

TIMSBURY CIRCULAR WALK 1

Timsbury—Withy Mills—Greyfield Woods—High Littleton—Amesbury—Timsbury

This walk starts in Timsbury and then includes the surrounding countryside. Although today the views are almost entirely rural, this area was at the centre of the Somerset Coalfield. On this walk, you will see some of the remains of this industrial past. Click on the map to see a larger view of the route. You can also walk the route online. You will find more detail as well as many photographs.

START

1. Timsbury High Street

Looking west you will see the parish church of St Mary's. Walk towards the church. On the left hand side is Church Farm which used to be a butcher's shop with a slaughter house. Pitfour House, on the right dates from the mid 17th century. The Georgian facade was the result of alterations, extension, and prefacing at the beginning of the 19th century. It is a Grade II listed building. Cross the road and enter the church yard.

2. St Mary's Church

The first recorded documentation of a church in Timsbury was 1292. The old building fell into such disrepair that it was redesigned and rebuilt in 1826. Follow the path either to the left or right of the Church to reach Samborne's Gate. The gate is named after the Samborne family who were the lords of the manor for many centuries. The old manor house used to stand to the rear of the Church. The house was demolished in 1961. Go through Samborne's Gate and turn left, then right at the electricity sub-station and enter Southlands Drive. Turn left and walk down Southlands Drive until you reach the T- junction with South Road.

3. South Road

Turn right and walk along South Road. On the left is The Laurels Care Home. This was formerly the village surgery before the present surgery was built in St Mary's Close. A 100 yards further on, on the right, is a large black gate in between two pillars. This marked the entrance to the drive that led to Greenhill House (now the Cheshire Home). Carry on past Greenhill Cottage until you reach the Cheshire Home.

4. Cheshire Home

Greenhill House is thought to have been built around the beginning of the 19th century. The house was occupied by Bartholomew Smith at this time; he was related to the Sambornes who lived in Timsbury House. Walk on another 50 yards and then turn left into a lane. Walk along the lane for 75 yards until you reach a large open field on your right. Walk diagonally across this field in the direction of the wind turbine and television mast in the distance on the Mendips.

5. View of Hillside House

As you begin to walk across this field, look right back towards the road. You will see a large square building which is now called Rosewood Manor, but used to be known as Hillside House. The house was built in the early 19th century and was the home of William Coxeter Smith, a Justice of the Peace. It is Grade II listed building. Vale House is to the left of Hillside House hidden by the trees. This was the home of the Langford family. These large houses were built by prosperous landowners who were involved in the development of local coal mining. Continue to walk diagonally across to the corner of the field and the next stile. Cross this stile and walk diagonally towards a gap in the trees.

6. View of the River Cam Valley

Pause at the gap in the trees, look below and left to gain a clear view of the River Cam Valley. In the 19th century this would have looked very different with the Somerset Coal Canal, GWR Railway, coal mines and various tramways. Walk diagonally down the hill to a stile in the corner of the field. Cross the stile to a lane that leads to Withy Mills Farm.

7. Withy Mills Farm

This lane leads to Withy Mills Farm. The Farm dates back to at least 1790. Cross the stile immediately in front of you, and walk diagonally left across the field towards a clump of trees. At the bottom of the field turn left, keeping the stream on your right, and go through a metal gate which marks a former bridge on the GWR railway line between Hallatrow and Camerton. Walk straight ahead to the stretch of water that is Timsbury Basin, the former head of the Somerset Coal Canal.

8. Timsbury Basin

The Somerset Coal Canal was built in the early 19th century. At one point, the Basin was served by numerous tramways which connected it to the surrounding coalmines. The Canal declined in the second half of the 19th century following the development of the GWR single track branch line from Hallatrow to Camerton which opened on 1st March 1882. The Basin is now a part of a nature reserve. Over 70 bird species have been seen on or around the reserve as well as 21 species of butterfly. More than 160 different plant species have been recorded. Turn right and aim for a gap in the trees. You will soon see a metal stile and stone bridge in the trees. Cross the stile, follow the footpath ahead through a gap in the trees until you reach Goosard Bridge Sewage Pumping Station. Turn right at the wooden gate and walk around the fence to a metal gate. Turn left keeping the hedge on your left until you reach the drive leading up to the entrance to the pumping station.

9. Goosard Bridge

Turn right along the drive. On the left are steps leading up to Goosard Bridge. At different times in the past it has been called Gooseyard and Gooseherd. Walk across the road, taking great care, and walk down a flight of stone steps opposite. These originally formed the pedestrian access to Paulton Halt on the GWR Railway. Don't take the stile immediately on the right at the bottom of the steps, but walk on about 10 yards to reach the old railway line, which is now a permissive path. Turn right and follow the railway line for just under a mile.

10. GWR Railway Line

Having walked along the old railway line for about a mile your progress is blocked by some large trees. Before this take the stile on the left and walk diagonally across the field to the wooden gate. Walk along the short drive to the busy A39 road.

