

High Street / Chestnut Road Trail



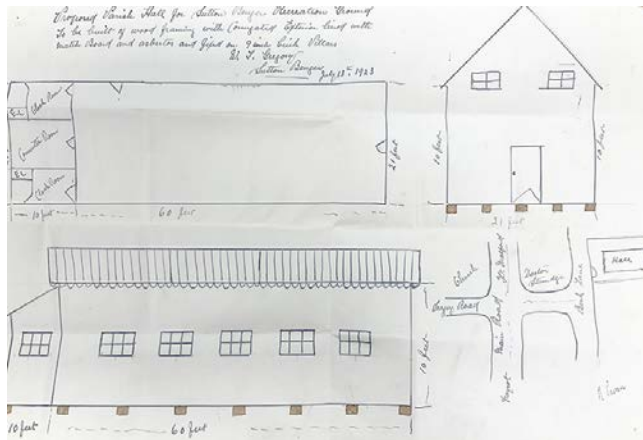
This is a short family-friendly route around the heart of Sutton Benger village, pointing out places of historical interest.

Trail Length	1 mile
Duration	1 hour
Walk / Cycle	Walk
Suitable for pushchairs	Yes
Suggested footwear	Shoes or trainers
Hazards	Crossing highways



Map Courtesy of Google Maps

1. Village Hall and Recreational Ground



Sutton Benger's Old Village Hall used to be where the car park is today. The New Village Hall was opened in 2000 after a major fund-raising effort.

The image shows the original hand drawn plan used to build the old Village Hall in 1923.

Recreation Ground



Before 1920, there was no Hall and no Recreation Ground. There used to be an orchard where the Bell Piece houses are. There was a kitchen garden next to the orchard. It belonged to the Bell House, home of the village doctor. This is where the doctor's surgery is today.

In March 1920 there was a big Auction of the entire Draycot Estate. Eight acres of land from Queen's Field was donated for a recreation ground.

The photograph shows a carnival on the Recreation Ground, probably in the 1930s.

Old Village Hall



After a fund-raising effort by the local villagers a Village Hall was opened in November 1923 by Lady Cowley. It only took Mr Gregory, the Sutton Benger wheelwright and carpenter, 3 months to build, with volunteer help, at a cost of just £300.

New Village Hall



Throughout the years the Village Hall was well-used but by the 1990s the Old Village Hall was not big enough for the needs of the village. The New Hall was built in 2000 at a cost of over £250,000 as a 'Millennium Project' after a major fund-raising project in 1997-1999 by a small group of villagers.

The New Village Hall was formally opened by local MP, James Gray, on 28 October 2000.

World War II



Sutton Benger Village Hall has been used for many functions and events over the years. The photograph above shows one of the many functions just before and during the Second World War that was held for the local community in the village hall.

Next On The Trail

Go left away from the Village Hall, around the corner, and turn right down Bellside towards the High Street. Stop half way down Bellside.

2. Bell Hotel / Bellside



The Bell Hotel was built in the 16th century. It was a coaching inn until about 1848 and then the home of the village doctor, before becoming a hotel again 50 years ago.

The photograph shows The Bell Hotel when it was the doctor's house, probably in the 1940s.

Bell Hotel / Doctor's House



Like every other house in the village in the 1800s, the Bell Inn was owned by the Tylney-Long-Wellesley family of Draycot House. The High Street used to be the main road from Bath and Bristol to Oxford. Coaches, as seen on the left of this 1960s photo, would stop here to change horses and for passengers to have a rest. There were fewer coaches on the road after the railway arrived in the 1840s.

In 1848 The Bell Inn became the home of the village doctor for over 100 years. The surgery door was in Bellside, and is still visible in the brickwork / paint on the side of the building. The last doctor to live here was Dr Clarke, who sold the property in 1955 to Berni Inns, who reopened it in 1958 as a hotel.

Herbing



Herbing began in Sutton Benger in the 19th century and ended in the early 1950s. A herbing business was run by Tom Bray from Bellside. The sheds on the left hand side of Bellside were used as storage.

The herbs grew in the countryside and people took all day to collect them. Teachers at the school would take the children on

nature walks to collect rare herbs. The herbs were sold to make medicines and ointments.

The photographs from the 1920s show people outside the Old School House on Seagry Road after they have been gathering herbs.

Next On The Trail

Carry on down Bellside, and carefully cross the road to go into the churchyard; stop just inside the gate.

