The Way of Life

Gainford to Durham

Introduction

This guide gives directions for travelling The Way of Life from Gainford to Durham. All the Northern Saints Trails use the same waymark shown on the left. The total distance is 47 kilometres or 29 miles. I have divided the route into 4 sections between 11 and 14 kilometres.

This pilgrimage route, along with the Ways of Love, Light and Learning, all lead to 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 a well and a river.

Section 1

Gainford to West Auckland – 11km

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. Trout, grayling, and salmon are 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.

The walk begins at St Mary's Church and more specifically at St Mary's Well which can be found on the south side of the church near the River Tees. Make sure you visit the church before or after starting at the well. From the well, walk round the church and out onto the village green. Go straight across on the left hand side of the green and up the road on the other side passing The Cross Keys Inn to reach the A67. Go straight across to the road opposite passing the Corner Shop on your left. The pavement is initially on the left and then as North Terrace becomes North Lane you cross over to the right hand side.

After leaving the village, you soon pass a group of houses and then as the road bends to the left look for the footpath sign by a bench and stone steps to a field which you cross over. Cross another stone wall and at the next field boundary, go down and turn right and then after 50 metres turn left by a tree onto a pleasant grassy track which leads to a road where you turn right. When the main road turns right, continue on and round to the left to walk into the pleasant hamlet of Headlam.

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 and then passed on to the Stobart family until 1977 when it was bought by the present owners John and Ann Robinson.

After passing an ornate gate with heraldic shields, walk on a few metres to the main entrance to Headlam Hall and opposite it you will find a path across the green. Note (but do not cross) the old packhorse bridge to your left. Walk on, passing a medieval stone enclosure on your right and head across to the north-west corner of the green. On the right hand side of Mason's Cottage, you will see a large garage. To the right of it by a gate, you will find the footpath sign to lead you rather narrowly through the stone wall to a path between fences. The path leads out onto Back Lane where you turn left. After 70 metres take the footpath on your right. Cross over the field and then turn left and you will come to a gate out onto a road where you turn right.

After a few metres, turn left along the road into Langton with pleasant houses and a row of cottages all painted white. Where a road goes off to the left, you continue to the right, passing Langton Farm on your left. Immediately after, where the road turns to the left, take the footpath straight ahead. Go down the hill and cross over a damp patch before crossing Langton Beck over another old packhorse bridge. Walk on 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. Take the road away from the farm. 100 metres after crossing a stream, where the road bends to the right, take the footpath on your left, which leads up to Ingleton village alongside a well established hedge on your left. You pass by a recreation ground keeping the hedge on your left and as you reach the main road, 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).

Cross over the road and turn right. Shortly before a bus stop and the end of the village, take the footpath on your left. Cross the first small field diagonally and then walk down along the left hand field boundary before crossing a brook and going across a field, then left and right to go through a kissing gate and up a farm track with a wood quite close on your left. As you reach the top of the hill, go through the gate onto a farm road. There is a disused quarry on your left. Cross over a road and go straight on up the drive to West Leaside Farm. Leave the drive as you approach the farm to find the footpath around the left of the farm and into a field where you keep on the right hand field boundary.

[If it has been very wet you may prefer the alternative route below at this point.]

Cross over a farm track and across a patch which is wet after rain to reach a path with a wood on the right hand side. The path continues into the wood and it is often rather wet at the beginning, but you should find a dry way round through the woodland on your right. Cross the stile into a field and go over the bridge ahead and then walk diagonally left up towards Bolton Garths Farm. Go through a gate then to the left of the barn before going through a gate. Pass the farm on your left and continue on the farm road downhill and round to the left to cross a stream with a pond on your left. Walk up the hill and turn right into Hummerbeck Lane at the top keeping a wood on your right.

This alternative route is drier but longer at nearly 3kms rather than 1.5km. Instead of crossing the farm track, turn left and after about a kilometre, it will lead you to Moor Lane where you turn right. Soon after passing Hilton Moor on your left, fork right into Hummerbeck Lane. After a kilometre you come to a lane on your right and a wood and this is where you rejoin the main route continuing straight ahead.

Where Hummerbeck Lane turns right to Fair View, you keep ahead on a footpath for 350 metres. Where the path rises, take a footpath on your left with a hedge on your right, but when the field boundary turns to the right just after a telegraph pole and sycamore tree, turn sharp right through a narrow gap to follow the field boundary which is now on your left. There is a gap after 50 metres, but ignore that and after 100 metres turn left. After a further 200 metres the path turns left with a line of trees on your left as you approach the A688. Cross with care and go up the bank to the footpath on the other side which after 250 metres leads to a stile before a stream. Do not cross the stile, but turn right with the fence and stream on your left. You will soon find a green bridge to cross the stream. Playing fields are on your left and Oakley Cross Primary School is on your right. Turn right and then left into Monteith Close. Ahead of you is the Community Parish Room. Turn left and

right through the estate to access the village green (claimed to be the largest in the county) and cross diagonally left towards a bus stop near the war memorial.

