards your starting point at the village green.*

## LOCAL AMENITIES

Rode Post Office and Village Stores sells a range of groceries, stationery and sweets, and excellent coffee. (tel. 01373 830321)

The Cross Keys Inn offers b & b, lunch and evening meals (tel. 01373 830900)

The Mill at Rode offers lunch and evening meals (tel. 01373 673112)

## FURTHER READING

'Visual Signs of Rode's History' (Rode post office)

'A Pictorial History of Rode' (Rode post office)

'History of Some of the Old Houses in Rode' written and produced by Dawna Pine (Frome Library)