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4 Curry Mallet History Trails

A 2015 Magna Carta 800th Celebration Project

Introduction

Welcome to Curry Mallet, a farming and residential community in the heart of Somerset. Not a classic West Country “chocolate box” village, but an area possessing abundant charm and character. Please be aware that this route follows roads and, although traffic speeds are low, be mindful and ensure your own safety.

In 1791 the Revd. Jon Collinson published what is still the most comprehensive history of the county in his work, ‘The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset’, in three large volumes.

He begins his section on Curry Mallet thus – “This parish... on the borders of North Curry and, including the small hamlet of Stewley, contains 53 houses, and about two hundred and seventy inhabitants. The greater part of the houses, which are meanly built, form a straggling street near the church. The rest are called High-Street, or High Curry-Mallet... Its situation is flat and woody; the soil a stiff clay, and produces principally wheat, beans, peas and vetches. There is rather more arable than pasture... It has a right of common in West-Sedgmoor... a revel is held here on the feast of St. James”.

Today the village population is some three hundred, the “meanly built” houses have been demolished or rebuilt, the woods have largely disappeared and the church is now dedicated to All Saints. As for the farming (well, ask a farmer!).

Two hundred and twenty-odd years later, the broad layout of the village has not changed too much from Collinson’s day. There has been much improvement of old property, some new building and the road and lanes are now tarmacked.

The village is rich with structures which have been listed by English Heritage as of special architectural and historic interest. This is your guide to most of them. All trails begin at the Village Hall car park or from the Manor House (2).

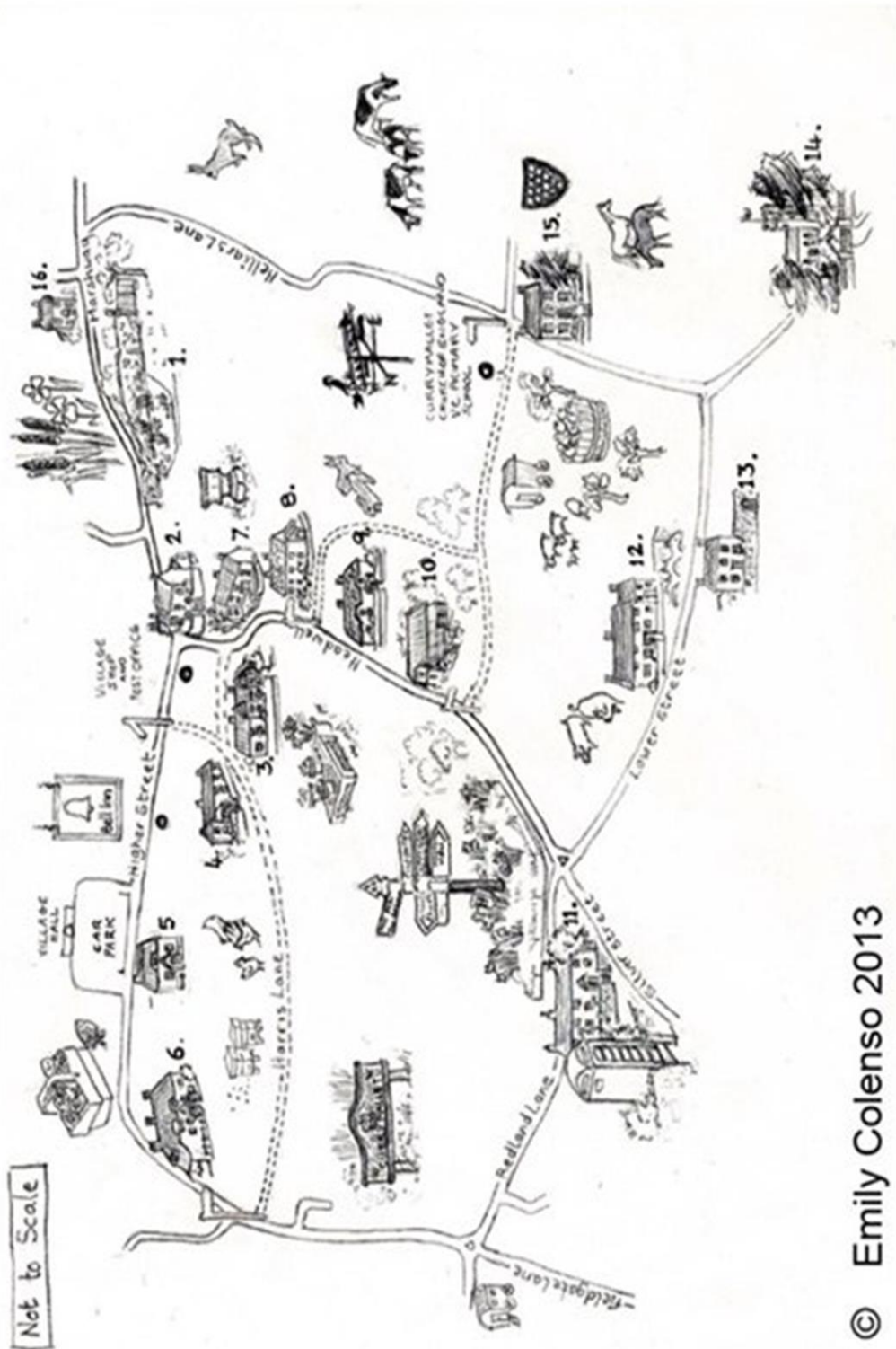


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Curry Mallet Listed Buildings



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Trail 1

Turn left out of the car park and, before you reach the village shop the Bell Inn has an interesting history, built not as a pub but as an almshouse. At one time the bar was used once a week for a doctor's surgery and, if you study the pub sign you will see a bullet mark; it was shot at by a wartime American customer after he was refused a drink. Opposite the Bell is The Smithy, a house formed from the blacksmith's forge. At one time there was a busy shirt factory behind the forge and a fish shop alongside the village shop. Old maps show a chapel in the shop's garden – this is mentioned in a Duchy of Cornwall memorandum dated 1615 as the Chapel of St. John. The Manor House (2) on the map is opposite the shop but follow the Langport signpost along what 19c maps called Allotment Lane (now Marshway), admiring the six poplar trees (especially beautiful when enhanced by a blue sky) and passing the Manor House boundary wall (1), which may include parts of William Malet's castle. The pond may have been part of the moat and, in the right season, sports Elecampane (*Inula Helenium*) the yellow daisy – a rare native – and Reed Mace or Cats' Tails (*Typha Latifolia*). William Malet, Lord of the Manor in 1215, was one of the rebel barons present at Runnymede in 1215 to ensure that King John sealed the Magna Carta. The 800th anniversary celebrations of that event included many projects and events, one of which was a dig by Somerset archaeologists at the Glebe Field by the Church and at Mallet Court. A full report of their findings will be available from the Parish Council. Another initiative was a competition to design a village sign which you will see close to the pond, together with a planting of Magna Charta roses donated by Primrose Mallet-Harris, a descendent of William Malet. Opposite (1) is Mallet Court Nurseries which has collections of rare and unusual trees, shrubs and woody plants and a large and thriving mail order business. A short stroll further along will bring you to Marshway Cottage and the 'Hansel and Gretel' charm of March Cottage (16), originally 18c and recently restored.



Retrace your steps to the Manor House (2) which is the principal secular building in the Curry Mallet has three parts – Higher Street, Lower Street and Silver Street. Robin Bush, the historian, thinks that the Manor House (2) and the Church (14) "may well represent the two ... estates granted to the Courcelles family", as recorded in Domesday Book. The Mallets acquired the Manor in the early 12th century. What you see today is a large hall (or barn) c. 1500 and a small house c.1600 (with attractive curly chimney stacks) linked by a later wing. The whole was remodelled by the architect Clough William Ellis c. 1939. Curry Mallet can boast that in 1215 the Lord of the Manor, William Malet, was one of the 25 rebel barons at Runnymede to act as a guarantor of the sealing of the Magna Carta. According to legend three streams are said to run under the Manor leading directly to

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the Holy Well at the foot of Glastonbury Tor. There are many specimen trees in the garden and the Yew tree you can see is over 400 years old.

