

Conclusion with a Round Walk in Gillfield Wood

Gillfield Wood is, at present, at a point when its future could take either of two obviously related, but divergent courses: it could follow its initially intended role and be regarded as a commercial undertaking; or it could have its *raison d'être* altered to that of conservation area and amenity. I would prefer the latter course, but this would entail just as much time and expenditure in maintenance as the former option, without the eventual financial recompense.

I believe that the wood is invaluable as a refuge for wild plants and animals, and that this vital function should be maintained and broadened as the trees mature. As I suggested on page 67, some areas should be cleared to provide as many habitats as possible within such a small place.

The amenity aspect could be catered for, and people encouraged to visit the wood, by the publication of a small booklet, such as those for Padley Gorge and Rivelin Valley (by the Peak Park Planning Board and the Sheffield City Museums respectively). Such a booklet could include the wood on a round walk of the Totley district. Gillfield has always been noted for its quietness and charm by ramblers, and in the book "More Rambles Round Sheffield" by C. H. Chandler, published in 1915, reference is made in the following terms: "The path leads through a narrow but very pretty wood, full of flowers in the spring; with a babbling spring at the bottom. This is a secluded, peaceful spot."

I have drafted a brief round walk, which could prove most suitable for children especially. A fuller, more detailed version would be needed to cater for adults and teachers, and if this could be produced, together with a simple map of the route, and the public encouraged to use this, then I am sure that as they became aware of the wood's existence, and contents, that the need for such areas near large urban districts, would become apparent.

ROUND WALK: TOTLEY - GILLFIELD WOOD – TOTLEY (1975)

BACKGROUND. Totley is an ancient parish at the south-western extremity of the city of Sheffield. The village is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1087, and in all probability dates back much further than that date. Today it stands as a quiet suburb of Sheffield at the gateway to the Peak District. Until quite recent times, the village was part of Derbyshire, but along with neighbouring districts became part of the city of Sheffield in 1934. The South Yorkshire-Derbyshire boundary now follows the course of Totley Brook and is marked by a sign on Baslow Road near Totley Firebrick Works.

The walk begins at The Olde Crosse Scythes public house on Baslow Road, which is the terminus¹ of the 24 bus² from the city. There are toilet facilities available here.

Cross the road and walk down Totley Hall Lane³, which runs alongside the Post Office. *Totley Parish Church* lies off the road to the left. This was built in 1924. Prior to that date, the villagers had to travel to Dore Church. On the same side of the road is the old village school, which bears the date 1827, and was provided by D'Ewes Coke, the then owner of Totley Hall. Several old buildings can be seen down this lane, and it is well to remember that these are some of the few remaining buildings of the old village of Totley.

The lane now enters a section dominated by Totley-Thornbridge College of Education, and amongst them is the building which is indeed *Totley Hall*.⁴ This was built by George Newbold

in 1623 (this can be confirmed by the datestone over the front door). This building has been the residence of the squire for many years, the last being the late W. A. Milner. The hall and estate were purchased by Sheffield Corporation in 1944; the hall became the centre of a Teacher Training College specialising in Domestic Science. This college amalgamated with Thornbridge College in 1971 and is due to become part of the new further education system proposed for 1976.

Follow Totley Hall Lane to the end of the metalled road surface; climb over the stile⁵ and take the left-hand path. This path crosses two fields and enters *Gillfield Wood* via another wooden stile⁶. Take the main path which bears to the right (the left-hand path leads to Holmesfield over the white bridge which crosses Totley Brook).

¹ The terminus is now at the western end of Gillfield Wood which is part of the walk later on. A bus stop still exists outside the Cross Scythes on both sides of the road.

² Today's buses are No. 97 and No. 218 (Baslow)

³ Heading south.

⁴ Comments needed...

⁵ Old stile still present left of gate to fields. Its right hand side has a kissing gate with Radar key access if needed, built in 2019.

⁶ Two more kissing gates facilitate access to the wood along this path; one by the pond next to the veteran Oak, the other on entering the wood.