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 2

West Auckland to Bishop Auckland – 11km

Take a path on the right hand side of Manor House Hotel passing a car park on your right. Where the track forks, go left to cross a green bridge over the River Gaunless. Go straight ahead and you will soon cross over a former railway line and carry on through the gate with a conifer plantation on your left. Proceed uphill on a good wide track passing by four gates with kissing gates on the left. You pass under pylons at the third gate. When you reach the fifth gate, just after passing Deborah Wood beyond the field on your left, turn right along the footpath with the hedge on your left to reach a road, where you turn right to walk through the hamlet of Greenfields. There is no verge or pavement here so take care. After 400 metres you come to a sign indicating that you have reached the famous Etherley Incline where you will turn left.

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/

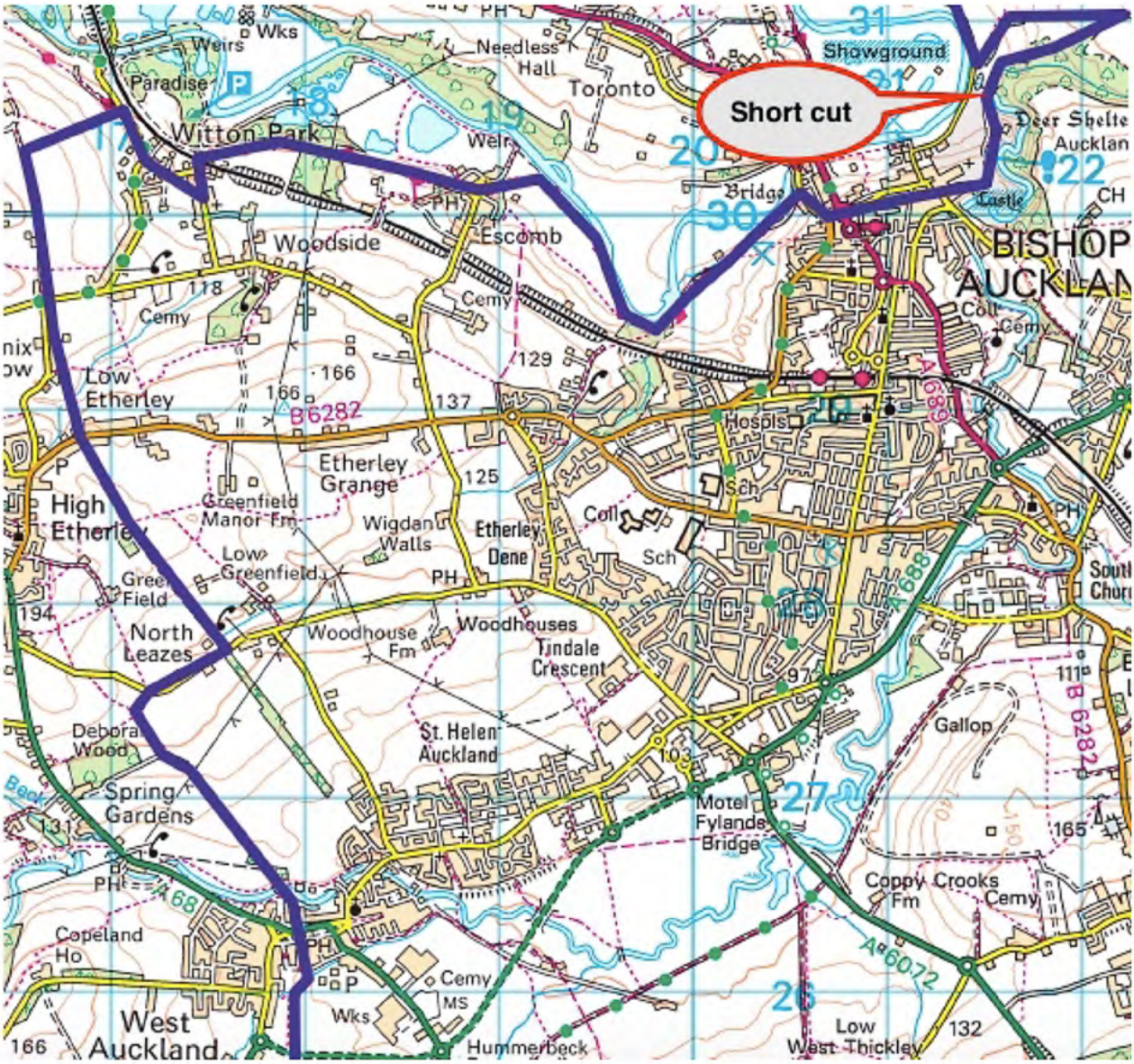
For the next delightful kilometre you walk steadily up to the top of the incline and then descend to the village of Etherley. Steam locomotives did not operate on this part of the railway as the gradients of the hilly countryside would have been too challenging for early locomotives. For this reason 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. At the start of the walk there is an embankment and a culvert for a stream. When you reach the top of the hill you will find a wider open area to your left 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.

