

Golden Valley Walks

Hardwicke

Hardwicke Green, also formerly known as 'Gibbet Green'

Here the bodies of executed criminals were hung up at various sites, most notably those of two members of an infamous gang known as 'The Six Welshmen' who had committed murder in Glamorganshire sometime in the second half of the C 18th. 'A dangerous and disgusting practice: it frightened the horses' – no doubt the local people as well!

The Golden Valley Railway

The walk twice crosses the old route of the Golden Valley Railway. The route is not what the railway promoters wanted. They planned that the railway should run close to the road (B3438) down to Hay (car park). However, strong protests from local landowners forced the railway to take the longer way round via Clifford. The Hardwicke horses and pheasants remained undisturbed by the puffing monster, the railway locomotive, when it finally arrived in 1889.

Clock Mills

Clock Mills in 1793 was quite significant consisting of a water corn mill, grist mill, cider mill and clover mill with yard house and gardens. Sadly all that now remains is the mill stream which flows through gardens formally laid out and originally designed by Christine Dixon, second wife of Rafael Sabatini, author of 'Scaramouche' and 'Captain Blood'. Christine was a famous sculptor and a recumbent statue of her son can be seen in Hay Cemetery. During the 1950's when mains water was brought to the area Mrs Sabatini had stone features placed along the mill stream, many of which remain.

Newton Tump

On a map of 1786 old chapel ruins are marked on the deserted village site here. A fine motte and bailey is the obvious landmark today.

Windle Park Wood

Once known as 'Windhill Park', this is one of the ancient woodlands in the Parish. In the spring it is carpeted with wood anemones. Note the line of pollarded oaks along the field boundary on your left as you leave the wood after the metal gate. These mark part of the boundary between Clifford and Westbrook Manors.

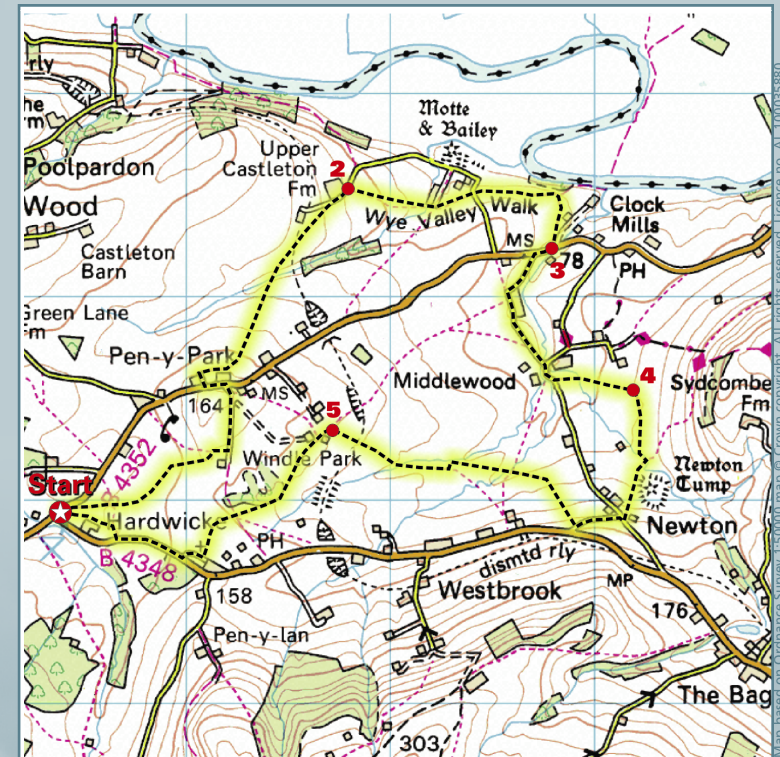
Holy Trinity, Hardwicke

Dedicated in 1853, this is a harmonious and pleasing example of an early Victorian church. The plaques in front of the organ commemorate the three men who were the organists at the church between 1853 and 1994 – some 140 years – a remarkable record of dedicated service!

The Haven

The former vicarage where the Rev Thomas William Webb lived 1856-85. He was a celebrated amateur astronomer who viewed the night sky from a small wooden observatory in the front garden. With little light pollution the stars are still as bright as they were for Thomas.

For bus timetable information contact Traveline 0870 608 2 608 (open 07.00-22.30 daily).



This walk which crosses fine agricultural land, wooded streams and ancient woodland around Hardwicke and Middlewood takes you near the sites of both a gibbet and an ancient motte and bailey. Enjoy splendid views over the Wye Valley and up to the surrounding hills of Merbach, Little Mountain and Cusop Hill.

