

Local Heritage Walk

Walk H : Bridgetown and Exton

1.5 miles : 1 hour plus stops

Learn to love our location

Start on the bridge in Bridgetown. Going away from the A396 the structure on the right is the old village forge where horses and horseshoes could be changed en route to Dulverton, Dunster or Taunton. Just beyond the forge is Forge Cottage, probably the nicest looking house in the village.

Return towards the bridge and go through the gate opposite the forge into a sheep field (close the gate and dogs on leads). The yellow building on the right was built as squash courts, but now converted into 2 houses. Follow the path with the river on your left until you reach the gate into the Cricket Ground (Hallowed Turf and Pavilion). The ground has been described in Wisden as the loveliest in England, and by the Telegraph newspaper as the 'pick' of the quintessentially British Cricket Grounds.

From the cricket ground cross the footbridge over the river, and turn left having noted the date of 1824 carved in the rock above the road which tells us when the A396 was built. It was established as a toll road for sheep & cattle to be taken from the Minehead area to the market town of Bampton. On the left of the lay-by is the newly planted 2012 Jubilee oak tree. You will come to the Badgers Holt which was called The Rock Inn until 1970. Opposite the Badgers Holt is Rock Cottage, and the Old Post Office once incorporating the village stores and a petrol station. Prior to that it was a waterwheel operated wheelwright business. This group of buildings dates back to the 17th century and to the time of Lorna Doone. Jacob, the village ghost, is often seen in this area: join him for a pint in the pub.

Turn right off the road to take the bridleway at the back of the pub. Believe it or not, you are now on the old road to Taunton. The stone building on the left was once a waterwheel operated sawmill. Go through the gate and up the track to find a Memorial in the fir trees. This is the site where a British plane crashed during the 2nd World War killing all the airmen. Turn back and take the first right down towards a stream. Cross over a bridge, and then, follow the yellow footpath signs, turn left for another 200 yards and look out for the footpath sign at the end of the rock-face on your right. Take the path climbing northwards to Exton. You will cross another track where the footpath sign tells you to go through a hunting gate above the track, and into a field. Keeping the hedge on your right walk up to the top of the hill from which you can see Exton Church and views across the Exe Valley.

Go through the wooden gate in the right-hand corner of the field, and through a further gate beside some old tractor tyres. On the left is a view to the cairn on the top of Dunkery Beacon. You need to turn immediate right. Over the stile (or thru gate) signed 'permitted footpath Exton ¼. Cross the field to metal gate in the top left corner, then turn left past the 17th century building of Red Door Farm. From here the farmer keeps sheep on many of the fields around the village. Turn right at Exton Lane, and just above the farm is Exton House, which was built as the Rectory, and later converted into a small hotel which closed in 2010.

On the other side of Exton Lane take a narrow track past the Old Schoolhouse and the Old School which closed in 1950. After 120 yards there is a gate on the left leading into the Churchyard. St Peter's Church dates back to the 13th century and possibly earlier. It has 6 bells and a Norman type arch into the Bell Tower. This tower has been described as the most 'Rude and Roughest' in the district. The church made history in 1996 when it was awarded the first Heritage Lottery Grant to be given to a church. The restoration that followed cost £150,000 as compared with a similar exercise in 1878 costing £734 which then included the rebuilding of the Chancel. As an essential feature in our community, we are very keen to see the church survive and be maintained. As you exit from the church porch, there is a preaching cross in front, turn right to the 2000 millennium lychgate at the bottom of the churchyard. Beyond the gate there are two sprouting holly stumps where horses could be tied up whilst their owners attended church services. The path leads you to Lype Lane, turn left back to Exton Lane, where you will see that the house on the corner is called The Hare & Hounds: this was once the Exton hostelry. Turn right to go down the hill.

Almost at the bottom of the hill, opposite a house called Herons View is the Jubilee Tree, a large copper beech, which was planted by the villagers for George V in 1935. As you arrive back at the A396, part of the house on the right corner, Charlwood, was once a 'Dame' school, where the pupils paid one penny per week to attend. In front, over the road, is Bridgetown Grist Mill, which dates back at least 400 years. Although no longer used for grinding corn, it is one of the few mills on Exmoor which is still in

working order. Note the hood at the top of the building from which sacks of corn & flour were loaded on and off carts in the road. Also note the pair of millstones in front of the building, which were purchased from the Dulverton Town Mill 25 years ago.

Turn left down the road. The Parish Hall on the left was brought here in 1907, having previously been a hospital at an army camp near Minehead. In the early days it was used as a newspaper reading room for the village with electric light powered by locally produced electricity. The Hall was refurbished by village volunteers in 2009, and is now good for another 100 years.

Turn right opposite the hall into Week Lane (pronounced Wick Lane). On the right is a house called the Old Chapel. It was built in 1848 as a Methodist Chapel, and converted into a house in 1973. You will then go over the mill race stream where there once existed a machinery repair shop and later an electric generating facility, both powered by a waterwheel in the mill race. The National Grid brought electricity to Bridgetown in 1955, when the building was converted to being a toilet block for the then newly opened campsite. Thus back to Bridgetown bridge – **finish**.

