



The Way of Light

Heavenfield to Durham

Introduction



This guide describes the pilgrimage route between Heavenfield and the shrine of St Cuthbert at Durham Cathedral. All the Northern Saints Trails use the same waymark shown on the left. The total distance is 72 kilometres or 45 miles. The route is divided into five sections of between 8 to 18 kilometres in distance. There is no public transport close to places on the 18 kilometre section between Hexham and Blanchland. Points of interest are described in red.

The route starts at Heavenfield which is a sacred site associated with St Oswald and is also the start or the finish of St Oswald's Way between Heavenfield and Lindisfarne. For the dedicated walker, combining The Way of Light with St Oswald's Way provides a 142 mile route between the Durham and Lindisfarne – the two most important pilgrimage sites in the region. Less than 5 miles south of Heavenfield is Hexham, which is the other most well known pilgrimage site on the route and is associated with St Wilfrid.

There are a number of reasons why the name 'Way of Light' has been chosen for this route. The Way of Light is characterised by spaciousness and wide expansive views across the moors and hills you cross on your way to Durham. County Durham has been branded as 'Place of Light' for this reason and also because of the region's association with the coming of spiritual light through the northern saints. Also St Cuthbert was particularly fond of St John's gospel and major themes in that gospel are light, life and love which all feature in the titles of three of the six Northern Saints Trails.

Here is a short story from the life of St Wilfrid that links with the theme of light...

Ecgrith the King of Northumbria was constantly at loggerheads with St Wilfrid. He found cause to have Wilfrid thrown into a deep dark dungeon and he ordered that no candles should be lit there during the night. Guards were on duty outside the dungeon and at night they heard St Wilfrid cheerfully singing Psalms. Eventually they became curious and cautiously opened the door to check on their prisoner. As soon as they did so, they were blinded by a light bursting through the crack. It was an angel of light sent by God to support St Wilfrid in his trials.

So as you embark on your journey in the words of an old Celtic blessing:

"May the blessing of light be on you – light without and light within."

Section 1

Heavenfield to Hexham – 8km

Heavenfield

This field with its simple church has traditionally been the site of the battle of Heavenfield which took place in 634 AD, but new research by Max Adams (see *The King in the North 2013 Head Zeus*) suggests otherwise.

A year before this battle took place, an invading force of Welsh under King Cadwallon and Mercians under King Penda had defeated the Northumbrians at the Battle of Hatfield near Doncaster. Edwin, the king of the Northumbrians was killed and Cadwallon's army laid waste Northumbria whose kingdom was split in two between Eanfrith who became king of Bernicia and Osric who ruled Deira. However very soon both kings were

killed by Cadwallon. At this point, Eanfrith's brother Oswald returned from seventeen years of exile on Iona to claim the throne.

The threat of Cadwallon however remained and when Oswald learnt that he was advancing with a huge force, he had to raise an army as soon as possible. This army assembled at Heavenfield where Oswald had a vision of St Columba who said to him, "Be strong and act manfully. Behold, I will be with thee. This coming night go out from your camp into battle, for the Lord has granted me that at this time your foes shall be put to flight and Cadwallon your enemy shall be delivered into your hands and you shall return victorious after battle and reign happily."

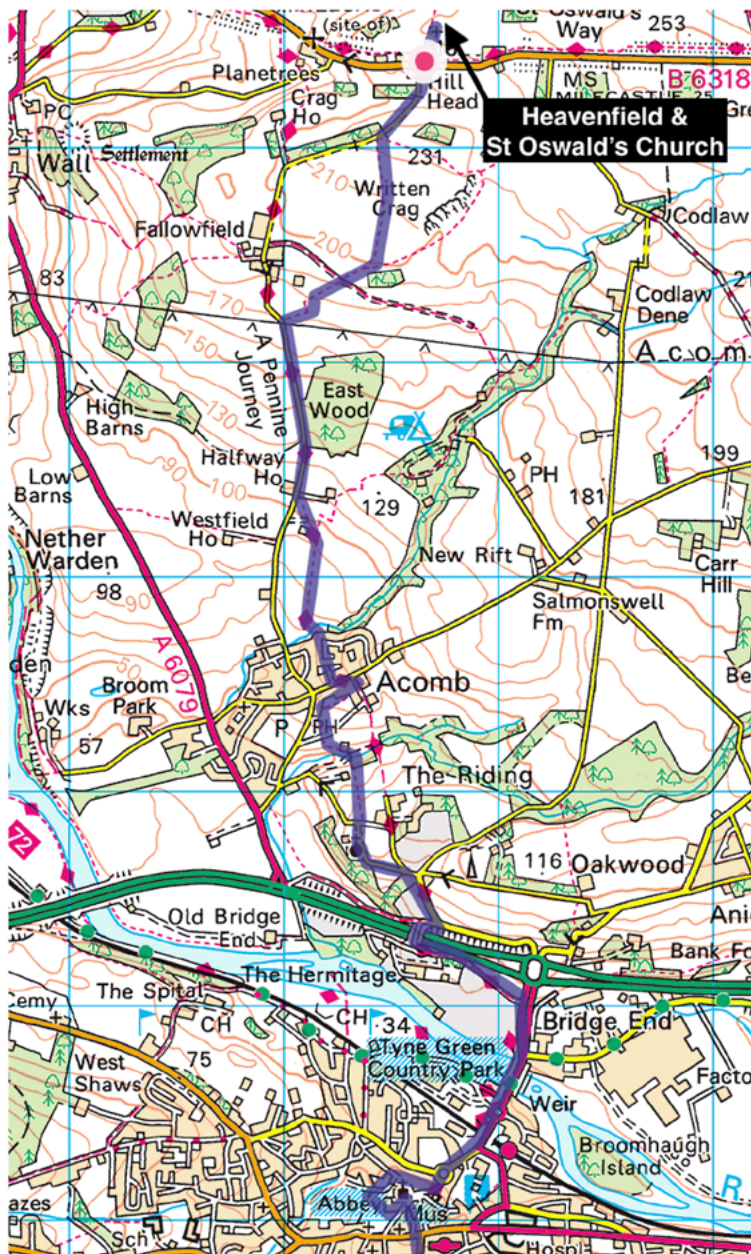
Here is how the Venerable Bede describes what followed:

"Oswald set up the sign of the holy cross and, kneeling down, prayed God to send his heavenly aid to those who trusted in him in their dire need. This place is pointed out to this day and held in great veneration. It is said that, when the cross had been hurriedly made and the hole dug in which it was to stand, the devout king with ardent faith seized the cross and placed it in position himself, holding it upright with his own hands until the soldiers had heaped up sufficient earth so that it stood firm. This done he raised his voice, and calling out to his army, said 'Let us kneel together, and pray the true, the ever living and almighty God to protect us in his mercy from the arrogant savagery of our enemies, for he knows that we fight in a just cause for the preservation of our nation.' The whole army did as he ordered and, advancing against the enemy as dawn was breaking, they won the victory that their faith deserved. At this spot where the king prayed, innumerable miracles of healing are known to have occurred which serve as a reminder and memorial of the king's faith. This place is known as the 'Heavenly Field', which name bestowed upon it a long time ago, was a sure omen of future events, indicating that there the heavenly sign would be set up, a heavenly victory won, and heavenly miracles take place."

The rest of the story of this battle is described on page 5 (**The Defeat of Cadwallon**) at the place where it is now believed that much of the battle took place.

The church itself is probably the third on the site, the first being a Saxon church built soon after the battle. A medieval church followed and in 1887, it was remodelled and the porch and bellcote were added. The porch contains some relics of an earlier Elizabethan restoration as well as fragments of a medieval cross shaft. An unusual feature is the gas-lighting, for safety reasons now disconnected. The two painted figures behind the altar are of St Aidan and St Oswald.

After you have visited the church, make sure you walk round to the northern side to enjoy the excellent views before you begin your southward journey down the grassy path to the gate by the tall oak cross which was erected in the 1930s. Cross over and go down the road by St Oswald's Cottage. The road soon bends to the right and when you reach the gate at the top of the hill, you will find a gate on your left. Two footpaths are indicated and you take the right hand one, walking over some slabs of rock and heading across the field towards the right of the conifer plantation ahead. There are wonderful views of the Tyne valley during your gradual descent.



After passing the plantation the path bears to the right down to a gate. Cross a farm track and go straight on to the gate ahead and then cross a field to the gate which leads out onto a road. Turn left here continuing down hill. Over to your left in Fallowfield Dene, lead mining took place from as early as 1611 up until 1846. After that, it was mined for the two very rare minerals of alstonite and witherite. After passing East Wood on your left and barns on your right, turn left and you will find the footpath on your right. Go into the field and walk to the attractive house with the tall chimney. Walk round to the left of it and diagonally down to near the field corner where you will find steps over to the next field. Turn right along the field edge. As you reach the bottom of the field where it gets a little steeper fork left down to cross a bridge over a burn. Go up the steps and then along a lane. You are now in Acomb. The lane leads to a track where you turn right and soon reach a road.

