



# The Way of Life

Durham to Gainford

## Introduction



This guide gives directions for travelling The Way of Life from Durham to Gainford. The Way of Life follows the same route as The Camino Ingles which starts at Finchale Priory north of Durham, so you can follow those waymarks as well as Northern Saints Trails signs.

This pilgrimage route, along with the Ways of Love, Light and Learning, all lead to or from the shrine of St Cuthbert in Durham. This route would have been the closest to St Cuthbert's final journey in his coffin from Ripon to Durham in 995. He had died over 300 years earlier, but the monks who carried that coffin believed that by his spirit he continued to be alive and to guide them. This is why this route is called the Way of Life. Water is a symbol of life, so it is appropriate that the route begins by the River Wear and ends at St Mary's Well by the River Tees.

Distances are approximate. The total distance is 47 kilometres or 29 miles. I have divided the route into 4 sections between 11 and 14 kilometres. The section numbers were originally allocated from south to north, so we start with section 4 and end with section 1.

## Section 4

### Durham to Tudhoe – 11kms

After leaving the cathedral facing Palace Green, turn right along the north side of the cathedral into Dun Cow Lane and then turn right to go down North Bailey which soon becomes South Bailey. There are many interesting buildings as you walk along the cobbled street, including the church of St Mary the Less on your right. It was originally Norman, but extensively rebuilt in the nineteenth century.

As you come down to the River Wear, you pass through the Water Gate and arrive at Prebends Bridge This bridge was built on the instructions of the Dean of Durham between 1772 and 1778 as a private road for the dean and chapter. A former bridge was destroyed in a flood in 1772 and the new bridge was especially placed slightly north of it to afford the best possible views of the cathedral and the river. Cross over the bridge and make sure that on the northern side of the bridge you find a plaque with Sir Walter Scott's famous lines about Durham:

*Yet well I love thy mix'd and massive piles,  
Half church of God, half castle 'gainst the Scot,  
And long to roam these venerable aisles,  
With records stored of deeds long since forgot.*

After crossing the bridge, the route goes left on the riverside path and after going round the southern loop of the river, the path gradually ascends to reach St Oswald's Church.

### St Oswald's Church

The exterior of St Oswald's church, located on Church Street, is largely the product of Victorian restorations giving the church a misleading appearance of having been begun in 19th century. However, there is strong evidence that a Christian community has existed here before the Norman Conquest and even before the arrival of the Lindisfarne Community in 995.

For instance, in 735, Pehtwine was consecrated as Bishop of Whitborn in Elvet, then called Aelfetee, the village, now a suburb of Durham, where the present church now stands. Moreover, extensive Anglo-Saxon sculpture, now to be seen in Durham Cathedral's Open Treasure Exhibition, has been found on the site dating from as early as the 10th century. Such has compelled some scholars to suppose that this site is where St Cuthbert's coffin became stuck, according to the legend of the Dun Cow, forcing the Lindisfarne Community to settle at Durham.

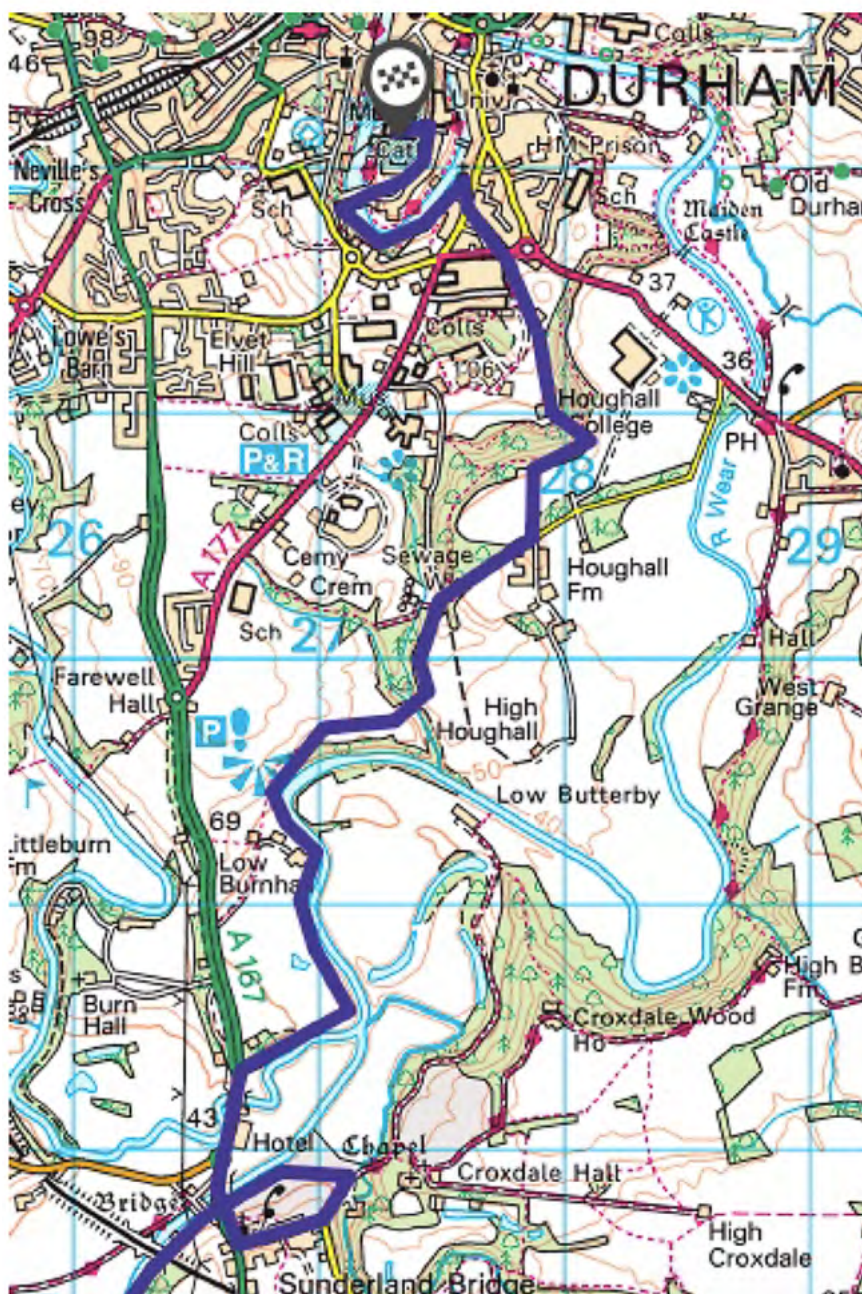
The interior is an eclectic assortment of medieval and Victorian features competing to dominate the light filled space. The chancel arch, its waterleaf capitals frozen in stone, along with the four east bays of the nave, date from the 12th century. The tower and nave's two western bays, with slender arches and pinnacles, date from at least the 15th century. In 1834, the Victorians damaged the original medieval clerestory and nave ceiling, retaining only a few original angels and grotesque faces. It is a pity that these angelic and grotesque faces cannot speak of all that their lifeless eyes have witnessed.

