



Left: Path through Aconbury Woods
Right: Castle Inn, Little Birch



A walk through time

Mary Howcroft of Hereford Ramblers witnesses the history of Herefordshire on a two-mile ramble

HEREFORDSHIRE is steeped in history – so when you go out walking look around you and think of the people who walked that same route in the past. This walk visits a variety of historic sites all within a two-mile radius.

1 Whether coming to Kingsthorpe from Hereford by bus or car, turn back down the road from the starting place and walk a short distance to a track on the right that leads steeply upwards past some dwellings to the edge of the woods. Carry on forward and then bear right onto a marked footpath (yellow arrow) up through the woodland, bearing left at the next yellow arrow to reach a crossroad of footpaths. To left and right is the ditch and straight ahead is the rampart of Aconbury Iron Age hill fort which dates from 800 years BC. You can take a detour and walk right round the fort admiring the steep ramparts and maybe setting eyes on some of the itinerant deer that roam the woods. Walk up through the gap in the ramparts and onto the inner more level area. Pause here to think of our Iron Age ancestors building their dwellings and making a living from the land around. At the top turn left and shortly after take the marked footpath to the right that winds steeply down crossing two forest tracks and then reaching a T-junction.

Turn left and then right down to a stile. In places you can see through the trees what a good vantage point these ancient people had from their lofty home. Take the path across the field to the lane and turn right. Aconbury ‘forest’ was protected royal forest, the first historical record being in 1213 when King John licensed William Cantilupe to take 33 oaks to fortify Hereford castle. In 1216 he allowed a small area of forest to become farmland to support the nuns at Aconbury Priory. By the 1700s the estates had been sold to the governors of Guy’s Hospital in London who felled the timber, sending much of it to the King’s dockyards. By the late 1700s much of the summit had become open farmland, but this was reforested by the late 1800s and remains today as a managed woodland.

2 We now follow the lane round to the little hamlet of Aconbury where the nuns established their Augustine Priory in the 1300s. All that remains now is the little church restored in the 1800s but is now closed. Retrace your steps from the church and take the second marked path to the left just past the small pond (St Ann’s Pool). Bearing slightly left and then right follow the short stream heading back up towards the woods. This stream and the one through the trees on the right are fed by springs and

the one through the trees was commonly known as St Ann’s Well. This fed the pools by the lane and on the other side of the Church, which acted as fishponds for the priory. It also had medicinal properties with the first bucketful of water collected on twelfth night being the best and said to cure eye troubles. At the top of the field on the left is another holy spring haunted by the spirits of two lovers and called Ladywell. On reaching the wide forest track turn right and then left to follow the footpath up through the woods. Later turn right at the footpath sign (yellow arrow) to walk up along the field edge with the woods on your right. At a junction of paths, take the left hand turn down a track bearing the sign Violette Szabo GC Trail. The Allied Special Forces Association, in association with the Violette Szabo GC Museum in Wormelow, launched this trail in 2000. It follows six miles of footpaths and lanes from the outskirts of Hereford to the museum, which is well worth a visit. Both the trail and the museum celebrate the life of Violette Szabo who worked for the Special Operations Executive as part of the Resistance in France during the Second World War. In 1944, she was captured and shot by the Gestapo. She frequently stayed with her cousins in Wormelow and the present owner of the house has set up a museum as a tribute to her