Cross over the road and turn left passing The Miners Arms Inn and then turn right. The Miners Arms was so called because as well as the lead mine, there was also a coal mine which in 1886 employed 200 miners. Turn right again just before a row of cottages and walk down a wooded lane with houses on your right. Take the next footpath on your left across steps and through a gate into a field. Go through two kissing gates to cross a driveway. The path goes to the left of the tree and hedge and leads down to a bridge across a burn. Go up and through a gate into the field and keep ahead with the hedge on your right. At the top of the hill, go through a gate and straight ahead on a narrow road, where you soon arrive at St John Lee Church on your right.

St John Lee

The church is dedicated to St John of Beverley who died c. 721 AD. He became Bishop of Hexham in 687 and later Bishop of York in 705, before going on to establish a monastery at Beverley. He was well known for his care for the poor, his great scholarship and as a miracle worker both during his life and after he died.

There was a church on this site from medieval times, but the present church is mostly the consequence of a rebuild in 1816. The tower and spire were added in 1865. Inside the church there is a Roman altar which was once used as a font and also a cup and ring marked rock called 'The Oakwood Stone' which dates from 1600 BC.

In 1765, a very unusual marriage took place here. Robert Scott, a well known player of the Northumbrian pipes who was 90 years old was married to 25 year old Jean Middlemas. Robert had been using crutches for 26 years but on the morning of his marriage, he threw his crutches away and walked 3 miles from Wall and after the service walked back with fellow pipers. Some wondered if this miracle should be attributed to St John of Beverley!

After visiting the church, continue on the road which turns to the left and soon reaches a crossroads by the charming Peaslaw Gates Cottage. Turn right here downhill and at the bottom turn right to reach the footbridge over the A69. The road turns left beside the A69 along a tree lined avenue. When you arrive at the main road into Hexham, turn right crossing the bridges over the Tyne and the railway with your destination at the abbey now in view. Where the main road bears left, continue ahead. After passing Waitrose, go across at the pedestrian lights and then go steeply up Hallstile Bank. At the top of the hill, the route does not go straight to the abbey but goes along the cobbled street past Wetherspoons. This joins a road which you cross and then take the first road on your left to walk under St Wilfrid's Arch. Near here was the accommodation for pilgrims. Turn right before the car park and enter the park and circulate round. Turn left when you leave the park and you will arrive at the entrance to the abbey.

Hexham and the abbey

Hexham was founded by St Wilfrid in 674 with the building of his abbey. Wilfrid, who was born in 634, had been educated on the holy island of Lindisfarne and it was after visiting Rome and seeing the magnificence of the buildings there, that he determined that he would build something worthy of the great Christian kingdom of Northumbria. He used stones from the nearby Corbridge Roman site and possibly from Chesters fort also. In its early years this building was the cathedral for the region, but ceased to function as such in the face of Viking raids. Later the threat from the Scots was much greater. There were Scottish raids in 1296, in 1297 led by William Wallace and in 1346. The town even paid a £2,000 ransom to Robert the Bruce to avoid a similar fate in 1312.

The Abbey has survived all these adversities and houses some special treasures. The crypt is the most important survivor of St Wilfrid's original building. Early artefacts include the Frith Stool, carved out of a single block of stone and possibly used as a bishop's throne, Acca's cross, carved in memory of Acca, who was

Wilfrid's successor as bishop, and a Saxon chalice unearthed in a grave. A replica of the chalice can be seen in the south choir aisle and the original is displayed in the Big Story Exhibition. In Norman times, the abbey became an Augustinian priory and between 1170 and 1250, the eastern part of the church, that is the choir, transepts and tower, was rebuilt in the Early English style. It was during this time that the superb night stair was built. The present nave on medieval foundations was only built in 1907/8.

There is an outstanding collection of 84 15th and 16th century painted panels which is the largest single collection of painted panels in the country. The majority of them depict the northern saints. The northern saints with scenes from their lives, also feature in the great west window which dates from 1916-1918 and was made by Henry Bosdet.

Most of Hexham's history is inevitably linked to the abbey but one other event of particular note was the Hexham Riot which took place in the Market Place in 1761. This occurred when the people of the town protested against changes in the procedures for serving in the militia. Troops from the North Yorkshire Militia were called in and they opened fire and killed 51 of the protesters.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Hexham was renowned for its leather industry and most particularly for making gloves which were called Hexham Tans. Today the town is an important shopping centre for the surrounding countryside and is also a centre for those who wish to explore the central section of the Roman Wall.

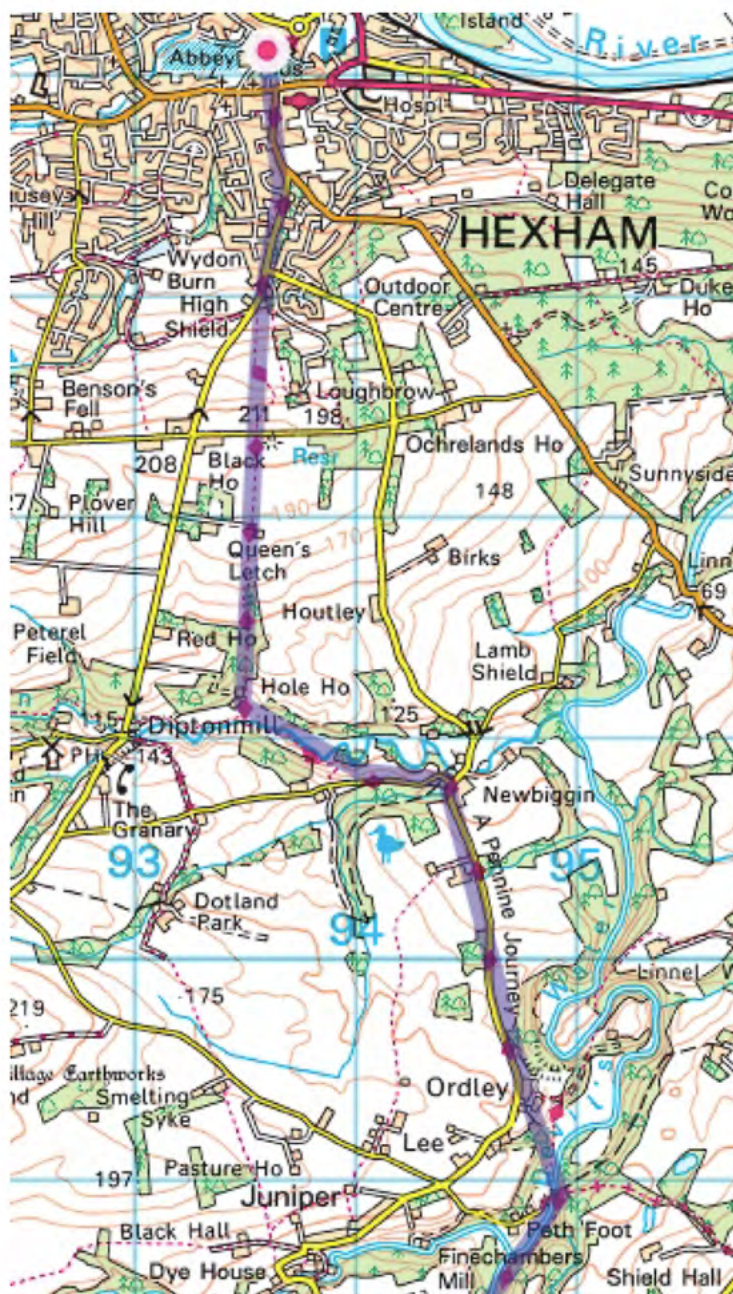
Section 2

Hexham to Blanchland – 18kms

From the abbey entrance, cross over to the market area and on your right you will see a narrow passage which you take beside an antique clocks specialists. This is called St Mary's Chare because there was a church called St Mary's here. You can see all that remains of the church if you look to your left and behind you just after going through into the alley. When you arrive at the main road, cross over at the lights and turn left and then first right into Eastgate. You now begin a long steady haul out of Hexham. After 300 metres where the main road bears left, take the right fork up Dipton Mill Road. After 450 metres you pass the last house on your left and then take the footpath on your left.

Walk up hill on a path which keeps to the left of the old field boundary with hedges and some trees. As you come to the last steep slope before the top of the hill, the path kindly zig zags up to some trees where you get a very fine view back to Hexham and across the Tyne Valley. Go over the steps to cross the road and go over into a field as new vistas come into view. Walk down till you reach a copse with a ruin in it. This is called Queen's Letch after Queen Margaret. She and her son were set upon here by a band of robbers when she was fleeing after the last battle in the War of the Roses in 1464. She pleaded for mercy from the robbers who hid them in a cave by the West Dipton Burn before they could be moved.