3. Church Crossroads



Sutton Benger church was built in the 12th century, nearly 1000 years ago.

Sutton Benger Church



Sutton Benger church was dedicated to St Leonard, but renamed All Saints in 1763. In the time of the Civil War (1642-1651) the Roundheads stabled their horses in the church, damaging statues and windows. The church bells may have been hidden in the

Bell House for safety, this is a rumour that one was stolen. During World War II, the church tower was used as a look out by the Home Guard.

This image was originally a watercolour by John Buckler of All Saints Church and is dated 1808.

Church Interior



If you want to know more about the church, there is an additional 'church trail', with copies available inside the church.

The Corner Shop



For about 100 years, throughout the 1900s, the house on the corner was a shop that became known as The Corner Shop, with an entrance on the High Street. At one time, in the 1940s, it also served as the Post Office. There were two entrances, one for the shop and one for the Post Office.

In the 1800s, 200 years ago, the High Street through Sutton Benger was a main road, with lots of horse-drawn coaches travelling from Bristol and Bath to Oxford. There were at least three blacksmiths in the village; one was possibly next door to the Corner Shop at 54 High Street.

Next On The Trail

Walk along the path through the churchyard, between the church and Seagry Road. Stop at the end, where you can see the Old School House and La Flambé.

Please keep to the path, respect the graves and those visiting them. Please also keep noise to a minimum.

4. Churchyard



This 1920s photograph is looking along Seagry Road towards the churchyard, with an old car parked alongside the churchyard wall.

The photo was taken from outside La Flambé, when it used to be a pub called The Vintage. On the right is the Old School House, with the bell tower over the porch.

La Flambé



La Flambé, 5 Seagry Road, and The Cedars, next door at 6 Seagry Road, have been altered a lot over the last 300 years. There was originally one smaller house here, built in about 1720 by John Fry, father of Joseph Fry. Joseph later moved to Bristol, where he founded the Fry's Chocolate Factory. Between 1839 and 1911 the Hull family were grocers and spirit merchants, probably in John Fry's house. In 1920 the buildings became a public house called The Vintage Inn. Refurbished in the 1950/60s, it is said locally that the bar and other furnishings were built out of wood left over from the building of the M4.

Old School House



Opposite is the Old School House, the village school. Children aged 5 to 12 were taught together in one classroom. In 1910 the building was divided into two classrooms, and remained in school use until 1971.

Next On The Trail

Go back down the churchyard path, leave the church and carefully cross Seagry Road; stay on the pavement to Park Lane, turn right and go half way down Park Lane.

5. Park Lane



200 years ago the entrance to Park Lane was a lot wider, and there was a 'village pound' in the entrance. Most houses had their own chickens and pigs, and stray animals found in the street were put in the 'pound' until their owners came back from work to claim them.

The Old Bakery / Park Lane Shop



The Old Bakery used to be behind No 5 Park Lane and the ovens remain in the garden to this day. One hundred years ago it was owned by the Heath Brothers. In the 1930s there were bread deliveries to each house every day, including Sunday, on an old black bicycle with a basket holder.

The bakery business closed, but No 5 Park Lane opened as another village shop (White & Chalmers), closing in 1986.

The bread ovens of the Old Bakery were still being used to cook turkeys for villagers as late as the 1960s.

The Schoolteacher's House



Opposite No 5 is a pair of cottages, just behind the Old School House. The crest at the top shows that it is one of several houses in the village that were built by the Draycot Estate between about 1850 and 1910. Several of them have a date showing when they were built; this is one of the earliest, with a date of 1868. Bramley Cottage, next to the alley, was where the village school teacher used to live.

Next On The Trail

Go along the footpath at the end of Park Lane, into The Park, and turn right at the end, stopping on the pavement by Seagry Road.

6. Seagry Road Farms



Across Seagry Road to the right is the farmhouse from Church Farm, and to the left is Church Farm Barn.

Church Farm



Church Farm is over 300 years old, and the farmhouse is one of several buildings in the village that have been given special status: they are known as Listed Buildings, because they are on a national list of buildings with special historical and architectural interest. There used to be several farms here, along Seagry Road. They included Church Farm on the far side of the road, and Hazelwood Farm on this side of the road.

Church Farm was known as 'Bond's Farm' throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, after the family who were the tenants for about 100 years. The bridge across the brook, on the outskirts of the village to the north of Church Farm, was known as 'Bond's Bridge'.

