

TALES
OF
NORTH
NIBLEY



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INTRODUCTION

Walk the Cotswold way from Wotton; through the woods of Westridge on the path which bends its way among the overgrown undulations of the old fort. On your left through the trees, you glimpse the beginning of the Berkeley Vale.

Further south, silhouetted against the sky, stand the twin pillars of the bridge. The Severn's waters, as they meander with pale gleam northwards at the tide, are a natural barrier between England and Wales. The road from Wotton to Dursley hugs the waist of the hill like a girdle. Along its route the ploughman no longer plods his weary way, but races through on motor-bike, or in a car. It is the walker, with a load that would be considered illegal for a camel, who trudges with any semblance to the old rural weariness.

Leaving the majestic beech at the wood's edge, you are faced with the monument, standing there like a stony sentinel above the village of North Nibley. Erected in the 1860's (by local builder Joseph Whitfield) it commemorates the work of William Tyndale in translating the Bible into English. It also gives North Nibley the local name of 'Spike Island'.

The village has long been connected with such august names as John Smyth, William Tyndale and Timothy Excell. The first for his historical records; the second for religious enlightenment; and the third for his social protest. It was in this spirit of protest that Elijah Hill wrote his 'History of a Parish Clerk' in the latter part of the nineteenth century. His version of life with Frederick Organ is, not surprisingly, a little biased in the writer's favour. But the basic facts are true enough. And, when you consider there were more Organs in North Nibley at that time than there were organs in the whole of the South Gloucestershire churches, you might well conclude Elijah Hill had little chance of local sympathy. You could well be right.

Most of Elijah Hill's original narrative has been retained. The few changes made have been in the breaking down of extremely long paragraphs into smaller, together with the cutting of repetitious or ambiguous phrases for clarification. However, grammatical aberration, where it does not detract but rather adds to the character of Elijah's story, has been allowed to remain. For Elijah, according to the records, was himself ill-educated.