

SLEA WALKS 8

SOUTH KYME VILLAGE AND THE KYME EAU

Having left Sleaford the River Sleas passes through only one village during its journey to the Witham at Chapel Hill. That village is South Kyme, a place that despite its rural location has a long, distinguished history. In fact the river here has for centuries been known as the Kyme Eau.

The undrained fens could only be settled on a few isolated "islands" and the nucleus of the ancient village occupied the raised ground (the 5 metre contour on modern maps) where the church and Manor House now stand. The first inhabitants were probably the Coritani tribe, whose settlement at Old Sleaford was sufficiently important to have its own mint.

But it was around 1100 that recorded South Kyme history begins and the village assumed local (and indeed national) prominence, for this was when the de Kyme family became lords of the manor. By 1135 they were "Barons of Kyme" and within two generations they were Sheriffs of Lincolnshire too. It was a Philip de Kyme who, around 1170, founded a small Augustinian priory (whose members wore black robes and were thus known as the Black Canons) here on the site of the present St. Mary's church. [A] It was later much enlarged by Simon de Kyme and again by their successors the Tailboys family. The priory continued to prosper and survived until the Dissolution in 1536. In 1338 the manor passed through marriage into the hands of the de Umfraville family and it was Gilbert de Umfraville who had a grand, fortified house built here around 1340 of which the Kyme Tower is all that remains. [B] Gilbert had replaced an earlier wooden manor house with his "castle" and when that in its turn was pulled down around 1725 the present Manor House was built nearby from the stone. There are remaining earthworks to the south of the church for the original manor house moat and for the gardens of the 18c house.

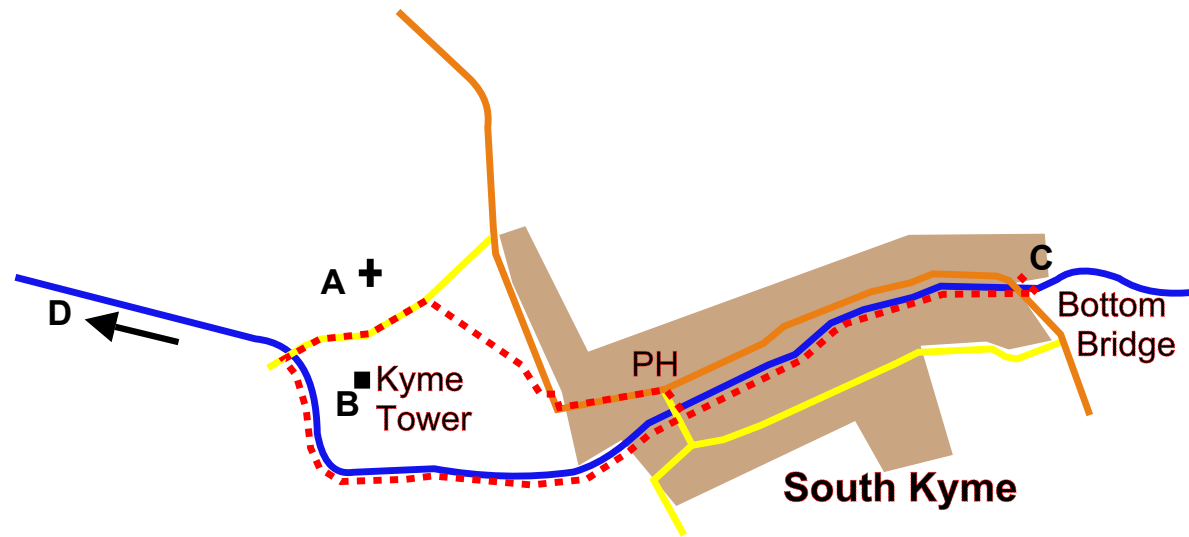
On completion of his grand house Gilbert de Umfraville turned his attention to St Mary's church at the priory. He enlarged it considerably around 1435 and though some fragments of the early masonry remain it is much smaller now. It was first reduced immediately following the Dissolution and again when being rebuilt in 1805. At the restoration of 1890 however it grew again when a new chancel was added.

Part of the walk is beside the Kyme Eau, which terminates at Ferry Farm Bridge when the waterway becomes the River Sleas. The Kyme Eau predates the Sleaford Navigation as a navigable waterway by several centuries. It is known to have existed since well before 1343 for there is a record of a petition in that year to King Edward III from Gilbert de Umfraville requesting the personal right to charge tolls in return for delineating and maintaining the channel. We also know that building materials for Tattershall Castle, begun in 1434, were transported along the waterway. That long history may well account for the Kyme Eau name surviving onto 21c OS maps.

Amongst all the history there is modern artwork to be seen too. On a small green by the High Street stands a large wooden carving of a kingfisher by Simon Todd, created as a celebration of the birds' return to the Kyme Eau during the 1990's. By Bottom Bridge a large ornamental archway commemorates the bi-centenary of the Sleaford Navigation in May 1994. [C]

A suggested extension to the walk goes northwest for a mile and a half to Ferry Farm Bridge. [D] Some old maps name this as "Halfpenny Bridge" and it was also known locally as "Ha'penny Hatch", with two conflicting versions of how these names came about. The first is that the "halfpenny" relates to the passenger charge here in the days when there was a ferry, and later a tollbridge. The second tells that local children were paid a halfpenny to jump onto boatloads of hay, their weight flattening it sufficiently to prevent it catching on both this and Town Bridge in South Kyme.

On the approach to Ferry Farm Bridge the navigation is noticeably straight for here it utilises a short section of the Roman Car Dyke, a 56 mile long drainage system, possibly also used as a canal for transporting supplies, linking the River Nene in Cambridgeshire to the River Witham in Lincolnshire. Roman pottery has been found in the vicinity.



SOUTH KYME VILLAGE

This is a circular walk, mainly in South Kyme village of, 1¼ ml (3 km) with an optional extension to Ferry Farm Bridge which adds 2½ ml to the walk. The walk starts near Bottom Bridge in South Kyme where there is some parking, (Grid Ref. 178498). This short village walk may also be extended beside the navigation in the other direction towards Chapel Hill. There is a small parking area by the Sleaford Navigation bi-centenary memorial situated on the north side of Bottom Bridge, near the golf club entrance.

The walk comprises a selection of easy, level canal side paths, meadow and country lanes. There is a pub, the Hume Arms, in South Kyme for refreshments and it is possible to picnic almost anywhere beside the Kyme Eau.

MAPS: OS. Landranger 130 (Grantham), Explorer 261

ROUTE INSTRUCTIONS.

- (1) Cross Bottom Bridge and turn right onto the signposted footpath by the navigation. (Look for the kingfisher sculpture on the far bank as you go) Pass a footbridge over the navigation and continue to a road bridge (Town Bridge).
- (2) Now turn right to join High Street and cross to the pavement opposite. Turn left. Just after the road bends right, cross again (with care!) to a footpath sign and twin kissing gates. Next bear right on a part grass, part surfaced path towards St. Mary and All Saints church. A second pair of kissing gates gives access to a lane across which there is a path to the churchyard. Turn left to pass the church and the Kyme Tower before crossing a bridge over the navigation.
- (4) [To do the recommended extension to the walk turn right here. A good, wide grass path leads in a mile and a quarter to Ferry Farm Bridge. There are far reaching views along the way with Asgarby and Ewerby churches seen on the skyline. Return the same way.]
- (5) Otherwise turn left by the waterway and walk back to Town Bridge. Here you may either keep ahead and retrace the outward route back to the start, or return along High Street past the kingfisher sculpture.