

MENDIP RING Leg6A. Faulkland to Charlton. 6 Miles

Start point G.R. ST739545

1 Leave Faulkland Village Green towards the Pub turn right up Grove Lane, and when the road bends sharp right turn left into the bridleway immediately turn right into another bridleway Tenantsfield Lane (this can be muddy) follow this to the road. Turn left uphill, just before the house go through the gate on your right follow the middle path across this field to exit onto a road with the church on your left. Turn right going down the hill and where the road turns right take the enclosed path on your left along the side of the house following this across several fields to reach the road.

2 Turn left, at the junction take the right hand turning then the footpath to the left as you reach the bend in the road. Go uphill to reach a road, Follow this road crossing the A362 into Knobsbury Lane, just pass the school turn right into Mells Lane soon take the drive leading to Huish House, but before you reach the house go over the stile on your right down the hill under the old railway following this path out to a lane, turn right towards Kilmersdon.

3 When you come to the village turn right up Jack and Jill's Hill, at the top keep straight ahead then left into Waterside Lane, cross the main road into a bridleway, follow this down hill over a stream into an enclosed path then take the first path on the left follow this through the woods to reach the B3139.

Points of Historical Interest

SECTION 1

From the junction of Grove Lane with Lippiat Hill the field names suggest the presence of a Park running down to a boundary at Bladdock Gutter. Lippiat is 'leap eate', a gate in fencing too high for deer to jump.

There is a reference to a tenant called Bladdicks in the Ammerdown Estate papers and he may have given his name to Bladdock Gutter. The stream joins the Wellow Brook near Single Hill.

Tenantsfield Lane is shown on the earliest 19th century maps but is unnamed. The two fields on the right are Tenants Field Bottom and Tenants Field and it is probably that the lane has taken its name from them.

A step aside moment

Down to the right, at the T junction with the road, there is a WWII anti tank trap of seven concrete pyramids in the Wellow Brook. They are from the GHQ Line (Green).

This is now the eastern edge of the Somerset Coalfield
The demand for coal increased in the 17th century, probably initially due to deforestation and the loss of the easy availability of wood, but also in response to the rapid expansion of Bath. In 1763 the Earl of Waldegrave's Old Pit was sunk at Radstock and the story of the local coalfield starts from there.

This was a small field, running from just beyond Clutton in the west to Pensford in the north and Coleford in the south. In contrast to its larger neighbours in Wales and the Midlands, it did not have heavy industry nearby and the profit margins were therefore squeezed by the costs of transporting the coal. Capital investment was also constrained as many of the mine owners were themselves the tenants of larger landowners. With the age of mechanisation the field began to fall behind. The pits remained relatively small and the coalfield became a backwater where men scratched a living in conditions, it has been said, would have been the despair of miners from other areas. The last pit closed in 1973.

There is a local History Museum, with particular emphasis on the coalfield, at Radstock half a mile to the west.

Shoscombe is the across the valley. There was a small pit here which opened in 1828 and closed in 1860. Nothing remains to mark the site.

The viaduct was part of the Frome to Radstock railway line. It closed in 1959.

The remains of the shrunken village of Foxcote, with earthwork platforms and linear banks, are in the next field crossed by the footpath.

The church of St James the Less is a Grade II* early 18th century building. It is open for services only between Easter and October, but there is a description of the interior on the Somerset County Council Historic Environment website.

In the next field it should be possible to see, in the distance, two long ranks of miners' cottages at The Tynings, north of Radstock. Built by Countess of Waldegrave it is considered to be a very high standard of working men's accommodation for the time.

The disused pit in the wood at OS 710 553 is Foxcote, first mentioned in 1853. The shaft intended as 1212 ft deep was opened in January 1859, but because of water problems it was only used down to 954ft depth. It was not a successful pit and was said to have been attended by an unusual amount of difficulty and danger. Output here was 600 tons per week in 1930, probably its highest level. Coal winding ceased in 1931 and the pithead was demolished in the 1950's.

The footpath continues on the raised tramroad that was used to take the coal to Lower Writhlington. Out into the road, Lower Writhlington pit was on the opposite side and somewhat to the right. The two shafts were sunk in 1829. In 1939 electric pumps replaced the original Cornish beam engine, but the pit remained largely unchanged until Nationalisation. In 1966 the steam winding engine, the last to be used for regular coal work in Somerset, was replaced by an electric engine. The company built its own access route, connecting the Upper and Lower Writhlington pits and Foxcote to a loading dock on the GWR at Radstock. It was probably opened in 1867/8 and included an incline up to Frome hill where a depot was sited.

