

Kingsbridge Town Trail

Discover clues to the history of the town



A 1.5 hours easy walk around the town of Kingsbridge. Leave at least an extra hour if you wish to explore the museum, churches and pubs. There is an audio guide for this walk which is best listened to along the route via the South Devon AONB walks webpage.

Start: | Kingsbridge Information Centre,
The Quay, Kingsbridge TQ7 1HS

Distance: | 2 miles

Difficulty: | Easy; a steep walk up Fore St

Terrain: | Level pavements and surfaced roads

Parking: | Quay St car park, Kingsbridge
TQ7 1JD

OS map: | Explorer OL20

Grid Ref: | SX 735 440

Public transport: | See www.travelinesw.com

Refreshments: | In Kingsbridge

Toilets: | At entrance to Quay St car park

This walk is available in the following formats from www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/walks



online walk



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downloadable route map onto your device



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Directions

- 1 Kingsbridge Quay:** The area in which you are now standing was once under water. In medieval times, all of this area as far as the row of shops behind you and The Creeks End Inn to your left would have been on the shoreline of Kingsbridge Creek. Over the centuries, quays were built over the mud flats. With winding, muddy and often impassable roads, water transport was far easier in the South Hams. Even in the last century, these quays would have bustled with life as cargoes of timber, barley, livestock, building materials and people were unloaded. Quay House, the fine 18th century stone building set in gardens to your left, was until 1952, the 'Twyford School for Girls'. It now houses Kingsbridge Town Council. Heading towards the town, cross the road by the traffic island and turn into Fore Street. Opposite the Quay pub turn left into Mill Street.
- 2 Medieval Mills and a Woolcombers Saint:** The town mills which give this street its name, were demolished in the 1980s and have been replaced by the shops and British Legion premises on the raised walkway to your right. During the 19th century the mill made cloth, but the original mill on this site was the Abbot of Buckfast's medieval corn mill. The huge mill wheels were powered by water channelled down the hill through leats and it is these leats which hold the key to the medieval shape of Kingsbridge - bounding it like city walls. Next to the mill was a pub called The Bishop Blaise - who was the patron saint of woolcombers. In 1746 a rival tavern 'The Bear' opened on the corner with Fore Street. With excellent cooking and a blazing fire in winter, it attracted townsfolk and those who came to market, later causing The Bishop to close. Further down on the right is The Hermitage which has only been a pub since 1953 but has links with local spirit and wine merchants whose embossed bottles have been found in the area. Beyond on the left is the rear of The Seven Stars, opened in 1840 and originally offering 'good beds, extensive stabling and lock-up coach houses'. At one stage the pub also housed the Kingsbridge steam fire engine. Until the 17th century, bridges were



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- associated with the Christian faith and hostels for travellers were often built close by. The name may refer to the seven stars of Mary's crown and may indicate a much older hostelry near a very old bridge. To see the mill leat, return to the hermitage and walk up the narrow alley which runs alongside the building. This passageway is aptly named 'Squeezebelly Lane'. Turn right and follow the leat along the path. The metal grill into which the water flows is where the water from Eastern backlet once joined and powered the mill wheels. Continue along the path into Fore Street and turn left up the hill.
- 3 Architectural Facelift:** As you walk up the main street, look above the shops and you will see that many of the buildings are slate hung: a protection against the weather. For many, modern facades hide medieval 15th and 16th century buildings built on long narrow plots. Leading off Fore Street are a maze of narrow passages, with names which include Coronet, Khartoum, Melbourne, Phoenix and Wisteria. Take the time to explore them and each will give you a new surprising view out of the town. Take the passageway on your left marked 'Baptist Lane'.
 - 4 From Quakers to Catholics:** At the end you will find a fine Baptist church built in 1799. But you will have already passed Kingsbridge's original Baptist meeting house - an older more modest building, now the pastor's office. The Kingsbridge Society of Baptists was formed as early as 1640, just 30 years after the first Baptist church in London. Although they had a meeting house in the town, early Baptists were still persecuted and so chose to bury their dead at 'Venn Yard' a piece of land several miles away near Aveton Gifford. Return to Fore Street and a little way up on your right you will see another place of worship. Set back from the road this fine pillared classical style 'Gospel Hall' now houses Kingsbridge Evangelical Church. It was built in 1853 of local stone. Almost opposite is