A few metres further on at the next field boundary, a footpath crosses which was formerly an ancient drovers' road. The path narrows as you gently go down to Etherley. When you reach the road, cross over with care and on the opposite side is a cottage which 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. After looking at this house, go west a few metres where there is a modern house which was built across the line and then turn right between houses. When this road turns to the right, keep straight on through a gate to another short impressive stretch of the former railway where a high embankment was built over a stream called Belts Gill. At the end of this you come to Phoenix Row. 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. If you look at the right hand side of the gable end of the first house in Phoenix Row, you can 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.

Go along the back of Phoenix Row which was the route of the wagon way. When you come out to the road turn right passing a former Primitive Methodist Chapel on your right and Softly Dene Farm on your left. You next reach a road which was formerly an old coach road. Cross over passing New Inn Farm on your left. This inn was built after the railway was established to cater for the needs of the local community. Carry straight on, on a good track northwards for 800 metres. There is some fine stone wall building on the first field on the right. The area after the next farm – East Farm is where the Witton Park Colliery was located.

Shortly before you reach the derelict East Park Farm, cross a stile on your right and keep along the right hand side of two fields with fine views as you descend into Weardale. Cross a stile and walk down to a path and turn right – you have now joined The Weardale Way. You soon reach a road where you turn right to walk into the village of Witton Park. Where the road bends round to the left, cross over to the village green near the sign to Paradise and walk diagonally across to the far corner where you will find the memorial garden and statue celebrating 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 Institute. He eventually gained a London BA and a Leipzig PhD and became a highly distinguished Hebrew scholar and the first non-Anglican to receive a doctorate in Divinity at Durham University. When he joined the staff of the South Wales Baptist College and discovered another lecturer there called Thomas Davies, he decided to insert the name of his beloved village and became Thomas Witton Davies. He had a personal library of 17,000 books.

By 1870 Witton Park had 21 public houses included the Cambrian, the Welsh Harp and the Shamrock. When not fighting the Welsh, the Irish fought among themselves. After an Irish Riot between Fenians and Hibernians, four men were convicted of manslaughter after originally being charged with murder. The closure of the Ironworks in 1884 brought poverty and destitution to the village.

In 1914, flag waving villagers welcomed a train carrying 40 Belgian refugees – the first northern community to do so. Eventually 170 Belgians were housed in Witton Park. Roland and George Bradford were the only brothers to be awarded VCs in the First World War. Also Thomas the eldest brother was awarded the DSO and James the MC. 2018 saw the opening of the special memorial garden to the Bradford Brothers including the fine statue by Ray Lonsdale called "*The Ball and The Bradford Boy*".

From the Bradford memorial walk down hill and where the main road turns left, go ahead to walk under a tunnel into Paradise! If you have time on your hands you could explore Paradise which is to the north and west, but our route goes right to two gates – you skirt round the one on the right to continue on your way. Keep going ahead mostly between fences with fields on your right, then going through a small wood. Ignore a downhill left fork and keep straight on crossing a stile under overhead power lines. To your left are some small lakes. Then descend to cross a stream and stile then ascend a hill which provides good views across the lakes and to Bishop Auckland in the distance. You come out on a track between allotments on your left and a small pine plantation on your right. This soon leads you into Escomb with its famous Saxon church rather curiously surrounded by a housing estate.

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 research 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.

After your visit to the church, walk round to the opposite end from which you arrived and take a road which has a playground sign. This soon bends to the left towards the river, but you fork right before a small sewage plant to go over a stile into a paddock, which you cross diagonally over to reach the riverside. Walk along between fences at first with the river on your left and then into a larger field. There is a hedge line which you pass and then fork right away from the river, heading towards trees. Cross a ditch and you will find a gate into the wood. Take the path along a stream tinged with orange caused by iron deposits in the local minewater. You now have a very challenging section of no more than 300 metres appropriately called Broken Bank, where the land is subject to slippage towards the river. There are a number of path options, which in places may require some scrambling After 120 metres you come to a fence and go through a gate. The next 200 metres are a little easier!

