# ACT Location Walk - Chilham

## Introduction

Welcome to "Chillingbourne"

Michael Powell was born at Bekesbourne in 1905 and educated at King's School, Canterbury, growing up in the countryside we see in this film.

With 'A Canterbury Tale' he realised an ambition to make a film in and about the Canterbury countryside, and the people who travelled along the Pilgrims Way on their way to Thomas Becket's shrine in Canterbury Cathedral.

'A Canterbury Tale' became known as Canterbury's very own film and remains so to this day.

The film contains a wealth of images and messages - some obvious, others less so - but to most people who live in or travel to east Kent, what especially appeals is that the story was filmed in places we can still find today.

The film was unusual for its time because so much of it was filmed on location.

For most of the while we are in the great outdoors, occasionally cutting to interior sequences which can easily mislead us into thinking we are in actual buildings in Canterbury and its villages.

But I must warn you that that is not the case. Indoors we are almost always in Denham Studios.

Most of the story is set in 'Chillingbourne,' a make-believe village near Canterbury where the four main characters first meet.

'Chillingbourne' was inspired by Fordwich, Chilham and several other local villages and is the fictitious town where we first encounter the villain of the story, Thomas Colpeper, played by Eric Portman.

When this film was made in 1943 Portman was an established film star and had already appeared in two Powell & Pressburger films, '49th Parallel' and 'One of our aircraft is missing'.

The three other stars were making their screen debuts -

Sheila Sim (now Lady Attenborough) as Land Army girl Alison Smith

Dennis Price as a British Army sergeant, Peter Gibbs

John Sweet, a real GI, as American Army Sergeant Bob Johnson.

Three boys - Len Smith, Jimmy Tamsitt and David Todd were in the cast of principal characters, which means they were named in the credits; other boys from the villages around Canterbury were in the battle scene; and many other local people had small parts or appeared as extras.

Let's also spare a thought for Emeric Pressburger, Michael Powell shared writing, directing and producing credits with Emeric, a Hungarian Jewish refugee from the Nazis who had spent time in Berlin and Paris, learning the language and writing films and other stories in those countries before he came to Britain.

Powell and Pressburger made a major feature film every year from 1939 to 1951, plus a few others after that major burst of creativity. All of the films they made from 1940 to 1946 were original stories by Emeric - including this most English of stories.

We are starting this location tour at a railway station, just like our modern day pilgrims in the film. The station we see in the film is all in the studio, but is quite close in appearance to how this station looked in the 1940s.

Now lets make our way to the mill. Up to the main road, turn left, follow the road round to the left. Watch out for the traffic, it can be quite fast along here.

## Chilham Mill

This is Chilham Mill, it's seen in the background of a few scenes and in the distance from pow-wow hill which we'll be visiting soon. Not to be confused with the other mill seen in the film, the one where Bob comments about the weatherboarding as he & Alison ride by on the cart. This mill is also the boys' HQ in the film and is where Peter & Bob go to see the boys after they have collected the salvage which contains the evidence that Colpeper is the glue man.

This is also the scene of the climax of the boys' river battle. This is the river Stour, and it does flow into Canterbury, just like Peter says in the film. Are there still apples down by the river bank? They were the main ammunition used by the boys in their battle.

Onwards into the depths of the countryside. If anyone doesn't fancy the extended route, we'll be coming back this way, probably in about an hour

## Roll in the grass

It was near here that Alison and Colpeper had their "roll in the grass". We do know the exact location (see Paul's book) but it's just another field now. It's a field full of corn stubble now and it's a bit tricky to get to, so let's use our imagination and think of this field as a field of long grass. Alison has just walked through the woods,

============== Playlet ==============

Onwards to Old Wye LaneBeastly Carriers

Here we are in the lane that Alison was driving her cart along when she was ambushed by Peter and his carriers. There was a camera position at the top of that field and we see Alison and the cart travelling along the lane as two carriers come down the hill.

============== Playlet ==============

Back to Juliberrie's mound

## Pow-wow Hill

Known as Juliberrie's Mound and believed to be an Iron Age burial mound. This was "pow-wow hill" where Bob, Leslie & Terry had their meeting after the river battle. There were fewer trees then and we could see the mill from here

============== Playlet ==============

## Now, back to the millChilham Mill (revisited)

Pick up any stragglers. Back to the main road, cross (carefully)

Bagham Lane, Bagham Road - stop for a drink at The Woolpack?

Into Chilham Square

## Chilham Square

This is where we see the bus arrive. Alison goes and talks to the driver

============== Playlet ==============

## School Hill

Down School Hill a short way to see where Bob & Peter play catch

## Taylors Hill

Down Taylors Hill a short way to see the basis for Charing Street

## Chilham Church

Read out Colpeper's speech

Well there are more ways than one of getting close to your ancestors. Follow the old road and as you walk, think of them, and the old England. They climbed Chillingbourne Hill, just as you did, they sweated and paused for breath, just as you did today. And when you see the bluebells in the spring and the wild thyme, the broom and the heather, you're only seeing what their eyes saw. Ford the same rivers, the same birds are singing. When you lie flat on your back, and rest, and watch the clouds sailing as I often do, you're so close to those other people, that you can hear the thrumming of the hoofs of their horses, the sound of the wheels on the road, and their laughter, and talk, and the music of the instruments they carried. And when I turn the bend in the road, where they too, saw the towers of Canterbury, I feel I've only to turn my head, to see them on the road behind me.