Turn right and left here, now following the field boundary on your left. After three fields, you enter woodland and walk down to cross a burn at Hole



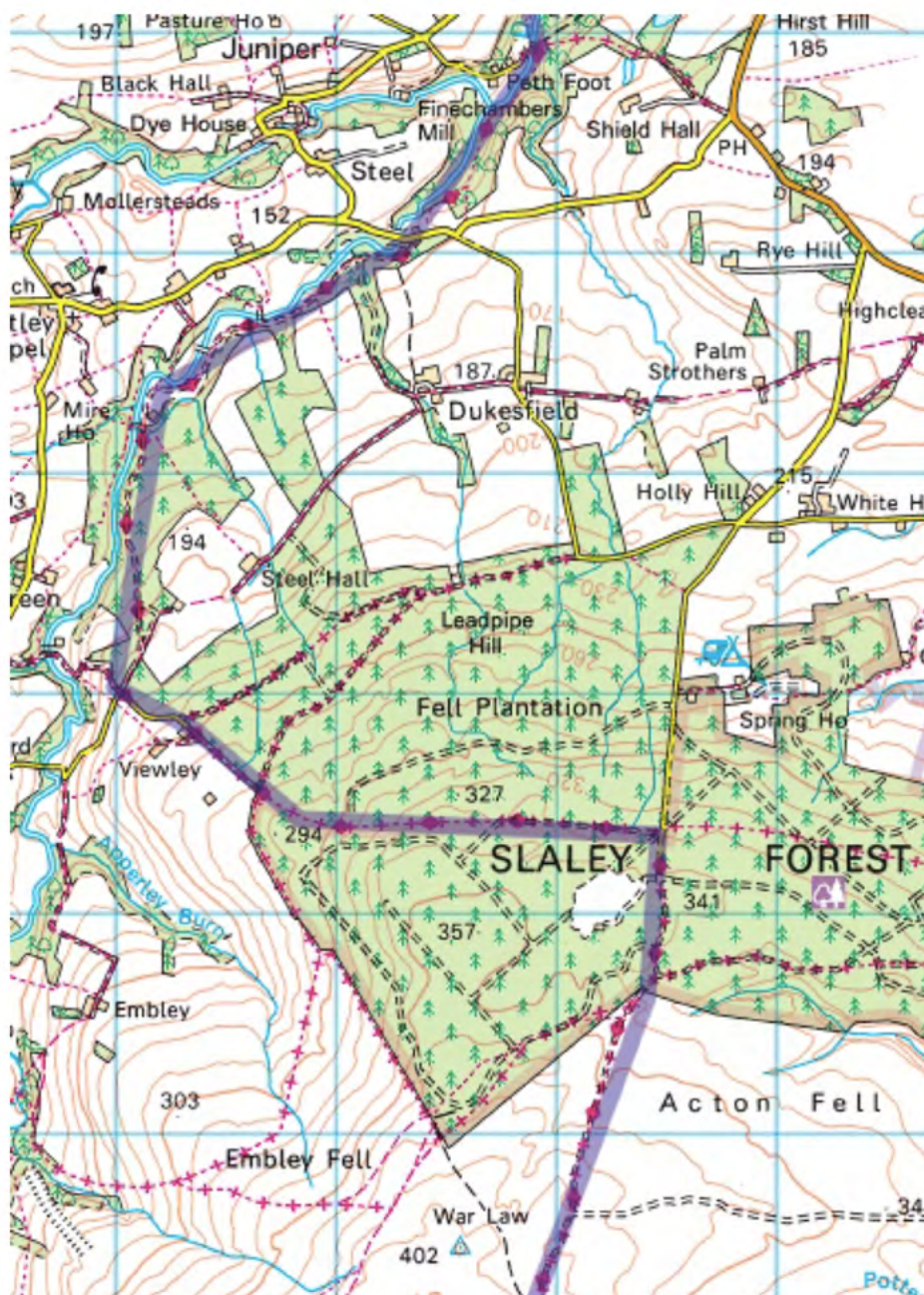
House which you go round into a paddock. Go through the gate then cross over the West Dipton Burn before going left through the gate. There is a pleasant stretch along the side of the burn until, after 350 metres, you see houses up on your right. The path zig zags up here to a road where you turn left to walk down to Newbiggin. Letah Wood nature reserve is on your right. It is thought to be Northumberland's last wild daffodil wood.

When you reach Newbiggin, turn right. Walk for just over a kilometre before coming to houses at Ordley. You will find the footpath on your left which goes through the houses to a track that leads down to woods. After crossing a cattle grid, look out for the footpath on the right which doubles back down through the woods to reach a field which you cross to reach a bridge over Devil's Water. Cross the bridge then turn right. You soon cross another stream coming into Devil's Water. When you reach a road, turn right and then left to continue walking beside the river.

The Defeat of Cadwallon

You are now walking through the area where the battle between the Northumbrians under King Oswald and the Welsh under King Cadwallon came to its conclusion. Cadwallon had camped in the most easily defended site available – *Corstopium*. This abandoned Roman village (now Corbridge) was ideal. A surprise dawn raid by Oswald's inferior force scattered Cadwallon's men, causing them to flee south over the Tyne and up the Devil's Water valley. Research has shown that the battle, at least the final rout, took place at Deniseburn. This name is lost but other evidence allows us to identify it as Rowley Burn and the site of the rout as the present day hamlet of Steel. After this victory, King Oswald set about the establishment of Christianity throughout Northumbria and sent for St Aidan from Iona to aid him in his endeavours. In this way what is often called 'The Golden Age of Northumbria' began.

You will soon come to Dukesfield Arches on your left, where there are excellent information boards about the site and about lead mining in the area. The mill here operated until the mid 19th century. As well as producing lead, silver was extracted from the lead ore which was brought here from Allendale and Rookhope. Go through a gate into a field and continue on the track to reach Redlead Mill where you may see peacocks. Go through another gate and proceed on a narrower track which is wet in places and soon climbs away from the river. Shortly after passing a field on your left, the path comes out onto a road where you turn left uphill. The road passes by Viewley Farm before ascending a rough track and then entering Slaley Forest. Walk east for 2 kilometres before reaching a road where you turn right. On your right, you will pass Ladycross nature reserve in a quarry. Walk on until you leave the wood and where the main track



turns left, go through a gate and out into the very different environment of Acton Fell and Blanchland Moor. It is a very gradual ascent and in the spring and summer you will be accompanied by the call of curlews.

You begin your descent and go through a gate by a stone wall with green fields to the left. As you descend you come to some woodland on your left. Bear left here passing Pennypie which is so named because the lead miners did get their pies for a penny here!

Walk on down with Shildon Burn in the valley on your right until you come to Shildon itself with its impressive lead mine engine house. At this point you turn left up to the cottages. When the mines were flourishing, 170 people lived here and it had a bigger population than Blanchland. Turn right and left around Keeper's Cottage and across a field to enter a wood. You may have to negotiate a fallen tree. Go through a gate and then down a bank and left onto a wider track for a few metres before taking the path on your right down to Blanchland.



Section 3

Blanchland to Castleside – 16km

Blanchland

In 1115, a rather vain young man called Norbert, who was related to the Holy Roman Emperor, was riding through the German countryside when suddenly he was caught in a violent thunderstorm. A flash of lightning and a thunderbolt fell near his horse and he was thrown off and lay unconscious on the ground. When he started to recover, the words of a verse from the Psalms were ringing through his head: "*Depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it.*" This Damascus Road type of experience led him to dedicate his life to the reform of the church and in 1120, he set up a new order called the Premonstratensians, named after the abbey of Premontre which he had founded. He founded many monasteries around Europe and the order reached England by 1145. Some monks from this order arrived in this valley in 1159 and in 1165, a Norman baron called Walter de Bolbec granted them land to build an abbey and monastery. The monks always wore white habits and this is possibly the origin of the name Blanchland.

In 1327, King Edward III stayed at the monastery when his army were pursuing the Scottish army. The abbot of Blanchland had a Scottish cousin and he got word through to him about the planned movements of the English army which enabled the Scottish forces to avoid the English and escape back to Scotland.

A legend about the Scottish raids which were a constant threat, was that on one occasion, the monks learnt that the Scots were coming to take the treasures in the abbey. The monks resorted to prayer and their prayers were answered as a thick mist descended and confused the Scots who gave up the search and went elsewhere in search of other plunder. As soon as the monks heard that the Scots had moved on, they rang the abbey bells to celebrate, but the Scots were not so far away and, hearing the bells, returned and took their treasures and killed several monks in the process.

The monastery was dissolved in 1539. In the 17th century, the abbey and the surrounding area came into the possession of a family called the Forsters who were from Bamburgh. In 1699 a marriage took place between Dorothy Forster and Lord Nathaniel Crewe the Bishop of Durham, which was to have far reaching consequences for Blanchland. There was a nearly forty years age difference between the couple but they enjoyed a happy

marriage. Lord Crewe was a sympathiser of the Stuart cause who had officiated at the wedding of James II, when he was then the Duke of York, to Mary of Modena. His nephew Thomas Forster was a general in the Jacobite rebellion of 1715 and after its defeat, the authorities came looking for him in Blanchland. He successfully hid in the rear of the huge fireplace in the Lord Crewe Arms which can still be seen today. Lord Crewe was a very generous man and after his death in 1721, it was discovered that Blanchland had been put in the hands of trustees called The Lord Crewe Trustees. It was through their good offices that the charming layout of the present village, based on the former outlines of the monastery was established. The fact that it retains so much of its 18th century features makes it a very popular location for films from the period. Amongst the many well known people who have stayed at the Lord Crewe Arms is the poet WH Auden who said that no place held sweeter memories for him.

With regard to the abbey itself, when John Wesley visited Blanchland in 1747, it's clear that the village and its once grand abbey church were in a sorry state. He writes, *'There seems to have been a large cathedral church, by the vast walls which still remain. I stood in the churchyard, under one side of the building upon a large tombstone round which, while I was at prayers, all the congregation kneeled down on the grass.'*

Five years later, the chancel and north transept of the great abbey were repaired to form the present parish church. Traces of the south wall of the once immense nave can be seen abutting the Lord Crewe Arms hotel. The chancel was built ca 1200-1210 and the transept is also 13th century, along with the bottom half of the tower. The belfry was added in the 14th century.

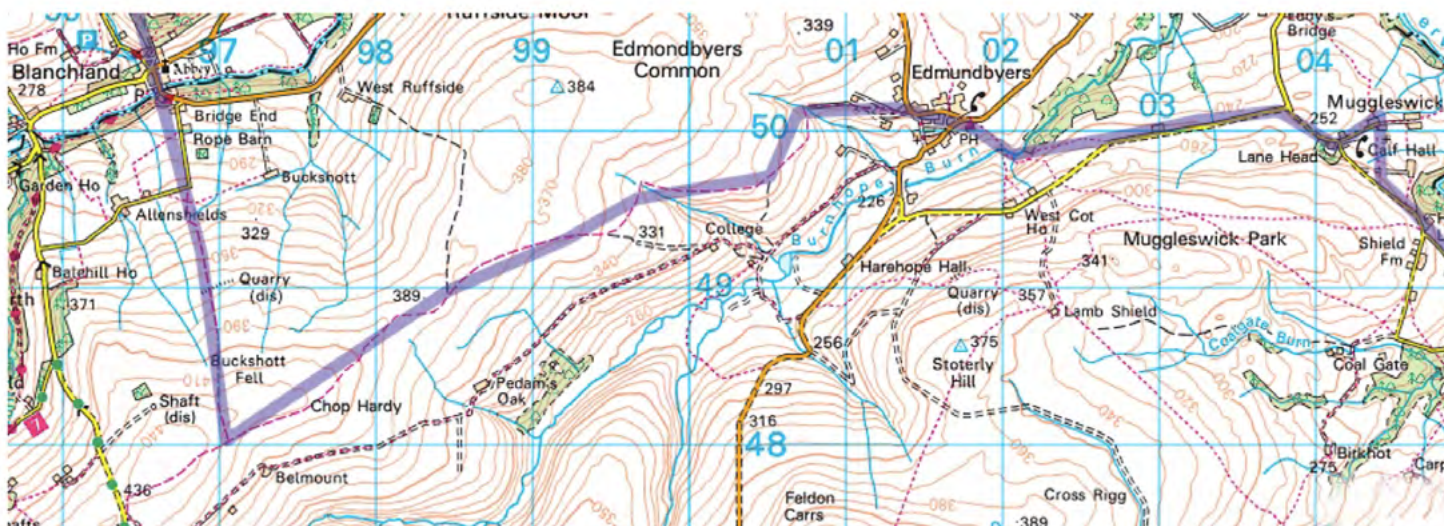
Six fine medieval grave slabs can be seen in the transept floor. Two have abbot's croziers, two have the emblem of hunters or foresters. Records from the 15th century reveal that the canons of Blanchland Abbey kept a pack of hounds and enjoyed hunting, but were firmly told by their bishop to stop these forbidden pursuits.

The lovely plain lancet windows, set in the north and south wall of the chancel, show the earliest-known use of zinc alloy in church windows in Britain, as the framework to hold the glass. The work was done in 1852 and it's likely that the frames buckled soon after they were installed, before stabilising.

In the churchyard there is a fine 13th century stone cross.

In December 2019, a ground penetrating radar survey done by the Department of Archaeology of Durham University revealed possible signs of an earlier building on the site. It also found evidence for what may be stone acoustic pits under the choir, which would be a rare and remarkable example of early medieval acoustic engineering (the abbey still boasts very fine acoustics). The Blanchland Abbey Project, as part of an ambitious programme to put the abbey church back at the social, spiritual and economic heart of the village, hopes to secure the funding soon to carry out excavations within the building to investigate these features.

Leave Blanchland by crossing the River Derwent and walking up the hill. Soon after it bears left, turn right up a minor road. You will pass a house on your left called Rope Barn with a very long barn. It is quite likely that rope making took place there. Methodists met here in the 18th century before they built their own churches. Where the road turns right, go through the gate and walk near the wall to start with, then straight on up to reach another gate and a track that leads up across Buckshot Fell. You will pass grouse butts on either side of the track. Go over the top of the hill and soon after you start to go down, the path turns left through a gate and



you have a long and gradual descent in a north easterly direction. After a kilometre, you move from the north to the south side of the fence. After a further 350 metres look out for a pile of stones called Cuthbert's Currick on the other side of the fence at the point where another fence goes down to the north. Cuthbert pops up in unlikely places!

The farm in the valley below is called Pedam's Oak. Soon after passing Cuthbert's Currick, fork right towards a stone wall and go through a metal gate and continue on your way towards Edmundbyers skirting round the top of Swan Dale and then Black Burn. When you reach Edmundbyers, turn right and right again down Church Lane. St Edmund's Church is on your right after 250 metres.

Edmundbyers

The name 'Edmundbyers' means 'the cowshed of Edmund' although 'byer' can sometimes just mean a place. The Edmund in the name is St Edmund, who was King of East Anglia from 855 until 869 when he was killed by the invading Danes for refusing to renounce Christ. The cult of St Edmund the Martyr was very popular in the Middle Ages. The church is dedicated to St Edmund and was built around 1150, but it is thought that there was a Saxon church on the same site earlier. Edmundbyers is mentioned in the Boldon Book of 1183 which records that the village was owned by someone called Alan Bruntoft.

There are records of witchcraft from the village in the 17th century. One of those records concerns the Derwent witches trial which took place at the Newcastle Assizes on April 3rd 1673. Ann Armstrong from the village was accused of attending a witches' meeting. She named several other people in the locality who had also taken part. They were accused of bewitching horses. One Mary Hunter was said to have transformed into a swallow, after which she flew around and under her neighbour's horse, cursing it and causing it to die in less than a week. There is a headstone on the west wall in memory of Elizabeth Lee, who died in 1792 and was reputedly the last witch of Edmundbyers.

After visiting the church, the official route is to turn right and left and walk uphill along the main road to soon reach the Punch Bowl Inn on your left. You may however prefer to retrace your steps and turn first right into a quiet road called The Closes. There are public toilets on the corner near the Punch Bowl Inn. Continue ahead past the former Youth Hostel on your right which is now independently run and called Low House Haven. Immediately afterwards take a path on your right by a caravan park. Go through the gate and down the path to cross the bridge over Burnhope Burn. Turn left here alongside a pretty stretch of the burn and cross a feeder burn before turning right. When you come to a farm track go left uphill. After a few metres you will see a narrow path on your right which leads up to a stile which you cross over and turn left.

Follow the path alongside the fence and then across the field to the top end of the wood. Keep climbing steadily, passing an oak tree on your left and then go through the gap in the stone wall boundary ahead near a telegraph pole. The path soon joins a deeply rutted farm track. Go through the gate and turn left onto the road. The common lands of Bashaw Bank and Muggleswick Park are on your right and there are good views of Derwent Reservoir to your left. After a kilometre at the road junction bear right and soon after there is a road with a gate on your left. Go through here down to Muggleswick. Before you take the path up to All Saints Church, walk a few metres further on to see all that remains of the priory.

Muggleswick

The Harry Potter sounding of the name Muggleswick led to its being chosen as the postmark for the first day cover of a set of Harry Potter stamps on October 16th 2018. This is of course just a coincidental connection because muggles appear in the series, but the most likely origin of the name is a person called *Mucel* and 'wick' refers to his farm. Later on it became the site of a hunting lodge for the priors of Durham. In the 13th century Prior Hugh de Darlington enclosed Muggleswick Park to create a hunting park to rival that of the bishops of Durham over at Stanhope! The ruins of the prior's lodge are a prominent feature in the hamlet. A church was built here in 1259, but the present building dates from about 1728 with further rebuilding in the 19th century.

