



## Gin Trail Route: A tour of 4 historic Hampshire churches

**Start point:** Holy Trinity Church, Merepond Lane, Privett, Alton, Hampshire (GU34 3PE)

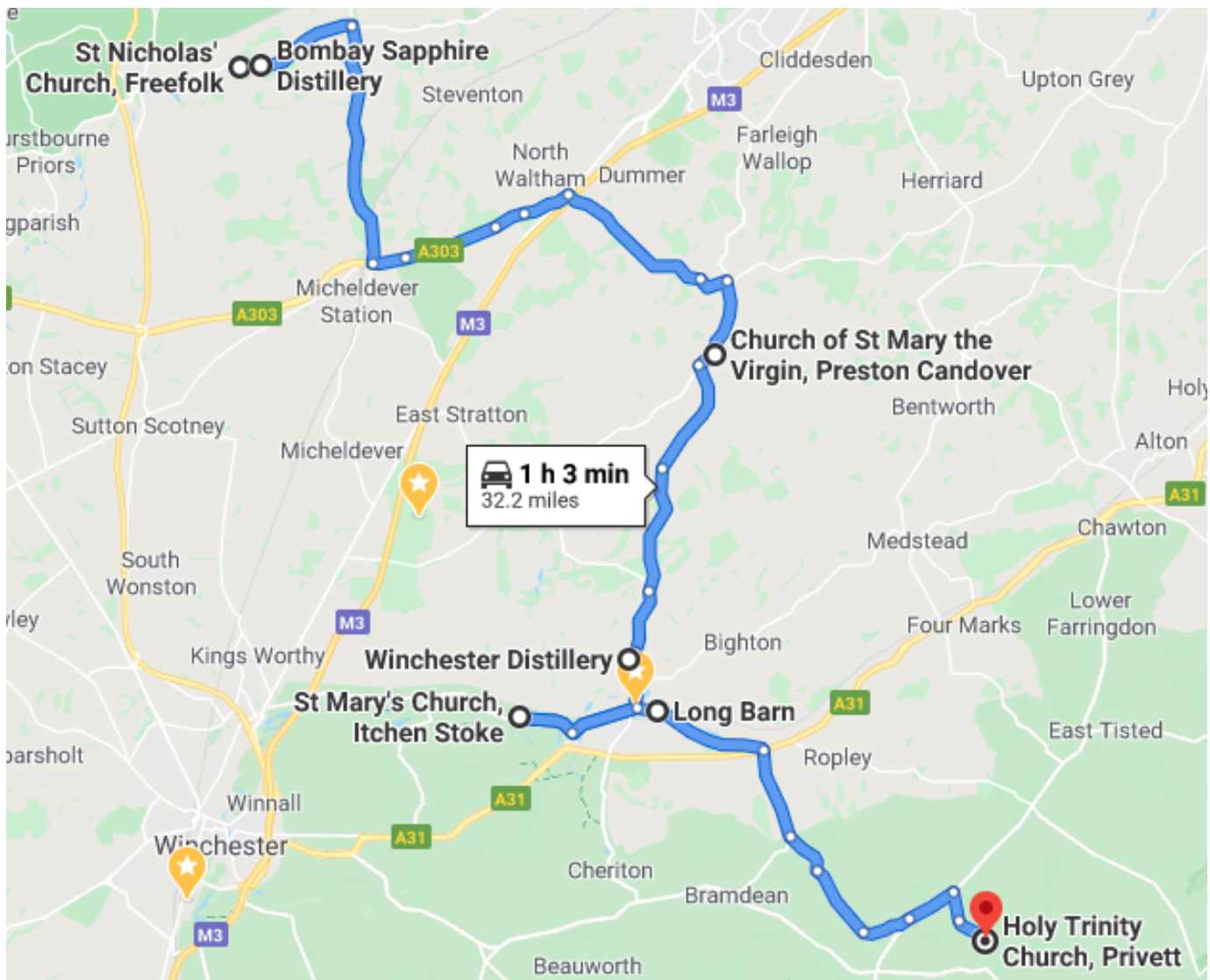
**Distance:** 1 hr 4mins by car (32.8 miles)

**Route:** Linear, Driving

*Always follow current UK government guidelines for COVID-19 ([www.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)) when enjoying these walks and check the most up to date advice before setting off. Please plan ahead as sites, public transport links and facilities (public houses, car parks, ect.) may be closed or have restrictions.*

Hampshire is the home of mighty ports, connected to thriving towns by busy motorways, but its leafy heart hides church spires and fine food and drink producers. Chalk springs feed church fountains, watercress beds and gin distilleries. Wild juniper survives in hot spots on chalk down land, while views from church doorways span river valleys to the farmland beyond. Flint farmworkers cottages line footpaths which have led congregations to services for centuries. Enjoy our Gin Trail through the South Downs and discover the history hidden in the landscape.

