

WYMONDHAM VILLAGE TRAIL

Although the trail can be picked up at any point in the village – where there is ample parking on Main Street – for the purposes of this trail we have started the walk at the Windmill on Butt Lane. Here there is a tea room, play area, camp site and gift shops with seasonal opening times. For info, tel: 01572 787304.



1 • Wymondham Windmill

Built in 1813 by the Compton Brothers from local ironstone and topped with brick, the Windmill on Butt Lane is a five-storey tower mill (pictured overleaf in 1904). It originally had six sails – it is one of only four six-sailed windmills remaining in the country – and is known as a 'Six Arm Lincolnshire Cross'. Some locals believe the Luftwaffe navigated between the mills at Wymondham and Whissendine for their raids on Coventry during World War II. It ceased grinding grain in 1952 (by then it was powered by an engine) but continued with cattle feed until 1960.

This was one of three mills that once existed in Wymondham, the others being a brick built post mill at the top of Brickyard Lane, and a steam mill on Edmondthorpe Road (Joe's Garage). Nothing now remains of these.

The windmill here is partially restored, and the cap was replaced in the 1980s. It is open for viewing, providing a superb view of the village and surrounding unspoilt countryside.

A 'Wymondham Junction' sign mounted on a wall here is from a signal box that was sited near Saxby where the four tracks went down to two towards Wymondham. It is in the typeface and colours used by the Midland Railway, which used the term 'Junction' liberally where there was a change to the track configuration as well as obvious junctions.

Turn right out of the Windmill car park and head down Butt Lane – named after the archery butts that used to be here in the Middle Ages, for battle practice no doubt. John Berkeley was granted 'Free Warren' of a large field called Big Conery, on the south side of Wymondham by Edward III, in recognition of the skill of the Wymondham bowmen at the battle of Crécy in 1346. The first property on the right before the bridge is point 2a, Station House. On your left, visible from the bridge, is 2b, The Old Station.

2 • Station Master's House/The Old Station

As you walk down the hill from the Windmill, on the right is Station House (2a), which was the station master's house. This looks like a modern bungalow, but is in fact a 19th-century timber building with a modern brick cladding. Look over the bridge parapet to the left to see the old station (2b), now a private house. The station here was actually called Edmondthorpe and Wymondham and it was once possible to buy a through ticket from here to Wymondham in Norfolk (pronounced 'Windum'), though you would have had to change trains. This line was the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway from Saxby to Bourne. Charles Stansfield Wilson, well known to railway enthusiasts, was the engineer who supervised the works on the line and he lived at a house on Main Street during that time.



The field on the right across the bridge was the goods yard, the large brick building being the goods-shed where produce would be transferred between rail and road with a track going through the bricked-up arch. The overgrown remains of the cattle-dock is in front of the shed and the derelict building at the entrance to the yard was a weighbridge.

At the bottom of Butt Lane, turn left onto Main Street, named the 'Kings Highway' on old maps, and immediately on your left you will see the (new) Manor House. There is a better view from across the street.

3 • The (new) Manor House

This building was erected by William Mann c1835, on land owned by Lord Harborough, as a shrine to Stilton cheese. Nicholas Pevsner, however, in his Leicestershire guide, dates it at about 1700. The design gives a birdcage effect, the arched brickwork on the roof, disguising the chimneys, being the handle. It was apparently a copy of a similar one in Stilton, no longer there.

William Mann made a fortune from farmhouse Stilton cheeses. Along with the Day family, who possibly made Stilton cheese in the Old Manor House dairy opposite, he monopolised the Stilton trade from the village after Frances Pawlett retired (see item 5, The Hunter's Arms). John Morris made Stilton cheese in the dairy at this house, at the end of the 19th century. It is now owned by the Tollemache family, major landowners in the area (the Tollemache Arms is a pub in nearby Buckminster).

Racehorse Red Rum came here as a yearling in 1896 where he was sympathetically broken in and trained by Tim Molony, who ran his training stables from the Manor House. From his stable here Red Rum was sent out to 10 flat races before being sold on and leaving as a 3 year old in 1968. He went on to win the Grand National three times in 1973, 1974 and 1977.

Cross the road to view the next point, which will be in Old Manor Gardens.

4 • Manor Gardens – site of the old Manor

This modern development now occupies the site of the original Old Manor House. On entering the development note the stone architectural feature set into the wall on the left. This was found, along with a green glazed ridge tile (now in the possession of WECS), during archaeological excavations that preceded the development's construction and are thought to be part of the Old Manor House, the remains of which were uncovered (it having been recorded on an Estate Map dated 1652). Medieval structures in the form of post holes and ditches were also very much in evidence.