On leaving St Oswald's, go over the zebra crossing and turn right and immediately left to walk down a lane with a park on your left and a little later a cemetery on your right. When you come to Stockton Road cross over with care and you will find a path that runs parallel to the road. There are university buildings on the other side. Continue up this path which soon leads away from the city and up into woodland. The hill here was called Mount Joy because it was where pilgrims had their first sight of the cathedral if they had been coming from the other direction. As you reach the top of the hill, look out for a small reservoir on your right. Just in front of it there is a very good view of the cathedral below. You can also see Durham castle and the tower of St Oswald's and the spire of St Nicholas Church.

A few metres after passing the reservoir, look out for a path on your left which will lead you steeply down 224 steps. Some local people call these *The Steps of Doom* if you are coming up the other way! At the bottom of the hill turn right and after 300 metres, turn left, cross a stile and follow the right hand field boundary. Cross another stile and pass a house on your right. You are now at Houghall.

## Houghall

Houghall is an Anglo-Saxon name meaning 'water-meadow by the hill-spur' from Old English for *hoh* (hill-spur) and *halh* (low-lying land). The first record of Houghall early in the 12th century was when Bishop Flambard gave the farm and its lands to William Fitz Ranulf. His great grandson, Thomas de Herrington donated the estate to Prior Richard de Hoton towards the end of the 13th century. The area was farmed by the monks themselves who reared sheep and grew oats and barley. There were many fish ponds and rushes were harvested for the cathedral and castle. Over the years the course of the River Wear changed many times and the silt deposits that were left contributed greatly to the fertility of the valley.



At the Dissolution of the Monasteries, Houghall was sold to Viscount Lisle. The farm was rebuilt as a moated stone manor house in the 17th century by the Marshall family who were Parliamentarians and were said to have entertained Oliver Cromwell as a guest in the house. The lands were returned to the Church (Dean and Chapter) in 1660.

In 1840 coal discovered and extraction started in 1842. Eventually in 1862 houses were built and Houghall village came into existence. There was a school and chapel here. The colliery ceased working in 1884. Miners continued working in other local mines, but eventually the village was abandoned in 1955 and the remaining houses were demolished.

Immediately after passing the house, turn right to cross another stile and you will realise you are on an embankment. This was formerly a wagon way between Houghall Colliery and Croxdale Colliery, which was actually near Low Burnhall Farm which you will be passing quite soon. There was a tunnel between the collieries under the hill you will be walking over. At one point, you have to briefly go down off the embankment and go under or round a tree before resuming your way. Go up the hill and soon after passing two large posts, you will come out to a field. Follow the path downhill with the woodland on your right and then take the path on your right steeply down the hill and cross the bridge where you enter the Low Burnall Woodland Trust reserve.

Go uphill and you will pass a circle of stones with spiral marks on your left. There are many paths in the area, but keep on the main path ahead following posts that lead you round the bend of the River Wear to the left until you come down to Low Burnhall Farm. Skirt round the farm going down and up steps by the riverside. Continue along the path by the river and, soon after passing a wicker lady (The Miner's Wife) on your right, where a wide path goes uphill, you keep on by the riverside which is now the Wear's tributary, the River Browney. There is some mature oak woodland on your right before you reach the main road. Turn left here, soon crossing the River Browney and then the Honest Lawyer on your left.

Go ahead to the roundabout. You may be able to notice that it is designed in the shape of St Cuthbert's Cross, although this is more evident from a double decker bus! At this point the route does a loop to provide both a safe crossing of the busy A167 and to include St Bartholomew's Church and Croxdale Hall parkland. Keep walking on the east side of the A167, crossing the River Wear and heading up hill until you come to the first road on your left into Sunderland Bridge village. You will soon pass St Bartholomew's Church on your left. Continue along the road (Hett Lane) until it turns right. On your left, you will see a gate and kissing gate on your left. Go down this unmade road. There is an attractive mill on your right here by Croxdale Beck. *[You may wish to make a short diversion here across the bridge and up the hill to have brief look at Croxdale Hall and the Norman Chapel which are not however open to the public.]* At the bottom of the hill turn sharp left along a fine avenue of trees with the River Wear on your right. You go under the A167 and exit the park and walk across to the path opposite, but before you do that, you may wish to walk a few steps to your right onto Old Sunderland Bridge. This bridge dates back to the 14th century but has had several rebuilds. It originally carried the Great North Road.

## **St Bartholomew's Church and Croxdale**

Croxdale is an interesting name. It is quite likely to be derived from someone with the Viking name of *Krokr* which means "crooked back". Early spellings of the village call it "*Crokesteil*" which could refer to the tail like loops of the river. Another alternative is that a cross or "crux" was erected in the dale here.

The first recorded owner of Croxdale was Roger de Routhberi (Rothbury in Northumberland) in 1291. By 1350, Croxdale belonged to Robert de Whalton, Treasurer of Brittany. In 1409, his granddaughter Agnes married Gerard Salvin and that family have dominated the history of Croxdale since that time. The Salvins were always staunch Roman Catholics even after the Reformation and encouraged Roman Catholicism in other places like Tudhoe. Most of the present Croxdale Hall was built in the mid eighteenth century. The small medieval chapel with a Norman door was the village church until 1845. In that year, the Salvins built the new church of St Bartholomew's for the expanding mining community and retained the church as a private chapel.

Proceed along the riverside path and walk under the impressive viaduct. About 300 metres after the viaduct fork left away from the river. Shortly after, you will come to the delightfully named Nickynack Beck. Turn left walking steadily uphill with the beck on your right. The path becomes a cinder track before you reach houses at Croxdale. Turn right here and cross a minor road before going across a bridge over the Nickynack Beck.

## The Nicky Nack Story

Many years ago there was a man who was returning to Tudhoe from Croxdale one evening via Chair Lane. He was somewhat the worse for wear through drink, and he sensed that he was being followed. Although he could see no one whenever he glanced back over his shoulder, he was certain that he could hear their faint footsteps, close behind. A sense of panic began to grow, fuelled by the fact that, whenever he stopped to listen, so did the phantom footsteps. His pace started to quicken but so did that of his 'follower'. By the time he was nearing the safety of the village he was running as fast as he could but the follower seemed effortlessly to keep up with him. Not once did he catch sight of his pursuer but, after a few more pints in the Green Tree, the mystery deepened and the general belief grew that Chair Lane was undoubtedly haunted. The invisible spectre was soon being referred to as the Nicky Nack ghost, the name derived from the sound which the traumatised man claimed to have heard.

Against his better judgement he eventually agreed to venture once more down Chair Lane at night, provided that he was accompanied by another person. Sure enough, the phantom footsteps quickly reappeared and both men were near to panic until the second man noticed that the soles of both boots of his friend were becoming detached and had clearly been in that state for some time. So the mystery was solved but the myth remained, some will tell you, to this day. The pub which stands at the eastern end of Chair Lane at the entrance to Croxdale had the unique name of the Nicky Nack Inn until it was sadly changed around 20 years ago to the Daleside Arms. Was that to exorcise the 'ghost'?! However the name lives on in the name of the beck.

Cross stiles to walk through two fields, passing a pylon on your left in the second field. [*The last field here before Tudhoe can be difficult to cross after very wet weather or after ploughing, in which case you may prefer to use the parallel minor road called Chair Lane to the north west.*] Continue ahead with a hedge on your left. At the end of the hedge, there is a left/right dog leg before you go straight on to Tudhoe village. This path was called Ratten Row and was where coffins were carried from Tudhoe to a burial site called Litch Field which is thought to have been in Croxdale. Litch is the Anglo-Saxon word for body. As you reach the village green, the route turns right, but you may like to visit The Green Tree Country Pub built in 1727 about 200 metres to your left.

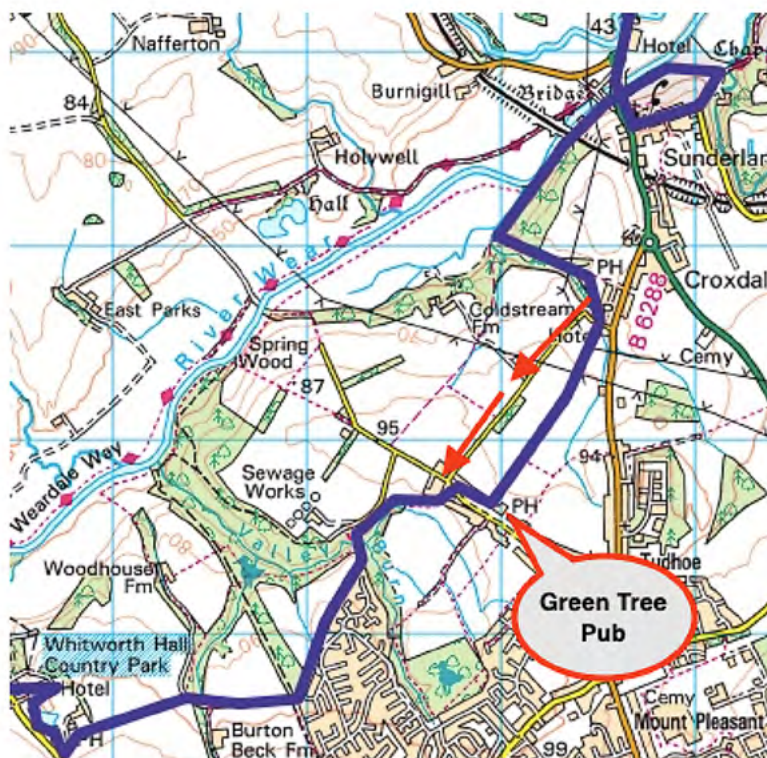
## Tudhoe

The village of Tudhoe is an ancient one which is mentioned in the Bolden Book of 1173. It is possible that the village may be named after St Tuda who was Bishop of Lindisfarne for less than a year in 664. Another theory is that it is named after a local warlord called *Tudda*. It is a typical Co Durham "green village" and in ancient documents the houses on either side are described as East and West Raws (Rows). The village lays claim to having the longest green in the county – 10 feet longer than West Auckland!

## Section 3

### Tudhoe to Bishop Auckland – 14km

As you walk along the green, notice on your right an impressive white house with pineapple stone finials. This was originally built in 1822 as a Roman Catholic seminary for girls. On the opposite side of the green is Tudhoe Hall which was built in the seventeenth century. Along with much of the village, it was owned by the prominent Catholic family from Croxdale Hall, the Salvins and has priest holes for hiding Catholic clergy. A little further along on your right, it is interesting to know that there was once a row of cottages called Welsh Row. The cottages were built for Welsh miners who came in the nineteenth century. It is appropriate that the Anglican church not far away, which opened in 1880, was called St David's!



Where the green starts to narrow, cross over the road and look for the gate leading into a narrow footpath before you cross a stile into a field. The path goes down and then swings round to the right, keeping a burn on your left. You cross a stile into woodland. You may see some sewage pipes which cross the Valley Burn on your left. You have now entered Tudhoe Mill Nature Reserve.

### **Tudhoe Mill Nature Reserve**

The reserve is owned and managed by Durham Wildlife Trust. Occupying the site of a former drift mine the woodland contains mature stands of sessile oak, beech, ash, wych elm, silver birch and sycamore while the ground flora includes an abundance of ramsons, bluebells and wood-sorrel. There is also grassland with an abundance of bird's-foot-trefoil and marshy vegetation that features rushes, common reed, wild angelica and common spotted orchid. This mosaic of grassland scrub and developing woodlands support numerous woodland birds plus a variety of butterfly species.

Turn left just before reaching a road. In spring, there is a good display of cowslips here. This path follows along parallel to the road until you reach a path which descends to a bridge over a stream. Go up the hill until you reach the corner of a housing estate. Turn right and go through a motor bike barrier.

Walk on with fields and woodland on your right and the houses of Spennymoor on your left. At the point where you leave the houses, you are crossing a former wagon way between the colliery of Whitworth Park to the south and Page Bank to the north west. You can see the embankment on either side. Walk on between fields and when you reach a T-junction go right to cross over a stream with woodland on either side. As you walk ahead, leave the road and go through to the footpath following a line of young oak trees on your left. Go through a kissing gate where it is wet at times, into another field. As you approach Whitworth Hall you will pass an interpretation panel about the history of the hall on your right. When you reach the road, turn right and then immediately right into Whitworth Hall. This is a permissive route here enabling you to enjoy the very attractive parkland with fallow deer and an ornamental lake and follies.

### **Whitworth Hall**

Originally there was a manor house at Whitworth and in 1652, Mark Shafto, Recorder of Newcastle purchased the manor. Whitworth Manor and Hall were the home of the Shafto family for 330 years. We have no records of what that manor house looked like. The famous Robert Shafto became MP for Co Durham in 1760 and he used the nickname "Bonny Bobby Shafto" and the famous song for electioneering purposes. The song is said to refer to the story of how he broke the heart of Bridget Belasyse of Brancepeth, when he married Anne Duncombe. Bridget is said to have died two weeks later. Ann Duncombe was very wealthy and the increased wealth was a factor that enabled their son to replace the manor house with the hall in 1845. That hall was substantially destroyed by fire in 1880 and only the detached library wing remains. The present two storey seven-bayed house dates from about 1900.

