

* FEATURES OF INTEREST *

- A. Hamstead Park.** The park dates from the early 13thC. It is some 220ha in area and is laid to pasture, with many mature park trees including a series of avenues planted in the 17thC/18thC. The park comprises several interesting historic features, as noted below (B to K) and which can be seen on this walk.
- B. Mediaeval Fish Ponds.** The Park is bisected by a valley with a stream running towards the River Kennet. During the 13thC the stream was broadened to form a chain of three fishponds. The ponds were stocked with Royal bream.
- C. Motte Castle Mound,** thought to be a Royalist siege-castle dating from 1153 during the reign of King Stephen (one of three Norman castles associated with Hamstead Marshall – see also 'J')
- D. Hamstead Lodge** (now called Hamstead Park). The Lodge was developed from a former hunting lodge of c.1720 to become the Craven family residence. During the 19thC the house was completely remodelled in the Regency style and later enlarged, and the gardens were laid out. The Lodge hosted many parties and visitors, including Queen Mary.
- E. Memorial Stone** dedicated to the US forces 101st Airborne Regiment of who were encamped here in the closing months of WW2. Also note the small stone, inscribed "P 1902 VS", marking the grave of a dog belonging to Victor Schmidt, estate steward in the early 1900's.
- F. Park Pale.** The ditch and bank earthwork remains of the mediaeval deer park 'pale' can be traced on the ground around the west, south and east sides of the park. First recorded in 1229, the deer park functioned until 1574. Deer parks were once common throughout southern England, but it is rare to find a park which has surviving elements of the mediaeval landscape.
- G. The Plain.** This expanse of grazing land was once used for village cricket.
- H. Site of Mansion.** The first Lord Craven's mansion, built in the 1660s and burned to the ground in 1718, was set in a series of walled ornamental and productive gardens. The elaborate gate piers and walling are all that remain. They can be clearly seen on Kyp's engraving of the mansion c.1709.
- I. St. Mary's Church** is positioned on high ground within the park. It has a 12thC south doorway and a substantial brick tower added c.1622. Sir Balthazar Gerbier, architect of the mansion, is buried here and in 1921 the Craven Mausoleum was built in the churchyard.
- J. Two Motte Castle Mounds** stand in the grounds of North Lodge (a former keeper's cottage, extended in the 1950's for the dowager countess). Occupied during the 12thC to 14thC, one is thought to be 'Newbury' castle which was held for the Empress Matilda by John Marshal. Henry III visited in 1218 and Edward III stayed at the castle several times in the 1350s.
- K. Great Western Railway** – Lord Craven insisted that the railway follow the line of the K&A Canal to minimise impact on the estate. Coincidentally, this was the preferred route for the 1835 'straight and flat' GWR route.



Hamstead Park Revealed

SELF-GUIDED WALK



THE HIGHLIGHT of this walk is the historic Hamstead Park, in the Kennet Valley near Newbury, Berkshire. The Park has been recognised by Historic England as a landscape of national significance and it is Grade II registered. Several features within the Park are also Listed or Scheduled.

This former mediaeval deer park has a fascinating history with royal connections and, for many years, was part of the Lord Craven estate.

Walk through the Park and discover castle mottes, the mediaeval deer park 'pale' and old manorial fishponds, a grand Lodge and veteran park trees. Then, rising surreally in the open parkland and apparently leading nowhere, pairs of enigmatic gateposts come into view to give a clue to the existence of a grand mansion long since vanished.

The walk has been prepared by the Berkshire Gardens Trust.

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Find out more about the Berkshire Gardens Trust at:
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HAMSTEAD PARK WALK

START: The Red House PH, Marsh Benham, RG20 8LY

PARKING: Roadside parking near the pub

DISTANCE: 4.5 miles | 2.5 to 3 hrs

TERRAIN: An easy circular walk over undulating terrain with 276ft total ascent. Mostly good paths, drives and tracks with two sections on road. Part of the route may be rough and muddy (see walk directions).

Take care when walking along the roads and when crossing the railway.

FACILITIES: There are no facilities/toilets on route. Refreshments available at The Red House PH.

MAP: OS Map Exp 158 | GR: SU 426 675

This walk follows public rights of way over private land. Please keep to the footpaths.

*Follow the Countryside Code:
Respect, Protect, Enjoy*



ROUTE: Features of interest throughout the walk (see over) are referenced [A] to [K] on the map and in the walk description.

1. Walk south along Milkhouse Road for about 1/3 mile - cross the railway, the Kennet and Avon Canal and the River Kennet. Take care! Pass Hamstead Mill to arrive at the gates into Hamstead Park (the road bends to the right).
Go left through the kissing gate to enter Hamstead Park.
2. You are now in the historic Park [A]. Follow the surfaced Park drive for about 1/3 mile down to the fish ponds [B]. On the ridge ahead of you, overlooking the ponds, are the remains of a 12thC castle motte [C].
Continue up the drive to the Dower House (built by the Cravens in the 1960s).
3. Leave the drive where it turns into The Mews - keep straight on over the grass to cross a small footbridge and pass through a gate (may be muddy).
The path skirts the grounds of the current Hamstead Park house to join the tree-lined drive to the front of the house [D].
Turn left along the drive, passing two stone plinths, to reach a meeting of ways just before the US Airforce memorial stone [E].
4. Take the grassy path on the right, through a gate and straight across the field to another gate by the trees. There are some fine views from here towards the Hampshire Downs. The path descends around the edge of the copse (on right).
The tree and hedge lined path soon levels out, passing through several gates, before a short gentle rise into Ashtree Plantation (this section of path can be rough and muddy).
Continue to reach the lane at Ash Tree Corner.
5. Turn right along the lane for 100 yds, then right again into Park Lane (take care!).
Continue for ½ mile, pausing at the farm gates on the right to view the Park Pale [F].
The lane gently descends, crossing a stream which feeds the Park fishponds, before rising again.
6. Look out for a footpath rising on the right to re enter the Park.
The path leads through two gates climbing up onto the Plain [G].
The ditch and bank of the Park Pale is now in full view on the right. Remember to stop to look back at the view!
Continue across the Plain and the gate-piers of the first Lord Craven's mansion come into view [H].
The current Hamstead House (former Lodge) can be seen to the right across the valley.
Pass the imposing brick wall (left) and gate piers (right), crossing the site of the former mansion, to reach St Mary's church [I].
At the path junction our way turns right, but first take time to explore the church.
7. Return to the path. Keeping the churchyard wall on your left, follow the track skirting the grounds of North Lodge to descend to the Park drive and gates where you had first entered the Park. The remains of a motte castle may be visible from the path [J].
Exit the Park, turn right and retrace your steps along the lane (take care!), crossing the river, canal and railway [K] to return to the start point.