Kingsbridge's Roman Catholic church which has had a varied history. The original building was erected in 1617 for the newly formed Quakers who up until then had held prayer meetings in their own homes. But by the end of the 19th century the Kingsbridge Quakers or 'Society of Friends' had dwindled and the building was taken over by the Salvation Army. Extended to twice its size in 1965 it became the church you see today - which is always open to visitors. If you can, wander around the side of the church and you will see a small burial ground, which contains the bones of Quakers once buried in a graveyard near Duncombe Street. They were moved in 1881 when a building to house the fire engine was erected on the site.

5 Bread and Beer: Further up Fore Street, on your left recalls the White Hart Inn (now a bed and bedding shop). Only closed in recent years, old papers tell that it was sold in 1879 for £1050 and had a reputation for good stabling and an outdoor skittle alley. If you go inside the shop you can see the old inn's restored well, thought to predate the original 13th century building. It would have provided water for the brewing of beer. In the fireplace you can also see a 'cloam' or clayoven for baking bread.

6 The Parish Church and a Curious Clock: Further up the hill, notice the beautiful ornate ironwork on the shop front below the old town hall. The town hall is topped by its curious clock. Built in 1850 it has a large hall and stage, reading rooms and cells! Although not now used as a town hall, it plays host to local fairs, a WI market and a craft market and upstairs provides a community-run cinema. Turn left into the churchyard of St Edmund King and Martyr. Before you explore the church, look back at the clock tower and you will see it has one blank face, which faced towards the old workhouse - some say so that inmates could not see the time when working. The parish church is the oldest and finest building in town. Parts of it are as early as the 13th century, but not until 1414 did the church gain status as a parish church. It was then provided with a burial ground - after Kingsbridge people grew tired of having to 'climb the high mountain' to the mother church of Churchstow to bury their dead. Walk



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across the grassed churchyard to the rear of the building and you will see a panoramic view of the west of Kingsbridge. Across the valley in front of you is a tall stone building; this was the workhouse, which was in use until 1937. Buses are now parked where its kitchen garden used to be. On the way out don't miss the inscription on the chancel door, (the narrow door on your left as you leave). A local cooper, herbalist and 'whipping boy' Robert, known as 'Bone' Philips's 1793 epitaph reads: "Here lie I at the chancel door, Here lie I because I'm poor, The further in, the more you pay, Here lie I as warm as they".

7 Quaker Simplicity: A littler further up, across the street from the church is Leigham Terrace. If you take a look down here you will see an appropriately simple stone building. A modest notice in the window will tell you this is now the Quakers' meeting house in Kingsbridge.

8 The Heart of the Market Town: You are now in the heart of medieval Kingsbridge. The granite pillared walkway is known as the old shambles - or butcher's stalls of the middle ages. In the 18th century, when the use of carts and carriages superseded the packhorse, Kingsbridge experienced its first road widening and the shambles was relocated from the middle of the street to one side. Imagine this part of town on a busy market day where meat was sold and butchered at the shambles and further down the road stalls sold shellfish, butter and poultry. Here was a cluster of inns and taverns which buzzed with farmers and local gossip from 10 to 11 o'clock when most brought grain and other goods into town, until 2 o'clock when the bell rang for the start of market. On the right hand side of the road once stood The Exeter Inn (at No 85 Fore Street), with 13 pork butchers stalls outside it and two doors up (at no 89) The Red Lion. Both cooked steaks from the butchers' opposite for the farmers' lunches, although Suey Rider from The Exeter Inn apparently had the edge with her peculiarly delicious gravy rumoured to contain the dregs of customers'

