

**EASTCOMBE. Short walk 2. Do not attempt to drive this route – there is nowhere to turn or park.**

*Eastcombe village until recently was just a maze of little lanes and modest cottages. It grew slowly over the past 600 years. There are three or four big Victorian houses, but this was really a community of working people – domestic servants, seamstresses, farm labourers, masons, plasterers, carpenters, factory workers, and – earlier – weavers... There is no grand architecture to look at, but there are lots of charming cottages and corners that will give pleasure. On the outside wall of the excellent shop (at the top of The Green) there is a map of the village – and a defibrillator – and possibly mobile phone signal.*

Beginning at the foot of **The Green**, at the end of **Dr Crouch's Road**, one can choose to walk downhill with the **Baptist Church** on one's left and the **red telephone kiosk** on one's right. Immediately past the phone box and Two Pillars there are two modern bungalows on the right, which were built about 50 years ago by the shopkeeper from **Beam Ends** (further down) to be his new home and shop. This was in the days when there was more than one shop in the village – days long gone now.

Facing the lower bungalow there is a gateway and door into the back, lower floor of the **Chapel** (as the Baptist Church is usually called by villagers). This was known locally as the Schoolroom, but it did not meet Government requirements in Victorian times, so that led to the building of the new (Baptist) school next door. This old Schoolroom has remained an asset to the community, and apparently, during the Depression in the early 1930s, unemployed men would gather round the coke stove in there and read the newspapers. Much more recently a club for elderly people had weekly meetings there.

After this there is a short footpath off to the left, curving back up past four cottages into **School Lane** which rejoins Dr Crouch's Road between **The Manse** and the **Primary School**. On the right, though, is **Chancewell Cottage**, and then another footpath drops down to the right. It passes the Victorian house known as **Yew Tree Cottage** (formerly Villa) and enters Wells Road opposite **Red Lion House**.

The final house on the left of this stretch of lane is **Brotherstones**, a very old cottage with beautiful features inside. Its name recalls a much respected couple who lost their two sons, their only children, in the First World War. The boys' names are on the **war memorial** in the upper chapel graveyard. This cottage and its next-door neighbour are typical of some of the older houses of the village – they had two good-sized rooms per floor and date from the affluent days of the woollen industry when weaving was done at home before the industrial revolution.

Round the corner to the left is **Beam Ends**, which also has good period details inside. It is one of several cottages that housed the Post Office at one time or another. The lane continues uphill to rejoin Dr Crouch's Road, passing three old cottages on the left and three on the right. On old maps it can be seen that this old road predated most of Dr Crouch's Road, as it follows the line of wells in the cottage gardens which tapped in to the stream that buckets along underground down this hill.

Opposite Beam Ends is a track leading to **Rodways Farm**, and this is private land though one public footpath zigzags down to **The Vatch**. The ancient gabled farmhouse, which before the twentieth century was known as Daniels Farm, can be seen in the distance. When it was looked at during the course of research for a village history book written about 35 years ago, smoke-blackened beams were found in the roof, indicating that the original hall house predates the addition of chimneys (which came in during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries). This must make it one of the oldest houses in the village.

Still at this crossroads where Beam Ends stands: one may choose to head down into the valley from here (the lane marked as a dead end and 'unsuitable for motor vehicles) but that walk is described as Route 3. Route 2 continues to the right, into **Wells Road** (unasked, Stroud District Council has put up some road signs, presumably to aid the emergency services, but not everyone likes this creeping (sub)urbanization). Wells Road now has a mixture of old and new houses to the left and right, with the footpath from above coming in on the right just after **Rose Cottage** (there are two of this name in the village).

The most 'important' house along here is opposite that footpath. **Red Lion House** was built by Stroud Brewery, but did not have a long life as a pub. In 1919 it closed, and has since been in private hands. For a time in the 1990s the attached, older, **Red Lion Cottages** were incorporated into the main house, but more

recently these reverted to being two discrete dwellings, still later joined into one. There are eighteenth-century records of a weaving family, the Youngs, here. Nathaniel's will of 1752 has an inventory that speaks volumes about the standard of living experienced here, listing little in the way of possessions.