You will find a path by the hall immediately north of the drive which you take. It passes a dene on your right and leads to a gate giving access to the church.

### **Whitworth Church**

This small church was rebuilt in 1850, almost entirely obliterating its medieval predecessor. The original church was a chapel of ease to save people needing to go up the hill to St John's Kirk Merrington. It is unusual in that it does not have any dedication to a saint and is simply Whitworth Church. The thirteenth century weatherworn effigy of a knight is the predominant witness of this site's medieval heritage. His feet rest on a writhing figure sadly representing a crushed Saracen. The knight in question may be Sir Thomas de Acle, who it is thought also took the title of Thomas de Quytworth or Whitworth. Next to him is another female figure, eroded beyond recognition. Both are testaments, one more than the other, to the cruel hand of many northern winters, but at least these sad figures have now been afforded some protection with their own canopies. Below the vicar's stall in the church, you will find a deeply cut tombstone with the arms of the Shafto family. This marks the entrance to the old family vault which contains several coffins including that of the famous Robert ('Bonny Bobby') Shafto. The last Shafto to be buried here was Robert Duncombe Shafto in 1889.

Leave the church and walk up to the road. Turn right for a few metres and then cross carefully over the road to access the footpath via a stile. Continue straight ahead with the hedge on your right. There are pleasant views across the Wear Valley. The path switches to the other side of the hedge and then you come to a stile which you

cross over to walk steeply down through Nancy's Wood. There was a bell drift mine here called Annie's drift. When it closed, trees were planted and it was renamed in the diminutive form of Annie as Nancy's Wood. Cross over the green footbridge and you soon come out of the wood. The path goes up along a field edge and at the top you come to a playing field. You have now reached Byers Green. Go through the kissing gate and turn left into North Street passing the Working Mens Club and the village green on your right. When you reach the main road you will see Thomas Wright House Hotel opposite you. Turn left here. You will pass The Royal Oak pub on your right and also pass a war memorial before arriving at St Peter's Church on your left.

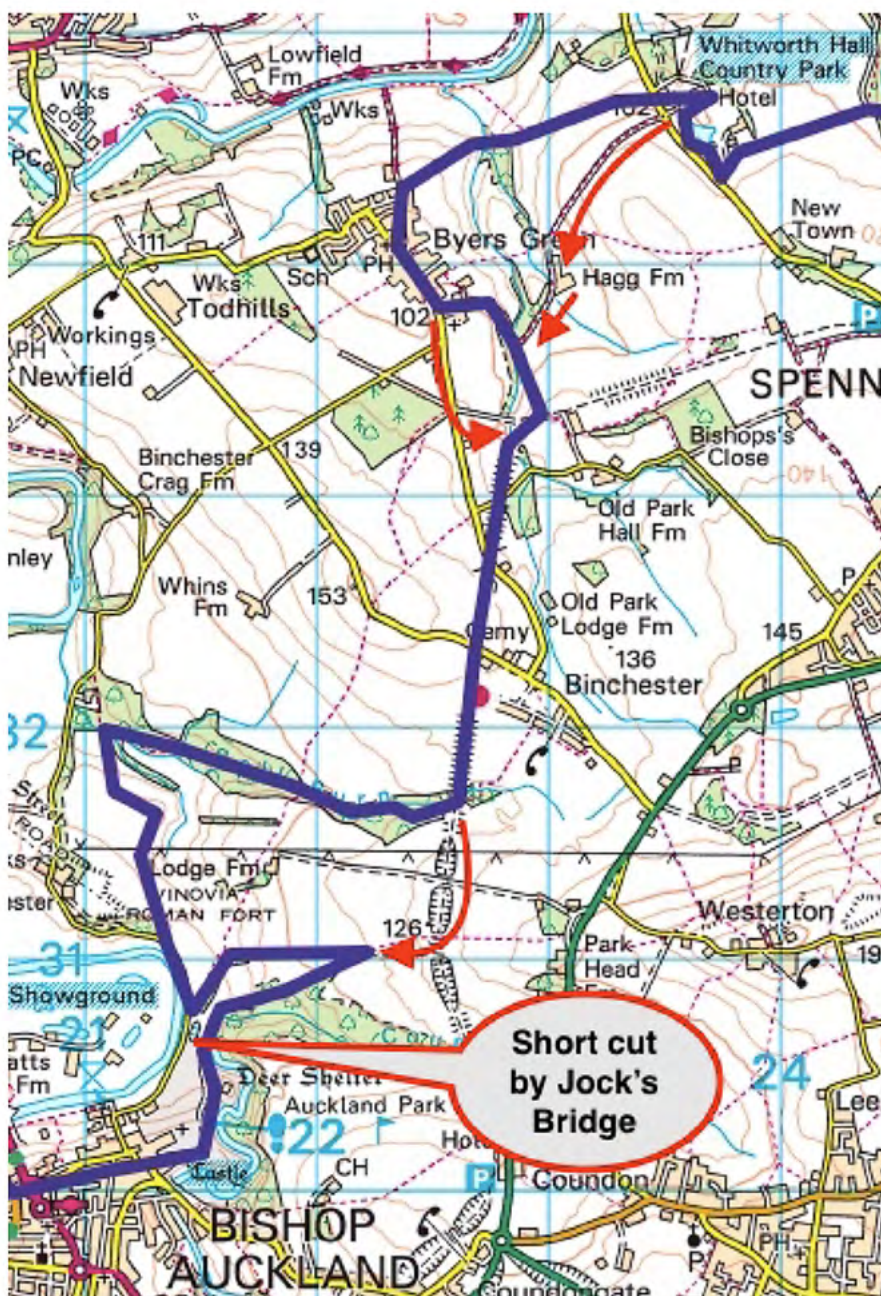
*Alternative drier routes between Whitworth and Bishop Auckland if it has been very wet are indicated on the map by red arrows on the map. When crossing from Whitworth over to Hagg Lane, PLEASE TAKE SPECIAL CARE. Cars drive very fast here and the view uphill is not very far to the bend, so when you are sure all is clear, cross over quickly.*

## Byers Green

Byers Green is first recorded in the fourteenth century and its name means "the green by the cow sheds". It would have been a quiet farming village until the opening of the coal mine in 1841. The Anglican church of St Peter's, paid for by the Bishop of Durham, opened soon after. At the height of operations in 1900, 1,000 men were employed in the two pits called Busty and Michael. The mine closed in 1931.

The most famous person from Byers Green was the brilliant Thomas Wright (1711-1786) who was an astronomer, architect and mathematician. He was educated at King James I Grammar School in Bishop Auckland. In his early twenties he made a huge orrery – a working model of the solar system. He was the first person to accurately describe the Milky Way and he realised that the faint nebulae were distant galaxies like our own, thus greatly expanding our view of the universe.

After leaving the church, go back and turn right opposite the war memorial into Hagg Lane. The lane goes down hill to the right. As you reach the bottom of the hill and Hagg Lane turns left uphill, take the footpath straight ahead over a stile into woodland with a burn on your right. It is inclined to be muddy here. Go over a stile into a field and then through a kissing gate into a paddock which often has goats in it. Go through a kissing gate to reach the Auckland Way. Please ensure kissing gates are properly shut – goats are very clever! Before you turn right, look diagonally left and you will see the cottages at Old Park Terrace which is sometimes called *Slowly* because there used to be *Slowly* notices for the trains here! As you head south, on your right you pass what was a branch line to Byers Green Colliery built by the Clarence Railway Company in 1836. After 300 metres, you will cross a minor road and then pass a platform on your right which is all that remains of



Byers Green station. Pass under a bridge and then walk up to cross an often busy B road. You soon pass the long row of cottages at Binchester on your left.

After crossing over two bridges, look for steps off the embankment on your right and then double back a few metres and then turn left and enter Bellburn Wood. The path gradually descends and crosses the burn by bridges and stepping stones. In the spring the wood is carpeted with wood anemone, wild garlic and bluebells. Eventually you will leave the wood by a stile with the secluded Vinovium Cottage to your right. You however go left and cross another stile and ascend the hill ahead. When you reach the plateau, turn left and follow the field boundary along the edge with pleasant views of the valley and Bellburn Wood on your left. Binchester Roman Fort is over on your right.

## **Binchester Roman Fort**

At its height this fort, which was called *Vinovia* or *Vinovium*, occupied seven hectares of land and was once the largest Roman fort in Northern Britain. *Vinovia*, more commonly known as Binchester, was founded in around 80 AD to guard the crossing of the Wear by Dere Street, a key Roman road that ran from York across Hadrian's Wall and as far north as the Antonine Wall in Scotland.

Despite being reduced in size in 160 AD, Binchester was still the largest fort in Durham and housed auxiliary cavalry from central Spain and, for a time, Holland. Around the fort developed a civilian settlement which provided goods and services, of more than one kind, to the soldiers stationed there.

As the Roman empire's control over Britain loosed from the fourth century, the fort commander began to build more independent localised power, paying his troops from the produce of surrounding lands. After Rome officially left Britannia in AD 410, archaeologists believe the fort developed into the base of a local warlord, perhaps descended from the Roman troops. The settlement moved within the fort and burials were inserted between the decaying Roman buildings.

Eventually, the fort and its community shrank to a 'poor village' and subsequently crumbled away. From the 16th century onwards some antiquarians took an interest in what remained, but when coal mining began many altar stones and other objects were used as props inside the pits. Some excavations took place in Victorian times and continued into the twentieth century. The site has been open to the public by Durham County Council since the 1960s. Archaeologists continue to work on uncovering more about the lives of those who lived within and around the fort.

At the end of the plateau, cross over a stile and go down steps through a wood to reach the road where you turn left. You will see Auckland Castle ahead of you. *[The route in this area may change in the light of future developments between here and Auckland Castle. As long as the River Gaunless is not in spate, there is a short cut into Auckland Park under the west side of Jock's Bridge as indicated on the map. This misses the longer route described in the next paragraph.]*

After 300 metres just before reaching Jock's Bridge, go over a stile by the park wall and follow the path uphill which bears right. You will pass Lodge Farm across fields to your left. When you reach a copse, cross over stiles on your right to get into Auckland Park. Walk diagonally to your left heading towards a pyramid which marks where water once came from to supply the palace. Well before you reach it, turn right onto a track which leads downhill with a valley on your left. You will pass some old oak stumps on your right. At the bottom of the hill, go left to cross a small stream and then go through a kissing gate and cross a bridge over the River Gaunless. This was built for Bishop Richard Trevor – the initials RD can be found on the keystone on the western side of the bridge. When the bridge was built, three Roman cremation burial urns were found. These pots are now lost, but Roman burials like this are often found close to roads, suggesting that the Roman road Dere Street may have crossed the Gaunless on its way to Binchester Roman Fort near here. Take a track on your left and walk uphill to reach the mock Gothic Deer House also built for Bishop Trevor.

## **The Deer House**

The medieval parkland was previously the exclusive domain of the bishops and their mostly aristocratic guests. Prized deer once freely roamed the woods and grassland of the bishops' deer parks throughout Weardale, which would have echoed with the thundering of horse's hooves as the bishop and his entourage pursued the popular aristocratic pastime of hunting. Recent archaeological research suggests that the Auckland deer park was probably more of a 'living larder' than a hunting park – somewhere that the Bishop's estate managers would have grown the deer herds and had semi-tame animals ready for easy hunting to put them onto the table at

quick notice. Hidden and secluded at the very centre of the deer park is what appears to be a fortified dwelling, complete with battlements and adorned with pinnacles. Yet, on closer inspection, these fortifications are evidently for show, adorning this 18th century folly with illusions of medieval grandeur. This deer house, built in 1757 by Bishop Richard Trevor, was a place where the bishop and his prized guests would dine and see the deer taking advantage of the shelter up-close. By this point hunting was less of a status symbol than having an estate that conformed to the pastoral idyll, but the architecture of this deer shelter shows Bishop Trevor's desire to reference the ancient medieval traditions of the park, and the historic power of the Prince Bishops.

Continue ahead and by now you should see the castle through the trees. Go through the park gates and you will find Auckland Castle with St Peter's Chapel and the Faith Museum on your right and the Walled Garden on your left. Ahead of you is the Robinson Arch built by Thomas Robinson for Bishop Richard Trevor in 1760 and beyond is the Market Place.

## Section 2

### Bishop Auckland to West Auckland – 11kms

#### Bishop Auckland

This place where the River Gaunless meets the River Wear has been a strategic location for two thousand years and more. On the eastern side of the Gaunless the Brigantes tribe had an important town, before the Romans came and built their fort at Binchester or *Vinovium* as they called it. After the Romans left in 400 AD, *Vinovium* is believed to have continued as the main local settlement until around the 9th century, by which time the focus was shifting to the west bank of the Gaunless as the villages of North Auckland, West Auckland and South Church Auckland emerged. The name Auckland may simply mean oakland.

The first mention of the name Bishop Auckland is around 1000 and in 1020 it is mentioned as being given as a gift by King Canute to the Bishop of Durham. In the late 12th century Bishop Pudsey had built the manor house and great hall and by the following century Bishop Auckland had become the preferred residence of the Bishops of Durham – initially because the hunting was so good! By the 13th century the basic layout of the town was established with four sections: the palace area, Bondgate, together with a market area and an extension along the line of Dere Street – the Roman road. Because of the Prince Bishops, it became a place of power and influence and was the chief settlement of what was called Aucklandshire which stretched up the Wear and Gaunless valleys.