Edward Bond was the farmer from before 1839 to the 1860s, and he was succeeded by his son James Bond, who was the farmer until the late 1890s. His son Edward Bond was then the farmer from about 1900 until at least 1920. The first year that the farm appears in the records as 'Church Farm' was 1911.

Hazelwood Farm



Many of the houses on The Park were built on Hazelwood Farm's land. The farmhouse for Hazelwood Farm is opposite La Flambé, and the name of the farm lives on in the Hazelwood Salon, which was built where the farm's stables used to be.

Brook Cottages



Two hundred years ago, there was a third farm. The houses at Brook Cottages used to be the farmhouse. Also, Harding's Farm, north of the motorway, used to be in Sutton Benger. The parish boundary line was moved when the M4 was built and it is now in Seagry.

The photo shows the Perris family in front of their house at Brook Cottages in 1905, shortly before Albert (second from left) emigrated to New Zealand.

With thanks to Jill Clarke for a copy of the photograph.

Next On The Trail

Return back down Park Lane, turn right on the pavement along the High Street, and stop opposite 'Wheelrights'.

7. Opposite Wheelrights



A wheelwright is a person who makes and mends wooden wheels.

Village Shops



HEATH BROS., <i>Bakers & Confectioners,</i> FLOUR, MEAL AND CORN FACTORS, SUTTON BENDER. GREGORY BROS., (Late W. T. Gregory), Wheelwrights, Carpenters, Undertakers and Decorators, SUTTON BENDER. Phone: SEAGRY 61.	We are Floral Artists WREATHS BOUQUETS BUTTON- HOLES SPRAYS, &c. <i>44, Market Place, Chippenham</i> All designs personally executed on the premises Tel. 2317 Cut Flowers, Plants, Ferns, Rose Trees, Shrubs and Seedlings, &c. Agents for Webb's Seeds
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GRAHAM OLDS,
PURVEYOR.
SUTTON BENDER.
 Fresh supplies of Beef, Mutton, Lamb and Pork daily.
 Daily supplies of all kinds of Harris's Smalls. Bacon a speciality. White or Smoked
All orders will receive prompt attention—Distance no object

In the 1700s and 1800s every village had all sorts of shops, and Sutton Benger was no different. It had wheelwrights, carpenters, tailors, drapers, painters, decorators, plumbers, butchers, bakers, gunsmiths, dairies, groceries, and several public houses and smaller beersellers. The village even had its own watchmaker.

The photograph from the 1940s / 1950s shows (left) Oliver Heath, the Park Lane baker and Michael Goddard (right) in their delivery van. Michael later took over the bakery business from Oliver when he and his wife Agnes retired. The 1930s Church Magazine shows an advert for other well-known Sutton Benger shops.

Wheelwrights and Carpenters



There were several wheelwrights and carpenters in the village throughout the 1800s. Joseph Gregory arrived in the village around 1890, and by 1891 was in business in the High Street as a wheelwright with his son William. By 1911 it was William who was running the business as a wheelwright and carpenter, as well as a funeral director. He also designed and built the original Village Hall. The business grew throughout the 1900s; William's son Joe inherited the family business and served on the Parish Council for 35 years. Gregory Close is named after the Gregory family.

Before the new houses were built on the land on the High Street there were two private houses and a builder's yard. The business closed and the new houses were built; their name 'The Wheelwrights' recognises the history of the site.

The photograph shows 35/37 High Street, with the Wheelwrights buildings behind. 35/37 is an Estate House, originally built in the late 1800s as three houses. It has a crest but no date.

The Village Draper's Shop / Butcher's Shop



In the 1800s the house at the corner of Park Lane, known as Sutton House, is where the village draper's shop was; and then in the 1900s it became the village butcher's. The shop was in an extension to the main building on the left hand side, and it had an awning over it to keep the sun off and help keep the meat cool.

Beersellers



The house opposite the entrance to Park Lane, now called Mansard Cottage, was occupied by George Jefferies, a beerseller. This was smaller than a public house or an inn, and is where the villagers bought their beer, often brewed on site. In the 1800s even children drank beer; it was very weak, and it was often healthier than the water.

