

# Circular Walk Four - Kingston St. Mary

## Exploring Taunton Deane



### General Information

**Distance of Walk: 9 kilometres**

Quite a strenuous walk to the east and south of this old village situated below the southern end of the Quantock Hills, passing Hestercombe Gardens on route.

**OS maps** - Explore r 128, Taunton and Blackdown Hills or Explorer 140, Quantock Hills and Bridgwater

**Terrain** - moderately undulating, with a steep ascent from Kingston St. Mary

**Parking** - at the church car park which is signposted from the main road, to the right if coming from Taunton.

**Refreshments** - at the Swan Inn in the village, or at Hestercombe Gardens.

### Landscape character of the walk - High Vale

The walk lies in an area described as High Vale. Rising from 70 metres up to 170 metres, this diverse area tends to be composed of moderately undulating vale with wooded hilltops and small fields enclosed by hedgerows. It lies within the catchment area of the River Tone and is the source of numerous springs, tributary streams and brooks, which give rise to an interesting riparian vegetation. Typical tree species vary depending on the type of habitat, which may be woodland, woodland edge and scrub, heath, or wetland and river banks. In the hedgerows hazel, hawthorn, blackthorn, dogwood, spindle, holly, privet, crab apple, field rose, dog rose and guelder rose can all be found with ash, oak and field maple as standard trees.

The underlying geology is predominantly Devonian sandstone, siltstone, mudstone and slate with Permo-Triassic reddish mudstone and alluvium. Throughout the area the soil is generally Lower Marls and Pebble Beds giving rise to good quality agricultural land suitable for mixed arable and pastoral farming.

### Directions

**A** Go right out of the car park and up to some cottages on the right and turn right to follow a footpath sign to Volis. At the drive before the last cottage go right over a stile. Keep the garden on your left and follow the path up the hill, through the gate and over a stile. Cross a wide track keeping straight ahead between the conifer trees.

**B** On emerging into the field, over two stiles, continue forward on a well defined path, through a kissing gate, and then bear slightly right away from the fence down to the valley bottom. Cross the bridge and stiles and walk across the field to the stile in the top left hand corner. Over the stile, turn left and follow the hedge round to the gateway onto the road.

**C** Cross the road and go through two gates into the field. Bearing slightly right, cross the field to the gate in the hedge, going over a farm track. Go through the gate into the next field. Again, bear slightly right across the field to a gate, passing under the electricity lines. Through the gate, follow the hedge on your right around the field to a gate in the bottom left hand corner to the right of the pylon. Through the gate and continue ahead with the wire fence on your right to a gate and stile into the woods. Continue ahead through the woods. On leaving the woodland track, go through the gate and keep Hill Farm on your left.

**D** Just beyond the farm buildings go through a gate on the right and bearing right follow the wire fence towards the tall trees and the yellow building on the skyline (*keep the fence on your right*).

Go ahead over a stile and down the field with the hedge on your right. Go straight ahead into the wood and follow a track ahead at first and then down to the right, and continue down to the road with Hestercombe House and Gardens on the right.