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Immediately in the wood on the right is a fenced-off area⁷ which used to be kept for the rearing of pheasants for the squire's sport in past years. The path crosses a small stream and then bends to the right, past a group of Silver Birch trees. Opposite this point is a small path which leads to a rectangular pond⁸ - this was a swimming pool excavated for the pleasure of the squire and his family. This has silted up and supports a flourishing population of Floating Sweet Grass (*Glyceria fluitans*). The pond is filled by Totley Brook, which, although shallow, supports a healthy population of Brown Trout, and a few Bullheads. Walking back to re-join the main path the stream is passed again and on the bank is a clump of Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*) which can be seen in flower in spring. Along the stream are a few Hornbeam trees - this is the hardiest of our native trees and was used for cogs and gears before the introduction of modern, more easily worked materials.

Once again, on the main path, walk on past the Larch plantation on the left (the delicate female flowers can be seen only in early spring). These trees have been planted within the past ten years. In May and early June, many small holes can be seen in the main path - these are the holes of solitary bees (*Andrena sp.*) which excavate a deep hole and store food for their larvae.

⁷ The area is no longer fenced off. FoGW have developed a glade in Pheasant Wood accessible to the right further along the path.

⁸ Look for a raised embankment now overgrown with various trees to your left. If you walk along the straightened section of path you have missed it.

The path is soon crossed by another footpath⁹ leading to Fanshawe Gate (the home of the Fanshawe family for many generations). There are a few large Beech trees on the very steep bank of the stream near this point. These are remnants of the wood before it was largely felled in 1943. Near the Larch plantations are some bushes of Broom which are ablaze with yellow flowers in summer. The footpath from Totley to Storth House is soon passed¹⁰ and in the nearby field (to the north) is a small disused quarry¹¹ which supplied most of the stone for the walls and buildings owned by the squire. In the Larch plantation to the left of the path is the remains of a small stone-built building¹² which was used by the squire and his shooting companions. Little remains of this now, but the walls are partly intact and the large roof slabs and lintels can be seen clearly amongst the general debris.

The path undulates from this point and in one of the water-logged depressions are one or two specimens of Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), a small buttercup. The open area just beyond this point has been planted with Sycamore and Red Oak saplings, both of which are species which have been introduced to this country (Sycamore in

⁹ The first of three north-south paths to do so.

¹⁰ Second north-south path.

¹¹ This, along with a few other places, gave local people access to Greenmoor Sandstone. See Chapter 4 (Geology) of Bob Warburton's diploma. FoGW also studied the stream in detail.

¹² Not so safe today December 2020

the 1600s and Red Oak from America more recently¹³).

Further on, the route passes between two Larch plantations, and beyond this point is the wildest part of the wood, where the ground rises steeply to the north where a large group of Sessile Oak trees dominates the broad expanse of this part area. The path turns gently to the right and the end of the wood is in sight. Leave Gillfield Wood by the stile and follow the footpath along the edge of the conifer plantation. Look back and find the original stile and gateway halfway between the present exit and Totley Brook. This exit was used until 1943 when the wood was clear-felled. Follow the footpath, cross the stepped stile in the wall, across another field and stile to emerge on Baslow Road. Cross the road to the footpath and walk right to return to Totley. (If the walk is to be extended then a further footpath exists near to the crossing point and leads to the Totley rifle butts¹⁴ and the small group of houses known as Totley Bents).

Walk back along Baslow Road, which was a turnpike road at the beginning of last century. Looking over the fields to the left, there are views of the moors, Totley Bents, Dore (Totley's traditional rival village) and the prominent air shafts of Totley Tunnel, which was constructed to connect Sheffield and Manchester via the Hope Valley. The tunnel is 6230 yards long and when built was the longest in the country. The War

Memorial lies off the path on the left, and a little further on Totley All Saints School lies below the road amidst green playing fields. The school was built in 1877 and helped to absorb the children brought into the parish temporarily by the 'navvies' employed in building Totley Tunnel.

Crossing Hillfoot Road, the walker may rest on the seat on a grassed section on the corner of Baslow Road and Hillfoot Road. This is the site of the village stocks, which disappeared many years ago. