

South Humber HERITAGE TRAIL

ALKBOROUGH



Return from the Hunt

Countess Close, on the edge of Alkborough village, is a designated Scheduled Monument of national importance. Antiquarians believed this ancient earthwork to be a Roman camp, but modern archaeology has shown that the great ditch and bank is medieval. This impressive dry moat with commanding views over the Trent probably enclosed a medieval manor house. Excavation revealed a stone causeway over the ditch at the southern entrance.

In 1066AD, land at Alkborough was granted to the husband of Lucy, who was Countess in her own right of Leicester, Lincoln and Chester. This may be the origin of the monument's name, Countess Close.



Excavation and Reinstatement

In the 1960s, the southern bank of Countess Close was bulldozed and ploughed. Only the north bank and ditch survived to their original impressive height. In 2006, excavations traced the ditches, and the banks and causeway were reinstated in the original position.

Julian's Bower Turf-cut maze

The turf maze at Alkborough is probably also of medieval origin, and the villagers are said to have played religious and children's games on it. A Victorian copy of the meandering pattern is set in the floor of the church porch.



On the Heritage Trail

The South Humber Heritage Trail is split in two sections and can be walked in either direction between Burton-upon-Stather and Winteringham and between Barton-upon-Humber and South Ferryby. There are several car parks along the trail and regular bus services between the villages.

Along the trail are seven information panels at Burton-upon-Stather picnic area; Countess Close medieval earthwork at Alkborough; the Humber bank at Whitton; Winteringham Haven; River Ancholme Car Park at South Ferryby; the Old Cement Works at Far Ings; and the Waters' Edge at Barton-upon-Humber.

Within this pack are leaflets providing information about the South Humber Heritage Trail and each of the five villages along the trail, and details of local walks. As well as the fascinating buildings and historic sites to discover the villages offer a number of establishments to cater for a pleasant refreshment stop.



How to get there

The South Humber Heritage Trail is located along the South Humber Bank between Barton-upon-Humber (7 miles south-west of Hull), and Burton-upon-Stather (5 miles north-west of Scunthorpe).

Exploring the Humber's Heritage

Trail leaflets are available from tourist attractions and information centres across the region, and can be downloaded from the South Humber Collection website: www.south-humber-collection.org. The Ordnance Survey Explorer 281 map covers the route of the trail.

South Humber Bank Wildlife and People Project

Far Ings National Nature Reserve Visitor Centre
Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust
Off Far Ings Road, Barton-upon-Humber
North Lincolnshire DN18 5RG



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Alkborough Village

Alkborough has a history dating back to Roman and earlier times. The village has Saxon origins and was entered in the Domesday Book as 'Alchebarge', translated as 'Aluca's grove'. The Church of St John the Baptist was founded in 1052AD by Thorold. He gave the church to the monks of a small Benedictine Priory that is thought to have stood at College Farm beside Countess Close.

The lower part of the church tower is Saxo-Norman and has the characteristic twin bell-openings of this period. Look out for the insect wings in the porch; these are the remains of butterflies and moths eaten by the resident brown long-eared bats. Inside the church are re-used moulded Roman or Saxon stones hidden under a trapdoor in the raised floor.

The medieval village had a haven and port down on Alkborough Flats. A 13th century document mentions a 'port of Holfleet', and names villagers involved in the illegal export of wool from the port! Later there was a small shipyard on the haven, which was moved to Burton-upon-Stather when the channel silted up.

During the English Civil War, in the mid 17th century, a gun battery was set up in a small fort on the Flats. In 1643, the Parliamentary army defeated the Royalist troops stationed there. The church was badly damaged by cannon fire in the same action when Cromwell's men attacked the Royalists who were barricaded inside.

The village has a number of interesting buildings; attractive stone-built cottages opposite the church, a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel on Front Street, and Tower House on Back Street. A sea captain, whose wife and daughter drowned in the Humber, is said to have built the Tower House. The unusual height and numerous windows allowed him to watch over the estuary.

Around Alkborough and Walcot

A rewarding detour from the Heritage Trail is down onto Alkborough Flats — a low-lying flood plain developed as part of the Environment Agency's flood risk management strategy. Experience the Flats for yourself by walking down the hill past the church and out onto a network of footpaths.

For a circular route to Walcot, from the church take the Heritage Trail to Julian's Bower and Countess Close, and head south towards Kell Well. Return past Walcot Old Hall and the pleasant parkland of neighbouring Walcot Hall. Taking the footpath beside the cemetery and the side of Countess Close you will pass through the village, along Front Street, past various buildings of interest.

Walcot is a separate hamlet mentioned in the Domesday Book. The medieval village dwindled and the Lord of the Manor may have deliberately swept it away to provide more profitable sheep pasture.



Walcot Roman Settlement

The earliest archaeological remains on the site of Countess Close belong to a Roman settlement that existed 1,000 years before the medieval earthwork was built. Surveys have mapped a buried roadway, flanked by a series of rectangular plots forming a linear or 'ladder' settlement, along the cliff edge. Pottery finds confirm the Roman date of this settlement.



Long-legged Wading Birds

Alkborough Flats is one of the UK's largest managed re-alignment sites, developed to reduce the risk of flooding along the Rivers Trent and Ouse, and the Humber Estuary. The area attracts a great number of waders and wildfowl. Inter-tidal mudflats, fresh water reed beds as well as wet and dry grassland, provide a haven for breeding and wintering birds.



Walcot Roman Jar and Coin Hoard

In 1931, a coin hoard comprising a complete Roman jar and coinage dated around AD337 were discovered around 350 metres south of Countess Close suggesting that the Roman village extended for some distance.



A Stone Shaped by Swords

In the churchyard stands a curious sculptured stump. Once a medieval churchyard cross, generations of sword and tool sharpening has shaped the gritstone shaft. Legend has it that in 1170, the Knights who killed the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas-a-Becket, took refuge in Alkborough church and restored it as part of their punishment.

Wealthy Walcot

Walcot Old Hall was built for Nicholas Denham, a merchant from Hull, who was Lord of the Manor in the mid 17th century. The Hall is built in the fashionable Artisan Mannerist style of the period. The decorative cut-brick detail is a fine example of this architectural tradition. In the 18th century a new hall was built nearby and surrounded by landscaped parkland.