You eventually come out of Broken Bank into a field. Walk ahead downhill to a gate and cross the stone stile on the right of the gate. At this point, you can either keep on the road, passing the rugby club on your left or use a more attractive riverside path. If you choose this, walk along it until you come to the end of the playing fields near a picnic table where you will need to rejoin the road. When you reach the road junction, turn right up the road. At the top of the hill, keep on the right side of the road and cross first over West Road and at the roundabout on the A689 cross over into High Bondgate. At the mini roundabout go ahead into the one way street with a car park on your right. You are now in Fore Bondgate which is an old medieval street.

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 developed 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.

You emerge into the spacious Market Place where it is good to pause to get your bearings. To your right is Newgate Street which 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. Across the Market Place is the continental looking town hall and St Anne's Church. You can see ahead of you the Auckland Tower and the Robinson Arch. This area is the centre of much recent development under the auspices of The Auckland Project.

Section 3

Bishop Auckland to Tudhoe – 14km

It is likely that you will be stopping here and perhaps visiting the Spanish Art Gallery on your right, then the Mining Art Gallery on your left followed by the Auckland Tower, but when you are ready, walk on through the Robinson Arch, built by Thomas Robinson for Bishop Richard Trevor in 1760 and continue passing the Faith Museum on your left, the Walled Garden on your right and finally Auckland Castle and the Chapel.

Go on to the gate ahead and into the parkland. Take the main track on your left and then take a fork right to reach the mock Gothic Deer House.

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 horses' 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 Trevor, was a place where the bishop and his 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.

Walk downhill from the Deer House and cross the River Gaunless on a bridge which was also 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.

[The route at this point may change in the light of future developments between here and Binchester Roman Fort. At the time of writing, you may be able to make a short cut avoiding a mile by keeping on the west side of the Gaunless and going out of the park under Jock's Bridge and crossing the bridge to resume the proper route. NB This is not possible if the Gaunless is in spate!] Follow the main track which crosses a smaller stream then turns to the right uphill passing old oak stumps on your left. At the top of the hill continue ahead passing a copse on your left and then head diagonally across to the left to the end of the park wall where you will find a stile to cross.

[Alternative route below may be chosen here.]

Turn left after the stile and walk a few metres with the wall on your left and cross another stile. The path follows the line of the park wall on your left and goes downhill to the road by the Wear where you turn right. After 300 metres, turn off to the right, immediately after a new car park on your right, on a path which goes up through woodland and includes some steps. Halfway up, there are a few stone slabs which can be very slippy in wet weather. Go over the stile and into a field. Binchester Roman Fort is over on your left.

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 loosened 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 Britain 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.

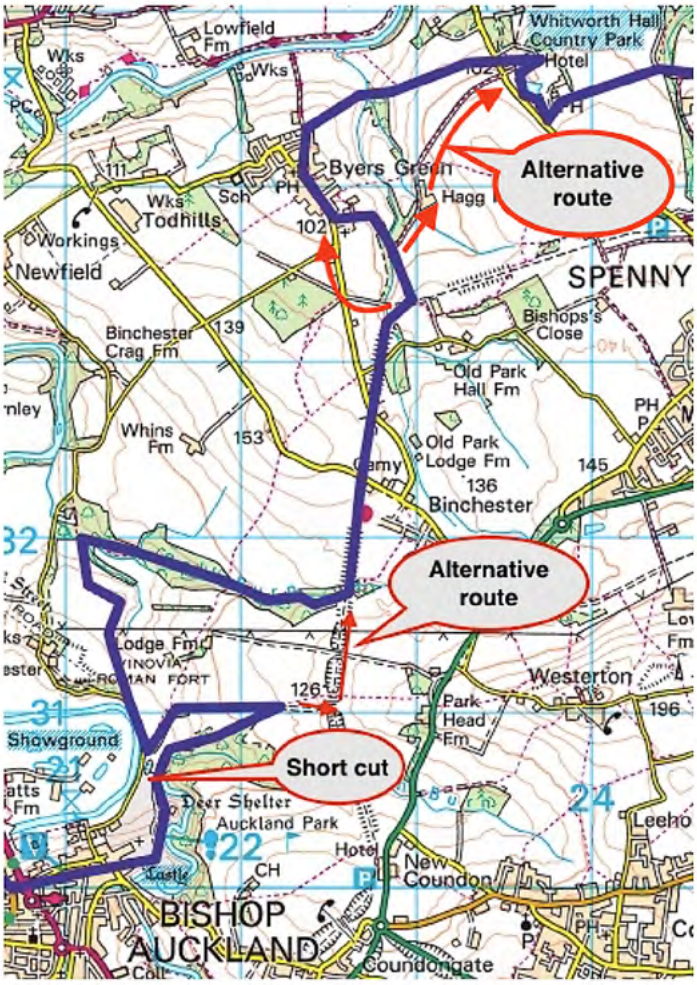
Eventually, the fort and its community shrank to a 'poor village' and later crumbled away. From the 16th century onwards some antiquarians took an interest in what remained, but when coal mining began many altar stones and other objects were used as props inside the pits. Some excavations took place 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.

