

KINGSCLERE

Wykeham Manor Walk



Kingsclere is an attractive North Hampshire village, protected by chalkland scarps which dominate the horizon in the form of downland hills. The College's connection with Kingsclere dates back to William of Wykeham: in 1391 Haughurst and Riddlelsland in Kingsclere were acquired for the College, together with other possessions of the monastery of Holy Trinity on Mont St. Katherine (Rouen).

Further purchases and donations led to a considerable landholding in the village: in 1470 and again in 1485, lands were purchased in Kingsclere and Echchinswell (including The Swan, still in operation as a hotel and inn). In 1489, Thomas Faukes bequeathed land in Kingsclere as provision for his obit; finally, one of Winchester's most famous sons, William Warham, Lord Chancellor, Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor of Oxford University, gave The Falcon in 1506, an inn that survived until around 1950.

Winchester's link with Kingsclere lasted just over 500 years until the sale of all College land here in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The closest land now owned by the College is at Lasham.

Wykeham's purpose in giving land to the College was, in addition to purchasing remembrance and salvation, to fund the education of 70 Scholars and 16 Quiristers of The College of the Blessed Mary of Winchester, near Winchester. Though much property has been sold over the past 150 years, land at Lasham and elsewhere (Ropley, Alton, Winchester and Twyford, Eling, Hambledon, Bradford Abbas (Dorset) and Cambridgeshire), together with our other investments and buildings, fund or assist in the education of 120 Wykehamists, out of a total of approximately 700. Though much has changed, the charitable aims of the Founder continue, over 600 years after the death of William of Wykeham in 1404.

LENGTH OF WALK: 5.63km/3.5 miles SAT NAV: RG20 5PJ

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: Moderate

CAR PARKING: There are a number of car parks in the village, but the most convenient are in the centre: a five-bay strip to the east of St. Mary's church, and a larger longer-stay car park off Anchor Road.

PLACES TO EAT AND DRINK: Church café, tea shop, pubs.



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|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 St. Mary's Church | 4 Plantation Farm | 6 Park House Training Track |
| 2 Kingsclere Playing Fields | 5 Hannington Mast | 7 Arts and Crafts Mansion |
| 3 Plantation Hill | | |

ST MARY'S CHURCH



The walk starts from St. Mary's church, a large building of cruciform plan with a squat Norman

crossing-tower. It is reminiscent of St. Cross in Winchester, and despite much alteration in the 19th century, maintains the looming presence of a Norman building. The weathervane is either a bed bug or a tortoise: local myth prefers a bed bug interpretation, recalling an uncomfortable night spent by King John in a Kingsclere inn when forced by bad weather to stay overnight in the village while out hunting.

Sadly, there is not a scrap of evidence for the story. There was once a royal palace just outside the village at Tidgrove, built in 1172 by Henry II, and the palace was indisputably used by King John, but of bedbugs, royalty and weathervane there is no factual connection.

THE CROWN INN

To your left is The Crown Inn, the site of murder in 1944, and the cause of an apology to the village by General – later President – Eisenhower. The details were hushed up at the time, for fear of straining Allied relations before D-Day, but it seems that 10 GIs, angered by an order to return to barracks, returned with rifles which they then fired into the pub, killing the landlady and two military policemen. Rumours of occasional ghosts and the sounds of rifle fire persist; of the fate of the 10 soldiers, little is known, as they were returned to the U.S. in disgrace to serve out their sentences in American prisons.

Cross over the road to reach McColl's and then walk up Anchor Road, passing a public car park on your left-hand side. Continue up the hill. Where the road turns to the right, take the footpath to the left, continuing uphill. Exit onto some community playing fields. Keep going uphill (!), a children's play area to your left. Pass the swings, then take a diagonal 11 o'clock route towards the left of the two goalposts. Pause at the top to

catch your breath, and enjoy a view of the valley and hill beyond.



At the foot of the valley, notice the horse racing gallops. Horses have been trained in the area since the 18th century,

and there used to be races at Cannon Heath (far right).

Now turn back on yourself; approximately 60 metres before the left-hand goalpost you will find an opening in the hedge.