The 19th century was a major one of transformation for Bishop Auckland through the industrial revolution. This included population growth from under 2,000 in 1800 to 16,000 in 1900. The town also became an important centre for rail, with large amounts of minerals such as coal, limestone and ironstone mined in the surrounding area passing through the town on the way to the coast. During the 20th century, Bishop Auckland began to decline as coal reserves ran out and unemployment was as high as 60% in 1932. There was a slight improvement in fortunes as more coal was needed in the Second World War, but further decline set in and last mine in the area closed in 1968.

As you walk ahead across the impressive Market Place, you will pass the Auckland Tower, the Mining Art Gallery and St Anne's Church on your right. On your left is the Spanish Art Gallery. At the west end of the Market Place before you go on into Fore Bondgate, look left down Newgate Street. Newgate Street is part of the former Roman Dere Street. The line of Dere Street continues almost completely straight by roads or footpaths for about 25 miles to Catterick. From the south at this location Dere Street turned right to reach Binchester Roman Fort.

Walk down Fore Bondgate Street. At the end of it is a car park and mini roundabout. Cross here to the south side of High Bondgate. At the roundabout cross carefully over the A689 and continue ahead to cross West Road. You are now on Newton Cap Bank and the road goes downhill. After passing terraced houses on your left, take the next road, Bridge Road, on your left. The road leads past rugby playing fields on your right. *[If you would like a more interesting route this point, there is an attractive parallel path along the riverside.]* At the end of the playing fields, you will come to a gate, where you cross a stone stile into a field.

Walk up the field and look out for paths on your right into what is rather a challenging section of no more than 300 metres. It is appropriately called Broken Bank, because the bank is very prone to slippage at this loop of



the river and path repairs are frequent. The paths higher up are a bit easier but lower down you get better glimpses of the river. About two thirds of the way through you pass through a gate. As you come back down off Broken Bank, you follow the path along a stream tinged with orange caused by iron deposits in the local mine water. Go through the gate to leave the woodland and turn right to cross a ditch and go diagonally across a field to regain the riverside. After about 300 metres cross a stile onto a narrow path between the river and a fence. Go through a gate and into a paddock which you cross diagonally towards the village. Go over the stile by a small sewage plant on your right and turn left to find Escomb Saxon Church.

## **Escomb Saxon Church**

The church at Escomb is a real delight for the historical enthusiast and, dated to between 670 and 700 AD, is one of the oldest Anglo-Saxon churches in England, being one of only three complete churches from this period. However, this relic of a distant past has been encircled by a sea of modernity after the surrounding village was mostly rebuilt in 20th century.

The church itself sits on a circular site on top of a now culverted stream, suggesting this still-hallowed ground has been associated with the divine long before Christian missionaries first arrived in this region. Archaeological investigation suggests that the church was originally built on an isolated hill in a marsh, only approachable from the south.

Before you enter the church, notice the 17th century sundial above the door and, more significantly, to the right of the porch is an intriguing sundial which lays claim to being the oldest sundial in the UK in its original position. It is a 7th century sundial which was set into the wall as the church was built.

A tall, narrowly built nave would indicate that this venerable stone building is a later successor of an earlier wooden church. The stone cross at the eastern end is probably older than the church and may have been a preaching cross. Other highlights include an incised consecration cross behind the pulpit, the Tree of Life carved in the wall to the left of the altar, a gravestone made of Frosterley marble and the 13th century font.

To construct the church, the builders dragged large stones from the crumbling Roman fort, at Binchester nearby. Despite the repurposing of Roman stone to build a place of Christian worship, the Roman fort lives on in markings of chariots ruts, the faded remains of a Roman altar shaft and an upturned stone inscribed with LEG VI under a lintel which can all be found on the church's north wall. It even appears that the chancel arch, now decorated with 15th century painting, was taken directly from Binchester's bathhouse.

It is likely, as revealed from glass fragments found during excavation, that Escomb was part of the monastic foundation of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, the same monastery which the famous Venerable Bede inhabited until his death c. 735 AD. Archaeology has also uncovered the remains of a north porch and west annexe at Escomb and these humble dwellings, now marked out by paving slabs, may have provided accommodation for the priests or monastic brothers who led this church's early congregations. The roof line of one of these now lost buildings can still be seen in the west wall.

When you leave the church, the Saxon Inn is ahead of you. Go to the right up across the green to reach a track with allotments on your right and a small pine plantation on your left. This leads to the path across the fields with good views across to the lakes on your right. You go down to cross a stile and a stream before passing through a small wood. You continue on with fields on your left and woodland on your right until you come out at Paradise! This is an area of reclaimed scrub and wetlands. The track bears left and under a railway tunnel as you arrive at Witton Park. Walk straight on up the road for 100 metres and on your right you will find the memorial garden and statue about the famous Bradford brothers. St Paul's church which was built in 1877 is a few metres further on.

## **Witton Park**

Although coal was known to be close to the surface, it was not until 1819 that commercial extraction began. With the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825, which began at Witton Park, it was not long before there were nearly 100 pits within 5 miles.

The first ironworks in the northeast of England opened in Witton Park in 1845. Many of the workers came from Wales and Ireland. There was a Welsh speaking chapel and an annual Eisteddfod. The village was known in the county as "Little Wales". One of the Welsh families produced a remarkable son Thomas Davies, who was a labourer in the ironworks until he was 21. He spent every spare moment reading books from the Mechanics



Etherley Incline Railway. After about 800 metres, you come to New Inn Farm on your right. This inn was built after the railway was established to cater for the needs of the local community. Cross over the road which was formerly an old coach road.

## **The Stockton & Darlington Railway**

The Etherley Incline is part of the famous Stockton and Darlington Railway which opened on September 26th in 1825. Its distinction is that it was the first publicly subscribed railway in the world to use steam locomotives. It carried coal from Witton Park Colliery to the mouth of the Tees. Coal was originally carried away by horse and cart, but the increasing volume of coal and the costs involved meant that an alternative needed to be found. George Stephenson was engaged and he supervised the initial construction of the railway before handing over in this area to his colleague Thomas Greener. The Etherley Incline closed in 1843 being made redundant by the building of the Bishop Auckland and Weardale Railway. The following paragraphs tell more about this ancient monument which is protected by English Heritage, but for much more detailed information and for helpful guides see: <https://www.sdr1825.org.uk/walk-booklets/>

You now arrive at Phoenix Row. After passing a former Primitive Methodist Chapel on your left, go along the back of Phoenix Row which was the route of the wagon way. Pause when you come to the last house in the row because this was actually the northern terminus of the Stockton & Darlington railway. Horses would have pulled the wagons along the level land from the pit head a kilometre north to this point and the wagons would have been hitched to ropes powered by the engine at the top of the incline ahead. If you look at the right hand side of the gable end of the house, you will see some of the two hole stone sleepers that were used in building the railway. At the left hand side of the gable end, you can see a roofline scar. This is where the pay office was located, where colliery staff paid to use the railway to export their coal. Continue ahead along a short impressive stretch of the former railway where a high embankment was built over a stream called Belts Gill. Walk up to the road and turn left. The second house on the left was formerly The Railway Bridge Inn. Note the S&DR 1825 plaque which is not original to the house. Take a look also at the gate to the right of the house which includes a rather charming representation of a horse in a wagon. Cross over the road with care to regain the Etherley Incline.

