

# A Canterbury Tale

## 1940s Society trip to Chilham aka 'Chillingbourne'

The end of August is the period in which 'A Canterbury Tale' is set and is therefore the month when the Powell & Pressburger Appreciation Society make an annual pilgrimage to Kent. Meeting up at one of the locations associated with the film this year the venue was Chilham and this year they were joined by members of the 1940s Society.

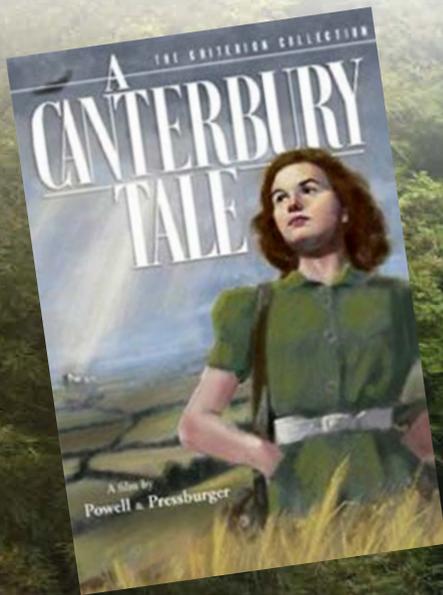
It was a shame that more members couldn't attend (7 in total but it was a bank holiday weekend) though it was a good afternoon and in all there were 30 or 40 of us taking a tour of the very picturesque village of Chilham and its surrounding area. The event is always held on the Sunday of the August bank holiday weekend and we were fortunate that despite it being a little overcast the

weather stayed dry and warm (unlike the Monday which was a typical bank holiday!).

If you have never watched the film 'A Canterbury Tale' then I heartily recommend you take the time to find it. It's a film that we have shown at Society meetings several times over the years and one that is always a pleasure to watch. Released in 1944 the film is like an onion – it has many layers. There is the main plot which on the face of it is quite strange. There are the

four main characters all from different walks of life and social classes. There is the mystical quality of the miraculous pilgrimage to Canterbury. And throughout the film there are the subtle and not so subtle wartime messages that some would call propaganda.

The basic story is quite simple. Three people arrive in a village in Southern England in the early years of World War 2. Alison Smith is a London girl who is due to start working on a farm as a 'Land Girl'.



The river where the youngsters battle took place. Note the ammunition (bottom right) still available today.



Chilham Mill

Peter Gibbs is an Englishman conscripted into the army, taking a few days leave before going abroad. Bob Johnson is a U.S. Army sergeant who wanted to go to Canterbury, but got off at 'Chillingbourne' by mistake. As they walk into the village, Alison is attacked by 'The Glue Man', a prankster who pours glue in women's hair. The three of them start to explore the area to discover and expose 'The Glue Man' but then get engrossed in the history of the area and the tales of The Pilgrim's Way. The local magistrate, Thomas Colpeper, JP is a local historian and a very mysterious character who leads them further into the mystery.

Walking back from the location where Alison was met by the 3 bren carriers.



'Chillingbourne' in the film is in fact the village of Chilham which is where we spent our Sunday afternoon. Meeting up at Chilham station the afternoon was led by Steve Crook of the Powell & Pressburger Appreciation Society ([www.powell-pressburger.org](http://www.powell-pressburger.org)) who did a marvellous job of setting the scene and explaining how much of the film was actually shot in the village and surrounding area.

Our first location was at Chilham Mill. This was the scene of the youngster's river battle and it was easy to imagine the boys rowing up the river and the subsequent ambush. There were certainly still huge numbers of crab apples on the trees and river banks – the ammunition used by both sides.

The Mill was also the location of the later meeting of Bob Johnson, Peter Gibbs and the boys.

We moved on into the countryside to where Alison talked to Colpeper in the grass and then to where Alison was intercepted by Peter Gibbs's three Bren Carriers. At each location we stopped to look at the scene and imagine the camera angles. Volunteers also took the role of characters from the film reading a short piece of the script. I did my

best at getting into the role of Peter Gibbs talking to Alison at the Bren Carrier scene but perhaps an actor's life is not for me!

A short walk via a couple more locations found us having a brief rest at a village hostelry and then on to Chilham village. Chilham is certainly a beautiful location and I wasn't surprised to learn that it has been a popular location for period filming over the years being used for the film adaptation of Jane Austen's 'Emma' and episodes of Agatha Christie's 'Poirot'.

Locations in the village included where Alison met the bus conductress Polly Finn and where Bob & Peter played catch. It was interesting to discover that one street in the village was actually recreated at Denham Studio

rather than attempt to use the village itself. I was perhaps a little disappointed to discover that whilst we might see the exterior of the buildings, almost all the interior scenes were filmed in the studio rather than on location.

Our last stop of the afternoon was at St Marys Church where Steve Crook finished by reading Thomas Colpeper's lecture about 'The Old Road' and a few of us stopped for a picnic. A good way to end a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon.

Those attending came from as far away as wales and even someone from Sweden. If you're interested in attending next year put it in the diary now and keep an eye on the powell & Pressburger website. Why not visit Chilham and take a look for yourself.

Chilham village - where Alison met the bus conductress