OS Map no: Explorer 201
Distance: 9 ½ km (6 miles)



Starting from the car park adjacent to picnic site on B4348 take the stile at the junction of the B4352 and B4348. Aim diagonally left across field to a stile at opposite corner of field. Cross stile and follow left hand field boundary to corner. Cross over stile on left and turn diagonally right to stile in hedge. Cross stile and footbridge to pass beside cottage, through gate and turn left onto bridleway following this to road. Turn left and take next footpath on right by side of cream coloured house, then right over the first stile. Follow the hedge on the right around the field behind the houses. Cross the stile and head diagonally to the far bottom corner of the large field where a new footbridge crosses the brook.

These small dingle woodlands have survived because of their inaccessibility. They are havens for wildlife with a variety of habitats in a small area: stream, old trees, dead wood and coppice. They not only support their own wildlife but provide important havens for creatures on the move, acting both as stepping stones and corridors when linked by hedges to other woodlands.

Head up the steep bank and go right around the ploughed field to a stile. Cross the stile onto the old railway embankment (*disused railways are also very important refuges and corridors for wildlife*), and another into a plantation. Bear slightly left through the plantation and under the electricity lines to the stile. Cross stile and bear diagonally left across field towards the farm buildings and down to a field gate. Pass through this gate and another, into a field, not going into the farmyard.

2. With your back to the farm buildings bear slightly left downhill through the field to cross over a stile and footbridge at the opposite corner, through a tiny bit of wet woodland (*in spring look out for moschatel or town hall clock, bluebells, celandine and lots of ferns*). Cross another stile turning left towards the farm track, through gate, where you will find steps up a bank on your right to a stile. Cross and bear left to a stile into another lane.

Cross the lane and go through the field gate opposite, waymarked as the Wye Valley Walk (*the leaping salmon symbol reflects the fame of the Wye as a fishing river*). Walk across two fields keeping the mixed hedge to your left (*note the elm in the hedgerow, and the wonderful views of the sinuous loops of the Wye below*). Cross the stile and bear right past the house and formal garden, along the track to the road.

3. Cross the road and follow the lane opposite towards Middlewood. *The mill stream is another dingle woodland, long, narrow and very damp, carpeted in wild garlic in spring, and dripping with ferns, mosses and liverworts.*

At the bridge turn right towards Dorstone. After about 100 metres look for steps up the steep bank to the left that lead to a stile in the hedge, cross into the field and head for the impressive poplar tree. Cross the stile and footbridge and bear right across the field to the old hedge and into the sunken lane. As you cross this field Merbach Hill lies ahead of you. *Much of the hill is registered Common Land. Notice the difference between the bright uniform green of the improved fields lower down the flank and the mosaic of colours and textures of the unimproved Common.*

4. Turn right in the sunken lane, through kissing gate and follow the edge of the next

two fields until you cross a footbridge over the stream. Bear left to walk along the hedge uphill to the field gate and across two small fields to stile and into the lane (*the field on the left has the wooded Newton Tump motte and bailey - somewhat obscured now by the field hedge*). Go right up the lane opposite until you come to a huge ash tree covered in ivy. *These veteran trees are invaluable in the countryside being home and host to many insects, birds and small mammals. Contrary to popular belief, ivy does not harm a tree in any way, merely using it for support, but ivy is a very valuable plant to other wildlife. The thick dense leaves provide cover for many birds, small mammals and particularly as a bat roost. The flowers produce nectar, and the berries which appear late in the year have one of the highest fat contents of any plant – a lifeline for wildlife in the scarcity of winter.*

Cross the stile to the right. Go straight down the field and then diagonally left to the bottom corner of the next field. *Note the large rookery in the trees on the right of this field.* Cross the stile, footbridge and the stile straight ahead ignoring footbridge to left. Go straight up the field with the hedge on your left, through the gate at the top, following the stream and fence line to stile. Cross and go straight ahead to footbridge over stream, then go diagonally left to metal gate. Go through and follow hedge on right to cross next stile and railway embankment, straight ahead to next stile and along path with garden and house on left. Turn left in front of house and follow the track for 30 metres, then walk diagonally left to a stile.

5. Cross the stile and follow the hedge on your left to a stile. Cross it and then turn left through a gate into Windle Park Wood. *Listen out for woodpeckers drumming.* Follow the well defined path over a stony bridge and up through a gate.

Turn right and go across the field to stile. Cross this, the bridleway and another stile. Cross field, stile, then go left to final stile and across field to pass in front of church to road.

Turn right down the road until you come to a stile with a fingerpost in the hedge on the right. Go across the small field to next stile. The house on the left is The Haven (see History & Fables below). Cross stile and go left down the field back to the car park.



HISTORY AND FABLES

During this walk the River Wye can be seen meandering down the valley towards Hereford. Over the centuries the river has changed course and signs of the former river bed can clearly be seen. The river is deceptively deep in places and in times gone by folk would say that the river was unsafe until it had claimed its yearly victim. Once, when a boy was drowned and his brothers were warned to keep away from the banks, an old man said: 'Let 'em go, let 'em go! No-one else'll be drowned this year. The river has had its due'.

