

Cockington Country Park

A Walk Back in Time

– Large Print

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**Torbay Coast &
Countryside Trust**

A Timeless Valley

Walking in to Cockington is like walking back in time. The valley is famous for its atmosphere of a bygone age, with its old cottages, its pastures, woods and Devon lanes. It is a living landscape, which tells a story stretching back for centuries: a story of how human beings shaped the land and worked with nature to make a living from the valley.

Our ancient ancestors had a presence here well before the birth of Christ but it was the coming of the Saxons, some 13 hundred years ago, that was to create the settlement of Cockington that we can identify with today. It is highly probable that one of the Saxon groups landing on the shores of Torbay made their way up this wooded valley looking for a suitable spot to clear and create their farmsteads, for they were very much a farming people.

Here they created their settlement and provided its original name: Cocca's - tun. It is possible that this originated from the name of the original group leader "Cocca", tun being the derivation for a Saxon farmstead. Another possibility is that "cocca" relates to the abundant red soils of the valley.

Either way we'll allow you to make up your own mind.

The Three Families of Influence

At the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066, Alric the Saxon was Lord of the Manor of Cockington but soon lost his estate to the Norman conquerors. The Fitzmartins became Lords of the Manor and, obviously well pleased with their new domain, took the name “de Cockington”.

Their ownership was to last for 3 hundred years, and then in 1375 they relinquished ownership which soon passed to the Cary family.

The Carys were a family of considerable national influence and were to become a pillar of the local establishment. Amongst other positions of rank George Cary was a Deputy Lord Lieutenant of the County during Elizabeth 1 reign and this included responsibility for defending the local area from the Spanish threat of invasion. In 1654, having fought for the king during the Civil War, Henry Cary was pressured into selling Cockington to the Mallocks, gold merchants of Exeter. The Mallocks were to remain as owners of the estate until 1933. It has been through the stewardship of these three families that Cockington developed up the 20th century.

Your walk will provide you with evidence of Cockington’s three families of influence and the labours of generations of their tenants who moulded the countryside hand in hand with nature and the seasons of the year.

The Walk

1. The Mill

A mill has existed on this site since mediaeval times. As well as grinding corn which was then stored in the adjacent granary, power from the water-wheel was utilised through a series of cogs and shafts in the Victorian sawmill for cutting timber. This was situated within the site of the gardens through which you have just walked. In addition, water-power was used for threshing and combing local reed in preparation for that vital building material – thatch.



Walk out in to the centre of the Village through the main gate.

2. Village Centre

Cockington has two hearts – the Court, where the Lord of the Manor lived – and here, at the centre point of those original Saxon farmsteads that nestled on the valley floor. You have just walked across the site of one of those farms. This was once called Home Farm and it finally ceased working in 1939. The Weaver’s Cottage, next door to the Granary, was the farmhouse. The village centre

soon became an important crossroads to neighbouring villages and towns such as Torre, Paignton, Marldon and Totnes.

Until the 1840s there was no coast road between the new Torquay and Paignton, so much important trade would have passed this way, mainly on the backs of pack animals.

No doubt The Forge would have provided a useful service to travellers as well as to the needs of the locals in providing their horseshoes and one hundred and one iron implements. The origins of the present building are thought to be 14th century.

Across the “square”, to the north-east of the forge, stands Court Cottage. This building has had many purposes during its long life. It started as a “Devonshire Longhouse”; a self-contained smallholder’s homestead, where the family lived with their livestock, divided only by a simple timber-walled corridor. Later it became the residence of the reeve, the village foreman, and as such, the venue for the village court. In Victorian times it briefly became the village school.

Across the road from Court Cottage is Rose Cottage. This was where the blacksmith from the forge lived for many years as well as being the village store and post office during the reign of Queen Victoria. You can see how the developing centre of the village provided for the needs of its inhabitants. In mediaeval times, we

also know that a pond existed in front of the forge, complete with its ducking stool for gossiping women! For the men there were adjacent stocks with a good supply of dung at hand!



Now proceed down Cockington Lane towards the sea, with the stream on your left.

Immediately on your left, in the gardens of Rose Cottage, notice the last remnants of cider apple trees in this particular area.

Next you will pass between the sites of two more of the original Saxon farmsteads, literally opposite each other. Associated with the right-hand farm is the now converted majestic Red Barn and abutting it a granite drinking trough that once stood on the turnpike road near the present day Grand Hotel.

3. Lanscombe House

Lanscombe House is a late Victorian house built on the site of a previous tannery, destroyed by fire in 1881. Leather was another immensely important multi-purpose material for centuries.



One hundred yards on down the lane from Lanscombe, pull in by a five bar gate. Here the old Paignton road turned right to climb the hill, a route you can still take today as a right-of-way.

For those who can cope with a flight of steep steps you can also take the rather fascinating route up around a Z-bend in the track and then immediately turn right, off the track and down the steps, an integral part of the Lower Lodge.

For those who can't cope with steps just keep on down the lane and turn back sharp right to the Lower Lodge.

4. The Lower Lodge

The Lower Lodge denotes the entrance to the Park. It was built, together with the new driveway, by the Rev. Roger Mallock in the late 1840's to allow the Squire and his lady direct access to the Court without having to drive past the prying eyes of the villagers.



Walk through the archway of the Lower Lodge and up the carriage drive to the first of the ponds.

5. The Ponds

The history and development of the park and ponds is beautifully enveloped in the mists of the time. From Norman times the park land would have been closely associated with deer hunting and

even in 1654, when the Mallocks purchased Cockington, 120 deer were accounted for.

