

Walk 12 AINSWORTH TO WALSHAW

Distance: **2 miles**

About: **2 to 3 hours**

Terrain: **Ascent 138ft descent 89ft**

Parking: **Plenty on street' available.**

Public transport:

486 - Radcliffe to Bury via Ainsworth

510 - Bury to Bolton via Ainsworth & Walshaw

Refreshments:

**The White Horse on Church St, Ainsworth.
The Queen Victoria and the White Horse,
Walshaw.**

No public toilets. All paths fully waymarked.

Ainsworth has a long history of human habitation. Bronze Age burial sites and artefacts, dating back at least six thousand years, have been found on the surrounding moors. It was first mentioned in the early 13th century, when land there was given by Roger de Middleton to Cockers and Abbey. Later the village was a part of the estates of the Earls of Wilton at Heaton Park. Religion has played a large part in its history. The Church of England had a chapel of ease built in Tudor times but there was subsequently a long history of religious dissent.

The area was initially dispersed farms with a medieval hall at Dearden Farm and extensive ridge and furrow crop marks delineating a medieval field system north of Barrack Fold. Much of the surrounding area was common land but was gradually enclosed. Coal mining was extensive on Cockey Moor from the earliest times with evidence of early bell pits visible from Cockey Moor Road. The whole township was finally enclosed in the early nineteenth century. In 1853 the vicar recorded that 1700 people lived in Ainsworth, mostly handloom weavers and small farmers.

From the main gates of the Parish Church, Christchurch, on Church Street, cross the main road and proceed, almost directly opposite, down Duke Road, between the recreation ground on the left and the small cemetery on the right.

Go through the covered archway to the left hand side of the Duke William Inn.

The Duke William Inn dates back to 1737 (and reputedly haunted) was one of the two coaching inns on the old main road through the village which then crossed Arthur Lane. It was probably at these crossroads, where the local gibbet was sited and where hangings took place.

Follow the cobbled back yard around to the right and into the back lane, on the right there's the fine old handsome Unitarian Chapel and on the left the Reform Club, with the original horse mounting steps and block still in place.

Both buildings are Grade-II listed, both built in the 18th century. The chapel was first built in 1715, and enlarged in 1773. In the graveyard are many interesting 18 & 19th century graves. The Reform Club (now the Old Stables) was built in 1768 to provide accommodation and stabling for worshippers who lived a long way from the village.

Turn left around Hooks Cottage, with a date-stone above the front door 1773, built by Nathan Brooks (buried in the graveyard opposite).

Continue down Knowsley Road to the junction at the bottom, at the entrance gate of the nursing home. The lane on the left goes to Barrack Fold Farm.

In 1642 Lord Strange (a royalist and 7th Earl of Derby) mustered several thousand men on Cockey Moor in preparation for an attack on Bolton. The assembly on Cockey Moor was probably in the neighbourhood of Barrack Fold Farm, which could well be how the farm received its name. There is also a local tradition that a number of soldiers lay buried by a clump of trees near the footpath leading down to the bridge over Whitehead's reservoirs.

Another suggestion is that Knowsley, which is the name of the Stanleys in Lancashire, received its name because Lord Strange's soldiers mustered there or that Lord Strange himself had his headquarters about there.

The Holcombe Hunt point-to-point races were held here from 1921 to 1971, known as the 'Mill Workers Derby' attracting crowds of thousands. The mills of Bury and Bolton closed for the day and crowds of up to 100,000 are reported as attending the early meetings.

Straight ahead is Ainsworth Nursing Home (originally Broomfield), until 1986 an isolation hospital for smallpox patients.

Turn right, past the front of the rather pretty row of cottages and continue down the lane ahead, a well-trodden path lined with trees and bushes.

Knowsley Cottages reputedly, but unverified, are Flemish weavers' dwellings of the seventeenth century'.

③ At the end of the path, go over the stile and cross the field, following the hedge on the left to a second stile that joins the track to Paddock Leach. Turn right down the footpath alongside the track.

The original Paddock Leach dated back to the seventeenth century or even earlier, in 1900 it became an Isolation Hospital (for smallpox, TB or any other infectious disease) and when a purpose-built replacement was erected nearby at 'Broomfield', it became a TB Sanatorium. Paddock Leach was deemed by the Local Health Authority to be of no further use and to avoid the health risk from any residual highly infectious diseases, sadly ordered it to be destroyed by fire in December 1971. Paddock Leach stood there for well over 300 years and served the local children as the "haunted house" for almost as many years.

Follow the track where it joins the lane to Old Barn farm. Turn right and around 100 metres go left through a gate, beside a five barred gate, into a large open pasture.

Follow the well-worn path with distant views of Scout Moor Wind Farm and beyond on the left. The path goes between oaks on a very pleasantly open wooded hillside. At the far side of the wood, cross the stile and turn left down the hill.

Look out for Kestrel, Buzzard, Lapwings Sky Lark, and Martins in the fields, and Little Owls and Spotted Woodpeckers in the trees.

Cross the footbridge, over the stream to the lower of the three Whitehead reservoirs, and head at around 45

degrees uphill to the left, passing just to the right of the wooden bridge over the overflow from the middle reservoir.

This corner of the upper reservoir makes a delightful spot for a picnic on a sunny day. The three Lowercroft reservoirs were constructed for the nearby Lower Croft Works and are together with the surrounding areas, sites of biological importance (SBI) and an excellent area for wildlife on the walk. The bird sightings at this site cover many species, including the Common Tern, Wheatear, Oyster Catcher, Mallard, Canada Geese, Great Crested Grebe, Greylag, Moorhens, Coots, Black-headed Gull, Common Terns, Great Spotted Woodpecker, House Martins, Swallows, Willow Warblers, Nuthatch, Reed Buntings, plus Eyebright, Hairbell and other interesting plants and Chimney Sweeper Moths.

② From the corner of the reservoir continue to head uphill to the top left hand corner of field where the modern houses meet the dry stone boundary wall.

Go through the 'kissing gate' and along the narrow path to join the farm track to 'Meadow Croft' at the top.

Turn right down the track to emerge onto Slaidburn Drive and Walshaw High Street.

Turn left up the High Street, passing the Parish Church on the right.

① The War Monument and the centre of Walshaw lie just beyond

If continuing on the Village Link Walk No 10, Walshaw to Greenmount, turn 1st right on the High St. into Sudren St. The path starts in the right hand corner of the parking area.

Public transport:

480 - Bury.

480 - Bolton via Greenmount, Hawkshaw & Affetside.

510 - Bolton via Ainsworth.

510 - Bury.

Car parking plentiful.

Refreshments:

The Queen Victoria and the White Horse, Walshaw

WALK 12 - AINSWORTH TO WALSHAW

Walks

Walk No.11 - Walshaw to Ainsworth

Walk No.12 - Ainsworth to Walshaw