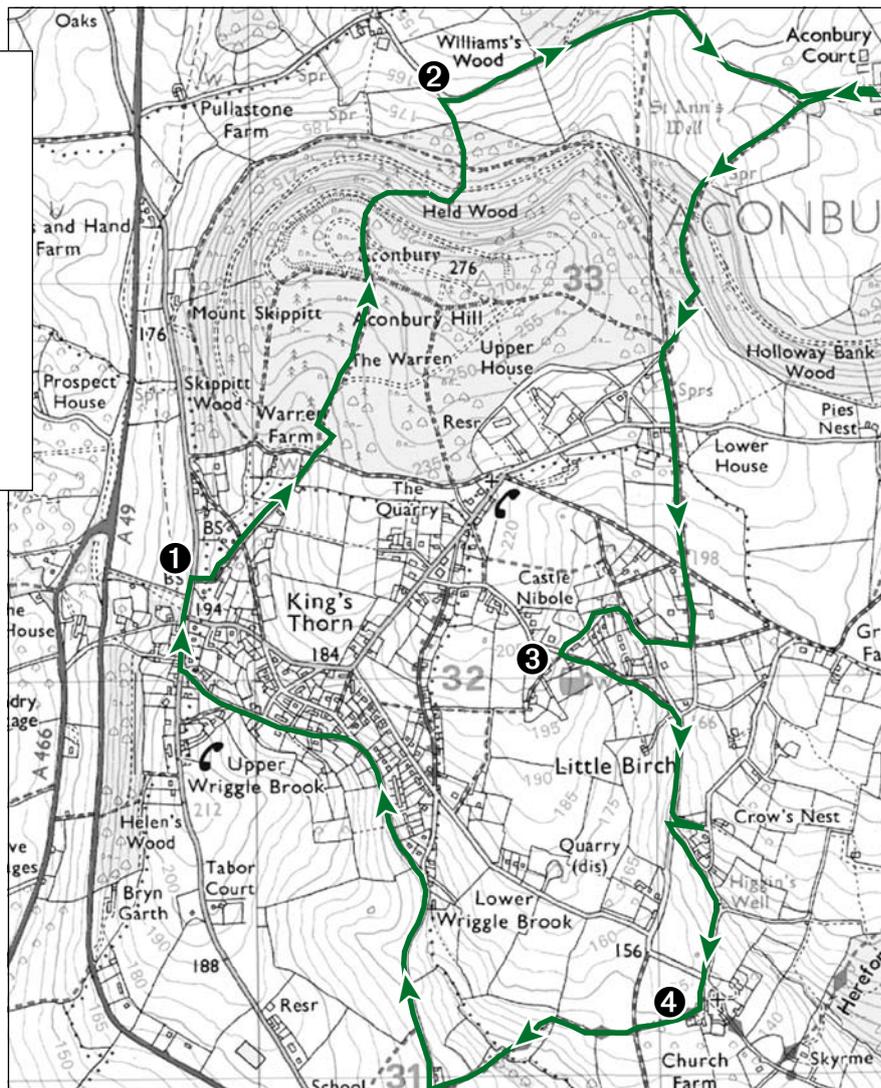
Start/parking: Kingsthorne bus stop
GR SO/498321
Maps: OS Explorer 189
Distance: 6.5 miles
Grade: moderate
Stiles: several
Public transport: number 33 bus from
Hereford Country Bus Station
Nearest town: Hereford
Refreshments: Castle Inn in Little
Birch, 0871 9511000
Toilets: at the pub, for customers

bravery. Follow the track and cross the lane to take one of the many green lanes and byways that are a feature of Kingsthorne and Little Birch. At the second crossroads, follow the VS trail to the right, then right up the lane and on to the Castle Inn, Little Birch.

3 Continue along the road and turn sharp left where there is a sign Glastonbury Thorn. At a small junction bear right down a narrow track and on your left you will find the thorn. According to legend, the famous thorn at Glastonbury was budded from the staff of Joseph of Arimathea when he came to England in the early years of Christianity. The numerous thorns scattered throughout Britain have been grown from cuttings. Here in the village of King's Thorn named after one of them, the original bush has died, but a new one is thriving from a cutting off the old.

Carry on down the track and turn right onto the road. Walk down road to the next turn left and take that. Follow the lane up and round to the right and walk between the houses and hedges to

The Ramblers is Britain's biggest charity working to promote walking and improve conditions for all walkers. In Herefordshire there are four groups: Hereford, Mortimer, Ross-on-Wye and Leadon Vale. For more information contact Tom Fisher, tel: 01886 821544 or email: tom.fisher@virgin.net



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the large well. Legend relates that a well higher up the hill was filled in by a Mr Higgins who was annoyed that villagers trespassed on his land to obtain water. Soon after his living room was flooded by a new spring and to appease the spirits, he quickly re-opened the well but at its present site. The current stonework was erected in the 1900s, so that the well now has two levels, one for domestic use and the other for animals. From the well, take the track lane slightly to the right along to Little Birch church which has been rebuilt in the Victorian style of the 1800s and has a Norman font and stunning intricate ironwork. Take the lane to the right of the church and soon take a footpath to the right through the fields by the farm.

4 We have now joined the Herefordshire Trail, a circular walk of 154 miles devised by the Hereford Group of the Ramblers Association to link the market towns by a scenic route all round the county. At the second line of trees on your left turn down the field bearing away from the trees to cross a bridge over the Wriggle Brook. The path on the other side goes uphill to a new gate and then up along the hedge to the lane. It now remains to wend our way along the lanes through Kingsthorne to the bus stop and car park. So turn right along the lane and take the first turn left to follow the brook steeply up the valley. Take the left fork again and follow it right up to the main road, turn right and, taking care, walk past the houses to the bus stop. ■