

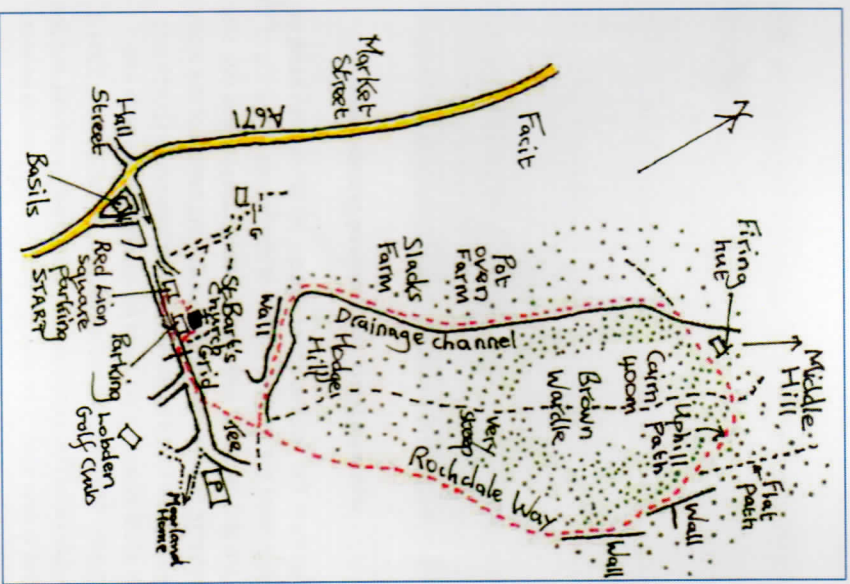
Whitworth is blocked off by Rooley Moor, but what a broad sweep of north-west England is visible from here on a good day – from the west: Fiddlers Ferry power station at Ashton-in-Makerfield; you might pick out the Chill Factor ski centre; Manchester city centre; Alderley Edge beyond; maybe Jodrell Bank telescope; Rochdale, obviously, but so many specific buildings to pick out; Oldham on its hill; and then the long long run of the Pennines dropping down to Derbyshire. ‘Wardle’ derives from the Old English (Anglo-Saxon) ‘ward hill’, meaning ‘guardian hill’: stand here, and you can quite see why – post a watch and no-one’s going to sneak up on Whitworth, are they – at least not from the south.

And after all those glories you need to get your more immediate bearings: you’re aiming pretty much dead ahead at the gap in the tramway. The only difficulties are the steep descent – just take your time; and the route-finding over the last quarter mile before the tramway – if in doubt, yomp.)

**In front of the tramway turn right along a rough double flagstone track, then right again down Whitworth Rake. At the cattle grid there’s a pleasant little detour, if you fancy adding five minutes. Turn up and right through a gate, and follow the path left on a gentle grassy descent around and above the church. If you look through the trees you get a charmingly unfamiliar view of the oldest parts of Whitworth. At the end of the path simply turn left down the concrete roadway to emerge at the bottom of The Square. JF



Fox. Watercolour by Michaela Elise



Key

- Fine guided walk
- - - Other footpaths
- S Stile
- G Gate
- B Bridge
- High land above 300m
- Land above 400m
- ☐ Trees

Map by Steve Flood

walking

WHITWORTH

There are good walks in Whitworth around Cowm Res, and into Healey Dell - but how about something a *bit* more adventurous? You know there are moorland paths, but how do you get to them; are you allowed; and can you get back without retracing your steps?

Well, you could be brave and just go...or you could take one of these guides. All are circular; all start from a place where you can leave a car; all fit comfortably into a morning or afternoon; all have ups (to give you views) and downs (obviously); and all have route instructions along with a clear, simple map and a small helping of history.

Whitworth, you'll find, has a fantastic network of paths that can be knitted together into satisfying walks. And then? Invest in OS Explorer map OL21 (South Pennines) and explore. You might even find some walks that are half as good!

WALK 4 - BROWN WARDLE

These walks are part of the Spodden Valley Revealed eco-museum. Visit: <https://spoddenvalleyrevealed.wordpress.com/>



WALK 4 BROWN WARDLE

Whitworth's most prominent hill rises to 400m. above sea level. This walk takes you round (in which case you've not much ascent once you're up The Rake) or over (which is a bit more of a challenge). Your choice - the views are tremendous either way, but the higher you go...