Follow the right hand field boundary along the edge of the plateau with pleasant views of the valley and Bellburn Wood. At the end of the plateau, ignore the defunct stile on your right and follow the field boundary down to the western end of the wood. Go over a stile and the Bell Burn. The secluded Vinovium Cottage is ahead, but you turn immediately right over the stile into Bellburn Wood, where the entry is similar to walking the nave of a cathedral. Keep close to the main burn as the path gradually ascends and crosses the burn by bridges and stepping stones. In the spring the wood is carpeted with wood anemone, wild garlic and bluebells. Leave the woodland by a gate and just before the bridge turn right and then left to ascend steps up to the Auckland Way where you turn left.

Alternative route – missing Binchester Roman Fort and Bellburn Wood but recommended after wet weather when Bellburn Wood can be very muddy. Step over another stile and turn right and follow the path through two fields with a hedge on your right. After passing a gate go ahead to cross over a bridge then go over the stile on your right. The bridge ahead is Bishop's Bridge, so called because it was built on the orders of Bishop Lightfoot who wanted a wide bridge to be built so that a wood could be planted on it to screen his view of trains on the railway! Go down the steps to arrive at the Auckland Way. Turn right here and you will soon pass Bellburn Wood on your left and then the long row of cottages at Binchester on your right.

After passing the long row of cottages at Binchester on your right, cross over a B road to continue on the Auckland Way. As soon as you have crossed over, look ahead and beyond the cottages across the field and on a clear day, you can see Durham Cathedral and even the Penshaw Monument further away. If you want to follow in the traditions of pilgrimage, this is a place to cross yourself and give thanks for the first sight of the cathedral!

After passing under a bridge, a platform is all that remains of Byers Green station. This was opened in 1837 and closed in 1958. Cross a minor road and after 300 metres, you will see a former branch line of the Clarence Railway feeding in from the left. The primary purpose of these railways was to take coal from the many mines in the area to Port Clarence on the Tees. *[If it has been wet, you may want to avoid the wood ahead and go to Byers Green via the old branch line on your left where the path bears right before Slowly.]* The official name of the cottages ahead of you on your right is Old Park Terrace, but is often called *Slowly* because there used to be Slowly notices for the trains at this junction! A few metres before you reach Slowly, look for the footpath and kissing gate on your left which you go through into a field which may have goats in it. Please ensure kissing gates are properly closed – goats are very clever! Cross straight over the field and down to another kissing gate. Cross the next field and go through a narrow double stile into a small wood with Hagg Beck below to your left. It can be muddy here, but you should be able to find a drier option to your left if necessary. Cross another stile into Hagg Lane. This is a very ancient route and was used by the medieval bishops between Bishop Auckland and Durham. Turn left here up the hill to reach Byers Green. At the T-junction by a war memorial, turn left and St Peter's Church is a few metres to your left.



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.

Alternative route. If it has been very wet, the drier route between Byers Green and Whitworth is the ancient Hagg Lane. When crossing from Hagg Lane to Whitworth, 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.

Turn right out of the church and walk downhill, passing the Royal Oak pub and Thomas Wright House Hotel on your left. Here you will find the village green on your right. Turn right here into North Street and keep the green on your left or you may prefer to cross the green diagonally. Continue on North Street and soon after passing the Working Men's Club, you will see a playing field on your right. To the left of the large gates is a kissing gate giving access to a footpath along the left hand side of the playing field. Continue down along the edge of a field and as you reach a wood, fork slightly right down to a green footbridge over the burn. This path to the bridge can be slippy after rain and if so you may prefer to go a few paces along the field edge until you see steps down to the bridge. 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. Go quite steeply straight up, avoiding other paths into the wood, until you climb over a stile. Continue straight ahead with the hedge on your right. There are pleasant views across the Wear Valley. About half way towards the houses of Whitworth ahead, the path switches to the other side of the hedge. When you reach the road cross over carefully. Walk uphill on the pavement for a few metres before turning left to go down to Whitworth Parish Church which is in a delightful secluded location.

