



Walk No. 7 – Hams Barton, Kerswell & Milestone Cross

This is walk number seven in a series of historical walks around Chudleigh and the surrounding countryside compiled by Alan Brunton for the Chudleigh History Group. Each walk commences from the Town Hall. The historical content of the walks is mainly brief, but further information can be found on our website and in The Chudleigh Book, available in the library.

Walk 7: Distance approx. 3 miles. Time 1.5–2 hours. Roads with pavements and footpaths

Cross to New Exeter Street and follow the nearside pavement to Colway Lane. On the corner are the Brookfield Flats. In 1879 a Baptist school was built here which became known as the 'Top School'. A large Baptist chapel built in 1850 existed a little further on in Exeter Road; a private dwelling since 1963 at the head of Chapel Court, the houses being built just a few years ago. The Baptist school, with an attendance of over 160, closed in 1945, the children moving to the 'Bottom School', now the library and youth club, which was extended to accommodate extra children. Upon the closure of the large chapel in 1963 the old school became the Baptist chapel. However, this was demolished in 1988 for the building of the flats. If you look closely you will see the old school bell set in the wall beneath the Brookfield sign on the left of the drive in and more obvious is a dipping point of the pot water supply in the wall to the right.

Now take either the pedestrian lane or next road on the right to the gate of the Sports Centre playing areas. Pass through and follow the path to another small gate and then take the little wooden bridge over the Kate Brook. Cross two more fields and reach Hams Barton. This is the oldest property in Chudleigh that is still lived in. Part of the mansion – some of it no longer extant – was built around 1400 and has an interesting history. During the Civil War Hams was a Royalist house and yet in 1646 Lord Fairfax, the Parliamentarian Commander, held a Council of War there discussing the siege of Exeter. It later became part of the Clifford Estate. In 1936, in order to raise funds to pay death duties, it was sold to the sitting tenant farmer, Stan Hill. In 1963 it was sold again to Robin and Gwyneth Andrew. They have both passed away but Hams remains in the family ownership.

Turn left and follow the road until the T-junction and bear left. Pass the road coming in from the right and then the driveway to Kerswell House and you will see four lime kilns. These are some of the finest examples of kilns to be found. Alongside the footpath by Kerswell Cottage you can just make out the remains of the lime burner's cottage. Above and behind the kilns is a quarry basin which used to have a tennis court and small pavilion. The limestone was tipped into the kilns from above and a fire of brushwood and kindling in the kilns was lit to reduce the stone to fine powder.

Follow the road between cottages and round to the left and walk towards the main road at Crammers Cross. You will pass the redundant trout farm and lakes. This was created in 1986 by Rupert Hern whose brother, Dick, was racehorse trainer to the late Queen Elizabeth. Before reaching the main road you will cross the Kate Brook once again. Cross the main road and walk on up the road opposite for a few hundred yards to Milestone



Cross, so named because of its (approximate) distance to Chudleigh. The road from left to right used to be the main route for the horses and carriages between Exeter and Plymouth and from here heads to Oxencombe and the Haldon Plantation. When using this road in the future note the mature trees set back either side of the road. This width emphasises the need to find the best ground/surface for the coach driver all those years ago.

At Milestone Cross turn left, pass the cattery and Farmborough House before walking over and above the A38. The hill takes you down past what was the Brigittine/Redemptoristine Convent and Syon Abbey from 1886 to 1990. It is an imposing four storey building in which a closed community of forty nuns spent their days. The chapel was available for secular worship. The property is now private dwellings. Further down, the nameplate on the wall of Bottle Bridge over the brook reads Heathfieldlake Hill. Why it is so named I do not know.

Now make your way down Old Exeter Street back towards the Town Hall. The little door in the wall of the entrance to Highlands Park houses the diverting chamber, valves and pipes of the old pot water supply. On the opposite corner are two blocks of flats for senior citizens named The Elms. A large house, similarly named, stood here, but was demolished in 1978 for the building of the flats. At Newinton Lodge, formerly named Scotleigh at the time of the fire in 1807, was owned by a wealthy property businessman, Christopher Hellyer. He let Richard Rose, the landlord of the fire-destroyed Kings Arms, now the site of our Town Hall, use part of his large house as a coaching stop until the Kings Arms was rebuilt. However, this did not solve Rose's problems as, in 1815, he was declared bankrupt.

Pullins Terrace on the left was built during 1926/27 and thought to be named after John Pulling, died 1785, a prosperous local citizen in the woollen industry. Of interest are numbers three and five Old Exeter Street. Number Three is named the Station House. Chudleigh's station opened in 1882 and closed in 1958. During this period it had four stationmasters that we know of. The first man to hold this position was James Box who stayed for twenty-one years and lodged in Fore Street. John Pellow followed until 1915 before retiring. Alfred Brooks then became stationmaster until the post was abolished in 1930 and lodged at number three which was at that time named Bay Cottage. He then moved to Heathfield Station until retirement. For some reason the stationmaster's position at Chudleigh was reinstated in 1936 and a Mr S Elson was appointed and he again lodged at Bay Cottage. Two years later the post was made redundant and two porters shared the duties until closure.

Number five used to be the police station and lock up. Surviving features are vertical bars in a side gate and a small key latch inside the passageway. The police presence commenced in 1864 until the police house on the corner of Rock Road was built in 1930. In the History Group's memorabilia we have an old police truncheon dated 1852 marked Chudleigh and VR – Victoria Regina. This predated the full-time position in the town.

Old Tannery Mews used to house a small workshop where skins and hides were tanned and on the corner of Old Exeter Street and Woodway Street was a grocer's shop of which we have an old photograph with the proprietors, Mr and Mrs Lambell, outside.



What is now The Garden used to be a row of shops with flats above linking Old with New Exeter Street. Next door to what is now number thirty-one used to be the Lion Inn. These were poorly rebuilt after the fire of 1807 and were demolished in 1963/64. Locals recall it was better to pull them down before they fell down!



Route of Walk No.7 (map source: OpenStreetMap)