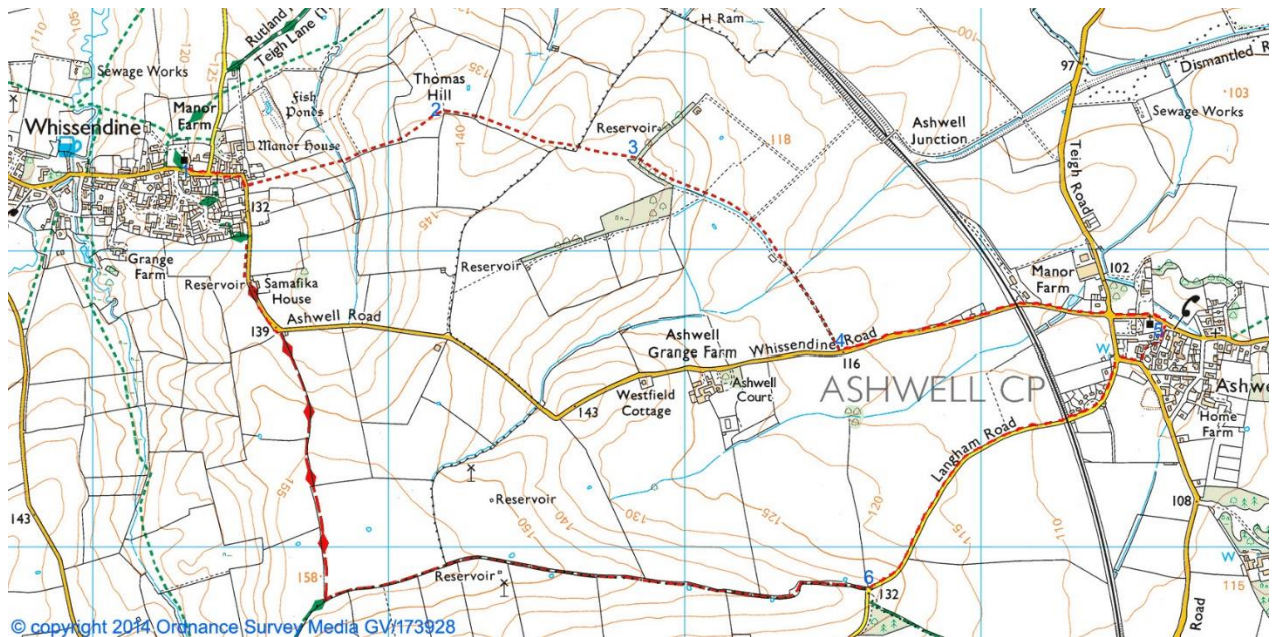


Whissendine Walks : To Ashwell and around

Walk by Graham Davies, History bits and Photos by Tom Digby

This walk takes you from the Church of St Andrew to the Church of St Mary in Ashwell, taking in field paths, bridleways, quiet lanes and a couple of level crossings. The walk is approximately six miles and involves some mild ascents (all ascents are mild in Rutland) which are rewarded with splendid panoramic views. You'll need just the one OS map: Explorer 234. There are plenty of stiles-sadly, not all dog-friendly-and some nettles, so long trousers are recommended.



WHISSENDINE TO ASHWELL

1. From the start outside Whissendine Church walk up to just beyond the sharp bend where Main Street becomes Ashwell Road. Opposite house Number 21, there is a stile and footpath sign. Go over the stile and walk down the field, going over a second stile on the way. At the very bottom of this field, a double stile takes the path over a small brook (nettle alert!). In the next field your way is uphill, with the hedge to your right. A yellow waymarker at a gap in the hedge at the top takes you into another field and a well-marked track leads to a further marker situated at a hedge corner jutting out from the right. You are now at the top of Thomas Hill: on a clear day there are great views, taking in a panorama from the Waltham Transmitter to the spire of the Church at Wymondham.



View from Thomas Hill

2. After the marker, hug the right-hand hedge as it takes you into a further large field. Keep to the right-hand hedge as you walk down this field (the track can be poorly defined here in winter, but is clear enough in crops). As you reach the right hand corner of the field, look out for a plank bridge hidden in the hedge a few yards ahead on your left. Cross this rather shaky bridge into the next field which you cross diagonally toward the coppice in the distance. A yellow marker situated on the edge of the trees shows you the way.
3. Once in the coppice, the path winds through the trees before emerging on the edge of another massive field. In the distance are the cottages marking the outskirts of Ashwell and closer to hand, an isolated barn. Walk along the right-hand hedge of this field for perhaps 30 yards to a marker which directs you right through the hedge and onto a cart track, which leads downhill toward the barn. Keep straight ahead on this increasingly well-defined track, ignoring the turnings, first to the right and then to the left. Shortly after the barn, the track meets the Whissendine Road, where you turn left toward Ashwell.
4. Walk on the pavement toward the railway crossing, passing what appear to be estate cottages (some have the initials 'CNN' embossed in their facias). Once over the railway, go straight ahead at the crossroads. About 100 yards along you will find the lych-gate which forms the entrance to *St Mary's Church*, which is normally open and well worth a visit.

History bit

St Mary's Church, Ashwell *The church was founded in the 12th century, and much of the structure dates from the 14th. The church was extensively remodelled in 1851 by William Butterfield, who is responsible for the rather charming lych-gate. St Mary's holds the tomb of Reverend John Adams, its one time vicar who was the first clergyman to be awarded the VC for his courage in rescuing soldiers under fire in the first Afghan war.*

ASHWELL TO WHISSENDINE

5. When you leave the church, turn right rather than left at the lynch-gate and follow a footpath sign which takes you around the back of the vicarage-the village landscape here seems scarcely to have changed in a century- and out onto the Oakham Road.



Turn right and at the sharp bend cross carefully to the junction with Langham Road. On your right is the well which presumably lends its name to the village, complete with a cross and inscription. Head down Langham Road until you reach a level crossing gate. Even walkers are requested to 'depress the plunger' which alerts the signalman to raise the gates for you if the way is clear-enjoy, it is one of the last in Rutland! Follow Langham Road for about half a mile as it rises steadily toward the ridge ahead. As the road flattens out, look for the sign for the ridgeway-*Loodle Lane*- on your right.

History bit

Loodle Lane is an Iron Age track, for much of its length it is effectively a Ridgeway, leading from *Borough on the Hill* at one end to *Stamford* at the other, passing *Alstoe* another ancient place that was the site of the Norman Motte & Bailey castle, before that it was the Danish meeting place, and was in use much earlier in the Iron Age. *Alstoe* is on the *Burley to Cottesmore* road by the water tower. Unfortunately, the stage to *Burley* is now blocked, as the footbridge which carried the path over the old *Oakham canal* was washed away some years ago and has never been replaced. The track through *Exton* was destroyed in quarrying for Ironstone.

6. Follow *Loodle Lane* along the ridge, first with panoramic views out to the right taking in the ground you have previously walked over and when the vegetation subsides, out to the left as

well, with the spire of Langham church glinting in sunshine.



Walk along the ridgeway for just over a mile. After the wooden fence on your right ends, keep following the path for a single field's length to a marker showing a path off to the right. This is the most straightforward way back to the edge of Whissendine and the Ashwell Road; turning left at a farm gate just before the first village houses on the left will take you on a back way to St Andrews' church once more.