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White Ale! The Exeter Inn was also noted for its lively political discussions whereas The Red Lion (later called the Golden Lion before it closed in the 1840s) kept a room solely for the corn merchants. Down the passage at the northern end of the Shambles was a pub with changing fortunes. Opened and shut several times, its name changed from The Prince George to The Old Tavern, to The George. Over the years it degenerated into an undesirable and unsanitary place known as a tramp's lodging house and was closed in 1872. Established in competition and thriving today, The Kings Arms Hotel opposite had a complicated history too - being at various times a church house, shop and part of it a ballroom, it became the town's main coaching inn in 1824 when the first regular coach ran to Plymouth. Look for the high coaching arch beside the building. Inside you can see many old photographs of Kingsbridge and a selection of coaching harnesses of the period. Carry on up the street to where Duncombe Steet leads off to your right.

9 Methodists and Motor Cars: Almost opposite Duncombe Street, the archway to Albion Court marks the site of Port's Albion Hotel run by the Port family until 1894. Its claim to fame was that the first motor car ever seen in the town stopped here in 1898. Until recently there was a pub called The Albion here. Just beyond is the old Methodist church with a new church built in 1995 behind its facade. The original church was built to replace a rented room in Dodbrooke, where Welsh militiamen stationed in Kingsbridge in the 18th century were the first to practise the Methodist faith. A little further on is the old Kingsbridge Grammar School. Founded in 1670, it is now the home of the Cookworthy Museum. Its name commemorates William Cookworthy - a Quaker son of Kingsbridge who discovered china clay in Cornwall and founded the Westcountry porcelain industry. The museum which focuses on rural life includes the original school room, Victorian kitchen, Edwardian pharmacy, walled garden and a gallery of old farm implements. It is open from April to October and well worth a visit.



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10 An Early Naturalist: Continue up the hill and on your right stands Knowle House above the new houses at Knowle Close. Here lived Colonel Charles Montagu, captain in the American Civil War and famous natural historian. He gave us some of the first detailed knowledge of the wildlife of the Salcombe and Kingsbridge estuary and discovered Montagu's Harrier. He lived here with Eliza Dorville, his 'friend of science' as he called his mistress, who kept a chough as a pet bird. At Knowle House there also used to be toll gates across the turnpike roads out to Plymouth and Ivybridge.

11 Heating and Healing: Retrace your steps downhill and turn down Duncombe Street. Named to honour the first headmaster of the grammar school, the street once had a ford and later little bridges over the mill stream and Dod Brook. A Saxon thane (or lord) called Dodda, who owned this land to the east of the town, gave his name to the stream and the parish of Dodbrooke. As you descend you will see a church like building on your right. Now converted into flats, it was a church hall built for St Edmunds in Fore Street. Its distinctive thick iron gates were made at Lidstone's Foundry, in Church Street. You can see 'Lidstone' embossed on the gates. Once, most households in the district had a Lidstone kitchen range and throughout the town you can spot heavy iron railings, manhole covers and iron bollards also with 'Lidstone' marked on them. The foundry closed after being bombed in the Second World War. Beyond, the next lane on your right is Eastern Backway or backlet - as it runs beside the course of the old leat to the mill. The first two old stone buildings were once the cottage hospital. Built in 1898 it had just seven beds and two cots and also its own mortuary.

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12 Reading, Writing, 'Rithmatic and Religion: Carry on up Duncombe Street, across Belle Vue Road into Waterloo Road. On your left the new housing development 'Scholars' Walk' was the location that the National School stood on. Established in 1811 by the National Society for the Education of the Poor, National Schools all over England taught according to the principles of the Church of England. In Church Street, on your return you can spot a plaque at the entrance of the old 'British School' - the non-conformists' rival establishment!

