

A Walk around Great Bedwyn

This walk round Great Bedwyn will typically take 45-60 minutes at a gentle stroll, plus any time you spend visiting the Church or taking diversions. You will be walking on road, pavement, grass and paths such as the canal towpath (which may be muddy if the weather has been wet recently). There are also a few steps.

The grass and steps are not really suitable for wheelchairs and push-chairs, and alternative routes are suggested. **Please note** that crossing the railway line with a wheelchair or push-chair is not advised.



The walk starts from the island opposite No. 16 High Street, The Art House – until recently the Cross Keys inn. It dates from about 1735, built after the Great Fire of Bedwyn in 1716. The fire destroyed 28 houses in High Street, Farm Lane

and Church Street, which probably explains the lack of thatch in this central area.

The Victorian cast iron lamp standard on the island (which is now called 'The Chains') was erected in 1887 as a Jubilee memorial, close to the former medieval Town Hall and Market House, which was demolished in 1875. A court was held here, and the area around used for markets.

Church Street leads away to the right, as you stand with the Art House on your left. The building on the corner by the bus stop was originally the stables for the Cross Keys inn. Next, Tudor House shows evidence of the building which predated it. Note the Tudor rose in the glass of its small side window. The house next door was the butcher's shop until 1987, with a slaughterhouse behind.

Across the road is the Corner House, once the home of a local doctor, with its surgery building on the side. Back across the road, the building on the corner with Coster View was until recently the village bakery. Number 5 once housed a Dame School, and number 6 was once a doctor's surgery. Numbers 11 and 12 were all one house, and the post office was located here from 1926 until the 1980s.

Evidence of earlier buildings can be seen in the lower courses of some of these buildings, and no. 6 has an early barrel-vaulted cellar.

At no. 46 can be seen the bracket of the Old White Hart inn sign. The White Hart closed in 1867, and much later housed a sweet shop. There have been many inns in Great Bedwyn's past (14 at different times): today only one survives – the Three Tuns.



On the right you will soon come to the former Village School built in 1835 by the Marquess of Ailesbury, in whose estate the village lay from late Tudor times until 1929. Since the construction of a new

primary school in the east of the village in 1993, the old school has become the doctors' surgery and medical centre. Next to the surgery, in what is now a double-fronted private house, there was once a grocer's shop, and later an electrical shop which closed in the 1980s.

Beyond the surgery was once the stonemason's yard, which closed in 2009 after the Lloyd family had worked stone in Great Bedwyn since 1790. Lloyds of Bedwyn built the 1835 school. The yard has now been developed with new housing, but some of the Lloyds' eccentric works can still be seen on the walls of the Post Office shop next door. Worth a good look and read.



Beyond the post office are six attractive listed Victorian cottages in local buff brick, known as Ailesbury brick.

Next door is Glebe House, an imposing building set back from the road and dating from 1878-9. The former vicarage, it was designed by George Gilbert Scott Jnr., (the son of G G Scott Snr. who designed the Albert Memorial).

Opposite Glebe House is the large and ancient Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, dating from 1092. The size of



the church indicates that at one time the village was much larger than it is today, and served the surrounding area.

Inside is the tomb of the father of Jane Seymour (Henry VIII's third wife), who lived nearby at Wolfhall. You can also see a stained glass panel from Wolfhall. There is an excellent short guide and history of St Mary's inside the church.

Leaving the church, take the path left from the door through the churchyard and turn left at the churchyard wall, following the path across the corner of Church Field: this leads to a gate opening on to the railway tracks. **Please take great care** when crossing the tracks, watching out for high speed trains hurrying between London and Plymouth.

*(To avoid the grass and the railway track, wheelchair and push-chair users can retrace their steps from the church back to The Chains, and turn right down Brook Street over the two bridges to the wharf on the right – and then rejoin the walk where marked with * below).*

Now cross the brick bridges over the Kennet and Avon canal, and take the canal towpath to the left. The canal



came to Great Bedwyn in the first decade of the 19th century, and was a huge influence on opening up the outside world to the village. It eventually fell into disrepair due to competition from the railway, but a dedicated band of volunteers was able to reopen the canal in 1990 all the way from Bristol to Reading.