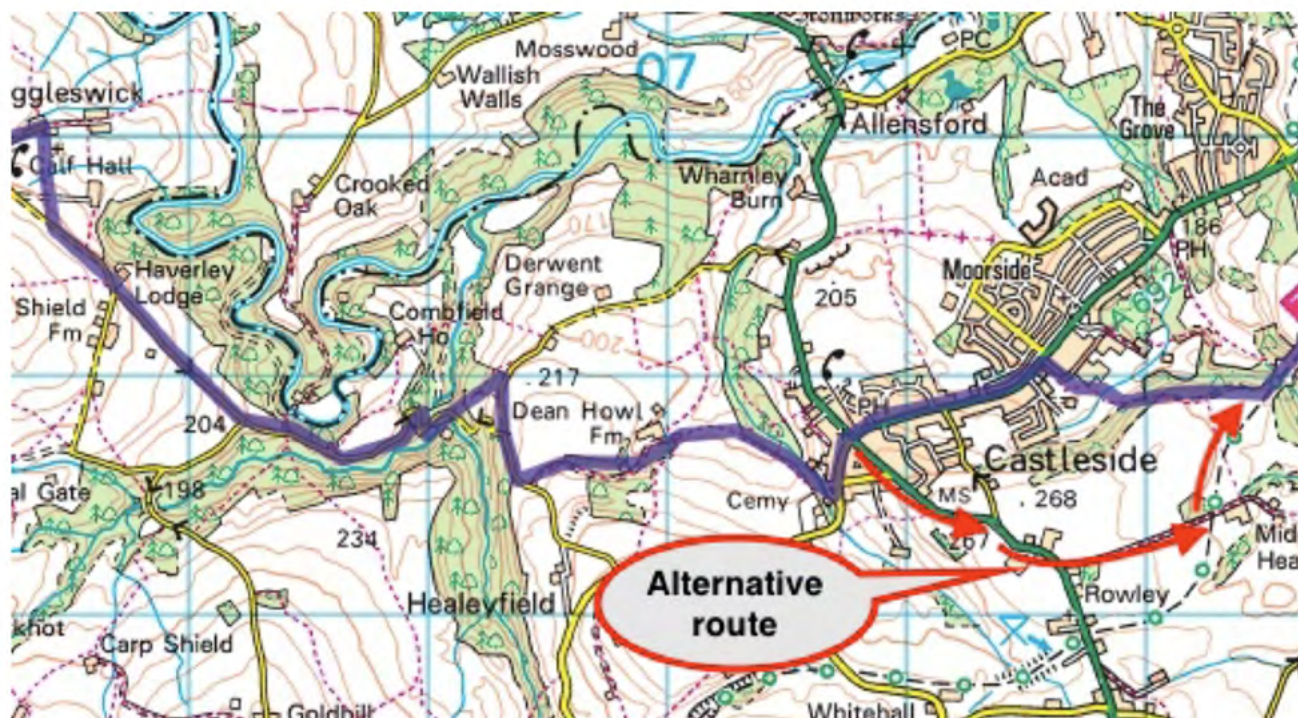
In 1662 an unusual event took place when John Cosin, the Bishop of Durham was informed that an army of Quakers and other nonconformists was assembling at Muggleswick with the intention of murdering the bishop and the dean and overthrowing Parliament. The bishop and the High Sheriff of Durham quickly gathered what men they could and hastened to Muggleswick to put down the uprising, but when they arrived there, there were no rebels to be seen. Most probably the bishop was the victim of a practical joke!

From the church go to the attractive lych gate and then straight on uphill passing Calf Hall below to your left. When you reach a road turn left. Heather moorland is now on your right. There are fine views down to the meandering River Derwent and Hownsgill Viaduct can be seen above Castleside. Take a left fork down hill at Haverley Lodge. You will pass a road coming in from the right. Over the next 1.5 kilometres, you are beside the Derwent Gorge National Nature Reserve which is the largest oakwood in northern England. Shortly after crossing a bridge over Hisehope Burn, you will find a path on your left which goes steeply up to a stile. Cross over and go over the field. Cross another stile into woodland. There is a point where the path is a little indistinct and you may wonder if it is ahead or up to your right. The latter will be your path to take you up to the road. When you reach it enjoy the view to the north east before turning right.

Walk along the road with fields on your left and the woodland on your right. You join the other road coming up the hill and as you leave the woodland, look for a road on your left which you take. This leads downhill along a sub-glacial spillway, a valley carved by meltwater flowing under pressure beneath the ice sheets that once covered Britain. You will pass Dene Howl Farm on your left. Continue ahead into a field. Carry on as you reach Birks Wood and for a short while you follow a stream, then cross it before heading up to the road at Castleside where you turn left. After passing St John's Church on your left you reach the A68. Cross over with care.

Castleside

The parish church, dedicated to St John, was designed by the distinguished architect Ewan Christian, who designed The National Portrait Gallery in London and became president of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He was very productive and designed more than 2,000 buildings including 30 churches. His inspiration for St John's came from seeing a church while he was on holiday in Switzerland. He reproduced several features from that church in his design, including the attractive apse at the east end. The church was consecrated on 7 March 1867.



Section 4

Castleside to Lanchester – 12km

[Crag Bank ahead can be slippery after rain and you may prefer the drier but longer alternative below here.]

Walk down the hill on the right hand side of the road and after passing Wesley Terrace, turn right immediately before an industrial estate. Where the road turns left, you will see some steps ahead which you walk up to gain the footpath which passes close to a high fence on your right. The path goes diagonally left uphill to a fence where you turn left and then turn right between fences to reach a path which ascends steeply in places through

woods. Just before reaching the top, you will see the crags which give Crag Bank its name. When you come out at the top turn left and go ahead with fields on your right and the woodland on your left. When you reach a belt of woodland ahead of you, go over the stile and you will arrive at the southern end of Hownsgill Viaduct. The viaduct was built by Thomas Bouch in 1858 to carry the railway across the steep wooded ravine of the Howns Gill. Built of yellow sandstone, it consists of twelve arches of 15 metre span rising to a maximum height of 45 metres. The views here have been somewhat impeded by the anti-suicide barriers, but they are still impressive.

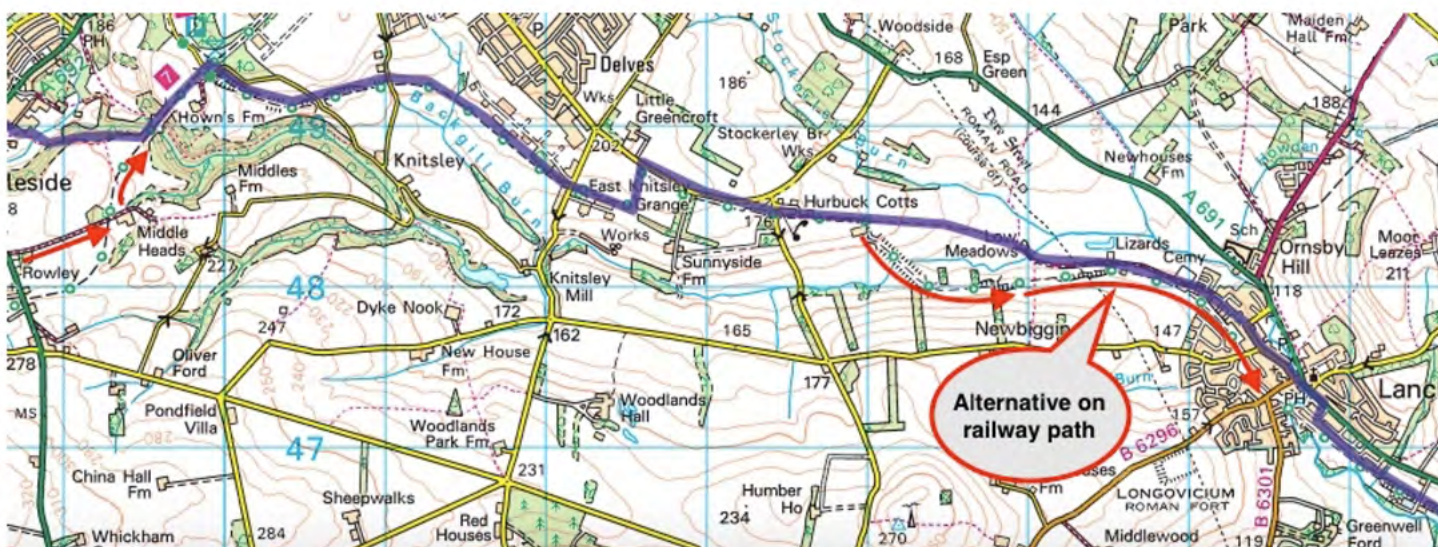
Alternative route

When you arrive at the A68, turn right and walk uphill on the pavement on the right hand side. After 800 metres, where the road bends to the right, you will see the derestriction sign and the paved footpath is immediately after it. Cross with care and walk ahead a straight 500 metres. Just before you come to a farm, you will find the Consett and Sunderland Railway Path where you turn left. Look out for black swans on the pond to your right. After a further 400 metres, you will rejoin the main route at Hownsgill Viaduct.

About 100 metres after crossing the viaduct, some will want to fork right to access Hownsgill Farm Tearooms and Bunkhouse, but the main route goes ahead until you reach Lydgetts Junction, which is in the site of the former Consett steelworks and is marked by a sculpture of a smelt wagon. Here you turn right onto The Lanchester Valley Railway Path. This railway carried iron ore to Consett Steel Works and coal from Langley Park. It was also a passenger line between 1862 and 1965. There follows a pleasant 2 kilometre walk to Knitsley with good views to the south. Knitsley means 'a meadow for knights' which gives you some potential for flights of fancy! You cross over two minor roads and pass an industrial estate on your left.

When you reach the road in Knitsley cross straight over and you will come to Knitsley Farm Shop on your right which is open every day except Mondays. Turn left and walk north for 300 metres before the route turns right beside a road for 500 metres then goes on past a barrier. You soon come to a road which you cross and go on, passing the row of Hurbuck Cottages on your left. When you come to the next house, you have two alternatives. You can either continue straight ahead or take the footpath on your right to stay on the Lanchester Way. In wet weather this is a drier alternative and has better views.