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.

After visiting the church, turn left (east) and go through the gate into the grounds of Whitworth Hall Hotel. There is a permissive route here, passing a dene on your left along a path with lights which leads to the drive. The hall is one of the few places between Bishop Auckland and Durham where refreshments may be found.

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.

Turn right along the drive, enjoying the very attractive parkland with fallow deer and an ornamental lake and follies on your left. When you get back to the main road turn left and immediately on your left, go through the kissing gate to a path which goes along the southern boundary of the hall. There is an interpretation panel about the history of the hall. Continue on across the fields, passing through a kissing gate and following a line of young oak trees. Turn right when you reach a road and go down, crossing over a stream and then forking left as the road turns right. At the point where you reach 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 with fields and woodland on your left and the houses of Spennymoor on your right. You will pass by a motor bike barrier and then when you come to a second one, walk left downhill away from the houses and keep descending to cross a bridge over a stream. The path winds uphill and you come to a sign indicating that you are at 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.

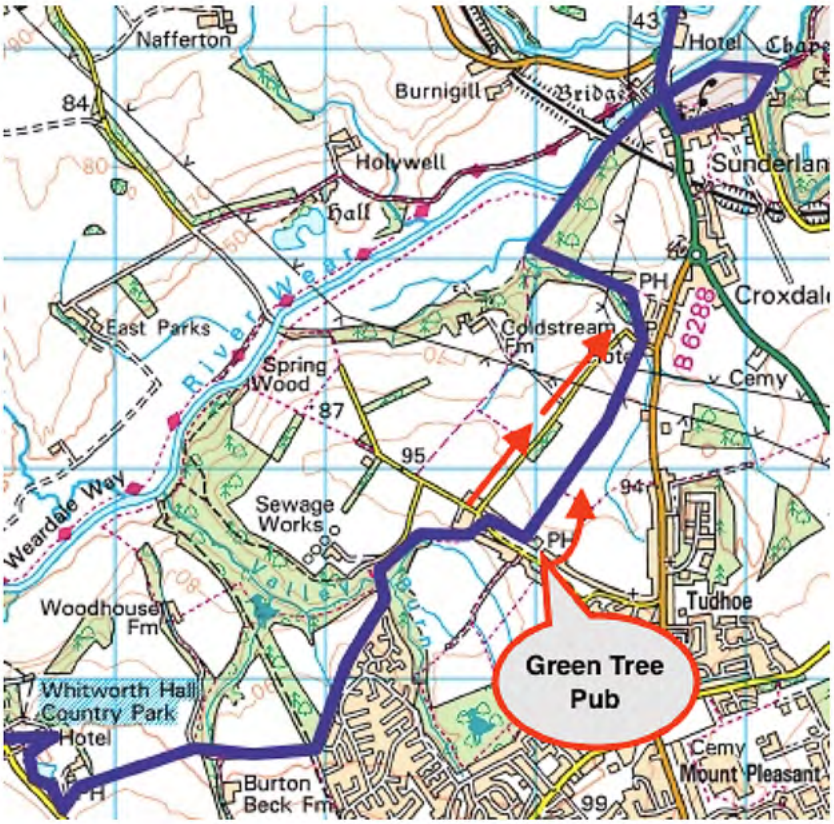
Ignoring the first path on your right, go on a few metres and before you reach a road and metal fence, take the path on your right through the reserve which runs parallel to the road. In spring, there is a good display of cowslips here. After about 200 metres, there is an exit from the reserve on your left by a noticeboard, but turn right on the footpath through the wood. You will see some sewage pipes which cross the Valley Burn on your right. Leave the wood via a stile and the path leads you by the burn before swinging up to the left where you will find a stile. This leads you into a narrow footpath and then through a gate out onto the village green in Tudhoe where you turn right.

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 4

Tudhoe to Durham – 11km



As you start to walk along the green, it is interesting to know that there was once a row of cottages on the east side 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! On your right you will see a prominent house which is called Tudhoe Hall and 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. Opposite is an impressive white house with pineapple stone finials. This was originally built in 1822 as a Roman Catholic seminary for girls. At this point, you may wish to proceed a bit further on to The Green Tree Country Pub, but the main route takes the footpath on your left between the two bungalows out to fields. *[The first field here 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.]* This path was called Ratten Row and was where coffins were carried to a burial site called Litch Field which is thought to have been in Croxdale. Litch is the Anglo-Saxon word for body. There is a left/right dog leg after 300 metres and you continue straight ahead towards the pylon. There is another left/right dog leg as you skirt a field with a hedge on your right. Cross a stile into the next field and you pass the pylon on your right. Go over a stile to the left of a gate into the next field before crossing a final stile to reach a bridge over the delightfully named Nickynack Beck.