This had been the original home of The Lords of the Manor, Hamelin (1150-1290), Berkeley (1290-1635) and Sedley (1635-1700) and was abandoned in favour of the new more prestigious Manor House you have just viewed. The Old Manor House buildings were then used for farming purposes.

Walk a short distance into the development and take the first turn on

the left. In front of you, bearing its Blue Plaque (designed by local historian Trevor Hickman) is The Barn, 5 Old Manor Gardens. This is an example of what is one of the oldest surviving cheese maturing buildings in England, dating from before 1650 Stilton cheese was made in the dairy until restrictions imposed in 1940 stopped production.

Now re-trace your steps back onto Main Street and turn right and then right again into Edmondthorpe Road. A short distance down, past the housing estate, on your right hand side at No 4, is The Hunter's Arms.

5 • The Hunter's Arms

This Grade II listed building, was formerly a pub, The Hunter's Arms, which closed in June 1997. In the 18th century it was the home of Mrs Frances Pawlett, who did much to establish the reputation of Stilton cheese. Her recipe produced a quality cheese of much higher standard than some others being produced in local dairies. She and her second husband William Pawlett, who also had a good head for business, marketed the cheese well. They supplied Cooper Thornhill, the landlord of the Bell Inn at Stilton on the Great North Road, with considerable quantities of Mrs Pawlett's own recipe cheese.

Mrs Pawlett died a wealthy woman on Christmas Eve 1808 at the age of 88. The inscription on her slate headstone (which can be seen in the churchyard not far from the church door) reads: 'Remember to Die', as she had outlived her son and most of her other close relatives, who could have expected an inheritance.

Continue along Edmondthorpe Road and turn right into Nurse's Lane. Follow this lane along and around to the right. At this point you will pass two paths giving access to St Peter's Church on your left. Continue past both of these, as we will be visiting the Church at a later stage in the trail (item 8). Half way up from here is Old Crown Cottage (No 12 Nurses Lane) was bought by the Church wardens and overseers as a poorhouse in 1778 for £21. As you proceed up the lane, if you glance across to your right you will get an even better view of the (new) Manor House.

Continue along Nurse's Lane, rejoining Main Street, and turn left. Walk along, then turn left into Church Lane. To your right you will see the Village Hall.

6 • The Village Hall

Construction of the Village Hall was financed through local fundraising. Colonel Grenfel of The Rookery, Rookery Lane was the chairman of the fundraising committee. Events to raise money included a Gala Fête held by Colonel Gretton at Stapleford Hall, a collection at the annual meet of the Cottesmore Hounds on the green here in the village and considerable donations from a great many villagers.

The hall, built in a traditional style, was opened in 1928 by Colonel Gretton of Stapleford Hall. It was originally lit by large gas lamps that had to be lowered every time they were lit. The water came from a well remaining from a row of cottages that were originally on that site. This well is still there, under the floor, about one metre in front of the stage.

The use of the hall was stepped up during World War II, when there was a huge influx of British and American soldiers and airmen and also Land Army girls. Regular dances were held in the hall to boost morale. Many romances were probably generated in this atmosphere. It was also used for some time as a classroom annex by the old primary school next door. Today it is used regularly by Wymondham Players, the Badminton Club and the Village Hall Committee for films and shows etc.

The last building on the left, before the churchyard, is the Reading Room.

7 • The Old Grammar School/Reading Room

This stone building to the left of the Lych-Gate was originally 'The Old Grammar School'. Built c1670 on the instigation of the Trustees of the Sir John Sedley Charity, as a school for the education of the children of Wymondham. Sir John, who died in 1638, left £400 to be used for educational purposes for the villagers of Wymondham. In 1881 the grammar school moved to the new building on the Melton Road. This original old grammar school was then bought and restored by the Rector and Church Wardens and opened as a parish reading room. The necessary purchase money was apparently raised by public subscription.

A slate slab on the front of the building is now gone and is in the church against the wall behind the knight and reads: "Founded by Sir John Sedley Bart AD 1637". Sadly, the Reading Room lost all its books in the 1950s and then became a snooker club. It was eventually sold and is now a private residence.

Pass through the Lych Gate and enter the churchyard. The Lych Gate was built in 1897 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and is Grade II listed.

8a • St Peter's Church

Wymondham Church is dedicated to St Peter and is built in the early English, perpendicular style in the shape of a cross, with decorated additions made mainly from local stone. It has a 13th century spire, while the light, spacious interior and windows date from the 14th century. The chancel has a wonderful east window made from Victorian glass.