The main route goes straight ahead through a gate and downhill through two fields. At the bottom of the hill, you will find a gate on your right which you go through and it takes you round to cross a farm track and go over into a field. Go straight ahead to Low Meadows Equestrian Centre. You pass through it and are now on a tarmac road. There is an attractive bridge before you leave the property. Walk on, passing a sturdy house called Lizards Farm and a cemetery on your left as you enter Lanchester. You will pass All Saints RC Church and school and then come to a main road, Front Street, where you keep ahead soon passing a good variety of shops. When you reach the green at the centre of town, cross over it to reach All Saints Church.



Alternative route

Local artist Judy Hurst extols the virtues of this route:

Soon after you have turned right on the Lanchester Way, you will come to a very beautiful view from what was a high embankment, over a valley, looking to the west with fields, woods, and copses full of wildlife. One can

see buzzards, numerous small bird species, deer and, if early in the morning, the quickly vanishing stoat or weasel. During spring/summer the sound of larks and curlews is the norm here as well. Moving onwards, the gently declining gradient enables the walker to relax, and enjoy – in the right season, of course! – the plant life growing along the path. For example, spring sees the welcome return of violets and cowslips, then common spotted orchids, (we even have butterfly orchids!), bedstraw, meadow sweet, gorse and broom to name but a few. Butterflies are a treat to watch as well and include small tortoiseshell, red admiral, ringlets and more.

When you reach Lanchester itself, you will cross over one road, Newbiggin Lane, and when you come to the main road, Station Road, turn left and after about 200 metres and passing The King's Head on your right, you will see All Saints Church on the other side of the A691. Cross with care and you have rejoined the main route.

Lanchester

Little remains now of the Roman fort of *Longovicium* which was built by the Roman 20th Legion on Dere Street in about 100 AD. There was a civilian settlement (*vicus*) nearby, but the present town started life as an Anglo-Saxon settlement to the west of the fort. The church and several houses in the town used stones from the fort and amongst several Roman finds, one of the most interesting is an altar stone to the Swabian goddess Garmangabis which is in All Saints Church of England.

All Saints Church was built in 1147. Stone pillars from the Roman fort support the arcade in the north aisle. The pews are by the Yorkshire carver Robert 'Mouseman' Thompson, so look for the mice there! A very recent addition in the church is the Lanchester triptych by Judy Hurst, which is a celebration of the Christian ethos, expanded to include our natural world, which was so appreciated by St Cuthbert. He would have recognised and been familiar with Lanchester wildlife, which is so similar to that found in the countryside he travelled through during his ministries. This fine work of art is a rich source of meditation and there are accompanying explanatory notes. There is also a labyrinth on the north side of the church.

Section 5

Lanchester to Durham – 18km

Turn left out of the church and cross over the road at the bollards. Shortly afterwards, turn right into Woodlands and as the road turns to the right you will find a brick laid path leading you up the Lanchester Way where you turn left. On your right is a wood called Dora's Wood named after the poet Dora Greenwell who was born a short distance away at Greenwell Ford.

Dora Greenwell

Dora Greenwell came from a well known family in the area. She became a celebrated poet and hymn writer and was a close friend of Christina Rossetti. Her best known hymn is "*I am not skilled to understand.*" She frequently visited inmates in Durham Prison and championed the cause of women's suffrage and wrote against the slave trade. Dora Greenwell's father, Canon William Greenwell was an antiquarian who excavated barrows and cairns throughout the British Isles. He was also a keen angler and invented the famous Greenwell's Glory fishing fly.

As you go on, you will see a sewage pipe on your right which leads to a sewage farm. Soon after passing under a bridge, look for steps on your right up onto the bank. Go down on the other side of the bank to a path which leads to the delightfully named Waters Meeting where the Smallhope Burn meets the River Browney. Walk along the path by the river with the Malton picnic area on your left. When you reach the bridge cross over it and walk uphill.

A Story about St Cuthbert

The following story is told in an early life of St Cuthbert and this would seem the right place to share it:

St Cuthbert was travelling in winter time near a place called *Leunckester* (most probably Lanchester), where he crossed a river and with rainy weather coming on, he found refuge in a deserted shelter which was only inhabited in the spring and summer. Both he and his horse were tired and hungry, but there was no one about to speak to or provide them with food. St Cuthbert brought the horse inside with him and tied it up to the wall.

St Cuthbert started to engage in prayer while he waited for the weather to clear. Then he saw a miracle occurring – the horse was reaching up towards the roof of the shed and eagerly pulling down some hay along with a generous supply of bread, which was still warm and wrapped in a linen napkin. Cuthbert realised that the food was for him, sent from God by the hand of an angel, who often came to his help in emergencies! He thanked God, blessed the bread and ate and was refreshed. As the rain ceased, he saddled the horse and set out again loudly praising the Lord!

Where the main road turns right go ahead passing a row of houses on your left. This is all that is left of the former Malton Colliery village. Turn left again and enter Malton Nature Reserve which is a former colliery site. If you have time you might like to look around the nature reserve and see if in the ponds you can spot any newts – all three British species are found here. The route goes straight through the reserve and then you turn right on the edge of woodland before emerging into fields. Climb diagonally through them to reach Biggin Farm.

After passing the farm buildings turn right, passing a house on your left and walking over to a minor road called Hamsteels Bank which you cross over. Follow the left hand field boundary through two fields and then across the middle of two more fields to reach Quebec. It is named after the city in Canada. The fields in the area were enclosed in 1759, the same year that General Wolfe won the Battle of Quebec.

When you come out onto the road, turn left. You pass a children's play area and a bus stop and then cross over and go down a farm road passing a house on your left. The road turns to the left and for the next kilometre you are on the Roman Dere Street and there are good views of the Deerness Valley and Esh Winning. Go through the gate into Heugh and then turn left uphill. As you walk up the track, you will see your first glimpse of the cathedral. You will probably want to walk on up to the highest point here to enjoy the very fine view which includes Teesside and the Cleveland Hills on a clear day. Closer at hand are Esh Hall and Ushaw College. The field here was called The Signing Field or Salutation Field because traditionally pilgrims would make the sign of the cross where they first saw the cathedral. The joy of the moment is well expressed in the fact that the road between Quebec and Esh is called Laude ('Praise') Bank.

After your pause for the view and praising the Lord, you come to a path junction where you turn right to go gently down to Esh. On your left across the field is the Roman Catholic Church of St Michael's. As you approach Esh turn left and right round the farm buildings and then turn left towards the village. Through the gateway, you come to a green on your left and here you will find a cross. It is locally called St Cuthbert's Cross although it was not built until 1687, but is thought there may have formerly been another medieval structure there. St Cuthbert's coffin is said to have rested in Esh during its many travels. On the eastern side can be seen just 87 of the 1687 date and on the western side is IHS standing for the Greek letters that start the words for *Jesus, Son, Saviour*.

Esh

Esh is a village of Anglo-Saxon origins whose name means Ash Tree, indicating that ash was probably prominent in the local woodland. The De Esh family lived here from medieval times until the reign of Henry VIII. It is not known where they lived but the village church dedicated to St Michael may stand on the site of the family's private 13th century chapel. Edward I visited the church on September 10th 1306 on his way to fight the Scots. Rebuilding of the church took place in the 1770s with further restoration in the 1850s.

The Smythe family, who were staunch Catholics, inherited Esh and the surrounding area from the De Esh family in the 1560s. It was they who built Esh Hall in the 1600s. It included a place for hiding priests. In the following centuries, the Smythes actively encouraged Catholicism in the area at a time when Catholicism was suppressed. It was the Smythes who provided the land upon which Ushaw College was built. Around the same time, the Smythes built the Catholic Church also dedicated to St Michael. It was built like a farmhouse so as not to attract attention and is the oldest Catholic Church in the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.

Unless you want to visit the village, retrace your steps at this point, noticing some gate piers which are the only visible remains of the original Esh Hall. You cannot go on to where the hall was, so turn left passing cottages on your right and go on the tarmac road down to Low Esh Farm. Go straight through the farmyard and continue on the pleasant wide path which has excellent views to the south across the Deerness Valley. When you reach a road, cross over to the other side and turn right and then left on a road past cottages and a former windmill built in 1817 to ensure that Ushaw College had a good supply of unadulterated flour. It proved to be too windy a spot and it was destroyed in a storm on New Years Day in 1853. Take the next track on your right, then turn left onto the road for a few metres before taking the next road past a barrier into the college grounds and walking to the main entrance.

