

Walk No. 8 Hartford Hall Walk

A Circular Walk to the River Weaver, Vale Royal, Whitegate and Pettypool

A very pretty walk taking you along the River Weaver, then through the grounds of the former Vale Royal Abbey to Whitegate and back past Pettypool. The Vale Royal locks on the River Weaver make a good picnic stop in summer. Some of this route can be very muddy after heavy rain.

8 miles, say 3½ to 4 hours.

Start at Weaverham Road Sports Field car park, adjacent to Sandiway school grid ref. SJ 605714.

Sandiway CP School was opened in 1948 to replace the former Church of England village school (now private residences at the junction of Weaverham Road and School Lane).

Go through the seven-barred gate directly opposite the car park exit and take the bridleway known as Hunts Lane.

The 17th century house visible across the field on your right is called Tooterstone and was once a farmhouse and part of the Vale Royal Abbey estate.

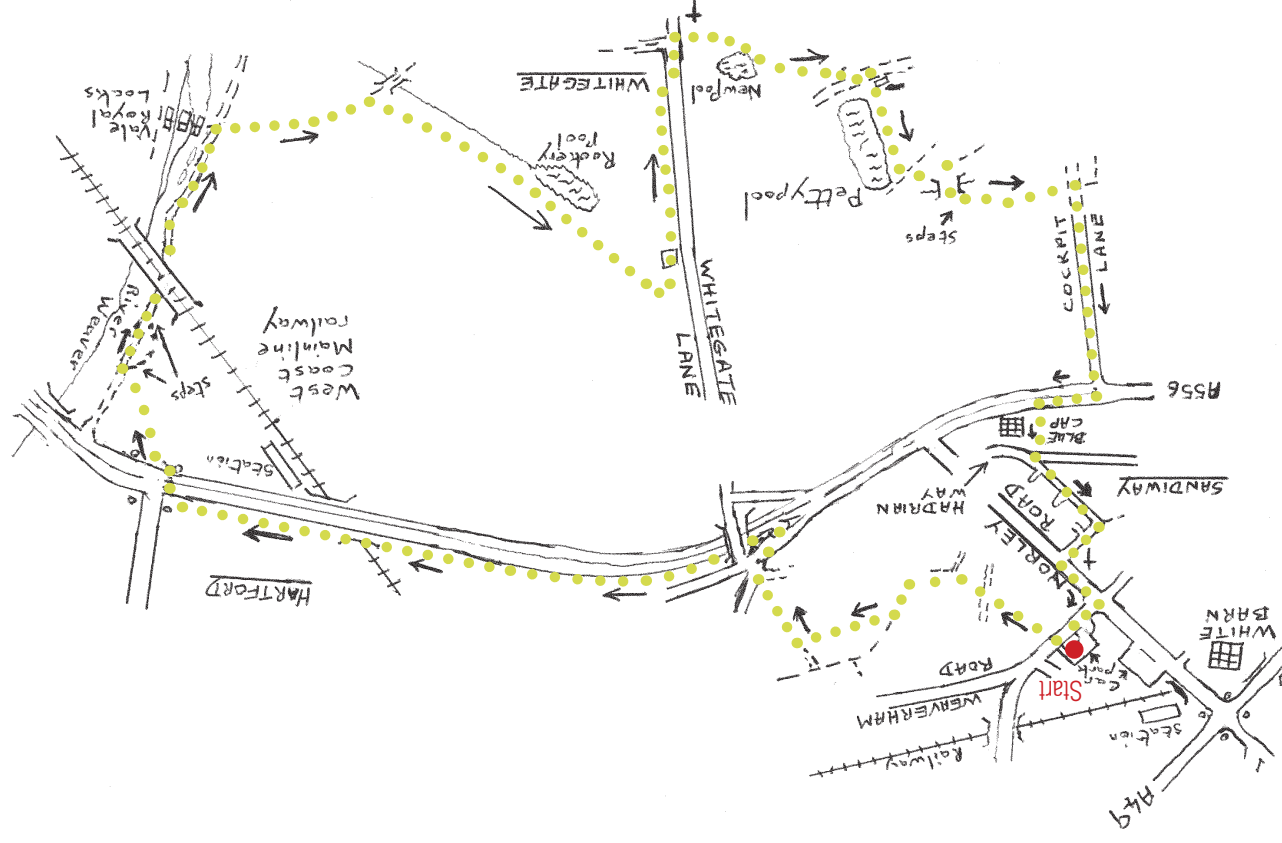
Pause at the brow of the hill just past the gorse bushes and enjoy the views which reach as far as the Pennine hills on a clear day. Closer by, the scenery has changed dramatically over the last 50 years as millions of tons of sand have been removed through quarrying. The sand, which gives Sandiway its name, was deposited from the melting ice of the last ice age and is now widely used for building purposes.

Continue down the hill and at the bottom, with the anglers' pool on your left, cross the quarry access road with care and continue straight on to join a field track.

Keeping the hedge on your left, go through a gate ahead and, shortly after, go through another gate to take a permissive path (possibly unsigned) diagonally right heading towards a wooden bridge and a stile into a field. Cross the stile and bear left up the hill towards the hedge on the skyline, reaching a kissing gate at the top of a steep slope.