The church contains two tombs of the Berkeley family and also an effigy of a Knight in the South Transept. This effigy, cross legged and in a coat of mail was traditionally thought to represent Sir John Hamelin, who was living in 1324. However, it is more likely to represent his father, Sir William Hamelin II who had a licence for a chantry at Wymondham in 1293. The lower scabard was supported by a small figure of which only the legs survive. The effigy is dated to c1300 and is among a group of 48 effigies scattered across eastern England which have been stylistically identified as the work of a single workshop of carvers. The cross legged pose is found on tombs dating from between 1250-1350. The idea that this suggested this has something to do with the crusades is a myth. It was simply an artistic fashion of the time.

8b • The Market Cross

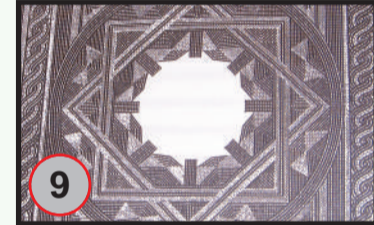
Outside the church, just immediately to the right of the church door (as you look towards the porch), stands the rather dilapidated remains of the medieval Market Cross. It used to stand on Main Street, near the present Post Office, but was moved to this spot, possibly in the 1830s for safe keeping. On February 12 1303, when his army was at Dunfermline, Edward I granted John Hamelin and his heirs the right to hold a weekly Monday market at the manor of Wymondham, probably a reward for services rendered in battle.

As you leave the porch of the church, take the path to the right of the war memorial, leading down to the metal kissing gates. In the paddocks on your left, you may be lucky enough to see two pet llamas called Brenda and Diego and a sheep called Sean.

Follow the path ahead. At the next junction, you have the opportunity to follow the map to the location of the former Roman Villa, although we must point out that it is now covered up and there is nothing to see.

9 • The Roman Villa/Medieval Village

In 1796 and 1865 local antiquarians uncovered geometric mosaics in farmland to the south side of the village that were assumed to be part of a Roman villa. The site was then left untouched until the summer of 2002 and 2003, when archaeologists from the University of Nottingham and the Belvoir Community Centre at Bottesford investigated it. Preliminary geophysics revealed the presence of structures in two fields: Great Gann's (east) and Gann's Close (west). A series of trenches were subsequently dug and extensive mosaic flooring revealed. By the end of the project the floor plan of an extensive villa had been partially recovered with evidence of hypocaust systems (underfloor heating) and a range of tessellated floor surfaces indicating the high quality of the buildings.



Pottery finds dated predominantly from the late 2nd to 3rd centuries AD and were made up largely of Nene Valley beaker sherds. Pottery finds tailed off in the later 4th century, suggesting the villa was then out of use. The excavations revealed that the villa lay very close to the surface of the farmland and that the remains had suffered some plough damage. Unfortunately, further excavations have not yet been possible, so many questions remain unanswered: chiefly, where is the fine mosaic (pictured below), uncovered in 1796 and illustrated in John Nichols' Antiquities of Leicestershire (1798).

Gann's Close field also contains evidence from a medieval village and it is unclear how these may relate to the earlier Roman structures.

If you do not take the detour to the Roman villa site, turn right up the path leading to Chapel Lane. As you walk the path, diagonally to your right over the wall, you will see the Priory.

10 • The Priory

This grade II listed house can be best seen as you start to walk up Chapel Lane. It is not as old as it looks, however, as it is actually Victorian. It was built c1840, when some cottages along Back Walk, near the entrance to the church, were demolished. It is believed some of the stone decorative features used on the front of the house came from the old Manor when it was pulled down. The plaque on the front is dated 1637, which coincides with the date of the old Manor House.

Continue along Chapel Lane to the top where on your left you will see Miss Gill's shop.

11 • Miss Gill's Shop

This pretty little building was used as a hosiery factory and socks were made here for soldiers in World War I. It was built in the 1880s by Edward Garnham, and when he died, it then passed to his eldest daughter, Elizabeth Mary, wife of John Michael Gill. Elizabeth outlived her husband by several years and the shop then passed to their daughter Marion (May) Gill. She continued running it as a general supplies shop until the late 1960s, becoming a well known character in the village. She apparently often went in and out of the back door, when the shop was closed, to sell sweets and necessities to people she knew well. By 1970, it was owned by John Morris, a local businessman, who ran it as an antique shop until the late 1970s. But it is still known today by villagers as Miss Gill's Shop. Attempts to get the building listed by English Heritage to ensure its preservation have so far been unsuccessful.

Turn left onto Main Street. After the chapel on your left you will see 'The Three Horse-shoes' and the Forge.

