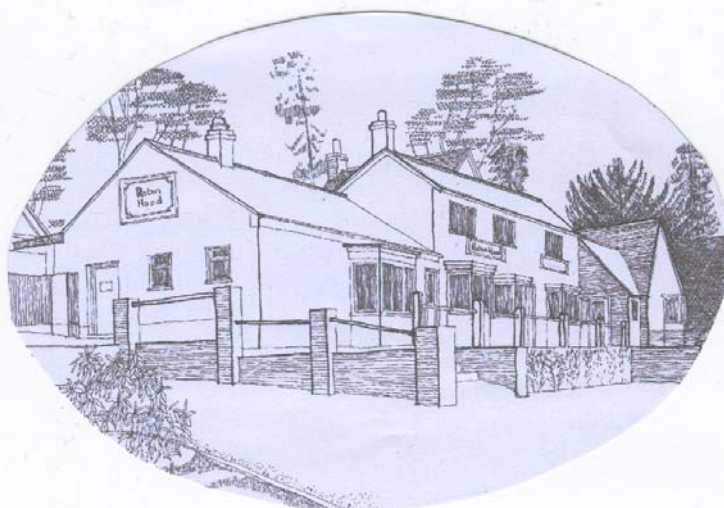


Dodderhill

Parish Survey Project

Historical Footpath No 1

This circular 5 ½ mile walk gives an excellent view of the western part of the parish where the busy A38 road links the town of Droitwich Spa with Bromsgrove, and the modern M5 motorway speeds traffic through the parish. The walk takes you past a site where Mesolithic remains have been found along an ancient Ridgeway, crosses two Roman roads, passes through a Roman fort, and goes close to the site of a Roman villa. There are links to the Saxon past, and the important heritage of the Salt Industry, while passing through beautiful countryside with wonderful rural views.



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At the start of the walk, the Robin Hood Public House, and mid-way, St Augustine Church.

Start at the Robin Hood Public House (GR 918654), or the railway bridge over the Bromsgrove Road, Droitwich Spa town (GR903636).

Distance

An 8.3 kilometre (5 ½ mile) walk which can be undertaken as a circular walk or in two four kilometre (2.7 mile) sections.

6 stiles and 2 flights of steps.

Allow approximately 1 ½ hours for each section, or 3 hours for the complete walk

Map: Explorer 204 Landranger 150

Transport to and from the start/finish point

144 Bus connections and car parking at the Robin Hood pub (please use the excellent bar and restaurant facilities), or Droitwich town centre where bus and train connections, car-parking, toilets and food can easily be found.

Tourist information & Local History Centre

Droitwich Spa Tourist Information Centre, St Richard's House, Victoria Square, Droitwich Spa.
Worcestershire WR9 8DS Tel 01905 774312

This route was correct at the time of publishing.

No responsibility is accepted by Dodderhill Parish Survey Project for errors or omissions, or for any loss, accident or injury, however caused.

Enjoy your walk.

Historical Footpath No 1



The numbers indicate more information is available in the historical section.

FIRST SECTION: The Robin Hood to Chapel Bridge

The Robin Hood Pub (1)

Leave the Robin Hood Pub and take care as you turn left onto the pavement going south towards Droitwich Spa alongside the busy A38.

After a few yards and opposite the Little Chef, take the second lane on the left and continue to the end of the lane to Rashwood Farm.

Rashwood Farm (2)

Follow the Blue waymark (bridleway) signs across the farm drive.

The path goes across the field to a gate half way along the opposite fence and into a second field to go through the gate onto a track taking you into Chateau Impney Park

Make sure you stop when you get to the avenue of trees, for there are views to your left to Hanbury Church in the trees on the skyline, Hadzor Court ahead, and to your right, Dodderhill Church.

Chateau Impney (3)

Continue walking along the avenue of trees until the end, where you go through a gate into the rear of the Chateau Impney hotel grounds.

At the bottom of the slope turn left to cross a railway bridge. The railway line leads to Birmingham via Bromsgrove and the famous Lickey incline.

Follow the path straight on, close to the M5 motorway towards a housing estate.

Mesolithic Peat Deposits (4) were found to your right in the valley below

Impney Farm (5)

Continue straight on following the Blue waymark (bridleway) signs bordering the housing estate built on the site of Impney Farm

Turn right downhill following the yellow footpath sign to a bridge which you cross over the River Salwarpe. The river used to be the parish boundary.

Turn left to walk beside the River Salwarpe with houses to your right. Notice the restored canal on your left.

When the path ends at Swan Drive, cross and continue to walk along the riverside close to the site of the Town Mill (not an official footpath) and so reach Waterside.

Turn left onto Waterside and walk along the footpath until you meet the main road. This is a Roman Road and was the A38 before the by-pass was built.