Next On The Trail

Carry on along the High Street and stop opposite 'Starlings'

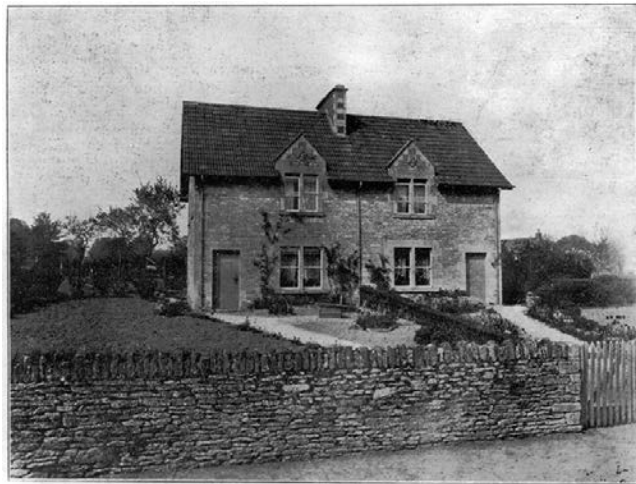
8. Opposite Starlings



Starlings used to be the farmhouse for a large farm called Poplar Farm. It was sold in the 1950s to become a family home, as

shown in this photograph from the Estate Agent's sale catalogue.

Estate Cottages



The houses opposite Starlings, on the north side of the road, are three more pairs of estate cottages; two are dated 1889, while the third building (28/30 High Street) is

probably older. The three buildings can be seen on the left in the postcard view of the High Street from the early 1900s.

The other photograph was in the Draycot Estate Sale Catalogue of 1920, showing 36/38 High Street.

200 years ago there were three or four inns in the village, providing food and drink, and overnight accommodation for people travelling through the village, as well as several smaller 'malthouses' and 'beerhouses' which mainly catered for the villagers. Two of the inns were called The White Lion and The Cross Keys. They were probably just here, on the north side of the High Street, but were both replaced when these estate cottages were built in the later 1800s.

Poplar Farm



Until 100 years ago, just about every house in the village, no matter how large or small, was owned by the Draycot Estate, which had a Lord of the Manor called Lord Cowley. All the houses and all the farms were rented from Lord Cowley. There used to be six main farms in and around the village, and most villagers worked on a farm or on the Draycot Estate itself. One of the farms was Poplar Farm, which was basically all land south of High Street, where the Chestnut Road and Cowley Way houses are now. The farmhouse for Poplar Farm was the old house across the road known as 'Starlings'. The gateway between the houses is the same as the original driveway into the farmyard.

Lady Maureen Margaret Methuen, the aunt of Lord Methuen of Corsham Court, used to live in this property 50 years ago.

Next On The Trail

Carry on along the High Street and stop between 24 and 26 High Street

9. The Old Post Offices



The village Post Office has had several locations in the last 200 years, including 24 High Street (shown in the photograph).

The Post Office; 1800s



A village Post Office was first mentioned in 1848. It is not clear where it was but in 1885 it was at 58, High Street, The Rowans, and remained there until about 1890.

The sepia-tinted photograph from the early 1900s shows Lewin and Emma Heath and their children outside The Rowans. One of the children, Oliver, would later become the Park Lane baker.

The Post Office; 1900 - 1950



The building at 22 / 24 High Street may be one of the oldest in the village; it actually dates back over 300 years, although the crest shows that it was updated in the 1800s. It was possibly a baker's at one time, as well as a draper's shop. It was also the village Post Office 100 years ago, from about 1900 until about 1930. Letters used to arrive from Chippenham around 4:30 in the morning, and were guaranteed to be delivered to your house by 7am. If you wanted to post a letter, last collection to be taken to Chippenham was at 9:30 in the evening.

In the 1930s the Post Office was in 43 High Street, and then in the 1940s it was in the Corner Shop.

The Post Office; 1960s

The houses at No 26 and 26A are the newest on the High Street but for nearly 50 years the Post Office was in a bungalow that used to be where No 26 is.

The Post Office moved here in about 1947. Twenty years ago the sub-postmaster was called Peter Smith, and when he retired in 2014 the Post Office moved to its current location in The Bell Hotel.

Stradone / Barringtons' Shop



The house on the opposite side of the road, known as 'Stradone', still has its well in the front garden. There used to be another village shop, in a temporary building just to the left of 'Stradone', known as 'Barringtons' Shop'.