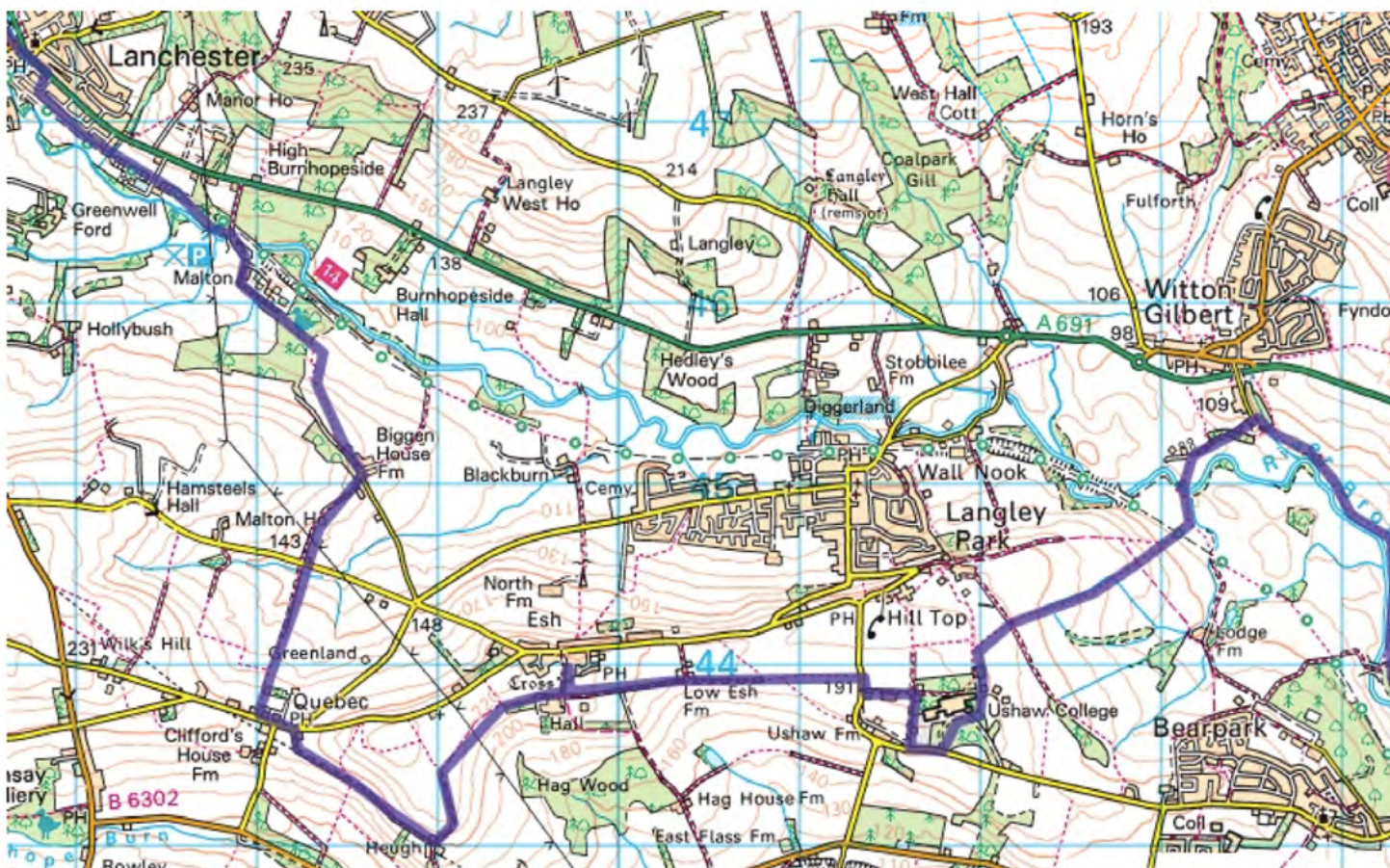
Ushaw

The extraordinary Neo-Gothic buildings at Ushaw are arguably the finest of their kind in the north east of England, but the history of how they came to be here is extraordinary too. The story reaches back to the year 1568 in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I when Catholicism was severely suppressed in England. In that year, an English priest called William Allen set up a college in Douai near Lille in France for the training of priests, who were then sent back to England to minister to the needs of Catholics who were practicing in secret, especially in the north of England. Many of those priests who were discovered were martyred.

The training of priests at Douai continued over the next two centuries, but after the French Revolution and the execution of the French king in 1793, war was declared between England and France and the English priests were evicted. By now it was safe for English Catholics to live in England as the celebration of the mass had been legalised in 1791 and influential Roman Catholics persuaded the British Prime Minister William Pitt to legalise the foundation of Catholic colleges. It was agreed that there should be one college in the south and another in the north. Initially the Douai pupils who came to the north were housed at a school in Tudhoe, but in 1794 they moved to Crook Hall near Ledgate. Crook Hall soon proved too small and eventually in 1798 the site for the new college was purchased from the Smythe family from nearby Esh.

The building of the college began in 1804 with a quadrangle of buildings in the Georgian style and the first 40 students moved in in 1808. Over the course of the 19th century a great range of additional buildings followed, employing some of the finest architects of the time and in particular the Pugin family. The highlight is the lofty and colourful St Cuthbert's Chapel which includes Arts and Crafts Movement features. Other parts of Ushaw include several other chapels, a library based on those at Oxford and Cambridge universities and housing over 45,000 books, a museum which includes many relics including St Cuthbert's Ring and a dining hall which is now the home of a café called Divines. The final architectural feature which must not be missed is the racket court on the eastern side where the game of Cat or Katt used to be played. It incorporated elements of squash, golf and baseball.

With the decline in applications for the priesthood, the training college eventually closed in 2011 and Ushaw has reinvented itself as a wedding and concert venue, conference centre and tourist attraction. Ushaw has also had a close association with Durham University since 1968 and the Business School occupies the East Wing.



From the front of the college walk on round to the back on the eastern side where the game of Katt used to be played, and walk through to where you will see woodland ahead. Take the path right and left here and after passing some cottages you come to some fields where willow is grown. Please note that by the time you walk here, it is always possible that the willow might have been harvested! Just after the first field boundary on your right and immediately before another path on your left, look for a path that goes diagonally right through the willows before coming out at a farm track. Cross over to the small gate beside the larger gate. You now continue on a straight track along the left hand field boundary passing through three fields. There are good views ahead including Durham Cathedral.

When you reach another farm track, cross over it and go over the stone stile into a field. Go straight on downhill aiming for a conifer plantation below you to the left of which is a gate which you go through. Cross over the railway path and go ahead in the field before joining a track where you turn left to reach the River Browney. Cross over on the green footbridge. Keep on this road which goes past sewage works on your left, before climbing the hill to the lovely church of St Michael and All Angels at Witton Gilbert, which you are likely to find open and there may even be tea and coffee available.

Witton Gilbert

Bronze age cup and ring marked rocks, which are a found in a few scattered locations in the north east, have been found in this area which indicates a very early settlement here. The name Witton comes from the Anglo-Saxon '*Widu-Tun*' meaning 'wood settlement.' Gilbert which is pronounced with a soft 'g' is named after a Norman Lord called Gilbert de la Lay who was given this land by Hugh Pudsey the Bishop of Durham around 1154. Gilbert set up a leper hospital for the care of five lepers here and an associated chapel was built nearby in the 1170s. It was also a chapel of ease associated with St Oswald's Church in Durham which meant that the villagers did not have to journey to Durham for the obligatory three masses a year. This was the precursor of what is now St Michael & All Angels Church.

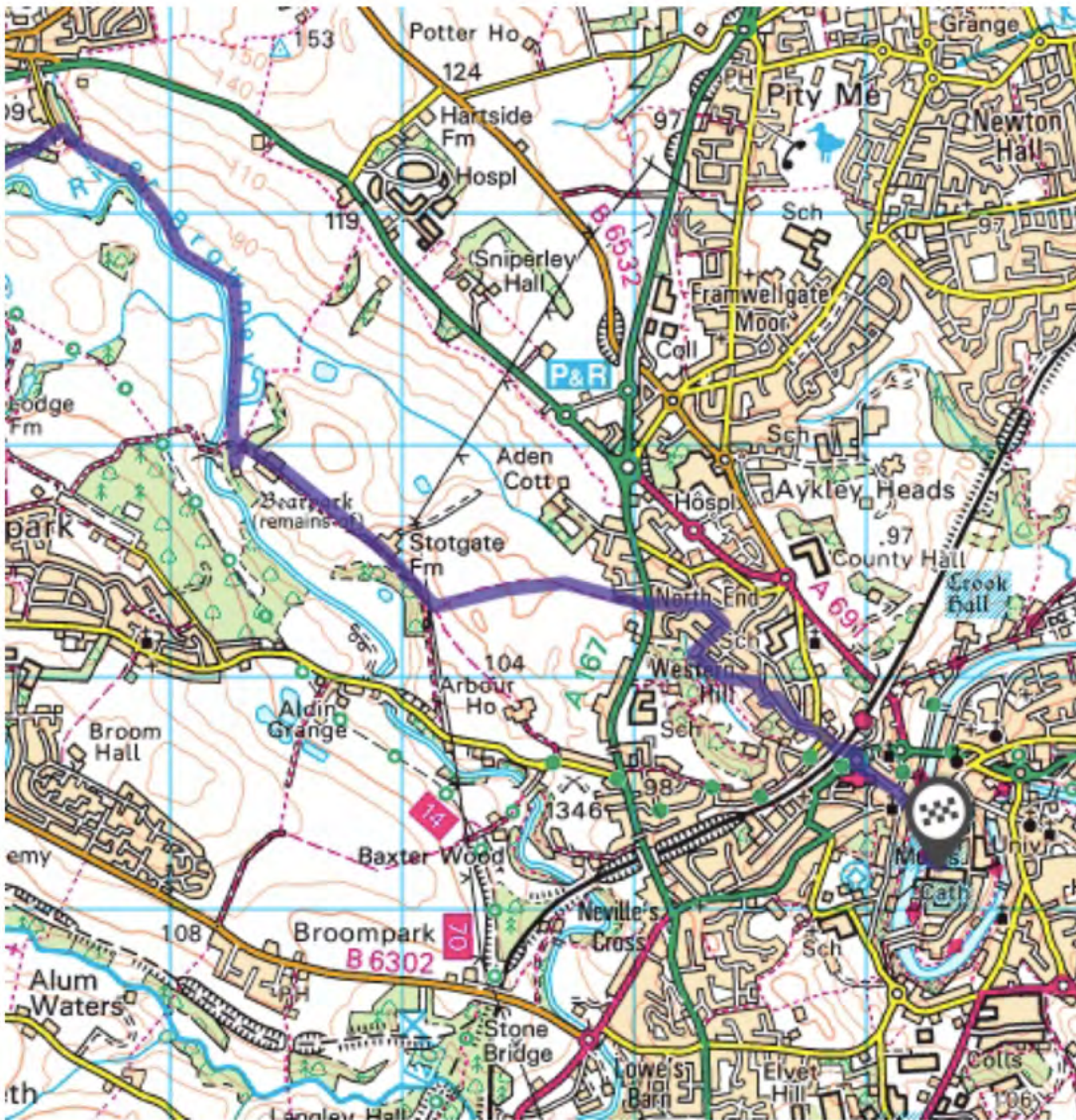
From the original building, part of the chancel and the south wall with its two small, deeply splayed, round-headed windows and partially blocked south door, still remain. The font has the original Frosterley marble circular shaft and base and the irregular octagonal bowl dates from the 15th century. The church registers, now kept in the County Record Office, date back to 1570, and are some of the earliest in the County. As well as recording all births, marriages and burials of the people of the parish, there are a few interesting notes like this one about the great storm of 1614 which reads: '*on this day there was a great snow, and it started on Jan. 5th, and it lasted with storms every day more or less until March 12th and many men and animals were buried in the snow*'.