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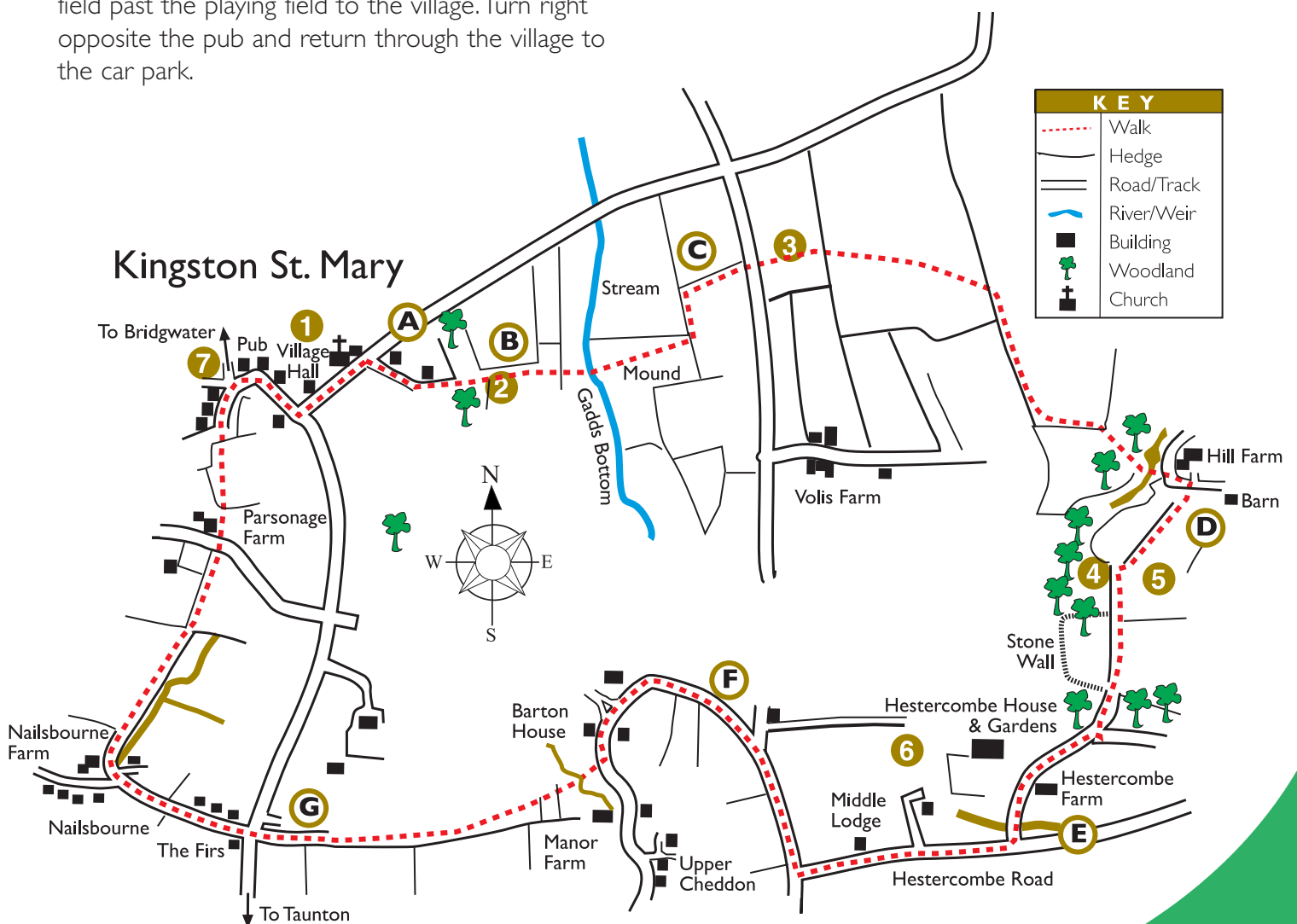
- E** Turn right along the road and continue to the T-junction. Turn right and then left just before the entrance to Hestercombe.
- F** Follow the road until you reach a junction. Turn left down the lane past Barton House and after 30 metres cross the stile on your right. After crossing the stream and the stile at the bottom of the field, go through the gate in the top left hand corner of the field and then over a stile. Follow the edge of the field and continue ahead until it becomes a track leading down to a field and then the road.
- G** Cross the main road and follow the Nailsbourne road straight ahead for 400 metres to a sharp left bend by a cottage. Here, go straight on up the driveway and right onto a farm track by a stream. Continue up the track, through a gate and continue over the fields towards Kingston Church in the distance. Cross a road and go through the kissing gate keeping the hedge on the left, on across the field past the playing field to the village. Turn right opposite the pub and return through the village to the car park.