Facing south (the shop on your right) you see the extensive thatched roof of Weavers Mead (3); a 16c house built of the blue lias rubble so common throughout the village. Take the left hand bend around the Manor House and the next building of note is Ashtree House (7) on your left. This L-shaped, thatched building dates from the 15th century with additions made between the 16th and 19th centuries. Behind the house in an old barn (unfortunately not visible from the road) is a 19c malting kiln. For a while there was also a threshing machine and a Mr. Perry who once lived there used to do contract threshing. Hulls Place (8) next door is two conjoined buildings – the earliest 15c with later additions. Just past Hulls Place (8) and Chestnut Cottage next door look to your left and you will see a newish development of houses. This lane used to be known as Institution Lane. The Duchy of Cornwall had plans for residential development in Curry Mallet which led to some local opposition. As a result, in 1983 a special study of Curry Mallet's needs was carried out. A survey was made of every household and it soon transpired that there was a large measure of misunderstandings as well as some divergence of views about how people wished to see the village develop, but most favoured an increase in houses. As a result the Duchy went ahead with plans and five houses were built between 1985 and 1989. Prior to the new development this is where you could find the old thatched village hall (once run by the WI until their coffers held only 21/2d). The village playing field was down here too. Continue to Headwell House (9) which is 16/17c in origin with a distinctive wood-shingled roof (once thatched). Pass Bumblebee Cottage and, just before the Cider House, are three bungalows which were originally built for the elderly in 1987/1988, also as a result of the Duchy study. Finally, on this short excursion along Headwell is the Old Cider Barn (10), disused for many years but recently sold by the Duchy for development as a private dwelling. Behind the Cider Barn there used to be orchards and stone buildings. (Retrace your steps to the Car Park for Trail 2 or begin Trail 3 from the Cider Barn).



Trail 2

Turn left out of the car park and walk up Allotment Lane/Marshway (signposted Langport) to March Cottage (16). Just after March Cottage and on your right is the yellow-rendered Whaites House, which has only existed in this form since 1998. Previously known as "The Cottage" it had been the long-term residence of sisters, Ida and Florence Whaits, both home-workers making leather gloves. Reference to "The Cottage", Marshway, can be found on the Curry Mallet Tithe Map and Register dated November 12th 1839. The field to the south was known as "yonder 5 acres". The field opposite Whaites House and to the left of Wheelwright's Cottage housed the

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wheelwright's premises. The piece of open land opposite Wheelwright's Cottage, as you turn right, nowadays boasting a profusion of spring bulbs, was previously enclosed by hedgerows and was Ida Whait's vegetable garden. At some point, following a serious accident at the road junction, the land was ceded to County Highways; they removed the hedging to improve visibility for motorists. Turn right and follow the meandering length of Helliars Lane. As you walk along the top part of the lane, take your time to admire the far reaching views and also the variety of tree species in the village. There is a gateway to stop in opposite where the hare appears on the map! Before you reach the School and Manor Farm (15) on your left you will see The Woolpack, a 1980 barn conversion where the roof level was raised and the gargoyles on the front added. Note the attractive feature window at the front. It was used for sheep shearing and wool storage (hence the large openings on the second floor). Cattle were also kept in the barn - the stones around the four entrance arches are polished by their movements in and out. The remains of walls to the north of the barn, within the current garden, are all that's left of a series of sheep pens. A paved area has recently been discovered under the mulberry tree, which is part of the old floor of this building. The Village School on your right was built in 1857 for 115 children and was also the meeting place for village functions; major renovations were carried out in 1990. Today the average number of children attending is 70 and the village hall is used for most community events. What a peaceful and attractive location, and this is where the village playing field is now situated. Almost opposite the School is Manor Farm (15), a late 18c red-bricked building on a blue lias plinth, currently occupied by second generation farmers and owned by the Duchy of Cornwall. This is a mixed farm and has a large dairy herd. The characterful Georgian farmhouse has huge high ceilinged rooms, a vast recently refurbished attic and a delightful courtyard behind the house.