Leave the church on its eastern side and go downhill with Dene Burn on your left. There is an information panel about the nature reserve. As you cross Dene Burn, you will see a farm track up to a field ahead of you and the main track to the right goes down to the River Browney. Just a few metres along that track on your left there is a footpath into the woods. This is a permissive path. On maps you may see a footpath closer to the river but at its western end it has eroded, so it is definitely advisable to take the higher path. Eventually the path descends to the river. You climb a few steps as you leave the wood and then walk on the riverside path for 1.5km with fields on your left. Since leaving Witton Gilbert, you have been walking through what was once a large medieval park called Beau Repaire or Bearpark as it later came to be called. You will arrive at an unmade road with a bridge across the river which you do not cross. Ahead of you will see a track which goes up a hillside and leads you up to ruins of Beaurepaire.

Beaurepaire

Beaurepaire means 'beautiful retreat' and this former manor house was where monks came out from Durham four times a year for rest and relaxation. Durham itself was crowded and unsanitary and up to forty monks at a time are believed to have come here. There is even a record of the prior's games – '*ludi prioris*' – taking place here, though sadly we don't know what those games might have been!

Beaurepaire was first built in the mid 13th century by Bertram of Middleton who was Prior of Durham at the time. The lodge and chapel were dedicated to St Edmund. When it was completed, the manor included a hall, large kitchens, a dormitory, courts and a garden. In 1285 Prior Hugh of Darlington enclosed all the surrounding land to create the hunting park which stretched all the way from Ushaw to the outskirts of Durham.



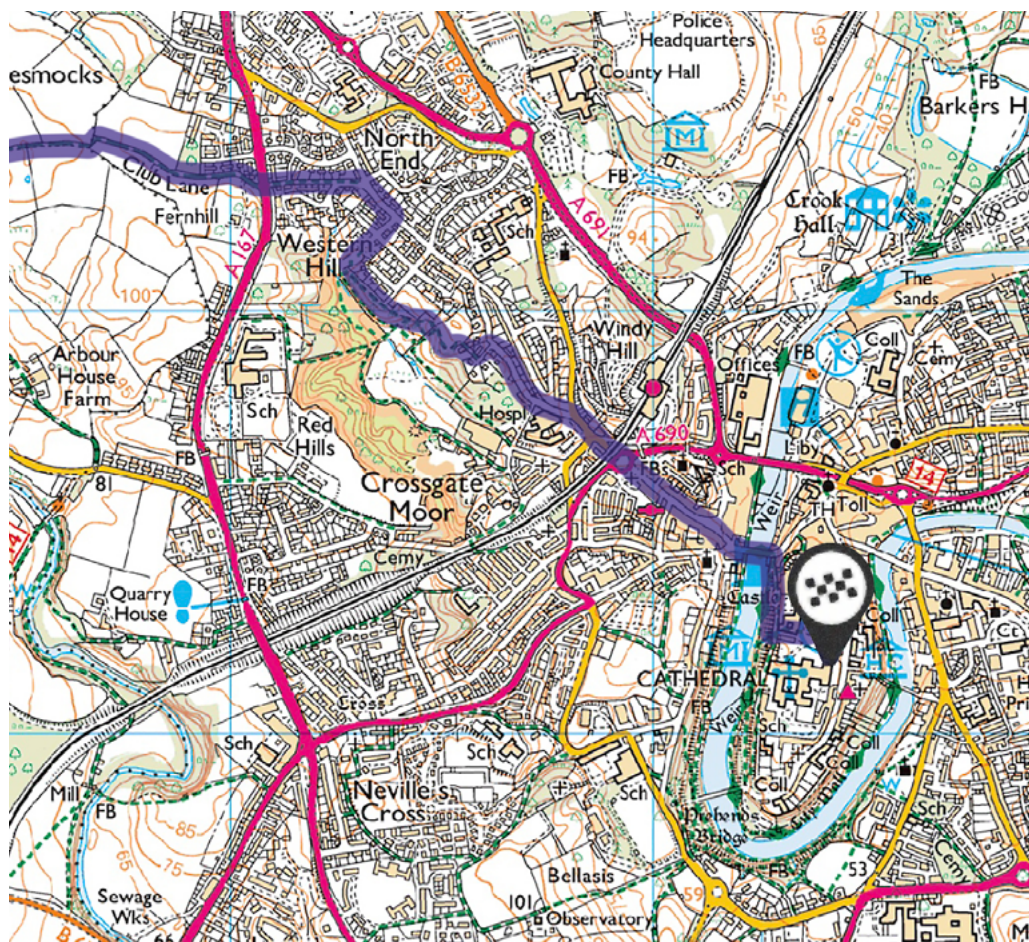
The manor was especially known for its fine furnishings and was visited by Edward I, Edward II and Edward III during their campaigns against the Scots. The Scots were a constant threat and in 1315, the prior and the monks managed to escape as the cattle were stolen and the manor looted. In 1346, the Scottish army under King David II camped here before the Battle of Neville's Cross. The manor was closed in the 1530s during the dissolution of the monasteries. After that time, the manor house was only used occasionally by the deans of Durham. During the Civil War in the 1640s, the Scottish army caused further destruction of the buildings.

In recent years a charity called Dream Community Charity has been set up to clear and preserve this very interesting and significant site.

After visiting Beaurepaire, return to the road and turn right to walk uphill and pass the attractive Thistledown Cottage on your left. Continue on past Stotgate Farm and 230 metres afterwards, look for a gate on your left which you go through and walk under the pylons. You will pass ponds on your right and on your left. Keep following the left hand field boundary up the hill until you find a stile by a gate on your left. Go over here and you turn immediately right into a shady lane called Club Lane which leads you out to the often busy A167. CROSS WITH GREAT CARE and go down the footpath opposite.

The footpath leads you into Springfield Park where you walk ahead a few metres to turn right by large horse chestnut trees into Fieldhouse Lane. Take the first road on your right which is Flassburn Road and walk down into Flass Vale Nature Reserve. As the main path bears down to the left, look for steps immediately to your left leading up to a narrow path. You will pass houses on the left, followed by allotments. Where steps lead down into the valley, bear left, keeping the allotments on your left. The path leads you steeply up more steps and, as you leave the allotments behind, you will soon arrive at a fine viewpoint called Gibbet Knowle or Hangman's Hill. This is not a time to dwell on what happened here in the past, but to feast your eyes on the view of the cathedral which is now close at hand. Walk in the direction of the cathedral to find a path between hedges

leading into Valeside. Walk down, turning right into Back Western Hill. Cross over North Road at bollards near the toilets and walk across into Station Approach and then take the footbridge on your right across the A690. Go round to the left to re-enter North Road and walk down to cross Framwellgate Bridge. Immediately after crossing the bridge, go down some steps towards the river, but then fork left on a path that gradually ascends towards the cathedral. When you get towards the top, look for a passageway on your left which will lead you to Palace Green and the cathedral is on your right.



Acknowledgements

Robert Peers for information about the Battle of Heavenfield and advice on the route between Hexham and Castleside.

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Sarah Hay for alerting me to the story about St Cuthbert near Lanchester.

In my research for other entries here on local history, I have used a wide variety of sources, but would particularly like to acknowledge the usefulness of England's North East website, where more detailed information about places on the route can be found – <https://englandsnortheast.co.uk/>

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