

WILDLIFE

With its well preserved landscape of hedges and woodlands, pastures and downlands, the Parish of Hastingleigh provides varied habitats for a range of wildlife.

Woodland

Hastingleigh contains several small woodlands, most of which are ancient (at least 400 years old). These include two nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (light blue shading on map). Ancient woodlands are well known for their breathtaking shows of spring wild flowers – wood anemone and bluebells in particular. There is a wide range of other plants that make up the unique flora of old woodland – herb paris, yellow archangel and red campion, to name but a few.



Bluebells and wood anemone in ancient woodland.

The animal life of ancient woodlands is just as varied: birds, including great spotted woodpecker, tawny owl and a variety of warblers; woodmice, bank voles and other small mammals; reptiles such as the slow worm.

Badgers are common across the Parish, most residing in woodland sets. The hazel dormouse is a very special protected species of many Kentish woodlands and will almost certainly be present in Hastingleigh Parish.



Dormouse in Hampton Wood.

Hedgerows and shaws

The Parish has retained much of its network of old hedgerows and shaws (narrow strips of woodland). They provide homes for a range of wildlife and act as corridors linking patches of habitat.

Farmland birds such as linnets and yellow-hammers depend on well maintained hedges. Many such species are in decline nationally. Bats feed and navigate along hedges and shaws. Old hedgerows contain a variety of different tree species – hawthorn, dogwood, hazel, field maple, blackthorn, wayfaring tree – and are a refuge for wild flowers in cultivated land.

Grasslands

At Wye Downs National Nature Reserve, visitors can enjoy one of the most important areas of chalk grassland in Europe. The eastern end of this internationally protected downland (shaded pink on map) lies in the south-east corner of Hastingleigh Parish and has public access. The adjacent field is also species rich, and is classified as a Local Wildlife Site. The Parish's other notable downland is part of Kingsmill Down, to the south-east of the church.

Chalk downlands are known for their incredible diversity of plants. Wild thyme, marjoram, eyebright, lady's bedstraw, rock-rose and harebell are some of the more recognisable. Several orchid species can also be seen, including some rarities.

A downland walk in summer wouldn't be complete without hearing a skylark high above the fields. You may also see buzzards soaring overhead – they favour downland but might be seen anywhere in the Parish.



Rock-rose

HASTINGLEIGH

In the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



KEY TO MAP

- 1 Points of interest
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- National Nature Reserve
- North Downs Way

1. THE VILLAGE POND



An old postcard showing the pond

This pond has long been known as the Witches Pond. The story goes that a woman walking through Hastingleigh was set upon by locals, accused of being a witch and thrown into the pond to drown! The Parson rescued her but he then forced her to make full confession at the church before she was allowed on her way.

If you hear a splash as you stand here today, it's more likely to be a frog hopping into the pond, which is now a haven for water loving wildlife. Look out for pond skaters and water boatmen on the surface and damselflies and dragonflies flitting by on a summer's day. Plant life includes the flag iris with its brash yellow flowers and reedmace with its distinctive seed-heads.

5. THE LONG BARROW



This long earthen mound in Shrubs Wood is thought to be a burial place of Kent's earliest farming communities. Long barrows like this are the most enduring mark that Early Neolithic people left on the landscape. The 40m long monument is one of three earthen barrows close to the Stour Valley, echoing the more famous stone-built barrows clustered around the Medway Valley. This photo shows it just after trees growing on the barrow were felled to protect it from root damage.

2. THE VILLAGE HALL



This important focal point for village life is shared by the parishes of Hastingleigh and Elmsted. So why is it called Evington Village Hall? The name comes from the ancient park that lies between the two villages and it was felt that it was a suitably neutral name that reflected its shared status. The hall was built in the 1950s, financed by local community fund raising.

4. THE DOWNS



View from the Downs.

Hastingleigh Parish encompasses a short section of the main escarpment of the North Downs. This is where the best views are to be had, and the best grasslands for wild flowers. Large parts of these downs can be freely enjoyed through open access. There are ancient earthworks here as well – ring barrows, ditches and a mysterious mound. Iron Age pottery and flint tools have been found.

3. CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN



The Church from the south-west.

Hastingleigh's church is Norman (11th century) but probably stands on the site of an older Saxon church. Look out for some rather mysterious carvings on the door jams, dating from the 15th and 16th century. There's evidence of the church being colourfully decorated in mediaeval times – some murals uncovered in the 1960's are visible in the south east corner.

HISTORY

However rural a parish may be, buildings are crucial in telling the human story of a place, and Hastingleigh is no exception.

Arguably the most important building in any village is the church, and St. Mary the Virgin Hastingleigh sheds light on perhaps the greatest change in the history of the parish. Have you ever wondered why the church is so far from the village? The reason lies in a very dark chapter in English History – the Black Death in the mid 14th century. Before this time, the village was centred around the Church and Court Lodge. Those families who survived the plague are said to have burnt down their houses before moving to 'clean ground' on top of the hill where the new village established itself.

The Court Lodge was the medieval seat of the Lords of the Manor. The old barn next door was built in 1673 by Thomas Crux, then occupant of the Court Lodge, who rented it and the Manor of Adelse from Christ's, Bridewell's and St. Thomas's Hospitals.

Edward VI had granted the Hastingleigh Estate to these Hospitals in the 16th century and it remained in their ownership for 300 years. The other major historic landowner in the parish was the Sankey family, who lived first at Kingsmill Down, then at South Hill. They were great benefactors to the Parish, some members of the family being buried in the church. The last to be laid to rest there was Leslie Richard Sankey, in 1936.

Opposite South Hill is the Old Rectory and Tithe Barn. The 16th century Rectory was replaced in 1880 by the Vicarage at Bodsham, built by the Reverend Collett. Collett also built the Mission Room that used to stand on Tamley Lane, so that villagers had a place of worship close by. It was later used as a men's club and a village hall. Myrtle Cottage on Pilgrim's Way is said to have been the village alehouse before



A float from a 1950s village carnival in front of The Bowl.

The Bowl Inn. The Bowl itself was built in the 1740s. It is now a listed building, as is the old skittle alley next door.

Opposite the pub used to stand the Village Stores. The shop was started in 1857 by George Tappenden, and remained in his family for another two generations. Sadly, it closed in 2004, unable to survive in the age of the supermarket, like so many rural shops.



Tappenden's Stores (late 1950s).

Possibly the oldest house in Hastingleigh is Coombe Manor, also known as Coombe Grove or Big Coombe. The buildings contain elements which date to the early 1400's. In

WWII an anti-aircraft gun and searchlight were located here. Other old farms in the parish include Hazel Farm, Cold Blow, New Barn, Parish Farm and Lyddendane, all of which date back centuries.

Such a rich history for a small parish! As you can see from the map, these historic places are within reach of this panel, waiting to be discovered.

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