

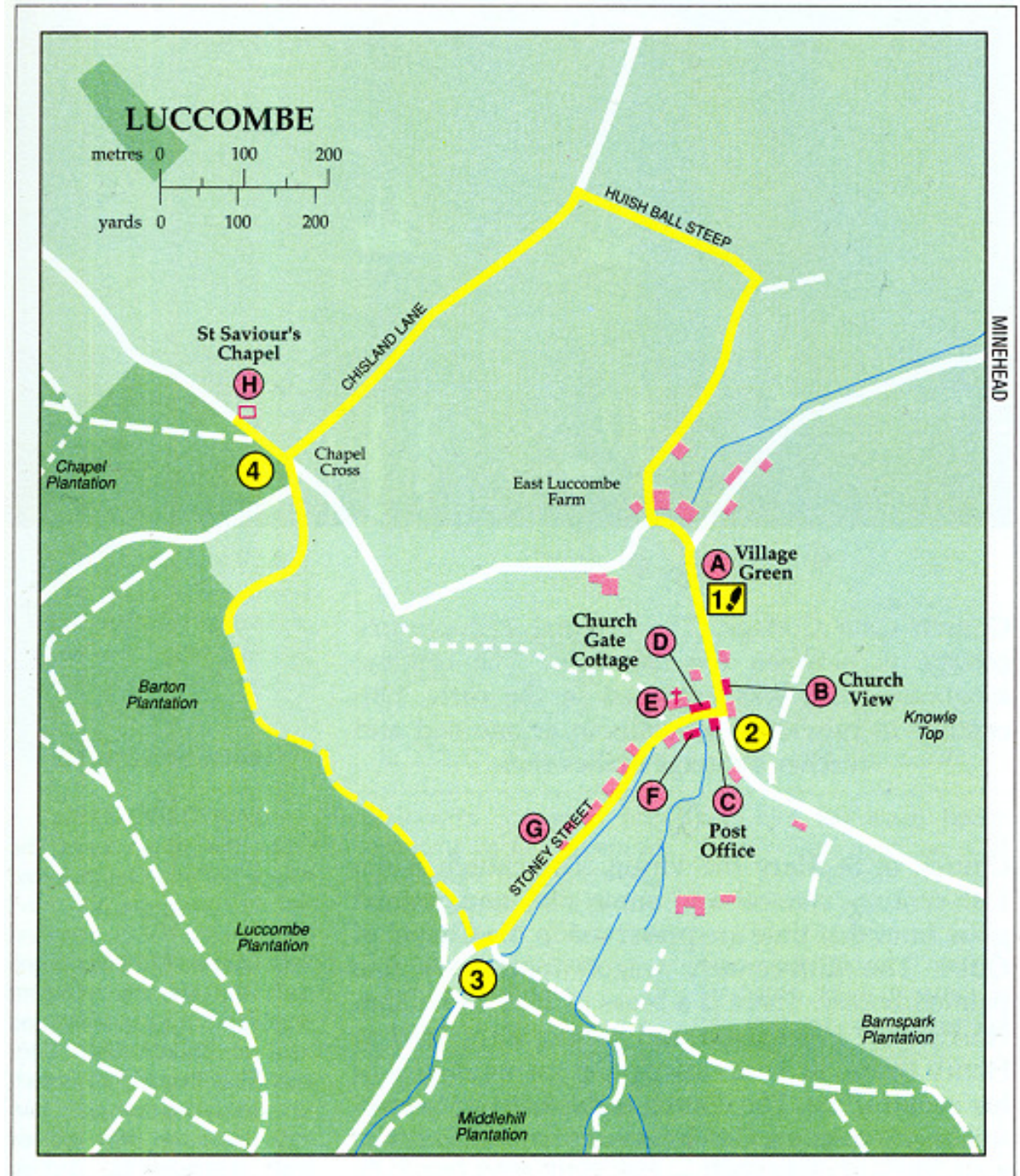
Luccombe (Somerset) village walk

LUCCOMBE, meaning 'enclosed valley' lies in a corner of the fertile Vale of Porlock. It was a Domesday manor, becoming a manor of the rectory in the 13th century, the house probably standing on the site of the present vicarage. There was also a manor at Wychanger, which has a thatched 16th-century farmhouse. From medieval times it has been a prosperous cereal farming area, with orchards since Tudor times.

In the Civil War, Parliamentary troops were garrisoned in the Royalist village. They tried to arrest the vicar, Henry Byam, but he escaped with his sons to join Charles I. His wife and daughter were drowned whilst escaping across the Bristol Channel. After many exploits he escaped to Jersey with the Prince of Wales, later Charles II. There was much local festivity at the Restoration, when Byam was returned as vicar of Luccombe, Canon of Exeter and Prebendary of Wales.

There were iron workings on Knowle Top and Huish Ball, and ore was shipped to South Wales via Porlock Weir and Minehead. In 1745 much of the area became property of the Aclands of Killerton near Exeter, and thrived under their ownership for two hundred years. Thomas Dyke, 10th Baronet Acland, lived at Holnicote from 1794, spending much effort in improving the estate.