11. Hallatrow

Cross the busy road to the stone squeeze stile immediately opposite and follow a narrow fenced-in lane to a metal gate.

12. GWR Railway Line

Walk ahead towards another metal gate which marks the GWR railway line again. Turn left for 10 yards and then right into the woods. Follow the path, crossing a bridge, between the trees to an open area.

13. Stephen's Hill

Ignore the paths that come from the left and right. Walk ahead and follow the obvious path into the woods, keeping the stream on your left. Highbury Hill, on the left, was the site of an Iron Age hill fort; Roman coins have also been found there. Walk through the woods until you reach a narrow stone bridge which crosses the stream.

14. Waterfall and Long Lands

At this point, don't cross the bridge but walk on upwards for 20 yards to gain a good view of the waterfall. Return then to the stone bridge, cross the bridge and walk up to the metal gate, and then ahead again to a metal gate and a small bridge which crosses a stream. Before crossing the bridge, turn right and walk along an obvious path. Stop just before the gulley and look right. You will see a small square fenced area which marks the remains of a stoned lined shaft.

Walk back to the metal gate and cross into the open area that is Long Lands. Walk across on a raised footpath and enter Greyfield Wood. Follow the path upwards. Ignore the first set of paths crossing and continue to walk upwards until the path flattens out and you join another crossing of paths.

15. Greyfield Woods

Greyfield Wood was mined for coal around 1610 and again from 1833 -1911. Walking through the woods it is possible to see the remains of 'bell pits', a very early form of mining. The woods are now managed by The Woodland Trust. Within the wood, you can observe stones carved like headstones in various places. There are two theories as to their origin. One is that surveyors of the coalmines carried out an underground survey, and then would repeat the exercise on the surface, marking strategic points below with a stone above. The other is that the stones mark the graves of the Earl of Warwick's hunting dogs. The Earl of Warwick used to own much of the land and coalmines. Continue straight on to a gate and car parking area.

16. Old Greyfield Pit

To the left of the car park was Old Greyfield Pit. This was not a very deep pit dating from the 18th century. Walk through the car park and turn right into an uneven lane. When you reach a tarmac road look left and you will see the remains of an old bridge, which was used to dump waste from the later Greyfield Colliery. Continue up the tarmac road.

17. Greyfield Colliery

At the T- junction pause to look left. The large stone building is the old engine house of the colliery. The road that goes to the left marks the route of an old tramway, called 'The Gug' which took the coal up the hill to a coal depot from where it was sent to Bath for sale. Turn right and walk along Greyfield Road to meet the A39 in High Littleton.

18. High Littleton

Cross the A39, turn right, walk 50 yards. At the Methodist Church, turn left into Rotcombe Lane. Walk down Rotcombe Lane for about 600 yards until the road bends to the right and starts to go uphill.

19. View of Rugbourn Farm

As Rotcombe Lane starts to go uphill there is a stile on the right. Cross the stile and then bear left keeping the hedge on your left. Walk up to the brow of the hill and then head for the stile in the hedgerow. The buildings on the left were part of Mearns Pit which operated from 1783 to 1817. Just before the stile, look right to the double roofed building. This is Rugbourn Farm. William Smith, the 'Father of English Geology' lived there when employed to supervise the work on the Somerset Coal Canal until 1799. Cross the stile and walk down the hill to a metal stile and then up the hill to Amesbury.

20. Amesbury

The buildings were miner's cottages. Coal mining was recorded at Amesbury in 1701. The pit closed in the 19th century. Cross the stile and follow the path straight ahead which joins a lane. Walk for half a mile until you join a T-junction with Prior's Hill. On the way to Prior's Hill, you can see the remains of spoil heaps in the fields on the left. Turn left and walk up Prior's Hill. After 150 yards, there is a stile on the right hand side.

21. Prior's Hill

Cross over the stile and walk up to the next stile keeping the hedgerow on your left. Before you cross the stile look down the hill and you will see the remains of an old tramway that joined the Somerset Coal Canal at Timsbury Basin. Once over the stile, continue up the hill aiming for the corner of the hedgerow in front of you. Just past the corner, there is a narrow gate in the hedge, go through and head for the building and the metal gate. Watch for the low branches of the tree!

22. The Ha-Ha

The gate marks the beginning of the Ha-Ha path. This path leads back to Timsbury and passed Timsbury House. The path was lowered in places so that the residents of Timsbury House would not see the local inhabitants walking past. There is an information board on the wall which gives details of the local area. There are clear views towards the Mendips. Follow the Ha-Ha for 300 yards until you reach a quiet road.

23. St Mary's Close

Turn right and then left past St Mary's Surgery. Follow this road until you reach a T-Junction with the cemetery in front of you. Turn right and then immediately left into a pathway that runs alongside the cemetery. Follow this path until you reach Newman's Lane.

24. Newman's Lane

Turn right into Newman's Lane and then right into The High Street and return to the starting point of the walk.