

Legend of the Mordiford Dragon

One day a little girl called Maud was walking through the woods near Mordiford when she chanced upon a small creature that resembled a shiny cucumber with tiny fluttering wings. Maud played with the creature for a while and had so much fun that she decided to take it home as a pet.

Her parents instantly recognised the creature as a dragon and her father threatened to kill it, but gave in when Maud cried and pleaded for its life to be spared. Fearing that he might still attempt to kill her new playmate she took it away to a secret hiding place in the woods and fed it on milk.

The little dragon grew very fast and soon milk alone wasn't enough to sustain it, so it began killing the livestock from surrounding farms. At first the dragon ate ducks and geese, but then its appetite turned to sheep, then cows and finally local people. However, it never touched Maud who continued to visit and play with her pet.

The villagers became terrified, but did not know what to do, as none of them were brave enough to approach the dragon, let alone attempt to kill it. Then one day a man with nothing to lose volunteered to tackle the fearsome beast. He was a condemned criminal called Garson who was guaranteed a free pardon if he could put the Mordiford dragon to death.

Garson discovered that every day the dragon went down to drink from the banks of the river at the point where the Lugg meets the Wye. He placed a large cider barrel nearby, hid inside and waited for the dragon to appear. When it started to drink Garson shot an arrow through a hole in the barrel, which went straight into the dragon's heart. Although Garson was successful he never received his reward as the dragon incinerated him and the barrel with its dying breath.

Up until the 19th century an image of a large green dragon or 'wyvern' was painted on the western wall of Mordiford Church. The first record of the dragon from the end of the 17th Century states it had three pairs of wings and four pairs of legs.

About Mordiford

The village grew up at an ancient ford over the River Lugg. The present nine-arched bridge is part 14th Century, but largely 16th Century and is one of the oldest registered bridges in the county. The river normally flows under two of the arches, but all are needed in times of flood. The church, whose tower dominates the end of the bridge, is of Norman origin, but much restored in the 19th Century.

A little to the north stands Sufton, the mansion of the Hereford family, lords of the manor since the 12th Century. It was designed in the 'classical' style by Wyatt at the end of the 18th Century and the grounds were laid out by the renowned landscape architect Humphrey Repton.

Nearby Bears Wood within the valley is reported to be where the last wild brown bear was killed in Herefordshire.

Herefordshire's Orchard Heritage

This walk shows off Herefordshire's claim to be "The County of Orchards". Look out for the 'traditional' orchards with their widely spaced, large old apple trees and the newer commercial orchards with their closer planted and smaller 'bush' trees; both types displaying mistletoe in winter, sparkling pinky-white flowers in Spring and brightly coloured apples in Autumn. Orchards, especially 'traditional' ones, are also home to a wide range of wildlife including the rare Lesser-spotted Woodpecker and iridescent Noble Chafer beetle. See what wildlife you can spot along your walk!

Parking

Parking is limited in the village, but there is space available near the bridge and a car park at Swardon Quarry.

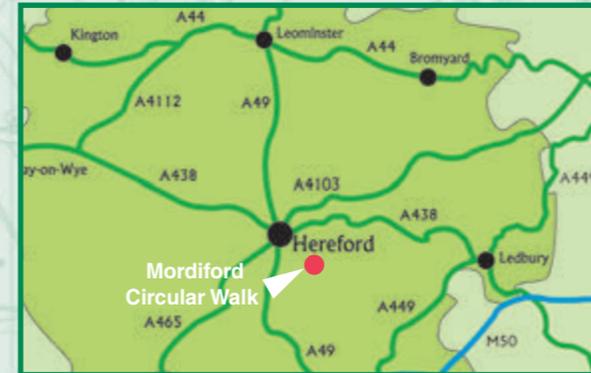
Refreshments

Refreshments are available at local village stores. Local public houses serve homecooked food and a range of locally produced ciders and perry, though some get busy during the summer months so booking may be advisable.

Walk Information

This leaflet has been designed to tell you all you need to know about the route **before** you set out.