For the next delightful kilometre you walk steadily up to the top of the incline and then descend towards Greenfields. Steam locomotives did not operate on this part of the railway as the challenges of the hilly countryside would have been too challenging for early locomotives. For this reason the tops of the two hills of Etherley and Brusselton had steam powered engine houses which enabled the coal wagons to be hauled up the hill by ropes. When you reach the top of the hill you will find a wider open area to your right which is worth exploring. This is where the engine house was and where there were cottages for the engineer and the blacksmith. You may notice some fruit trees planted when the cottages were built. There were also two small reservoirs which supplied water to power the engine, one of which survives.

## **Thomas and John Greener**

After he had supervised the construction of the railway, Thomas Greener became the first engineer and he lived here. He kept the engine house in perfect condition, frequently polishing the metal work. He was also an artist and the walls of the engine house were decorated with peculiar paintings of local characters. It is reported that, *"The beautiful engine was often visited by ladies and gentlemen from the neighbourhood, who mostly expressed their great satisfaction at this masterpiece of human skill, and the interesting conversation of the engineer"*.

When his wife died in 1826, Thomas Greener left to join George Stephenson in constructing the Liverpool and Manchester Railway and he was replaced by his brother John. John was a dedicated local Methodist preacher on the Bishop Auckland circuit and he taught several working men to read. On February 20th 1843, he was accidentally killed when he fell under one of the beams of the engine house while it was in motion. He is buried not far away in St Helen's churchyard. The engine house ceased operations soon afterwards and it is likely that John Greener's death was a factor in its closure.

Walk on descending gradually and, before you reach the road, notice an embankment with a culvert for a stream. Turn right to walk through the hamlet of Greenfields. There is no verge or pavement here so take care. After passing a small patch of woodland where the road bears right, take the footpath on your left. This leads to a farm track where you turn left and proceed steadily downhill passing by several gates. You come to a small

conifer plantation and cross a former railway track and soon afterwards cross the bridge over the River Gaunless. The Manor House Hotel is on your right as you arrive in West Auckland and the end of this section.

## West Auckland, the World Cup and the Kiwi Connection

West Auckland's most famous claim to fame is its connection to the World Cup. West Auckland Town FC won the Sir Thomas Lipton Trophy which was the first international football competition in 1909 and 1911. The competition was held in Turin where in the finals West Auckland Town FC beat FC Winterthur 2-0 in 1909 and the later very famous Juventus 6-1! The team were a group of coal miners who lost a week's wages when they took part. A statue commemorating this was unveiled on the village green in 2013.

Many people wonder if there is a link between the Aucklands in Co Durham and the city in New Zealand and there certainly is. In 1842 the first governor of New Zealand, William Hobson named the new settlement in honour of George Eden, 1st Earl of Auckland (1784-1849) who was his patron and friend. George Eden was the son of William Eden, who after a successful career in politics and also being British ambassador in Spain and the Netherlands, was elevated to the peerage as *Baron Auckland of West Auckland Co Durham*. The Eden family home was Windlestone Hall near Rushyford which is about 7 miles away. Sir Anthony Eden who was prime minister in the 50s was born there.

The Manor House Hotel is believed to have been a hunting lodge for Henry VIII. It was the former home of the Eden family which explains why William Eden took the name of West Auckland in his title in 1789.

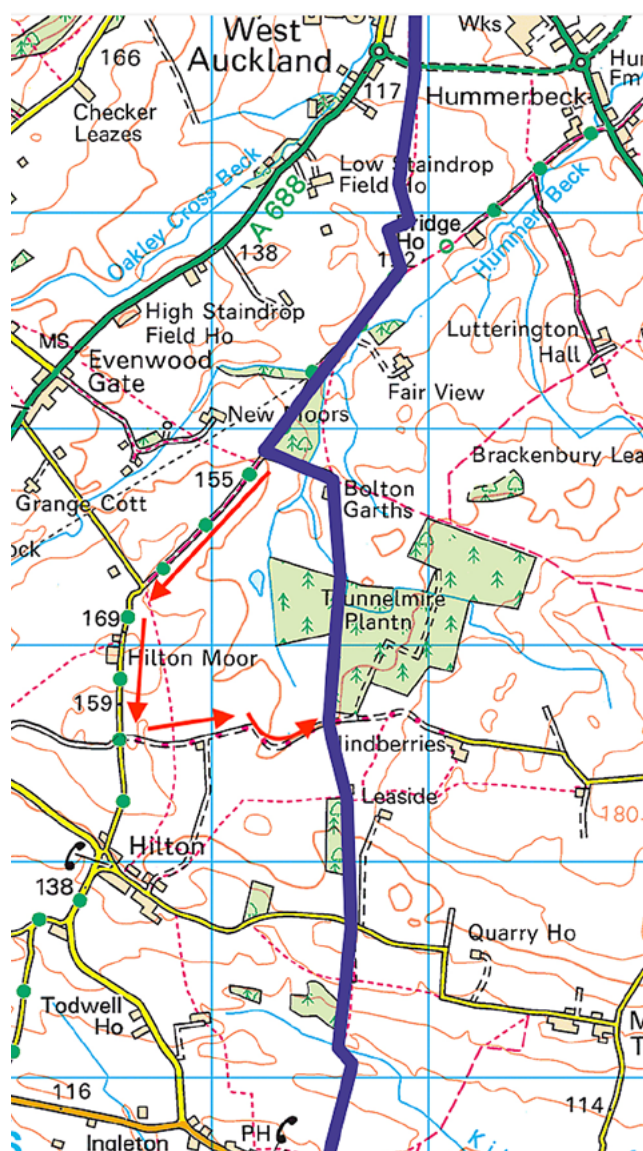
## Section 1

### West Auckland to Gainford – 11kms

Cross the A68 carefully and walk over the green towards the car park on the other side. Behind some trees you will find a path which leads through the estate to the Community Parish Room in Monteith Close. Turn right here and then right again passing Oakley Cross Primary School on your left. Immediately afterwards, turn left and cross a green bridge over a stream and turn right. After 70 metres turn left onto a path that leads you after 250 metres to the A688. Cross with care and go over the bank to regain the south bound path. There is a line of trees on your right. At the top, turn right and follow the field boundary round for 200 metres, then right again for a further 160 metres, before going through a gap in the hedge and turning left with the hedge on your left before you reach Hummerbeck Lane where you turn right. Pass the road to Fair View and continue ahead with a wood on your left. At the end of the wood, turn left.