The Nicky Nack Story

Many years ago there was 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 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 over a road and go left before the terraced houses to take a cinder path which leads downhill with the Nickynack Beck on your left. Eventually you join another path coming in from the left and continue on down to the River Wear. You will soon reach a viaduct. This fine structure is 75 feet high and 230 yards long and was built in 1872 by North Eastern Railway. It is part of the East Coast Main Line.

Soon after walking under the viaduct, you will come to the old Sunderland Bridge which dates back to the 14th century, but has had several rebuilds. It originally carried the Great North Road. You may want to go to the bridge first, but the route goes straight ahead to the small gate to the right of the main gates into the Croxdale Estate. You go through a tunnel under the A167 and out on a road between a fine avenue of trees. Walk along here for 400 metres and before the road crosses a burn, you turn right. *[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.]* After passing an attractive mill house on your left, walk up the hill and when you reach the gate at the top, turn right along Hett Lane into Sunderland Bridge. After 200 metres, you will find St Bartholomew's Church on your right.

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 church of St Bartholomew's for the expanding mining community and retained the church as a private chapel.

From the church walk to the A167 and turn right down the hill to cross the River Wear on the new Sunderland Bridge. The roundabout is in the shape of St Cuthbert's Cross which you may be able to see but is much more obvious from the top of a double decker bus! Walk past the Honest Lawyer on your right. Cross over the River Browney before turning right into Low Burnhall Woods which is managed by The Woodland Trust. To start with, the path follows the River Browney with some mature oak woodland on the left. Turn right at a path junction and after passing a wicker lady, you will be walking beside the River Wear. You skirt round Low Burnhall Farm, going down steps and then up steps at a point where the view down river is particularly attractive. Soon after the path goes through a fence, take the main path uphill which as you get higher, bears right. You follow the Sulphur Trail signs on posts. Pass a bench and you will soon come to a circle of stones with spiral marks. Continue ahead to the left of them and descend steeply to cross a bridge where you leave The Woodland Trust reserve.

Cross over a bridge and steeply ascend to reach a field where you turn left and climb uphill for 200 metres with the woodland on your left. Where the field boundary swings up to the right, continue ahead and when you see two large posts on either side of the path, turn right and descend via some steps.

[Alternative route may be chosen here.]