Follow the footpath between two hedges. At the fork, ignore the left turn, and continue straight on with a



field to your left, usually cropped by a herd of distinctive Hebridean sheep, a rare breed, famous for its black coat and profusion of horns. At one point in the early 1970s, the UK population of Hebridean sheep had collapsed to approximately 300; in the years since there has been a remarkable recovery. Today, the breed is prized for its hardiness, its ability to eat anything scrub-like, and its low-impact grazing, making it popular amongst wildlife conservationists restoring traditional grassland meadows.

The land to your right is owned by a local Kingsclere charity.

At the end of the footpath, turn right up a track.



As the track climbs gently upwards, look out for buzzards and (recently reintroduced) red kites. You

might also hear yellowhammers, with their characteristic song in spring and summer "a little

bit of bread and no cheese". The adult male has a bright yellow head and breast, and a chestnut rump. The females are comparatively plain. You can also sometimes hear the rapid and distinctive song of the skylark in spring and summer; interpreted by Ralph Vaughan Williams into *The Lark Ascending* when recovering after the First World War.

HANNINGTON MAST

Dominating the landscape is local landmark, the Hannington Mast, a television and radio transmitting station located on Cottington Hill. On the 17th July 1994, to much local irritation, vandals interrupted the power supply to the mast, meaning that hundreds of thousands missed an hour of the World Cup final between Italy and Brazil. It was of little consolation at the time, but the match is often cited as the most boring final on record: the South Americans winning on penalties after a goalless – and soulless – 2 hours.



Ignore the right-hand fork, but continue between the hedges and then climb upwards, large fields to

both your left and right. The gentle slope of Plantation Hill, beckons ahead.

PLANTATION HILL

There are magnificent views both right and left. To the right, in the far distance, is the rolling ridge of Watership Down, made famous by Richard Adams' book of the same name. The plot tells an unlikely story of rabbits finding refuge from Newbury developers in rural Hampshire. During your walk, you might see the occasional rabbit, possible descendants of those bred in medieval times for meat and fur; the trade recorded in local place names such as Coombe Warren. Rabbits now do a useful



service on the ridges, keeping down grasses once grazed by flocks of sheep, preventing scrub, and allowing the growth of chalkland flowers and particular meadow grasses, as well as their dependent butterflies and invertebrates. Look later in the walk for species of butterfly such as Common Blue, Marbled White and Chalk Hill Blue.



Near the top of Plantation Hill, exit the track and turn right at the (quiet) tarmac road, a white fence directly ahead.

PLANTATION FARM

Continue upwards, past Plantation Farm on your right-hand side. Continue through a tangle of cottages and farm buildings. Plantation Farm belongs to Kingsclere Estates, centred on Pitt Hall Farm in Ramsdell. The current manager, Tim May, is the fourth generation of his family to farm the land: he has committed the estate to a regenerative model of farming, aiming to significantly increase its biodiversity.

At a T-junction, with a sand horse racing track to your right-hand side, turn right and continue in the direction of the Hannington Mast, a hedge and the horse track to your right.



Pass what looks like a converted pillbox of the

Second World War; and you might see black and white Friesian cattle, part of a 450-strong herd milked using a 'roaming milking parlour system': milking happens once a day in the fields, rather than the conventional twice in a purpose-built dairy. This innovative method lessens the strain on the animals, improving yields.



ALDERMASTON

Continue along the ridge, with far-reaching views on either side, particularly fine to the right. In the distance is Aldermaston, once an attractive rural estate village, today overshadowed by the Atomic Weapons Establishment one mile south, where Britain's Trident nuclear missiles are first built, later decommissioned.

Beyond the ridge to the left is Hannington, another attractive village, thankfully nuclear free. At Hannington there is a network of further walks to explore another day.

Arrive at a crossing before the mast, and turn right (you will see a green-painted tank to your left). The track descends gently downhill, a hedge on your right.

Approximately halfway down the hill, look for a metal gate on your left-hand side and three steps.



