

Sandbach Footpath Group

SANDBACH HISTORY and GREENS

About 3.4 miles, 5.4 km

Shorter route 2.7 miles, 4.3 km

Allow 3 hours

Allow 2½ hours

As with all country walks, some paths are wet, muddy and uneven, so wear strong footwear and have clothing to suit the weather.

On narrow country lanes, take care to watch for traffic as you climb down the stile to the road, and when walking on the road make sure you can see oncoming traffic.

Start at the lower Waitrose car park.

Cross the little road that goes to Waitrose and walk towards the traffic lights.

On your left is the wooded St Mary's Dell. If you feel energetic, follow it down to the brook, then returning to the main road nearer to the traffic lights, otherwise, stay on the pavement.

At the traffic lights, go left up the High Street, over the Town Bridge, crossing Arclid Brook, built early 1800s.

If you cross to the far side and peer over the parapet you should be able to see a stonework base to the Brook, which looks as if it could have originally been a ford, before the bridge was built.

Further along the High Street, on the left, is the Old Hall Hotel, parts of it built in the 1650s as a manor house for the local squire, now a popular pub and function room.

A little further on up the High Street, on the left, look at the buildings set closer to the road and particularly notice the ornate black wrought iron hinges on the white doors and the patterned brickwork.

On the right hand side of the street is the entrance leading up to the tower of St Mary's Church.

Originally a much simpler building dating from the 1400s, it was restored and largely rebuilt in sandstone in the late 1840s by Sir George Gilbert Scott, an eminent architect in Victorian times. There is a ring of eight bells some dating from 1719 and a good clock with illuminated dial. Look at the inscription carved above the doorway under the arch.

Unusually, the right-of-way footpath passes through the arch in the tower, and down the steps to the road behind the church, where you turn right onto Crown Bank. Very soon turn left, slightly uphill, into Well Bank.

On the left, just before you turn into Well Bank, notice the beautifully restored original cast iron water pump of the town which was in use until the late 1800s. As you walk up Well Bank, look for the traditional black and white house, displaying a Grade II listed plaque dating "circa 1570".

Turn left into Hawk Street, with more black and white buildings ahead.

The old pub Lower Chequer and the house, named the "Cake House" to its right, both date from the 15-1600s. On the more notable buildings in Sandbach, you may see some silver coloured plaques done by Sandbach History Society, giving more information.

Pass the Lower Chequer on your right and go into the cobbled square with its Saxon Crosses, designated as "scheduled monument".

The Crosses were broken in the 1600s, but restored as far as possible and re-erected here in 1816. Most of the buildings around the square are full of character and worth a look. The War Memorial is an octagonal stone obelisk, unveiled in 1922, and this is where the Remembrance Day Commemoration is held each year.

Stand in the road (traffic allowing) near the Memorial and you should be able to see 7 pubs and almost as many tea/coffee shops, without moving your feet. There are not many places where you could say that!

From the cobbled square, turn right up the High Street in the same direction that you were going previously.

On the right is "Ye Olde Black Bear" pub with a thatched roof and inscribed with the date 1634.

Further on is an impressively styled red-brick building, now Handy Household.

The next building, also in red brick, is the Town Hall.

Notice the magnificent tower topped with a cupola and accurately working illuminated clock. Have a look at the sculpted figures and the inscription over the door showing 1889.

It is worth casting your eyes up towards the top of the walls and the roofs of old buildings to get an idea of the architecture, at the time, without the distraction of modern hoardings and shop fronts. For example, look at the Swan Hotel opposite; at least that is what is displayed on the finely bricked and stone capped gable, now called The Swan and Chequers.

Bear to the left into Hightown, but stay on the left hand pavement.

On the same side of the road as the Swan and Chequers is the "Saving Bank 1854", as carved into the stone lintel above the door, built in good quality red brick with blue brick set in artistic patterns. Further on to the left of the Savings Bank is the Literary Institute, designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott in gothic revival style, built in 1857 and nicely matching the Savings Bank. Outwardly the Institute seems unaltered by time. Originally designed as a library, meeting room and ball room, it now houses the Sandbach Town Council meeting chamber and offices and a function room upstairs.

Cross the road near the drinking fountain [no longer working].

Notice the old drinking fountain in the roundabout, given to the town by the Earl of Crewe, designed by Thomas Bower (the same architect as the Town Hall) and erected in 1897. Like most of the roundabouts in the area it is always worth looking at the bright flowers planted by the Council.

Opposite is the original "District Bank" (now NatWest), as carved into the stone lintel above the door and the Wheatsheaf Hotel, another building of character if you stand back and look up.

Now, make your way back, on the same side of the road as the Literary Institute and when you approach the Town Hall stop and take in the view.

The architect, Sir George Gilbert Scott has been mentioned a few times and will be again later, but he had a grandson, also an architect, who also designed a building in your view now. The building was very successful, but very small and the one you can see is one of thousands in the country. It is of course the telephone kiosk (K6) designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott in 1932. Take a good look at it, many kiosks have gone in recent times, but, at the time of writing, this one is clinging to its spot, and is now, apparently, a protected building.

Continue with the kiosk to your right along Congleton Road, crossing at the traffic lights, to the same side as the kiosk, and you should see a car park called "The Commons" [or Scotch Common].

Scotch Common has a claim to fame as a reputed skirmish with a Scottish army, marching home from the Battle of Worcester, occurred here in 1651. [It is common land, so no-one owns it, not even the Council]. The car park is now all set about with beautiful lime trees. Many of the lime trees are the ornamental silver lime with an attractive grey/silver underside to the leaf.

At the far end of the car park is an excellent library, housed in a black and white building, not in the classic style, but in 1960-style slabs, no further comment being necessary.