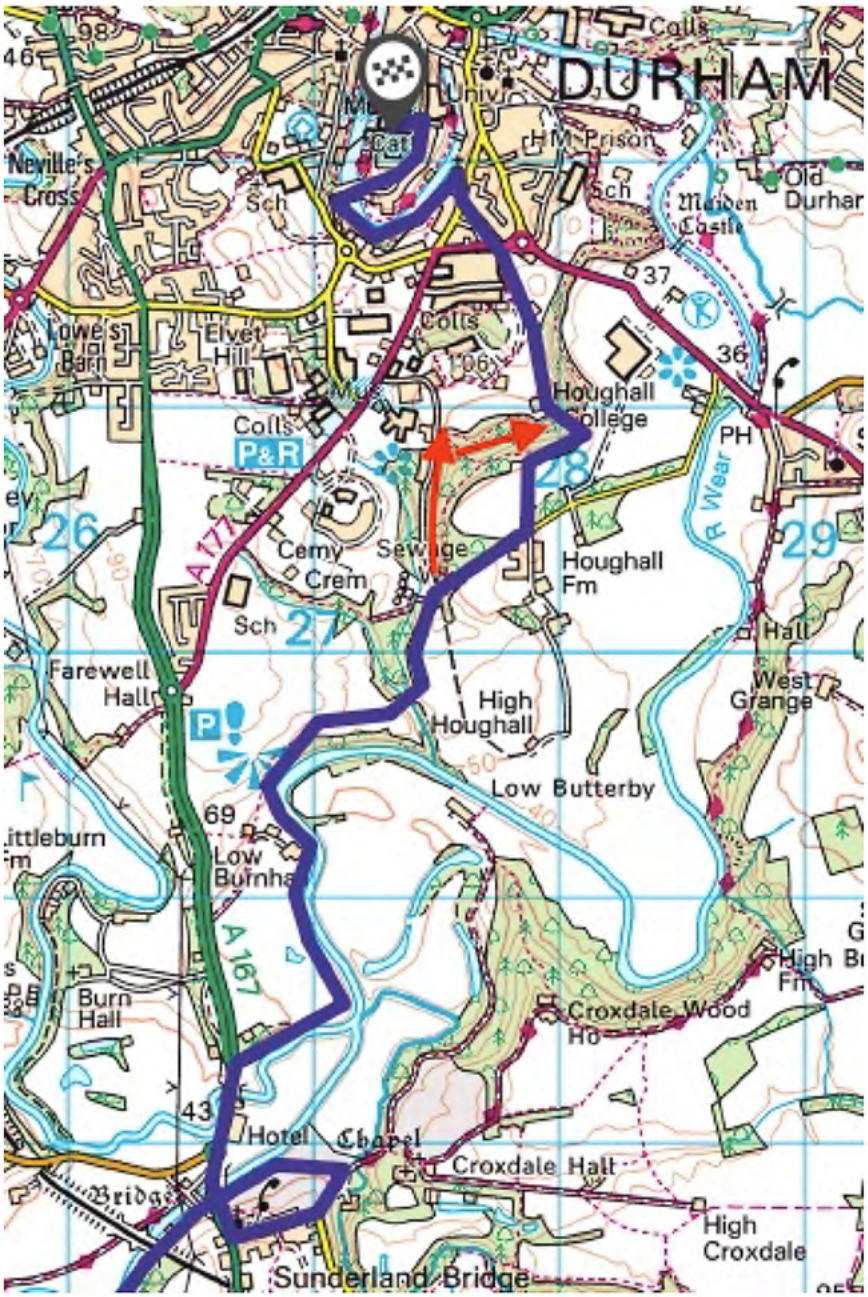
Houghall

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 was 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.



At the bottom of the hill, you come to an embankment. This was formerly a wagon way between Houghall Colliery and Croxdale Colliery, which was actually near Low Burnhall Farm which you passed earlier. There was a tunnel between the collieries under the hill you have walked over. At one point you have to briefly go down off the embankment and go under or round a tree before resuming your way. When you come to some houses at Houghall, cross over the stile and turn left, passing a house on your left and crossing a stile into a field. Between 1893 and 1949 there was an isolation hospital here for people with infectious diseases such as smallpox, typhoid, measles and scarlet fever. Walk ahead with the field boundary on your left. Cross over the last stile on your journey and turn right.

After 300 metres, turn left for your final challenge of 224 penitential steps up to the top of the hill. Some locals call them *The Steps of Doom*! Turn right at the top and follow the path on the edge of the hill soon reaching a wider track and after turning left and right by a fence, you will pass a reservoir on your left. At the end of it, turn left, passing a bench and once you are clear of the trees a wonderful view of the cathedral opens up. You can also see Durham Castle as well as the tower of St Oswald's and the spire of St Nicholas churches. The view is why this hill was called Mount Joy and where you can join pilgrims of past ages in giving thanks that you are in close sight of your final destination.

Alternative route missing the 224 Steps of Doom. Instead of turning right here, go straight ahead into a wide lane through the woods called Hollingside Lane. Walk for about 400 metres and after passing buildings on your left you will come to a gate. Immediately after this look for the footpath on your right. Walk along here for another 400 metres keeping on the higher ground near the edge of the hill on your right until you rejoin the main route at the top of The Steps of Doom.

Go back to the main track and continue down hill. You come close to a road on your left, but keep on the path above the road with the university buildings opposite. When you reach the main road, cross with care and go ahead on a lane with a cemetery and later a school on your left. Turn right when you reach the main road. Go over the zebra crossing 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 762, 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.

After visiting the church, walk from the door across the graveyard towards the river where you will find a small flight of steps to join the footpath. Turn left to walk down to the Wear. The path leads round to Prebends Bridge. Before you cross it notice the plaque on your left with Walter Scott's famous lines:

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.

Prebends 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. Walk across the bridge and up through the Water Gate into South Bailey. There are many interesting buildings as you walk along the cobbled street, including St Cuthbert's Society on your right. You will pass the church of St Mary the Less which is originally Norman, but extensively rebuilt in the nineteenth century. It is now a chapel for St John's College on the right which is a theological college. You pass from South Bailey into North Bailey where an impressive gateway leads into the Cathedral Close and the back entrance to the cathedral via the cloisters, but to end your pilgrimage in the proper manner (!), you should walk on a short distance along North Bailey to access the main entrance on the north side.

Acknowledgements

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For more information on the Northern Saints Trails, see northernsaints.com