## Points of Interest

### 1 Church of St. Mary

The great tower of this church, such a distinctive feature in the landscape, was built in 1490 to replace the smaller central tower of the original 13th century church. Growth in the output of woollen cloths in England in the 15th century brought greater prosperity which was reflected in the glorification of churches. Throughout Somerset there rose up the characteristic square-topped towers with pinnacled crowns and traceried windows. This tower is very similar to those at Staple Fitzpaine and Isle Abbotts and uses red sandstone for the structure and the more easily wrought Ham Hill limestone for the dressings.

The four dragons or 'hunkypunks' adorning the corners represent the dragon that, legend has it, once menaced Kingston until it was killed by someone throwing a large stone into its mouth.



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Inside there are a number of early 16th century oak benches and bench ends with carved panels of oak leaves, roseries, potted plants, oxen and yokes, and notably a weaver's shuttle indicating the source of all this expenditure! In the south aisle is a large Ham Stone tomb, topped with a slab of polished Purbeck Marble, in honour of John de la Warre and erected by the Warre family of Hestercombe in c.1380. Also buried here is Coplestone Warre Bampfylde who created the landscape garden at Hestercombe in the 1750's.

### 2 View

North-west across the southern slopes of the Quantock Hills. These represent the eastern end of a belt of Devonian rocks, collectively known as Old Red Sandstone, which extends from the coast near Ilfracombe eastwards to embrace Exmoor and the Brendon Hills which can be seen in the distance.

### 3 View

To the south across the Vale of Taunton and to the Blackdown Hills.

### 4 Gothic Alcove

One of a number of follies in the landscape garden of Hestercombe (see 6). The original building, first recorded in 1761, was taken down after 1887. It has recently been reconstructed using, as a model, other known designs in the gothic taste by Coplestone Warre Bampfylde.

### 5 View

To the south and east there are panoramic views across the Vale Taunton to the Somerset Levels and beyond.

### 6 Hestercombe Gardens

A combination of three period gardens surround Hestercombe House. The Georgian landscape,

designed and laid out by Coplestone Warre Bampfylde after he inherited the estate in 1750, stretches out along a deep combe to the north and features a Great Cascade and many interesting follies.

The Victorian Terrace was created when the house was considerably re-modelled in the 1870's by the 1st Viscount Portman. In 1904 his grandson, the hon. Edward Portman, then commissioned the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens to create a new Formal garden, which he did in collaboration with Gertrude Jekyll.

The restoration of the gardens at Hestercombe were begun in 1973 when Somerset County Council acquired them. This was helped greatly by the discovery of the original planting plans for the Formal garden which were found in a drawer in the potting shed! The Landscape garden was restored in the mid 1990's and more recently the Victorian Terrace and Shrubbery have been returned to their former glory.

The gardens are open every day of the year (except Christmas Day) from 10am to 6pm (last admission 5pm). Telephone 01823 413923 for more information.

### 7 Kingston St. Mary

Called simply Kingston until quite recently, this village was originally part of the great Manor of Taunton, assigned to the Bishop of Winchester, and came under the Reeve of Nailsbourne. During medieval and Tudor times there were several mills along the Quantock streams that flow through the village, producing cloth.

The village retains many of its old houses, including a 16th century Manor House, and a 17th century inn.

A copy of the story of the Kingston Dragon hangs in the porch of the village hall, which

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also displays a dragon weather-vane designed and forged by two members of the village. The seat around the oak tree on the green was made to celebrate the millennium. Each panel of the seat depicts an element of Kingston's history.

### Sources of information and further reading

The Parish Church of Kingston St. Mary  
*booklet available from the church*

Listed Buildings Database  
*Taunton Deane Borough Council*

Towers and Hunkypunks  
*leaflet by Taunton Deane Borough Council*

The Hidden Landscape  
*Richard Fortey - Pimlico*

Hestercombe Gardens  
An Illustrated History and Guide  
*Philip White*

Deane Tree Plan  
*Taunton Deane Borough Council*

Geology and Landscape of Taunton Deane  
*Hugh Prudden - Taunton Deane Borough Council*

### If You Require Further Information Please Contact:

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#### Bengali

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#### Chinese

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#### Hindi

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#### Portuguese

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