START WHITWORTH SQUARE

There is a limited amount of parking in The Square, so if it's full drive up Whitworth Rake – the road in front of the Red Lion – to a little parking area about 100 metres up. If that's full, drive further up, over the cattle grid and straight on, through the gap, then left to an area of hard standing with panoramic views. You'd have been walking up here anyway. [Start instructions at in this case.]*

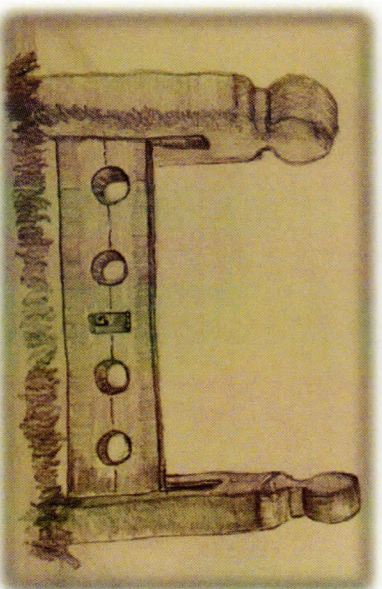
TIME An hour if you push – rather more (especially over the top) if you don't!

DISTANCE Not quite 3 miles

FOOTWEAR Sturdy/grippy – moorland walking with the prospect of mud and stony bits

Whitworth Square seeps history from every pore. The Red Lion dates from the 17th century. Look for the blue plaques all around. The Whitworth Doctors – the Taylors – plied their trade from the 1750s to the 1870s. Originally they were blacksmiths with a gift for healing fractures in animals. They began to treat humans, and were known as 'bone-setters'. Later generations were qualified doctors who built a national reputation for their herbal cures. See if you can find the Taylor burial vault and the old town stocks in the graveyard before or after your walk. Try

Whitworth Heritage Centre (North Street 07434703972) for lots more on this.



Whitworth Stocks. Pencil drawing by Linda Parker

Go up from The Square, either directly via Whitworth Rake, or by ascending the steps to the left of the houses at the top of The Square and using the path through the graveyard and one side or other of St Bartholomew's Church - the eeriest of the many gargoyles are found to the left. St Bartholomew's Church was built 1529, removing the need for worshippers to walk into Rochdale. The present building dates from 1850, but in 1984 it was gutted by fire. Local people raised funds to rebuild, but the church is now quite a lot shorter than the 19th century version.

Now join the Rake just below the cattle grid. Ignore the turn to Lobden Golf Club and keep on up, turning left either just before or just after the 9th tee at the end of the raised tramway. * The hill ahead is Brown Wardle. There are two paths that run parallel to each other heading just to the right of the hill: take your pick. They come together just before a wide gate that would lead you away to the right, to Watergrove Reservoir, so don't go through. Steer left, beneath a patch of black scree, which contains iron and coal from an old mine. The narrow, often muddy,

switchback of a path eventually brings you up between the steep hillside and a wall. Keep your wits about you here, because you are looking for another narrow path, grassy this time and bearing left, that will cross you over the drainage channel and lead you diagonally up, getting more obvious with every step, to the windy gap between Brown Wardle and Middle Hill.

It's worth pausing here, and looking back to your right.

Watergrove reservoir was constructed in the 1930s and a village disappeared. You'll also see numerous abandoned farms around the Watergrove valley. Prior to that clearance the valley had been a place of families, farming and industry. Beyond the valley you'll see Blackstone Edge, with the White House pub at its lip, where Yorkshire teeters to a halt rather than plummet down into Lancashire.

Where the path flattens you can't miss the broad eroded scar that is the path up to the top of Brown Wardle. *If that's not for you, stay on the path you're on. You'll start to dip, passing an ugly, bunker-type building on your right. This is a place where, in World War 2, the local Home Guard practised their shooting skills – people are still finding expended bullets to this day. Go left at a broad, chunky flagstone bridge. Under it is a sad-but-magnificent linear industrial ruin, a channel that one drained precious water off these hills all the way to local reservoirs. Only 40 years ago this channel was still a-gurgle but these days United Utilities source their water differently. Whatever, this channel is now your guide: simply keep it at your left foot and it will take you all the way back to the gap in the tramway. [Skip to **]*

If you do want to go over Brown Wardle, up the scar you go. There's a broad, obvious path over the flat top, from which, beyond Blackstone Edge, you can see Stoodley Pike. This Napoleonic-era beacon overlooks Todmorden. At the far, southern end of the path, pause again. The broad view over