On the right hand side of the road is the site of Writhlington Manor. There is a commemorative plaque on a stone pillar behind the seat. It is not easy to get at but it says 'The Site of Writhlington Manor, home of the Hon. George W Fairfax and his wife Sally Cary. 1785. Also the home of Miss Alex King 1874–1926'. At one time the Cary family lived in Virginia and there Sally was courted by George, the son of their neighbours, the Washingtons. However Sally's father discouraged the match because George had little wealth and no future prospects! Although they each married another, the two couples maintained a close relationship until the Fairfaxes returned to England in 1773. Another branch of the Cary (Carey) family claims descent from the liaison between Henry VIII and Mary Boleyn, the sister of Anne Boleyn.

In the field below Combe Farm, at the junction with Church Lane, WPC, (Writhlington Parish Council) is moulded into the cast iron squeeze gate.

Writhlington was Writelinctone at Domesday; the 'ctone' suffix indicating a boundary stone. Collinson describes it in 1791 as a 'small village of 14 houses'. On Church Hill, the old school is on the right, as is a Primitive Methodist chapel dated 1913. The village hall and play area, on the left, are on the original road from Frome, bypassed before 1820 by the present main road. The Fir Tree and stables are mentioned in the Ammerdown Estate papers in 1868.

SECTION 2

Knobsbury Lane was Nobsbury in 1784.

The coal batch at Old Mills is in the distance to the right. Looking like a large Christmas pudding, it is the 150 foot conical dirt tip of the Old Mills colliery which closed in 1966. It is between Midsomer Norton and Farrington Gurney.

Coming off Mells Lane the site of the colliery at Huish is just at the left turn in the track. The small stone hut on the right of the path was the weighbridge and Huish Cottage on the left was the pit office. In the lawn here is a manhole cover. It encloses the top of the down shaft. The lease for the Huish pit was signed in 1820 with the Lord Hylton (Joliffe) and the first coal was raised in 1824. Coal disposal was by road until 1855, when an incline was laid to the railway sidings at Radstock. This is still visible on the right, just where the path turns left. It is marked by a clump of fir trees. Huish was not especially successful and it closed in 1912.

Huish House is a fine 19th century house. Until recently it was the home of the novelist Gerald Seymour.

The railway bridge was once on the Frome to Radstock line. It is now part of the Sustrans National Cycle Network, which will eventually be a continuous route to Southampton with a link to Poole. The Network uses disused railway lines wherever possible, for traffic free walking and cycling. This section is called The Colliers Way.

Names of fields towards Kilmersden – ownership etc?

Ameslane Farm on the right in Ames Lane is a 17th century building.

On the left is the Free School. Dated 1707, this is a very early attempt to bring education to all. The plaque over the front door commemorates the benefactor, the Rev. Henry Shute. He is also remembered in the adjoining Shute Cottage. The School closed in 1900 and was replaced by the present building at the top of the village.

SECTION 3

Kilmersden is now largely a Conservation Area. Called Chynemereston at Doomsday, this was the chief village of the Hundred and a sizeable community. The Joliffe Arms was originally the Court House and the Lock Up, dated 1785, is now the bus shelter. Much of the village belongs to the Ammerdown Estate, the seat of Lord Hylton (Joliffe) since 1788. The church of St Peter and St Paul, was rebuilt in the 15th century by the Botreau family in thanks for deliverance from the Black Death. There is a guide to the church in the church.

The road was turnpiked by the Buckland Dinham, later Radstock, Trust to create a link road between the Fosse Way and Norton St Philip and there is a toll cottage at the western end of the village. The telephone box is Grade II Listed and described as was the box at Norton St Philip in Leg 5. It is also notable for its colour; the Ammerdown Estate grey. The land for the village hall was donated by Lord Hylton.

Kilmersden is the home of the nursery rhyme 'Jack and Jill went up the Hill' and the story of Jack and Jill is set on marker stones up the hillside. The full story is explained on the side of the school, alongside the famous well. The hill was once called 'Bad Stwoame Hill', because of the loose quarry stones that made the surface insecure. It has been suggested that this is what made Jack fall down, but who knows?

Crossing the road the walk enters an area associated with Charlton Park, the original home of the Joliffe family. Empty from the time of their move to Ammerdown in 1788, it fell into disrepair and eventually was demolished. The Palladian entry gates still remain on the Kilmersden Road. On the left of the stream through the new woodland at O.S. 683 525 is a fishpond associated with that House.

Charlton is a common OE place name, from Cerletone, meaning the settlement of the carls or free peasants.

No's 92 and 92A Charlton, on the right of the road, were originally a single 17th century Grade II Listed building.

Into hamlet – Merlon Cottage on the right is a 17th century Grade II Listed Building

Charlton Farmhouse, with its back to the route of the walk, is a grade II 17th century