NORTH HAMPSHIRE DOWNS

Follow the Hampshire County Council yellow footpath arrow and the Wayfarers' Walk sign. To your left, chalk spoil evidences the seabed that Plantation Hill once was, forced by pressure into a ridge. Geologists argue about why sea levels were so high during the Cretaceous period when these chalk beds were formed, the remnants of shell creatures that lived in warm, shallow seas. This side of the Channel, the chalk beds break dramatically, forming the white cliffs of Dover.

The North Hampshire Downs, over which you are looking, fall within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Continue ahead and then pass along the right-hand side of an extended copse, a faint echo of Windsor Great Forest, which in medieval times ended at Kingsclere.

The light aircraft often to be seen circling here benefit from rising thermals.

Continue through the copse for several hundred metres until you come to a fork; then take the right-hand path descending downwards. Where the track levels out, turn left towards a log barrier, immediately afterwards turn right down a footpath with a hedge on your left, a horse racing track to your right, jumps to the distant left.



PARK HOUSE TRAINING TRACK

Early morning, you can often see racehorses exercising, a fine sight in winter when steam rises off hard-worked backs. This is racehorse training country, long established in this part of Hampshire, brought to national fame when in 1867 Sir Joseph Hawley built, with Victorian confidence, a new training facility at neighbouring Park House Stables. Within a year, his investment had paid off: Blue Gown winning first the Derby, then the Ascot Gold Cup, in 1868.



Since 1964, the Balding family has been in charge of training. Ian, father of current manager Andrew,

produced over 2,000 winners during his 39-year reign, including Mill Reef, bred in the United States, but raced in Europe, the property of the philanthropist Mr. Andrew Mellon. Mill Reef would win the Epsom Derby, the Eclipse Stakes, the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes and the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, before injury ended his career. It was not just the number and prestige of his victories that distinguished this magnificent animal, but also the beauty of his gallop style, hoofs barely marking turf.

Outside the world of horse racing, the Balding family have found fame through Andrew's sister

Clare, television sports journalist, broadcaster and 'national treasure' whose double act with Willie Carson made BBC racing watchable, even for those without an interest in the sport.

ARTS & CRAFTS MANSION

Climb a slight rise and directly ahead you will see a gate with a blue and yellow Hampshire County Council footpath sign; here turn left onto a tarmac road. Walk past a series of estate cottages, mostly post-war. At a slight bend in the road, take the upper grass track, with newly built Marchwood House to your right, a 21st-century interpretation of an Arts and Crafts mansion.

Arrive at the appropriately named Winchester Road (direction Overton and Whitechurch). Here, turn right, and continue straight ahead, the road becomes Swan Street. (To turn left would take you up White Hill; a mistake, as the hill is a steep one, acute enough for road trustees in 1770 to seek authority from Quarter Sessions to require all heavy wagons to be drawn by ten horses, not Hampshire's customary seven.)

KINGSCLERE

This entry to Kingsclere takes you past a former Methodist church built in 1886, now a dance hall, and an attractive mix of 17th and 18th century street facades, some hiding older buildings. Number 20 was once a hall house with a jettied front, one of two Grade 2* listed buildings in the village. The Bel and Dragon on Swan Street, a

self-styled 'country inn' converted by Joel Cadbury (of the chocolate dynasty) in 2015, is now owned by Fuller's, and serves good quality food. There are two corner shops, a butcher's, a post office, a Modern British art dealership and a hairdresser's in the village, the remnants of a range of rural businesses that once operated in Kingsclere, which within living memory included farriers and ironmongers. It must have been thirsty work: during the 19th century, there were no fewer than eleven pubs and ale houses in the village, at a time when the population was approximately half of what it is today. Recorded in the Domesday Books are four mills in Kingsmill – the village was known at one time as Kingsmill, from which the dominant landowners took the name 'Kingsmill'; their chapel exists in the village church.

You are now back at the church where you started. Lovers of cricket might now seek out the Kingsclere Cricket Club, founded 1774, one of the oldest in the country, and where W.G. Grace occasionally played.

If in need of a rest, a cup of tea in the village's excellent tea shop or church café might suit; or a pint in one of the pubs. Here you might meet jockeys from the stables, discussing racing business, or, on occasion, Andrew Lloyd Webber who lives in the neighbouring estate of Sydmonton Court, a 5,000-acre patchwork of manicured English perfection.



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