Stiles	5
Gates	12 (1 kissing gate)
Steps	1
Narrow Bridges	0
Slopes	Many steep sections
Narrow path	At point 8 path only 1m wide



© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Herefordshire Council 10024168 2015

Always follow the Country Code. Enjoy your walk!

Walk them all...

There are 15 circular walks in the county ranging in distance from 2 to 10 miles and four of these walks are 'Miles without Stiles' routes.

For more information on the other routes or to download the leaflets please visit:

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/circularwalks

This route is managed by Balfour Beatty Living Places on behalf of Herefordshire Council
www.herefordshire.gov.uk/contactus

Designed & produced by Herefordshire Council in partnership with Hereford Cider Museum with support from the E F Bulmer Benevolent Fund



FREE

The Mordiford Circular Walk

DISTANCE: 4 miles

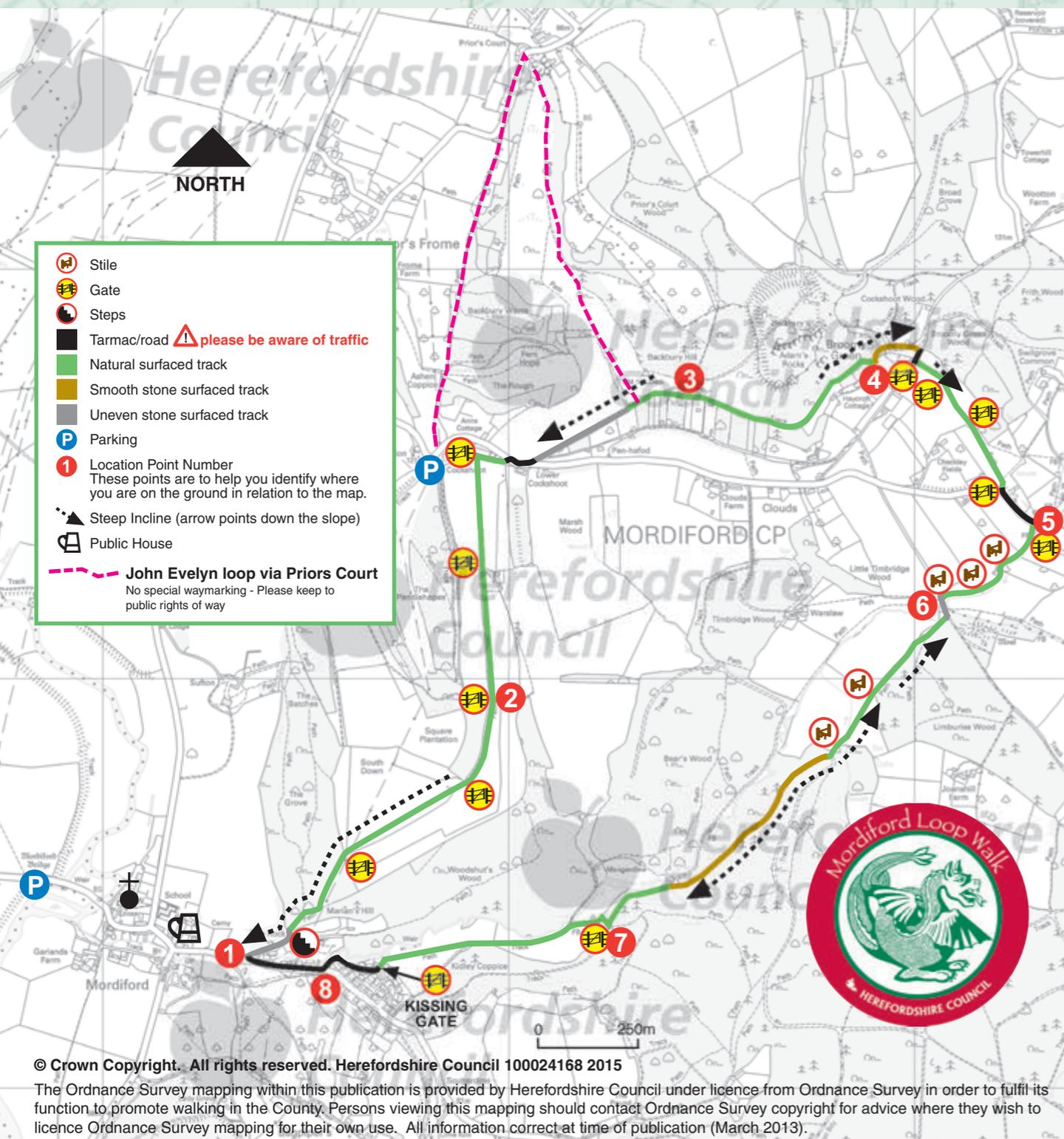


now including a
John Evelyn loop



Active
Herefordshire





Backbury Hill - Utopia in Herefordshire

Between points 3 and 4, this walk passes under the ancient hill fort of Backbury, settled in the Iron Age. This site has significance in the history of gardening as the place identified in the seventeenth century as the perfect form for a 'garden' which take its shape from nature, drawing in mounds and groves and views to wooded areas, valleys and rivers. This presages the English Landscape Gardening of the great estates that took place a century later, including at nearby Sufton Court.

The site was identified by Rev John Beale of Herefordshire in a letter to the famous diarist John Evelyn in 1659. Beale describes this as "Antique Gardening" where the main objective is an appreciation of natural features and views of rural scenes, contrary to the structured gardens that were the fashion. Although he had not seen it himself, John Evelyn went on to describe the spot in his unpublished book on gardening called *Elysium Britannicum*

"No fantastical Utopia, but a real place...a place so blessed by natural situation and varieties that...it were capable of being made one of the most august and magnificent gardens in the world."

Although it was never turned into a 'garden', the key elements of this "paradise" are still recognisable today. At the top, a mount of "vast and prodigious height, the ascent is by several ways some more oblique, some by more gentle degrees, windings and meanders... Upon the summit of this hill (the air seeming always serene and pleasant) is an ample green plain of a square figure, and every way crowned with thickets of oaks, the borders whereof are all the winter long decked with a fringe of primroses, violets and some other lively and odorant plants" and it was important to Beale and Evelyn that there were lesser hills standing nearby from which to appreciate the others.