Turn left and walk across Chapel Bridge towards the traffic lights, and cross. Once across turn right to go back towards the railway bridge. Stop before you return to Chapel Bridge.

Chapel Bridge (6)

Just before Chapel Bridge there is a gate on your left, go through this gate into Vines Park, and turn left so as to walk with the River Salwarpe on your right hand side.

Cross over the first canal bridge, and turn left to again walk with the river on your right, and the church on the hill above you.

The Salt Industry made Droitwich famous (7)

Stop to look at the statue of St Richard de Wyche, the Volunteer and the replica brine well, the Upwich Pit.

If required, Droitwich Town centre and its amenities are close by.

Retrace your steps and in front you will see a bridge crossing the River Salwarpe below the church.

Cross this bridge and facing the Gardener's Arms, turn right into Vines Lane, back to the main road.

Notice the three concrete blocks on your right – the remains of a World War II Tank Trap.

At the main road turn left and go to the railway bridge.

SECOND SECTION: Droitwich Railway Bridge to The Robin Hood

Go under the railway bridge heading out of Droitwich and immediately turn left up some steep steps beside the brick wall of the bridge. At the top you enter the churchyard. Look at Dodderhill church which was the parish church for the Wychbold area until 1887.

Dodderhill Roman Fort (8)

St Augustine – Dodderhill Church (9)

In the churchyard look left towards the historical buildings of Droitwich Spa, and below to Vines Park where the brine springs were found and the important salt industry developed.

Keeping the railing fence and Droitwich Town to your left, take the path which leads from the churchyard into trees and eventually down the steep slope or the steps where you turn right onto a tarmac path.

Bays Meadow Roman Villa (10)

Continue uphill through the housing estate, passing under a large concrete bridge (the A38 Droitwich Spa Ring road), until you reach a footpath gate up a slope on the left.

Go through the gate into the field and take a convenient route across the field, aiming for a solitary large oak tree, to reach a gate into the next large field.

Go straight on for about 150 metres then fork right towards a flight of steps up from the lowest point in the hillside to the Golf Course.

At the top look at the views all round: Chateau Impney; Pridzor Hill; Hadzor Hall; Hillcourt now Dodderhill School; Dodderhill Church; and the water tower on Yew Tree Hill.

Keeping the hedge on your right until you reach a track **WATCH OUT FOR GOLF BALLS**

Follow the track down to Crutch Lane cross over and turn left. (See the ridge and furrow (13) on the Golf Course ahead as you go down the track).

Roman Roads (11)

At the road junction with Ford Lane cross over to the stile and follow the footpath diagonally right across the field to another stile.

Cross this stile and follow the hedge on your left to cross the Salty Brook by a footbridge. (Salty Brook is aptly named for brine enters the stream making the water salty to the taste).

Enter the next field passing left of a phone mast and over a stile towards the right hand wind turbine and the hedge ahead.

Walk to this hedge and follow with the hedge on your left. The hedge is part of an ancient track which continues as the Ridgeway. (On the other side of the hedge you may see the air socks and runway for light aircraft at Brine Pits Farm, and in the distance Crutch Hill).

The Ridgeway (12) Ridge and Furrow (13)

Keep to the Ridgeway and pass through two metal gates.

Once through the second gate (and before you reach the cottage and barns) turn diagonally right across the field to the far corner. In this field look out for signs of ridge and furrow.

Cross the stile and immediately turn left, and follow with the hedge on your left. Turn right into the newly planted tree belt. At the end, turn left, and following the river to the corner where you will find a bridge across the River Salwarpe.

Cross the bridge.

Keep to the waymarked path through the grounds of Walkmills Farm (the swan sanctuary), with the big pond on your right.

Bear left through a gateway to two gates. Take the right hand gate and then turn right and follow the markers and head to the concrete farm track.

Mills along the River Salwarpe (14)

At the concrete track turn right and follow the track to the A38.

Although you will be able to see the Robin Hood pub, turn left and walk along the busy A38 to the roundabout by the M5 motorway. Here there is a refuge in the centre of the road making crossing much safer. Return to the Robin Hood pub where you may enjoy some well earned refreshment.

Historical Notes

1. The Robin Hood Public House

A map dated 1733 shows an elm tree growing where the Robin Hood stands today. The earliest known record of this property is dated 1st April 1757 when William Band of Rashwood, Victualler (supplier of food and drink – or publican) took a lease from the Pakington estate for 99 years for a cottage and land at Rashwood.

2. Rashwood Farm The present three storey single depth house is typical of the area when it appears that there was a rush of rebuilding in the area in the mid 18th century. This property was probably built in the early 1700s when it became part of the Vernon estate of Hanbury. The previous farmhouse was timber-framed becoming a dwelling house for farmworkers and eventually being used as a barn before it was demolished in the late 1960s/1970s. At the same time as the farmhouse was “gentrified” in the mid 1700s a ha-ha was constructed in the garden to allow uninterrupted views.