100 years ago there were very few houses with electricity and there was no mains water. About half the houses in the village had their own wells, which were shared with their neighbours. It was not until the 1920s that mains water arrived, and mains electricity arrived in the 1930s - although not immediately for everybody. Some houses in the village were still without mains water and electricity until the 1940s.

The Parish Newsletter for October 1931 records the following: 'Our little village is now becoming quite up-to-date in its equipment, for not only is the electric light to illuminate the village streets and private houses and the Church, but it is also to be installed at the Rectory and in the Village Hall ... One hopes they will not be found too expensive a luxury. With an adequate water supply and a new system of heating the Sutton Benger Hall will be one of the most useful and best equipped in the country.'

Next On The Trail

Carry on along the High Street to Heath Avenue at the entrance to The Park

10. Heath Avenue, The Park



Heath Avenue used to be at the entrance to a factory.

Park View / Park Gate



About 50 years ago, most of Manor Farm on the north of the High Street was sold off to build a factory which processed chickens for selling in supermarkets. Then the chicken factory was sold, at about the same time as Hazelwood Farm was sold, and all the houses known as The Park were built.

The large building on the left is the only old building on The Park, and is over 100 years old. When it was built it was known as 'Park View', and was the home of the man who managed the Draycot Estate. After the Estate Sale in 1920 it was sold as one of the biggest houses in the village, and became known as 'Stoneleigh'. It was divided into flats in about 1950, and then became the offices for the chicken factory. It has now been renamed as 'Park Gate' and is a family home once again.

Old Police House



Most villages in the 1800s and early 1900s had their own village policeman. The first one recorded in Sutton Benger was Constable Richard Ellery, in 1820. He was a part-time policeman, who combined the job with his normal profession as a baker. The role became more professional from around the 1840s, and the Censuses show that there were policemen in the village throughout the 1800s, but at a number of different locations. Wherever the policeman lived, with his family, was effectively 'the police station'.

From about 1915 the situation became more formal, and there was a more permanent police station established; it was across the road at the house now known as The Old Police House. Different police constables lived there with their families for over 50

years until 1975, when the last village policeman moved to Chippenham and the house was sold.

Next On The Trail

Carry on along the High Street to Manor Farm Drive

11. Manor Farm Drive



This was the location of the largest village farm.

Manor Farm House



Manor Farm House, on the right, had its own chapel. During the Civil War, when the Roundheads were stationed in the church, the soldiers tried to set Manor Farm's chapel on fire, luckily they were not successful. There is a record of a building on this site 800 years ago. It is possible the current farmhouse was built onto the chapel, rather than the chapel being added to the farmhouse.

The brickwork on the building shows where there used to be a chapel window.

Manor Farm was the largest farm in the village, with most of the land north of the High Street and as far as Seagry. The farm, like everywhere else in the village, was owned by the Draycot Estate. 100 years ago Lord Cowley decided to sell everything to pay off family debts. There was a huge auction in the village, and all the houses, farms, pubs and shops were sold. Manor Farm had several owners over the years before the houses were built here in the 1880s.

Next On The Trail

Carry on along the High Street to French Gardens Lane

12. French Gardens Lane



On the corner is another Estate House, Nos 12 / 14 High Street.

1800s Tradesmen

The Estate Houses were built here in 1897. Before then this was a very busy corner of the village.

In the early 1800s there was another carpenter's / wheelwright's workshop here. The carpenter was called James Bond. At the same time, there was also another blacksmith's shop next door, run by James Miles.

Bell Cottage



Further up the lane there is a thatched cottage known as Bell Cottage. It is another Listed Building, and is over 300 years old. The building was included in the lease of The Wellesley Arms, and the landlord possibly lived here.

French Gardens

French Gardens Lane gets its name from the market gardens further up the lane. There were nurseries or kitchen gardens behind the Wellesley Arms throughout the 1800s and 1900s. They were run by Henry Harris in the 1920s and by Eric Gardener from around 1940.

Next On The Trail

Carry on along the High Street to The Wellesley Arms; stop in the car park

13. The Wellesley Arms



This public house was built in the late 18th century.

The Wellesley Arms



This was another coaching inn, like the Bell Inn at the far end of the village. 200 years ago it was called the Tylney Arms because at that time the Lords of the Draycot Manor were the Tylney family. When they married into the Wellesley family in the 1840s, they changed the name of the pub to the Wellesley Arms. It has kept the same name ever since, even though the Lord of the Manor became Lord Cowley around 150 years ago.