Next to the Red Lion is a semi-detached cottage, though it is not obviously two. The further half, called **Uplyme**, certainly is believed to be one of the oldest buildings in the village. And on the right of the lane, past Red Lion House, there are three properties: two old cottages, and a respectable Victorian house that echoes Yew Tree Cottage. Replacing two demolished cottages and named **Pretoria Villa** (dating it to the Boer War, perhaps), this was recently for quite a few years a Bed and Breakfast.

On the left, past Uplyme, a lane (sadly now unsuitable for cars) joins Wells Road to the lane down to Bismore; and after that there is a green lane that becomes a precipitous public path (with steps) down a bit of woodland into Bismore. On the left of this path can be seen a large wooden hut which for many years provided a meeting place for the Women's Institute, before the current Village Hall became available.

After the cottage next to the woodland path, called **Mount Pleasant**, there are no more cottages on the left. The fields show clearly why this is so. The land slips down along the line of the little stream below the spring. It is thought that this could well be the East Combe which may give the village its name. No buildings can survive where there is Fullers Earth in the ground – whole houses and trees can simply slide down the hillside. Permission now is given to develop such sites – avoided in past centuries – but the cost of groundworks and phenomenally deep foundations on the whole makes work prohibitively expensive.

On the right-hand side of the lane after **Pretoria Villa** there is a rough footpath up to **The Lamb Inn** and **The Green**. And then the houses continue. There are three cottages – one detached, two semi-detached – and then there is a footpath up to The Street. Along here it is obvious that the level of the lane has sunk over the years, but the houses must be built on bedrock as they do not shift. There is one more cottage at lane level, and then two more out of sight up the bank. Wells Road ends at the spring that was the main and probably original water supply for this part of the village. It seems an insignificant little trickle, but was vital until mains water arrived in the 1930s. Some households continued to prefer the spring water right into the twenty-first century.

Opposite the spring, and facing back up Wells Road, is a very old cottage – probably about 400 years old. As was not uncommon in the village's poorest years during the nineteenth century, **Spring Cottage** was divided into two, and housed two families both of Victorian proportions. In the censuses from 1841 onwards it can be seen that some people had as many as 12 children; but in the chapel burial records also it can be seen that many died in infancy (or later). A common cause of death, not recognized at the time, was the disease caused by drinking polluted water. The wells in the cottage gardens too often were near the outside privies...

There is a steep pull uphill from Spring Cottage. At the top of the pitch is **The Street**, with the handsome Victorian house called **The Laurels** on the left. This was built by one of Eastcombe's few entrepreneurs, Henry Hook, who had a finger in many pies. His main interest was in a successful building firm called Wall & Hook, and it is thought that possibly his partner carved the stone heads that decorate The Laurels. They were very involved in the great nineteenth-century surge of church building and restoration. Henry owned other houses nearby (most people rented their homes). He built the **Model Cottages** opposite the top of the pitch. They had the date 1869 on their decorative gables, and perhaps show the interest in better housing for poor people that had been encouraged by Prince Albert at the Great Exhibition in 1851.

Turn right up The Street and one can see the house where Henry's father started one of the village bakeries. After his early death his widow and family continued this business, and others, in a very energetic way which must have inspired Henry to work hard and gain affluence and social status.

To the left alongside Model Cottages there is a grassy footpath up to **Fidges Lane**, and then there are two 1960s houses on a bank which used to be pasture land. There was a British Legion hut here earlier in the twentieth century – bought from a failed chicken farmer after the First World War. On the other side of the lane there is a path down to Wells Road, running alongside The Yews, the last cottage on the right, but one last effort uphill on The Street brings one back to **The Lamb Inn** and **The Green**.