From the hill top there are views of different natures. The one to the East into the Woolhope Valley Evelyn described as "a most desolate country called the Vale of Misery, full of poor and wild cottages...with woods and other vast objects of rocks, caves, mountains and stupendous solitudes fitting to dispose the beholder to pious ecstasies, silent and profound contemplation."

By contrast the view to the North and West visible from this walk, although now more obscured by trees, is towards the Wye, Lugg and Frome rivers and "into most rich vales and other ravishing varieties...a rich pasture by a most pleasant riverside...(with) arable and orchards after choice of ways leading down to the riverside whether upon a green and under shade or ... in the open air". At the foot of the hill lies Priors Court which may be the mansion in the view that Evelyn also refers to.

Rev John Beale (1608-1683) was born in Yarkhill, Herefordshire. His father was a gentleman farmer and his mother's family, the Pyes, were well connected at Court. John was educated at Eton and Cambridge, returning to live in Herefordshire. Pursuing his father's interest in cider, he published *Herefordshire Orchards, a Pattern for all England* in 1657 and contributed to Evelyn's *Pomona* (1664). He moved to Somerset to become vicar of Yeovil. Elected an early Fellow of the Royal Society, he was highly intelligent, respected, and thoughtful and was acquainted with Henry Hereford, a hermit and mystic who lived on Backbury Hill.



John Evelyn (1620-1706) was born in Surrey into a family whose wealth came from gunpowder milling. Educated at Oxford, he travelled extensively and moved in influential circles in London. He was a prodigious writer both as a diarist and on subjects as diverse as pollution, gardening and politics. He was a founder member of the Royal Society. In 1664 he published *Sylva*, an extensive examination of forest trees to encourage tree planting for shipbuilding, together with its appendix *Pomona* looking at fruit trees and cider in which he observed "all Herefordshire is become in a manner but one entire orchard".

Extracts from a paper by Peter H Goodchild in *Garden History*, Vol.19, No.2 (1991)