The origin of the three ponds is thought to be associated with the arrival of the neighbouring monks of Torre Abbey in 1196 and their spiritual involvement with the de Cockingtons. These simple ponds would have been solely for the purpose of providing carp for the monks' table. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries it is highly probable that the ponds provided an industrial use in being a soak for cattle hides in preparation for tanning down at Lanscombe.

In 1659, under the Mallocks, began the recreation of the park as a more aesthetically pleasing environment, complemented by the development of ornamental ponds and a home for the carp once again. In the late 19th century Richard Mallock did much to regenerate and re-plant the park and woodlands. His social responsibility to his tenants and Torquay's population was recognised in his position as a popular MP for Torquay until his premature death in 1900.



Walk up the right hand side of the ponds to the gamekeeper's cottage.

6. The Gamekeeper's Cottage

The gamekeeper's cottage lies on the edge of Manscombe Wood (Saxon derivation relating to haunted or devil's wood!). The building is first mentioned in the 16th century in the days of the Cary family. It was the Warrener's cottage, standing next to a large walled enclosure containing a rabbit warren, which provided meat for the squire's table.

However, by the early 19th century pheasant-rearing and shooting was the fashion and a Gamekeeper was employed to raise game and protect it from the poacher.

Penalties were harsh: in the 1830s Squire Mallock, as Justice of the Peace, sentenced a 12 year old boy to transportation to Australia for poaching a rabbit!

The latticework of timber across the end wall of the cottage is where game was hung in preparation for the kitchen.

By Victorian times this included:

- Pheasant**
- Woodcock**
- Partridge**
- Snipe**
- Hares**
- Pigeon**

- Plover
- Rabbit
- Wild duck
- Quail

The last gamekeeper left this cottage in 1936.



From the Gamekeeper's Cottage an additional circular walk through Manscombe Wood to the Warren Barn can be included. However for the main walk route take the surfaced path to re-join the carriage drive leading to the Court. The drive passes through a shaded red sandstone cutting and under the old Totnes lane leading up from the village. Some 50 yards on the Victorian drive meets the original drive from the village.

7. Carriage Drive Junction

The circular granite trough at this junction is a “pound” and was instrumental in producing that most important of Devonshire beverages – cider! Every Devon village had at least one pound and this one used to be up behind the Court. In this apples were crushed with a circular stone being propelled around the trough by a horse.

Behind you this beautiful spacious area of the park was an “arboretum” – the squire’s collection of different species of trees. Amongst the trees lie unobtrusively the “plague pits” where many unfortunate souls of the village were laid to rest in communal graves during medieval times.



Turn right down the Drive to the building immediately on your right.

8. The Higher Lodge

This is the original entrance and drive to the Court. The quaint timbered structure of the lodge is thought to have its origins in the time of Elizabeth 1 when George Cary was Lord of the Manor. The present building dates from the 1830s.



Now retrace your steps back up the drive to the junction and on towards the Court. Should you prefer walk across the lawns which lead up to the house, but please don’t walk across the cricket pitch!

9. The Avenue

The avenue of 42 Lime trees along the line of the drive was planted by individual members of the GATT (Global Agreement on Tariffs & Trade) Conference held at Cockington Court in 1951.

10. Cockington Court

A dwelling has stood on this site since Saxon times, initially for the Lord of the Manor and then by Victoria's reign, for the Squire and his family. The original structure would have been a modest timbered hall. The De Cockington family are probably responsible for the conversion into local stone and a structure that would have been recognisable up to Tudor times, including a separate kitchen block. It is the kitchen area, within the north wing, that provides us with the oldest architectural remains today. Notice the great granite lintel of the fireplace. From outside the north side of the wing can be identified with its characteristic Tudor door and mullioned windows.

It was the 18th century Mallocks who were to radically convert the Tudor manor house and doing away with its great hall, provide a quite distinctive pitched roofed, three storey house. However by 1820 a Mallock descendent had brought about the changes that provide us with the exterior we see today and later Victorian members of the family would recreate the library and drawing room with their walnut panelling which now provide the setting for

the café. The view from the Court down across the lawns is also associated with the 1820s. A number of buildings, including the original Alms-houses which were situated somewhere around the site of the present cricket pavilion, were demolished to give an uninterrupted view of total tranquillity.



Proceed through the Court, up the main stairs, past the craft rooms and out into the Rose Garden. To the right of the garden is the old stable and coach yard whilst by exiting left you will have access to Cockington Church passing by Mr. Mallock's tennis court.

11. Cockington Church

Cockington Church is dedicated to St. George and St. Mary and is one of the prettiest churches in Torbay. Its origins are as old as the Court but the main structure that you see today is 14th and 15th century. At the time of Torre Abbey the monks provided for the needs of the church, largely as a private chapel. The church is closely associated with the three Cockington families. One of the most fascinating aspects of its interior is the 15th century intricately carved screen of intertwining vines, amongst which are hidden delicately positioned birds.

The crenelated tower of the church, which dates back to the 13th century, indicates the very real threat to the local villages from pirates whilst inside the porch door (now on the wrong side in fact!) hangs the sanctuary knocker for those seeking safety from arrest in ancient times.



From the South door of the church take the path to the front of the Court and walk down past the cricket square along the boardwalk and through the gate in to the grounds of the Drum Inn.

12. The Drum Inn

We end our walk by seeing the last major building constructed in the village and this followed the purchase by Torquay Council in 1933. Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and opened in 1936, it was to be the first phase of building a “new model village”, a development never to be completed.



Time for a beverage! Or return down the garden past The Mill to the Visitor Centre.