Many 16th- and 17th-century cottages were extended from their simple two-room longhouse plans by raising the roofs and making attic rooms with semi-dormer windows. Most three-room cottages were 17th-century with fireplace and tall chimney on the front wall centrally placed to heat the whole house. Cloam (clay-lined) bread ovens project from the backs of the fireplaces and small openings in the chimneys ventilate curing chambers. Most buildings are of undressed local sandstone rubble. The 10th Baronet destroyed some vernacular features by ornamenting cottages in the Romantic fashion. At the end of the 19th century the population declined and the village shrank by 20 houses, mostly ones of cob, which deteriorates rapidly with lack of maintenance.



Between the 1920s and 1940s the novelist Eleanor Helme lived here and wrote about the village. In 1947 it was subject to a Mass Observation survey, recording its life in great detail in the book *Exmoor Village*.

The Holnicote Estate, including most of Luccombe, was given to the National Trust in 1944 by Sir Richard Acland. The Trust lets 23 cottages to families with local connections and attempts to retain a balance of young and old.



• A •

Village Green. The car park is on the site of a former saw pit. A track leads to a field where the former village pound for stray animals once stood. At the other end of the green is the village hall, built in 1881 as the school, which closed in 1946. Education was financed by subscription and assistance from the church and Acland family until 1891. School holidays were started at the whortleberry picking season and there were half-days for children to pick the berries, which were taken by horse and cart to the railway at Minehead for the dyeing industries. Several entries in the records show cases of children truanting to take part in

stag hunting. The green is surrounded by walnut trees, a feature of the Estate. A huge specimen near the hall was uprooted in a storm of 1950.

• B •

Church View. This cottage has a date 1680 and initials HLI over the doorway. It was one of a row of thatched cottages which burned down at the end of the 19th century. The slated bread oven of the middle one remains, but the building was replaced by Glebe and School Cottages. Church View was originally built to a simple plan of two rooms divided by a cross passage. A second storey and tiled roof were added after the fire. School cottage was the teacher's house for the new school and Glebe Cottage was a farmhouse. Its milking shed and outbuildings were in Stoney Street.

②

Turn right at The Square and pass through the lych-gate opposite the post office and next to Church Gate Cottage.

• C •

Post Office. This stands in The Square, where the village pump stood. Mains water and sewerage did not come to the village until the 1960s. The post office with Victorian post box is a 16th-century cob, rubble and thatch cottage. The 'Ketnor' sign remains from when it was Robert



Ketnor's shoemaker's shop in the 1880s. Kitnor is another name for the neighbouring parish of Culbone, of which the family were medieval lords. The shop became a general store in the 1890s, adding a post office in the 1960s, when there was still a shoemaker in the village.

• D •

Church Gate Cottage. The original 17th-century cottage is between the chimneys. The original longhouse plan was extended in the early 19th century to provide a schoolroom at one end and a teacher's cottage at the other.

Visit the church, return to the lych-gate and turn right.

• E •

Church of Saint Mary the Virgin. The church has a 13th-century chan-

cel and some tiles and stained glass from that time are preserved in the Chapel of Quiet. The 15th-century wagon roofs have fine painted bosses. There is a brass of 1615 to William Harrison of Wychanger and memorial of 1669 to Henry Byam, its Latin inscription giving details of his eventful life. The church is depicted in Samuel Palmers painting *Coming out of Evening Church*.

Pass the new houses and continue up Stoney Street to the gateway beyond Hill Gate Cottages.

• F •

New Houses. Three new houses were erected here in 1990, where cob and thatch cottages stood a



hundred years before. They were built for a local housing association, providing much-needed accommodation in an area where few people can afford it. Two cottages were built further up the street in 1988. Sympathetic but functional modern designs were chosen.

• G •

Stoney Street. The street was originally rough and stoney, hence the name. Inglenook Cottage was two one-roomed cottages and Rose Tree Cottage two two-roomed cottages. Along with Oakapple Cottage they are 16th-century and many others are 17th-century. The Cottage and Oakapple Cottage were originally farm-houses and Post Cottage was the post office between the two World Wars. All have been extended from simple two or three-room plans.



③

Turn right along the track signposted to Chapel Steep. From here there are views across the village to Knowle Top with its small plantation and mine spoil heap, Selworthy with its white-washed church, and beyond Stoney Street to Wychanger. The conifer plantation above the track was started in the 1920s for Sir Francis Acland, one of the original commissioners when the Forestry Commission was formed in 1919. Continue to the crossroads at Chapel Cross.

④

Detour left for 60 yds to view the remains of St Saviour's Chapel beyond the posts in the lay-by. Return to the crossroads and turn left down Chrisland Lane. Turn right at the next junction, along Huish Ball Steep. Turn left past East Luccombe farm and return to the green.

Information

Length of walk: 1½ miles

Approximate time: 1½ hrs

Terrain

Quiet country roads (but beware of traffic) and lanes, moderate slopes.

Parking

On green next to village hall, where there are toilets.

Refreshments

None in village. Dunkery Hotel at Wootton Courtenay, 2 miles to the east, or seasonal tea gardens at Horner or Selworthy.

• H •

St Saviour's Chapel. Foundations of a 20ft by 30ft chapel with doorways in the south and west walls can be seen. Excavations showed it to be of Early English style and there is a mention of a chantry chapel in the 14th century. The chapel was probably abandoned in the 16th century.



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