Take the next turning on the left and enter the "no through road" to the Church. It is believed that there is a tunnel dating from Reformation times which runs from this part of the village to the Church. The white long house on your right was previously two cottages and evacuee children lived here during World War II as well as in a number of other locations throughout the village. Carry on down the lane until you come to the Old Rectory on your right. The house that stands here now was probably built between 1830 and 1850 but it is understood that there was a building on the site long before that. There's a record in Somerset Records Office from 1735 for a licence and faculty for pulling down a decayed Parsonage and building a new Rectory. In the 1881 British Census Charles Pemberton (widowed) was living there with his two daughters and two house maids/domestic servants. He was Rector of Curry Mallet from 1854-1918. On 2nd March 1977 the Church sold the Rectory and a new Rectory was built within the walled gardens (this is now called Monksfield House). On 27th September 1994 a fire destroyed the first floor of the Old Rectory above the kitchen block. Opposite is pretty Jasmine Cottage once two cottages and Church Cottage, both former Duchy of Cornwall properties. The original part of the Church Cottage is believed to date back 400 years, when it was one large room, part of which was a forge or workshop. Caroline Taylor lived here from 1938 until 1969 and during the Queen's visit in 1966 was presented as the oldest resident, aged 92. She had 17 children, all born while she was living in Isle Abbots! In the Glebe Field to your right, just before the Church, there is evidence of a shrunken village. There are earthworks with traces of house platforms and enclosures and a few pieces of medieval pottery have been found. William Malet, Lord of the Manor in 1215, was one of the rebel barons present at Runnymede in 1215 to ensure that King John sealed the Magna Carta. The 800th anniversary celebrations of that event included many projects and events, one of which was a dig by Somerset archaeologists at the Glebe Field by the Church and at Mallet Court. A full report of their findings will be available from the Parish Council. It is likely that a deer park was in existence as early as 1285 where the pale contained two deer leaps and which was disparked around 1650-53.

Arriving at All Saints Church (14) you will see a perpendicular style building (i.e. early 14c onwards). Inside is a wealth of interesting features which you can explore with the

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aid of the building's own descriptive leaflet. No church is mentioned in Domesday Book, but this does not preclude the possibility of an earlier structure, possibly of wood. The present church seems oddly situated, almost in the yard of Park Farm (earlier Court Farm). However, early medieval settlement remains have been found in adjacent fields, strengthening the possibility that a church was once the centre of one of the two Domesday manors which made up "Curi" – Curry Mallet.

The Church, valued in 1292 at 15 marks, is a Gothic structure consisting of a nave, chancel, south aisle, north aisle, north chapel, north porch and at the west end a plain three stage embattled tower. This is 50 feet high and contains 6 bells, of which the tenor and 5th go back as far as circa 1450, made by Joanna Sturdy, the 3rd 1764 made by T Bilbie Chewstoke; the 2nd 1764 made by T Bilbie; the 4th 1774 made by T Bilbie, Chewstoke; and the Treble 1937 made by Mears and Stainbank. Note the interesting top section of the screen which separates the nave from the space under the west tower. Pevsner suggests that the screen dates to the middle of the 17th century. However if one looks at the costumes worn by Moses, Aaron and Hur in the centre top pierced work panel an earlier date could be postulated, maybe as early as the last years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Note the plough: Every year in early January the medieval service of Blessing the Plough is still held. The farmers bring the seed corn to be blessed and the farm workers and various tradesmen bring their tools of trade and process to the altar, followed by the plough which is carried in. The ancient plough is kept permanently in the church. Also note the font, which is 15th century. It is said that a Malet family member loved Curry Mallet and also loved London. He left instructions that when he died half of him should be buried in each place – but this cannot be verified nor which half is in Curry Mallet graveyard!

Behind the Church is Park Farm, nowadays a 900 acre mixed farm and owned by the Duchy of Cornwall since 1421. The present farmhouse was built in 1903. The old farmhouse was known as the Courthouse, as the meetings of the court leet were held there. Minutes are filed at the Duchy archives and can be seen by appointment. A survey of the village in 1651 shows that John Pawlett of Hinton St George had a lease of the farm in the sum of £500 for 90 years (three generations) with the annual rent being £6.13s.4d.



Trail 3

Follow Trail 1 to the Old Cider Barn (10). Continue to the cross-roads (Pope's Cross) with the old Baptist Chapel (now a private dwelling but retaining its own tiny cemetery) on your left. At Popes Cross the majority of the council houses were built in the 1940s, some for returning soldiers Straight ahead is Silver Street. Many Somerset villages have a "silver street"; a possible explanation is that the name echoes the Latin "ad silvam",

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i.e. to the woods. The Old Post Office (11) is 18c but still retains its 20c red telephone booth. It was originally three cottages and is listed in the English Heritage records as Bean Close. The refurbished Baptist Chapel was once made of wood but the community helped raise funds to construct the present building, newly refurbished. Opposite is April Cottage sold by the Duchy in 1976, which was simultaneously the police station and a shop in the early 1900's (could you buy a quarter of pear drops whilst waiting to be charged with an offence?). Old maps show a saw mill and saw pit on the land next to April Cottage. George Musgrove who lived in and ran the Old Post Office in the early 1900s was also the local coffin maker and the wood he used was sawn into planks there. The far reaching views show houses on the Beacon at Ilminster and the hills beyond and the windsock at RN Merryfield can be seen quite clearly when it is flying.