*If it has been wet, there is an alternative drier route but it is longer at nearly 3kms rather than 1.5km. Continue ahead on Hummerbeck Lane until you come to a road, Moor Lane, where you turn left. You will pass Hilton Moor on your right. 250 metres later take the farm track on your left and walk on for a kilometre where you will rejoin the main route where it crosses the track just south of the wood.*

Walk down the hill and cross over a stream with a pond on your right. The road bears right up to Bolton Garths Farm. Go through the gate and pass a barn on your left before taking the gate into the second field on your left. Walk diagonally across that field towards a wood. You cross a bridge over a little stream before going over the stile into the wood. It is inclined to be rather wet here but you should



be able to find a drier way round to your left. You soon come out of the wood and continue on your way with the wood on your left and the field on your right. After crossing a damp patch, go over a farm track and on into the next field where you keep along the left-hand field boundary before reaching West Leaside Farm on your left. The footpath crosses over to the south of the farm to join the farm road which you walk down to cross a minor road.

Walk on south, passing a former quarry on your right, then go through a gate and walk downhill with a wood nearby on your right. After crossing a beck, walk across a field and then in the next field keep on the right hand field boundary as you walk up to Ingleton. Turn right when you come to the main road. About 120 metres further on, you will find the church of St John the Evangelist built in 1843 is on your left.

## Ingleton

Ingleton was originally a Saxon settlement. Its name means either 'Ingeld's farmstead' or possibly 'Farmstead of the English'. The village is first recorded in the reign of King Canute (994-1016) who made a barefoot pilgrimage to Durham. He gave the lands around Ingleton to the church. Ingleton later passed on to the Neville family. Ingleton is a conservation village and most of the old houses are built of stone. Two dwellings near the post office have been dated to 1683 (Ivy Cottage) and 1701 (Glendon), while at the west end of the village, two houses were built in 1627 (Hillside Farm) and 1695 (Greencroft).

Take the footpath on the eastern side of the church which leads out to a recreation field. Walk on keeping the well established hedge on your right hand side until you reach a farm road where you turn right. Walk up to Pinder House Farm. In the past there was a 'pound' for animals here, where they could be kept overnight when travelling between markets. The pinder was the person in charge of this place and occasionally small sales took place here as well. Walk down from the farm to cross Langton Beck over an old packhorse bridge. There is some rough ground on your left and a patch which is wet at times before you walk up hill to find a road where you turn left into the pleasant hamlet of Langton. You pass a row of white painted cottages on your left. When you come to a T-junction, turn right.

You will soon find the footpath on your left through the gate into a field. The path turns right after 140 metres, crossing the field to reach Back Lane where you turn left. After 70 metres take the footpath between fences on your right. The path leads you to a property called Mason's Cottage and you might wonder if you are trespassing as the right of way goes right and left close to their front door before you come out to cross the open space at Headlam. Walk on, passing a medieval stone enclosure on your left and there is a second packhorse bridge to see but not to cross on your right. When you come to the road by Headlam Hall turn right.

## Headlam Hall

In the sixteenth century, the Headlam estate came into the hands of the Birkhead family from Cumberland. Henry Birkhead and his wife Anne built the present hall at the turn of the seventeenth century. The inheritance passed through the female line and in the mid eighteenth century another Anne, great great granddaughter of Henry and Anne married Lawrence Brockett. Their youngest son, also Lawrence, became Regius Professor of Modern



History at the age of 38, but five years later he died in a riding accident. The hall belonged to Lord and Lady Gainford (JA Pease MP) between 1912 and the 1940s. It passed on to the Stobart family until 1977 when it was bought by the present owners John and Ann Robinson.

Walk up the road and soon after it bears right, continue ahead at the junction with the main road and shortly afterwards take the path on your left, crossing the field on a pleasant grassy track. The path turns right and then left after 50 metres. Cross over a stone wall to cross the last field on your journey and cross another stone wall to reach the road into Gainford. The pavement is initially on your left, but later you cross over to the right. When you reach the A67, there is a corner shop on your right. Cross over carefully. You pass the Cross Keys Inn on your right before reaching the attractive village green. Cross over to St Mary's Church which you will want to visit, but make sure you go round to the left of the church for the official end of your pilgrimage at St Mary's Well.

## Gainford

Gainford is an ancient site. There was a Saxon church here in the 8th century. The presence of St Mary's Well on the south side of the present church facing the river is significant, because the early Christians often chose and cleansed sites formerly associated with pagan devotion, which often centred on springs or water courses. Fragments of Anglo-Saxon sculpture found inside and around the church are further evidence that an ancient Christian community existed on this site, whilst sculpture combining Northumbrian and Norse motifs reflects subsequent Scandinavian settlement in the region. These sculptures are to be found in the Open Treasure exhibition at Durham Cathedral.

As the earliest church in the area, St Mary's Church is fondly regarded as 'the Mother Church of Teesdale'. The first written evidence of Gainford was produced by Simeon of Durham who tells us that Eda or *Edwine*, a Northumbrian chief who had exchanged a helmet for a cowl, died in 801 and was buried in the monastery at *Gegenforda*. There are records giving evidence to Gainford having been part of the Northumbrian Congregation of Cuthbert of Lindisfarne in Saxon times.

The present picturesque grade 1 listed parish church was re-modelled and extended in the Early English style in the 13th century. The interior of the church is well-worth exploring. An original perpendicular 15th century window can be found in the south aisle to the west of the porch, whilst the south porch door is possibly held by original 13th century iron hinges. There are three medieval brasses in the chancel. Victorian restoration was sympathetic and left a legacy of a famed three manual pipe organ and a ring of six bells, both of which are in regular use.

Today Gainford village has a population of about 1,675 residents living in this Anglo-Saxon settlement built around its large and fine village green founded on a ford across the river, in which trout, grayling, and salmon are always found in its clear flowing waters. Sited on the north bank of the River Tees in County Durham and bordering North Yorkshire, Gainford is 'the gateway to Teesdale'. A Jacobean hall, Georgian architecture surrounding the village green, a 40 ft monument erected in 1900, a natural spa on the west end of Gainford's river bank, a theatre and school which the comedian Stan Laurel attended, are among Gainford's features of interest.

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