Standing in the doorway of the pub in the 1930s are (left) Oliver Heath, the Park Lane Baker, and Graham Olds, the butcher. They are taking a break from the fancy dress parade at one of the village carnivals.

Gate Farm / The Toll Gate



Across the road from here, 100 years ago, there were two other farms in the village. Straight across the road to the left, where the new houses are, was Arms Farm, named after the Wellesley Arms, and further along the road towards Draycot Cerne is Gate Farm.

Gate Farm gets its name from the Toll Gate which used to be at the entrance to the village. If you were travelling on the road you had to stop to pay a toll. The money was used to pay for repairs to the road.

The Toll Keeper lived in a little house on the north side of the road, opposite Gate Cottage. The Toll House was knocked down and not replaced when the Toll system ended in the 1870s.

Gate Cottage, by the entrance to Gate Farm, was actually the home of the village tailor for most of the 1800s.

Next On The Trail

Turn around, and carefully cross the road; turn into Chestnut Road and stop behind the first house on the right.

14. Chestnut Road



Until 50 years ago Chestnut Road was known as Back Lane. Originally, it did not join onto the High Street here, but only went from Sutton Lane to near the junction with Cowley Way.

The Garage



The houses on the corner of High Street / Chestnut Road were built about 20 years ago on the site of the village petrol station, which had been here since cars arrived on the roads in the early 1900s.

Barringtons' Taxis



The older houses on the left, facing the High Street, all used to have gardens which came all the way to Back Lane / Chestnut Road.

There were very few houses along this road, and none at all on the south side of Chestnut Road, beyond the garage, until 50 years ago.

On the left, behind the Old Police House and Barringtons' Shop, there was a taxi firm, also run by the Barrington family.

Next On The Trail

Carry on along Chestnut Road. Stop by Cowley Way.

15. Cowley Way



The houses here were built on land that used to be part of Poplar Farm. They were originally called the Chestnut Park Estate.

Street Names

The first new houses here were built in the 1970s and the roads are named after important people in the village's history. Cowley Way is named for the Cowley family, owners of the Draycot Estate in 1920. Westlake Place is named for Canon Westlake, the vicar in 1903. Gregory Close for the Gregory family who were the wheelwrights and built the Village Hall. Lee Crescent for John Lea, another person who lived in the village. Queens Close is named after the main field that was here. The field at the back of the Recreation Ground is still called Queen's Field.

The Old Road to Chippenham

There used to be a road out of the village, where the first part of Cowley Way is, when roads were just muddy tracks. You can still follow the route that it took, to Langley Burrell and Chippenham, if you follow the footpaths across the fields, past the Sutton Lane Meadows.

The 'Draycot Straight' on the main road between Chippenham and Sutton Benger was only built in about 1760. Before then the road went from Kington Langley into Draycot Cerne and then to Sutton Benger. It was much quicker to go across the fields here via Langley Burrell, until the 'Draycot Straight' was built as a 'Draycot Cerne by-pass'.

Sutton Benger By-pass

After the arrival of motor cars in the 1900s, and especially as they gradually became more widespread in the 1930s, the main road through the village became very busy. In 1939 there were plans for a by-pass to be built around the village. It would have cut through the Poplar Farm land to the south of the village, across where the houses are today, and across the school playing field and the Recreation Ground. Fortunately, the plans were cancelled when the Second World War started, and were never re-started.

Next On The Trail

Carry on along Chestnut Road. Stop by the School.

16. The School



This is actually the third school in the village in the last 60 years.

By the early 1960s, with the gradual growth of the village, the school on Seagry Road had become too small, and infants had to be taught in the Village Hall Annexe. The land for a new school was set aside in 1963, and juniors were moved into temporary buildings on the site in February 1965. The school gradually moved from the old building to the

new school over a period of several years, although the infants were still being taught in the Village Hall until late 1971.

The 'new' school grew over the years, supported by the Friends of Sutton Benger School (FOSBS). This fund-raising group of parents was formed in March 1974. However, the school was still using several 'temporary' buildings, including a School Hall that had been in Langley Burrell and was relocated and re-purposed. Funding for a new, modern, purpose-built building was eventually found, and the first phase of this was built in 1996. The school used a mixture of old and new accommodation for several years, until the second phase of the new school was completed.

Next On The Trail

Continue along Chestnut Road to the Village Hall.