Follow the road to the left past the Chapel House and picture a very pretty cottage shown on a Duchy of Cornwall map dated 1771 in the field left of Glebe House which is the first house on the left before Colliers (12). No doubt today it would be an expensive property; in earlier times the lady of the house, Emily Burt, who had the benefit of a well in her garden, took in laundry to help pay her way. The second building on your left is Colliers (12) a house with attached cottage from the 16c/18c, overlaid with modern roughcast and colourwashed. A survey was carried out of Colliers (12) in May 2012 and February 2013 by the Somerset Vernacular Building Research and a dendrochronology sample date of 1474-1506 obtained; substantially earlier than the English Heritage description, which is felt to be inadequate. On the evidence of the step-and-run-out stops of the beams, the property was substantially rebuilt in the 17th century as a one-and-half house and in the early 19th century the house was divided into three dwellings when the fireplaces were adapted to take updated appliances. The curing chamber and baking oven were probably then removed. Duchy Farm on the right and built in the 1700s was another Duchy of Cornwall farm until it was sold in 2009 to a private developer. Extensive refurbishment has taken place of the house and outbuildings and it is now a substantial family home with a cottage plus stables in the grounds. Next on the right is Holmead Farmhouse; a rather plain but still venerable 18c building. The red brick buildings further down and on either side of the lane are farm cottages belonging to Manor and Park Farms and at Croft Orchard there was once a sweet shop to the right of the house; yummy.

You can visit the Church (14) or continue round the left hand bend where Lower Street becomes Helliar's Lane. Manor Farmhouse (15) and the Village School end this trail. A footpath past the school is a quick way back to Headwell and the car park.

Trail 4

Begin at the Manor House (2), go round behind the Village Shop and The Bell Inn and walk up Harris Lane just past Weavers Mead. This house was once two farm cottages which were converted into one dwelling to provide accommodation for an Archdeacon. However, he quite quickly moved to Taunton (3). Harris Lane (stout boots when wet)

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will give you a flavour of what most of Curry Mallet's lanes and roads must have been like before 19c tarmac. At the lane end on your right is the tall red brick Edwardian farmhouse (1906) called Lyddon's Farm, a former Duchy of Cornwall farm and now a private home. Farmer Job Vile in the early 20th century also ran the bakery (6), what diversity in the village! On your left is a new barn conversion complex completed in 2012. What a difference they make; the barns and piggeries were derelict for many years. Summerhayes, opposite the Old Bakery (6) was originally two cottages for workers at Stud Farm. Note the Ham stone window frames. The Old Bakery (6) was originally a three-room cross-passage house deriving from a late medieval open hall. It has been dated to the 15c. In the mid-16c a fireplace, complete with a curing-chamber and, probably, a domestic oven, was added to the south gable end. A first floor was inserted into the open hall space sometime during the 16c. Bakery ovens were built in the early 19c. The Duchy of Cornwall Stud Farm (formerly Bawler's Farm), which is practically opposite The Old Bakery (6), has a huge strawberry business growing different varieties of strawberries for the main supermarkets. Pyne Orchard on your right has a two acre plot and is one of the larger areas of garden in the village and opposite are two Stud Farm cottages. The house between Pyne Orchard and tiny thatched Lavender Cottage, (built circa 1600, (5)) was once two cottages. The smaller cottage which was built forward, immediately fronting the road sadly burnt down, the owner perishing in the fire. A few yards further the car park is on your left. Just before you reach the twin havens of the Bell Inn and the Village Shop a short track to the right takes you past Fairholme (4) an 18c house with wooden shingled roof, now two cottages. When you return to the car park you will note that the village hall was built in 1987 and opened for the community by Prince Charles.

NB. Most of the buildings on these trails are private dwellings and you are requested to respect the privacy of the occupants at all times.

Many thanks to Eric Freeman who spent endless hours researching the listed buildings and to Emily Colenso for her wonderful sketches.