Prior to the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536-9) this land was owned by the Bordesley Abbey, Redditch.

3. Chateau Impney

Chateau Impney was built in the early 1870s by John Corbett for his French-educated Irish wife. The avenue of trees marks the line of the drive which was to take carriages north to the road, now the A38. His neighbour however had other ideas and the necessary land could not be purchased, so instead the drive makes an abrupt turn towards the A38 meeting it at North Lodge.

Besides the brick water tower in the parkland to your right is the round water reservoir, later used as a swimming pool and now derelict.

Impney was one of the original manors of Dodderhill.

In medieval times it was the home of the Corbet family (unrelated to the later John Corbett)

4. Mesolithic Peat deposits

Mesolithic peat deposits were found when the River Salwarpe was surveyed prior to a housing development being built close by. Mesolithic deposits are rarely found, and the Droitwich deposits indicate that the land was farmed for grain more than 8,000 years ago.

5. Impney Farm

The last farmstead on this site had the date 1757 built into the north wall in blue brick. It was demolished in the early 2000s to make way for the new housing estate.

6. Chapel Bridge

This was once the site of a river crossing called Gosford, on a route which followed the Roman road. The bridge is so named because a medieval chapel stood on it, with the chancel to the east side of the road and the nave to the west. The chapel fell down in the 18th century. The present day bridge was built in 1935.

7 The Salt Industry, Vines Park and Droitwich Barge Canal.

There is evidence at Dodderhill and at the Bays Meadow of bricquetage (porous pottery containers), used for transporting salt during the Iron Age period. In the Roman period Droitwich was called Salinae (Salt) from which the word salary is derived. The river side (Vines Park to the High Street) was once a dirty and smoky place. It was here that the brine was heated in lead pans over fires and as the water evaporated the salt crystals formed. An excellent museum in the Heritage Centre tells more of the salt industry from the Romans to recent times: also visit the salt workers' statue beside Droitwich Spa library.

In Vines Park see the replica of the Great Pit and the statue of St Richard who according to local legend blessed the dry brine well causing it to flow once more some time around 1248.

The Droitwich Barge Canal was designed by James Brindley and opened in 1771. It is one of the few wide canals built to accommodate the Severn Trows which carried salt from Droitwich to the Gloucester Docks. The Volunteer seen in Vines Park is based on the design of the Severn Trow.

The railway line, surveyed by Brunel in 1852, is known as the Stoke Branch and was built to link Droitwich with the Midland Railway at Stoke Works.

8 Dodderhill and Roman Fort

This was possibly named as the “hill where the plant Dodder grew”.

It is an historically important site as Iron Age pottery has been found, and later a Roman fort occupied this hilltop. Around the site are ramparts which were probably designed to be defended by a company of archers. The fort was garrisoned for quite a short period during the reign of the emperor Nero, and

possibly during the troubled period of Boudiccan revolt when some Britons tried to eject the Romans from the country.

9 St Augustine – Dodderhill Church

Evidence suggests an earlier Saxon minster on the site. The present 12th century church was once much larger, but the nave was demolished after suffering severe damage in 1646 during the Civil War. It has recently been altered and effectively “turned-round” so that all the congregation may see the altar, which now is unusually at the western end of the church.

10. Bays Meadow Roman Villa

This large villa was excavated 1967-1977 following some earlier investigations. An impressive complex was revealed incorporating stone buildings featuring rooms with decorated mosaic floors and painted plaster walls, and heated by hot air circulating under the floor. There were many finds indicating a high status building, and it is likely that the imperial officer in charge of the salt-making franchise was based here. Such a person is unlikely to have been popular and the main building was burnt down at the end of the 3rd century.

11. Roman Roads

This walk crosses two Roman roads: Crutch Lane connected the Roman fort to another fort at Greensforge; and the A38 to that at Metchley. Roman Roads are usually recognised by being straight, and leading directly from one place to the next.

12. Ridgeway

The Ridgeway is an ancient trackway which generally kept to the higher ground or ridges which remained drier whilst the valleys were always damp and difficult if not impossible to use. Ancient Ridgeways are found in many parts of the country.

13. Ridge & Furrow

The distinctive parallel lines of ridge and furrow seen on pasture land are signs of ancient ploughing before the field became pasture in the 15th century. These fields formed part of the system known as strip farming where various families farmed different strips of land. Each strip of land was worked by ox plough, and over time the plough moved earth from the furrow to the ridge.

14 Mills along the River Salwarpe

There are seven mills in the parish of Dodderhill along the River Salwarpe. Some were flour mills, but others papermills or fulling mills. Each used the force of the River Salwarpe to power the wheels which produced energy.



The Chateau Impney Hotel

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We hope you have enjoyed your walk around our parish.

For more information on our parish history visit www.dodderhillhistory.org.uk