Go along the towpath until you reach Great Bedwyn *wharf, once used by working barges but now servicing the many pleasure craft that use the restored canal.



Opposite the exit from the wharf (and across Brook Street) is Frog Lane leading to the Village Hall and the Cricket Field. On the left there is a fine long thatched cottage, the oldest part of which dates from 1650.

Leaving Frog Lane behind you and facing the wharf, turn left into Brook Street. 100 yards further on, on the left, you will see a small brick and flint building with bottle glass inserts in the wall – once the home of a large local family. This is one of the oldest parts of the village, and there are several fine 17th century thatched cottages here.

You can now turn back along Brook Street, back towards the centre. On the left, a footpath is marked to Bedwyn Brail (½ mile). This is not described here as part of this walk, but if you don't mind a longer walk, with some uphill ground, you can have a fine view over the village, and have a pleasant wander through the woods.

On Brook Street, go over the two bridges across the canal and the railway line. The railway service is an important transport link for the village, providing good access to Newbury, Reading and London, also to Westbury and the south-west.



As you continue up Brook Street, you can see a fine row of Victorian cottages, built in 1862 to house railway workers.

Continue along Brook Street until you reach the Art House, then turn right into Farm Lane. This is an attractive lane with fine cottages, many thatched, and the old smithy which you will find on your left just before the modern houses begin.

Opposite is The Maltings, converted in 1975 to private apartments for which it won a European Architectural Heritage Award. The Maltings housed German prisoners of war during the Second World War.



Just past The Maltings is Castle Cottage, one of Great Bedwyn's oldest buildings. It has a Norman chimney, but its origins remain a mystery. A blue plaque shows that In 1621 Castle Cottage was the birthplace of the celebrated physician

Thomas Willis, known as 'the father of neurology'.

Opposite The Maltings there are steps and a path that take you to the village Recreation Ground, with nine chestnut trees that were planted to commemorate the Great Bedwyn men who fell in the Second World War.

(Wheel and push-chair users, to avoid the steps and the grass of the Recreation Ground, can go back to the Art

House, turn right up the High Street to the Three Tuns, and turn right for a few yards up Brown's Lane to rejoin the walk where marked with ** in the next paragraph).

Cross over the Recreation Ground towards the right of the tennis courts, and join **Brown's Lane. Immediately on your right are several attractive 18th century houses. On the left is the Methodist Chapel, built in 1875, now a private house. On the wall of the cottage opposite is a modern carved stone copy of an old wooden sign which warned off vagrants. The original is in Devizes Museum.



On the right hand corner is the Thee Tuns, the surviving pub in Great Bedwyn, which opened its doors in 1784.

Turn left into the High Street. On the right is Foxbury Place, a conversion of former farm buildings to retirement housing. Immediately after, on the right, new houses have been built in 2018 on the site of the former British Legion Hall.

Opposite there is an attractive row of Victorian terraced cottages, and Hillbarn House. Formerly three cottages, it is now one of the largest houses in the village.

To the right, after the Bedwyn Motor Company, it is worth walking down Back Lane (though watch out for pot-holes). It leads past some 18th century cottages to the village allotments on the right and new houses on the left. The Fighting Cocks public house once stood in this area, and both sides of the street were lined with houses. In the 18th century Back Lane extended for several hundred yards almost to the end of Church Street.

Back to the High Street and turn right. After The Stores is Bedwyn House, which was originally called Portreeve House. It was the vicarage during much of the 19th century and later was home to at least two of Bedwyn's doctors, with a surgery held there as well. Next door, the Butler's Cottage, now a separate dwelling, was originally the coach house of Bedwyn House.

On the other side of the road, are two adjoining Georgian houses, numbers 14 and 15. You can tell from the windows of no. 14 that it was once a shop - until as recently as the 1980s it was a general store. No. 15, just before the Art House, has a Sun fire

insurance mark on the wall above the door. This is a copy as the original, which was placed there after the great fire of 1716, was stolen.

Now you are back where you started.

*This leaflet is produced by the **Bedwyn History Society**. If you want to know more about the Society, please send an email to bedwynhistory@hotmail.co.uk*

September 2018