Beyond the library, go through the magnificent wrought iron gates to Sandbach Park, a delightful little park, well worth a tour round. The bowling green on the right usually has a border of strikingly bright flowers and a round millennium stone-built planter also has a beautiful display.

With the planter on your right, keep to the left to follow the perimeter of the park.

As you reach higher ground, you should be able to see a birch tree with about 12 tightly bunched clusters of twigs, at first glance resembling bird's nests (more noticeable in winter). These are sometimes called "witches brooms", but they are apparently caused by an otherwise harmless virus.

There are plenty of interesting trees for you to see; try and identify them if you can. As you turn a corner to the right you should see three oak trees, with display plaques, planted in honour of various Kings and Queens:

- a) Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, planted in 2012.*
- b) Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary, planted in 1935 and now about 2 feet in diameter.*
- c) Coronation of King George VI planted in 1937 and now a substantial tree.*

Continue following not far from the edge of the park, going downhill to a pond and at the bottom go through a gate onto a wooden causeway to an observation platform with seats arranged to pause and observe wildlife, such as dragon flies. Leaving via another gate, and looking across the park you may be able to see some exercise machines, which you can visit another time if you so desire.

Leaving the gate, turn left through an opening and turn left again onto a track (often muddy in winter) and proceed with Dingle Lake on your right. Then fork left following a green arrow footpath sign uphill and through a kissing gate into a housing estate, this being Ravenscroft Close.

At the end turn right and then, just before a yellow bin for salt and grit, turn left onto a path, and at a T-junction with another path turn right. Continue on the tarmac footpath and it opens out into a large green space, then turn right onto another tarmac path, looking for Betchton Close ahead. On your left notice a nice little roundabout, planted with 4 Norway Maple trees, but continue straight, in the same line on a narrow alleyway, which leads into and crosses straight over Swettenham Close.

Keep straight on in the same direction and the alleyway soon opens out into a large green area. Turn left with back garden fences on you left and you may be able to hear the traffic on the bypass a few metres to your right, the other side of some banking and a band of trees.

You should soon come to a fine old oak tree ahead.

It is said that oak trees grow for about 300 years, live for another 300 years and take a further 300 years to die. This looks as if it could be well into its second 300 years.

Continue in the same direction through the green area. Eventually you reach a dead end with a wire fence, but you can follow this round to the right in a loop, and walk back, this time with the band of trees to your right and the bypass beyond a hedge on your left.

When you reach a kissing gate, do not go through it, but go right and immediately left to continue in the same direction, now with the band of trees and the banking to your left.

Continue in this direction and the large green area narrows to a grassy path with trees both sides, then bending right and leading slightly downhill with [at the time of writing] a dilapidated building on your left.

Notice the interesting Italian alder trees with smooth shiny pointed leaves, catkins and a larger seed cone than the English alder, which has a rounded leaf with a rougher surface and smaller seed cones.

At a fork, bear left and continue downhill on a track, then bend to the right at the railings enclosing electrical equipment. Continue through the trees and you should see Dingle Lake on your left.

The trees are a selection of field maples, sweet chestnuts, hawthorn, birch, cherry, aspen and poplar.

Ignore the path back to the right, which you followed earlier, but stay on the sometimes muddy track, and opposite where you came in from the Park, go left through an opening and follow the woodland path, again with Dingle Lake on your left. After about 100m, follow the path to the right and up some steps to re-join the track.

Turn left onto the track and you should see the magnificent Tower of St Mary's Church directly ahead. The track becomes a small road, emerging into Dingle Lane.

Turn left down Church Street with the high sandstone wall of the churchyard to your right, and then turn right at the wall corner and pillar, still with the wall to your right.

To the left of the steps ahead is the Town Spout. Originally it had sufficient flow of water to supply the town, but it was moved when the top of the street was filled in to enlarge the churchyard in 1876, and now it now just a dribble.

Turn left before you reach the steps and walk along Front Street.

Look at the nice cottages in red brick with blue brick patterns with the date 1861 picked out in the blue bricks. The next row of cottages is black and white with nice decorative and pointed ridge tiles.

Front Street joins the High Street just before the Town Bridge.

Cross over the High Street to the right hand side, and at this point you have a choice: Either:

Shorter route. Turn right at the traffic lights and return to the lower Waitrose car park.

OR

Full route. At the traffic lights cross straight over the main road to "The Hill" (only slightly uphill) and proceed along the right hand side.

A little way up The Hill, look across the road at the Almshouses.

There are 4 blocks to the lovely Almshouses, 20 properties designed by the architect Sir George Gilbert Scott, in Gothic Revival style. They were built in red and blue patterned brickwork, in about 1860 at a total cost of £2500. The Sandbach Almshouse Charity is still going today.

Continue along The Hill and opposite Smithfield Lane, turn right into Sandbach Cemetery. Go straight forward to the central memorial, originally sited at the Brunner Mond works, but moved here in 1934 when the works closed down. It is in memory of the people at the works who died in the 1914-18 war.

Continue straight through the metal gate and go half right across the playing field, to an alleyway leading to Palmer Road, where you turn right. Then turn left into Ormerod Close. Ignore the first opening to the right, but after about 50m turn right into an alleyway, and after another 50m follow the alley round to the left and you emerge in Birch Gardens.

Straight ahead you should see the main road, where you turn left and make your way back to the lower Waitrose car park.

Further information

If the notes on buildings has interested you, have a look at the website below:

<http://www.coldmoss.co.uk/html/architecture.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Listed_buildings_in_Sandbach

<http://www.sandbachchurch.co.uk/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Gilbert_Scott [and ditto, but type Giles instead]

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