

A Walk in Historic Sowerby

About 2.5 miles or more (optional)

Drive to Thirsk on either the A1/ A68 (past Topcliffe), or on the A61 from Ripon. It takes about 35 mins from the south side via the Harrogate bypass and the A1.

From the A168, take the first route into Thirsk & Sowerby on Topcliffe Road, go over the east coast rail line, and pass Aldi on your right. After mini roundabouts take a right turn into Gravel Hole Lane, the site of an old quarry and municipal waste dump, and turn left onto Front Street. It's a few hundred metres to St Oswalds Church (c. 11th Century), and you park somewhere around there.

[History of St Oswald's Church, Sowerby \(stoswaldsowerby.org.uk\)](http://stoswaldsowerby.org.uk)

From the A61, pass the railway station in Carlton Minniot and the racecourse, coming to the vicinity of Town End, just after Tesco and Lidl. Town End has a mini roundabout and you go straight over along Sowerby Road and Blue Row, which turns into Front Street after 300m. Continue until you reach a small park and then open fields to your left, and park somewhere on the roadside, or further along outside the Church.

Please note that there is an abundance of paths in the Sowerby area, dating from times when farm workers had to walk to their work in the fields to the east and south of Thirsk. You can use these to extend your walk and it would be "impossible" to get lost.

Now, do you want your fish & chips before the walk or afterwards? One of these take-aways were favoured by Christa Ackroyd of ITV background – guess which one. For fish & chips before the walk go north along Sowerby Road and take the path between the park and The Flats, following your nose until you get into the market place, where you find the White Horse Cafe near the town clock. If you have parked near the church, you can visit either the White Horse or the Land & Sea. The Land & Sea is on Back Lane, about 50 metres off your route.

Now to the walk. You need to get to New Bridge, east of the market place on the other side of Cod Beck. It can also be reached by walking on a tarmac path past the leisure centre/ swimming pool. There is a bit of a wiggle through the back of the Three Tuns, now a Wetherspoons.

The walk starts a few metres east of Bridge Garage, and here you walk south along a footpath, continuing through gates in the middle of fields until you get to Lock Bridge, which was built by entrepreneurs during the 1800's as part of an under-considered plan to build a canal from the Swale at Topcliffe, which is a navigable river. Continue along the route of the beck until you come to the vicinity of Blakey Lane, where you see Blakey Bridge. You will notice here a sign of societal change - the bridge was built for horses, carts, and pedestrians, and has more recently been used by cars and vans. Most recently, hopeful continental lorry drivers have attempted the bridge route as a short-cut from the A168 or the A170, and either demolished the bridge or got stuck. Nowadays there are concrete blocks in place to emphasise the narrowness of the bridge, and those hopeful continentals have to reverse along winding lanes until they get back to the A168, causing aggravation for the locals.

We walkers go 50 m along the lane and turn right onto a path to walk by the beck again. Keep a lookout to you left, as you will be passing Pudding Pie Hill

[Pudding Pie Hill, Past and Present trail \(visitthirsk.org.uk\)](http://visitthirsk.org.uk)

This bowl barrow is maybe 2400 years old, and was partially excavated in 1855.

Continue along the beck side until you get to Worlds End, nearby the relatively new A168 Thirsk bypass. Cross the minor road with the beck to your right, go over the little bridge and turn right to walk north-west along Back Lane, where you might notice the remnants of a tannery, which once discharged an evil-smelling brown-black liquid into the beck 200m away. (The fishermen used to favour this area during fishing competitions because the liquid contained fragments of flesh, which attracted shoals of fish. But, you wouldn't take your catch home to cook, because many of the fish had lesions).

Back Lane isn't particularly interesting, so you can walk up Front Street itself. There are paths adjacent to the houses, leading to both St. Oswald's and the small park.

Further notes:

Like many country towns, Thirsk and Sowerby were self-contained settlements with:

- an auction mart and abattoir
- a number of shops selling clothing, workwear, groceries, and fresh coffee
- a manufacturer/ retailer of fizzy drinks
- a town centre mail sorting office and post office
- a foundry and manufacturer of agricultural machines (where Tesco now is)
- a railway spur and goods yard for the foundry and other heavy goods, including crops and carcasses
- a brewery and nearby maltings
- a milk processing plant
- a water-powered mill (Millgate), fed by a mill race from the weir at The Holmes

[The Holmes, Past and Present trail \(visitthirsk.org.uk\)](http://visitthirsk.org.uk)