The trail starts at Holy Trinity Church in Privett, built by the Nicholson Family who have produced Nicholson Gin since 1736. It then moves on to the Lavender Fields and Watercress beds at Long Barn in on the way to St Mary's Church at Itchen Stoke. After this the route goes past Winchester Distillery before reaching the Church of St Mary the Virgin in Preston Candover. Finally, the trail visits St Nicholas' Church in Freefolk, which is just a stone's throw from the famous Bombay Sapphire distillery.





This opulent Victorian church is set high in the South Downs, a memorial to the Nicholson family of 'Nicholson's Gin' fame. They lived in style at nearby Basing Park and were philanthropic gentry, building the neighbouring flint school house and model labourers' cottages in Privett, as well as this marble-lined, soaring church.

Tragedy struck in 1901 at the Nicholson Gin Three Mills Distillery, West Ham, London. One worker was overcome by 'foul gas' when he inspected a disused well, the 29 year old managing director Godfrey Nicholson climbed down to investigate and two more workers followed. The victims of this industrial accident are commemorated by a plaque in Holy Trinity Church, and a sculpture called 'The Helping Hands' in Postman's Park, London.

1. *Can you spot another memorial to Godfrey Nicholson in the church?*

*botanicals*

Gin is distilled from wheat or potato spirit and predominantly flavoured with juniper. Gin distillers add other botanicals to the still to create their own distinctive flavours. As you drive through Hampshire, you will be able to spot several of these plants growing beside the roads. Around Alresford, there are lavender fields at Long Barn and watercress beds on the way to St Mary's, Itchen Stoke and the Winchester Distillery. At Laverstoke Mill near St Nicholas, Freefolk, you can see exotic botanicals grown in an elegant glasshouse designed by Heatherwick Studio. More prosaically, over one thousand wild juniper bushes have been taken from local cuttings and planted on the M3 motorway at Twyford Down.

St Mary's, Itchen Stoke

This romantic Victorian church was inspired by thirteenth century Sainte Chappelle in Paris. You will spot St Mary's apse and double belfry soaring above the road as you drive along the Itchen River valley. Enter through the west door on a sunny day and the stained glass windows will bathe you in a kaleidoscope of light, whilst the pale walls gleam with thousands of white-flowered tiles. There is a beautiful glass mosaic memorial embedded in the south wall, dedicated to Major Ponsonby Cox, who broke somebody's heart when he died in the First World War.

2. *Can you discover who 'the one who loved him' was?*

*Winchester distillery in Alresford*

This is a micro distillery located in a former cold-store for watercress. Inspired by the craft gin boom in London, it opened in 2015. Winchester gin contains 25 botanicals, inspired by the 25 seats for the Knights of the Round Table in Winchester.

St Mary the Virgin Old Church, Preston Candover

Follow the River Candover, the 'beautiful stream', up the valley from Alresford, to a tiny mortuary chapel tucked away from the main road. This is the chancel of a much larger mediaeval church, the corners reputedly marked by two sarsen stones to the west. St Mary the Virgin is a fascinating example of recycling: the west wall is built of a local rubble of flint, the fragment of a stone coffin lid and window tracery; the floor is a patchwork of Georgian stone memorials and medieval tiles.

3. *Can you uncover the brass memorial of a lady in late Tudor dress?*

## **St Nicholas, Freefolk**

Follow the River Test to the parish of Freefolk and Laverstoke. Two local buildings, St Nicholas Church and Laverstoke Mill, are mentioned in the Domesday Book and their histories are linked. St Nicholas Church has evolved according to the taste and means of the local landowners, from its thirteenth century footprint to the early twentieth century stained glass windows on the east wall, dedicated to the Portal family, papermakers of Laverstoke Mill. When you push open the heavy door of the whitewashed church, St Christopher's head and shoulders peer out at you from three layers of medieval frescoes. Further along the north wall, the Jacobean effigy of Richard Powlett will catch your eye.

*4. Can you find a 16th century helmet and 15th century spur?*

## **Bombay Sapphire Distillery, Laverstoke**

The paper mill at Laverstoke was renovated by the Bombay Spirits Company and opened to the public in 2014. The Georgian and Victorian buildings on the site now contain a sustainable distillery in a conservation area and a site of special scientific interest.

## **Answers**

1. There is a stained glass window commemorating Godfrey Nicholson and his brothers on the south wall
2. The vicar's daughter, Cecilia Skrine, commissioned this memorial
3. Katherine Dabridgecourt's memorial brass is hidden beneath the mat beside the east wall
4. The helmet and spur are hung over Richard Powlett's tomb