After the kissing gate, bear right uphill, past a redundant stile, into next field. From here take a line bearing left to a stile in the hedge opposite with a large bungalow visible ahead. Now aim diagonally left to a stile in the corner of the field, where the drive to the bungalow meets Littledales Lane.

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At the lane turn right, to the junction with Chester Road, then right again downhill. On reaching a 4-bar metal gate on your right, go left across the road to a grassy area with a path leading towards the Northwich by-pass (A556). Turn left, using the footpath alongside the dual carriageway, pass under the flyover bridge and continue for just over a mile until you reach the traffic light junction with School Lane (Hartford).

Just along School Lane is Hartford Hall, now a hotel, but once the home of the Fairclough flour milling family. Some of the rooms are reputed to be haunted!!

Using the controlled crossing at the traffic lights, cross to the footpath on the other side of the dual carriageway and then turn left. Almost immediately, on your right, are steps up an embankment to a kissing gate at the top. Go through the gate and cross the field to another kissing gate which is at the end of the hedge ahead. Suddenly at this point is the realisation that the traffic noise of the last mile or so is now left behind and the pleasures of the walk can again be enjoyed. Continue steeply downhill to another kissing gate, then into a wood to reach a lane at the bottom.

(Note: If at this point you are feeling particularly energetic, on your right, about 20m before reaching the lane, there is a bridge crossing to steps leading up into the woods. This higher level path is particularly attractive in the springtime when the bluebells are in bloom and the wild garlic is at its

leading down some steps into a wood. Go right at the bottom of the steps on the waymarked path ahead, ignoring the left-hand path to a wooden bridge. Continue through the wood to the end of Rookery Pool and the adjacent Vale Royal golf course. Keep on, staying close to the fence on your right. After some distance the path bears left into an anglers' car park. Go straight ahead across the car park. Do not go onto the road but instead follow the

waymarked path at the side of the golf course. (Straying onto the course is not advisable as meeting a golf ball in full flight can be painful if not dangerous!!) The path eventually emerges onto the golf road at an imposing entrance to the golf club.

This golf club house, originally the home of Lord Delamere, occupies the site of Vale Royal Abbey, built in the 13th century and once the largest Cistercian abbey in the kingdom.

Continue along the road for another 100 yards, then cross with care into yet another anglers' car park at the side of Whitegate church.

Whitegate is a small but attractive village and is well worth the short diversion. It still has a village green, with a maypole used in the summer, a village school and an interesting church with a small spire.

Pass through the kissing gate on the right side of the car park and cross the field gradually bearing left with New Pool on the right.

New Pool is said to have been created to provide private fishing for the Vicar of Whitegate as part of his living – how times have changed!

Continue through another kissing gate by the concrete platform at the pool outlet, then go ahead and round to the left into the wood with a ditch, or leat, on the right. Ignoring any paths to the left, keep straight on and you will cross a series of timber bridges and boardwalks over a marshy area before arriving at a metal gate into a field. Turn right here to a stile with a sign 'Permissive Footpath'. Turn left on this permissive path and pass a small thatched brick cottage on your right. Continue round to another signpost leading you into a narrow path running alongside a lapboard fence behind 'Keepers Cottage'. Arriving at the edge of Pettypool lake turn left across a field, with the lake close by on your right, to reach another stile entering Forestry Commission woodland.

Continue ahead along this now wide track, again keeping Pettypool on your right, until the track bears left and starts to rise, with a footbridge visible across the stream at the foot of the deepening valley on your right. Keep on the main track for a further 350 yards and then look for a marked footpath on your right. This path can be a little hard to find but look for – and aim for – another bridge over a stream down on the right with a signpost beside it and steps beyond. Take the path down to the stream and signpost and turn left here to climb a short flight of steps.

Continue along the woodland path with the stream on your left before climbing to a level section through the trees to reach a stile into Cockpit Lane. Turn right on the lane and then go straight ahead for half a mile to the end to arrive at the Chester Road (A556). Cross with care, turn right past the garage and enter the Blue Cap car park.

The Blue Cap was formerly the Sandiway Head Hotel but now takes its name from the famous hound 'Blue Cap' who competed in a famous challenge at Newmarket. The Blue Cap is one of the oldest surviving hosteliaries in Cheshire.

Just beyond the Blue Cap Hotel in the centre of the dual carriageway can be seen another Sandiway landmark, the Round Tower (or Round Lodge): This was formerly a gate lodge to Vale Royal and was built by Lord Delamere in about 1816. A carriage drive ran across what is now Sandiway golf course; at the Whitegate end was Monkey Lodge, a name deriving from the plaster bas-relief of a monkey amongst its many ornate panels.

Go through the Blue Cap car park, and in the far right corner go up a flight of steps to St John's Way. Turn right on this road and then almost immediately left into Hadrian Way.

Hadrian Way was so named by businessman Tom Walton, of Forest Hey, who sold the land for development on the condition that it took the name "Hadrian" after his brand of paint, produced by his firm based in the north-east of England.

Continue on Hadrian Way round a sharp right-hand bend and at the end turn left into Norley Road passing Sandiway church on the left.

The foundation stone of St John's Parish Church's was laid in 1902, on land donated by the famous Cheshire architect John Douglas, a Sandiway man. The church is said to be one of his finest works.

At the cross roads just beyond the church, turn right into Weaverham Road pass the school and return to your starting point in the car park.