13 Saints and Saxons: Continue up the hill and on your right is St. Thomas a Becket's church. The church has links back to Saxon times, when people worshipped at the wayside cross which is now the site of the war memorial. The font inside is Norman and predates the building. It is named after Thomas a Becket, murdered in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170. Strangely, one of his murderers, William de Tracey, owned land just a mile from here and may have helped to build this church. This fine building is mostly 15th century but has been heavily 'restored' since. Churches were always financed by the rector collecting goods or 'tithes' from parishioners. In the 14th century the rector required a flagon of white ale from each innkeeper. This later changed to a tithe of one penny. Retrace your steps and keep left along Church Street. You will pass The Dodbrook Inn - worth a look inside for the collection of old photographs on its walls. As you carry on, don't forget to look out for the archway to the old British school. At the bottom, the small garden area with railings around was the site of Dodbrooke's sheep and cattle market, which was used until 1922. Next to it, the pillared building was a cinema.

14 Mistaken Identity: Straight ahead of you is the slate hung The King of Prussia. Due to its German name it was known as The King George during the first and second world wars. In fact the 'King of Prussia' who gave the pub its name was a famous westcountry smuggler! Now follow Ebrington Street to your left (or follow Bridge Street to your right for a short cut back to The Quay). In the 18th century, the South Hams was noted for growing barley

and a flourishing trade grew up in Kingsbridge centred on Ebrington Street. On your left you will see 'The Malt House', which is now shops and offices and a much larger old building further up the road on your right which was also a malthouse. When in use, they would have been close to the quays and taken in barley from boats to malt ready for brewing beer. Malt is made by partly germinating barley to turn its starch into sugars, so malthouses were built with large, long floorspaces over which the barley was spread and the air warmed by kilns to encourage germination.

15 Industries Old and New: Where Ebrington Street ends, turn right into Derby Road, but as you do, notice the small 'industrial estate' ahead of you. This was once the site of a much older industry - Washabrook Mill was a tide mill for flour and grist, powered by the flow of the estuary waters just beyond. Dodbrooke Lodge, the fine house hung with quarry tiles on your right, was once the coach house to Dodbrooke Manor. All along Derby Road you may spot 'Lidstone type' railings in front of the houses. At the end of the road turn left and cross Embankment Road and you will be walking beside the estuary. The park behind you was also the site of a tide mill. You may like to try and spot the sluice from which it took estuary water - there is a gap in the wall of the embankment which can be seen at low tide.

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16 Silent Shipyards: Pause a while at the shelter at the end of this promenade. It's a great place to observe the birdlife - especially at low tide when you may see mallards, oystercatchers and perhaps even little egrets (birds which look like small white herons, more usually found in the South of France). 150 years ago this tranquil scene would have been very different for all around the water's edge people would have been hard at work building ships. Across the creek, Kingsbridge had its own ropewalk where 30 men and boys were employed making ropes for the ships. At Date's Quay, (near where a modern development now juts out into the estuary beyond the Crabshell Inn), schooners, barges and fast 'fruit clippers' which sailed to the Azores and West Indies for citrus fruits, were built. Vessels were usually jointly owned by a consortium of local shareholders. In the 1850s Date's yard was Kingsbridge's biggest employer using shipwrights, carpenters, riggers, sailmakers and the products of Lidstone's Foundry. The advent

of paddle steamers brought the boom to an end in the early 20th century, but provided useful local transport for Kingsbridge people, offering a daily service to Salcombe (the journey cost 3d in 1901) and to Plymouth several times a week. A new quay was built to accommodate the steamers. Called Bond's Quay - now Crabshell Inn Quay - it was built by Mr Bond who opened his New Quay Inn for steam boat passengers. If you visit The Crabshell Inn - just beyond the Crabshell apartments you can see old photographs of some of the steamers on the estuary. As you return along the promenade to The Quay you will have a superb view of the town ahead of you.

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