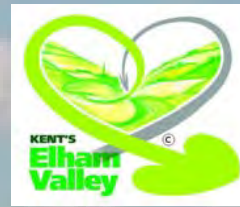


Elham Valley



Rural Scenes and Village Life

Ramble, cycle and open up scenes of pure delight. The Valley carves its way through the centre of the East Kent Downs in a wide sweep up to Barham and Patrixbourne, criss-crossed by a maze of tiny, sunken, one-track lanes. To the west lies a heavily wooded plateau, where expanses of conifer plantations are interspersed with remnants of ancient woodland. This is one of the most densely wooded ridges of the Kent Downs AONB.

The eastern side of the Valley is predominantly arable plateau, with a few smaller woodlands on the steep valley sides. Discover the less exposed, northern slopes around Denton, still dotted with pockets of historic parkland and orchards.

Immerse yourself in the distinctive attractions of village life, of churches, shops and pubs. Elham Valley villages are traditionally built of local flint, brick and tile, indeed the Valley takes its name from the picturesque settlement of Elham at its heart.

As you rise up through the Elham Valley you reach Newington, where you will gain magnificent views. Gaze from the scarp across fields and woodlands around Hythe right to the coast and English Channel, and on a clear day, France. Exhilarating! From Lympe and the Hythe Escarpment you can also drink in panoramic views over the Romney Marsh. Feast your eyes and feel your spirits soar.

River Legends and Landscapes

In the dry valleys of the Kent Downs, the valley bottom chalk streams or 'bournes' are underground, only flowing at the surface during periods of wet weather. Locally, bournes are also referred to as 'winterbournes' or 'woe waters', due to the distress they've caused in times past.

On your jaunts you will probably come across a number of legends about the Nailbourne stream. One says that it flows once every seven years. The truth is that, as with all winterbournes, it appears over ground following heavy rain.

The source of the Nailbourne is at Lyminge, where it springs from beneath St Ethelburga's Well. It's a noted phenomenon that, whilst the stream often holds a plentiful supply of water from Lyminge to Elham throughout the year, it rarely holds any water from Elham to Bishopsbourne. However, in wet years the normally dry ditch can turn into a fast-flowing torrent, flooding the fields.

Pretty Cottages and Swiss glass

Beyond Bifrons Park stands the village of Patrixbourne, a small collection of beautiful cottages built in the 19th century for employees on the Bifrons estate. For clues to the past, look no farther than St Mary's Church whose south doorway bears witness to great wealth in medieval times. Admire, too, outstanding examples of medieval Flemish glass, as well as 18 panels of 16th and 17th-century Swiss glass. With the exception of Temple Ewell, this is the largest collection of pictorial Swiss glass in a Kent church.

As Common as Minnis

On your travels you'll soon be struck by the number of villages with 'Minnis' attached to their names. These are former common lands. Most of the county's 'minnises' occur in a small corner of the East Kent Downs and as you explore Natural East Kent you will come across Stelling Minnis, Rhodes Minnis, Ewell Minnis, Swingfield Minnis and River Minnis.

All are now farmland except Stelling Minnis, which is privately owned by trustees of the estate and is one of the last remaining manorial commons in Kent. Perched high on the Kent Downs plateau and close to the old Roman Road of Stone Street, the 124-acre Minnis at Stelling is a stunning area - maybe have a refreshing ramble.

Stelling Minnis is the site of a Grade One-listed four-storey smock windmill, Davison's Mill. For many years it was powered by a Hornsby oil engine which you can still see today.

Old-World Charms

Between Lyminge and Elham lies the hamlet of Ottinge. An old railway bridge spans the track bed at Ottinge and carries a quiet lane eastwards over the hill to Shuttlesfield. In times past, Elham was the most important settlement in the Valley and once a flourishing market town. To this day it retains a genuine 'old world' feel thanks to its many characteristic buildings and inns.

To the Manors Barn

Excursions to Bridge reveal lots more interesting heritage. The village grew up around the crossing of the Nailbourne by the old Dover road and it is situated on the former coaching route from Dover to London. It has been an important settlement since Roman times and contains interesting buildings of varied architecture, from Tudor to Victorian. The village centre is designated a Conservation Area.

And just imagine this: nearby on the Barham Downs, armies used to assemble for campaigns abroad such as The Field of the Cloth of Gold, the Seven Years War and also India in the mid 19th century.

A characteristic of Bridge is its large manor houses like Higham Park House, Bridge Place, Bridge Hill House and East Bridge House - and it was also the location for one of the first workhouses in Kent. Higham House has been home to many important and colourful characters, including in the 1920s Count Zborowski, who conceived and built the first aero engine powered racing cars here, later immortalised by Ian Fleming's fantasy tale, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

Highwayman's Haunt

When you glimpse the church tower of St Giles, peeping from mature trees, you know you have reached Kingston. First built by the Saxons and rebuilt in the 14th century, the church is well worth a browse. Highlights include a 13th-century font, a Jacobean pulpit and 14th-century wall paintings.

With such attractive surroundings, it's hardly surprising that Kingston has drawn some illustrious visitors and inhabitants, among them world-renowned sculptor Henry Moore who lived here from 1934 to 1940. But who owned the valuable Anglo-Saxon artefact discovered on the Downs in the 1760s - see the Kingston Brooch depicted on the village sign.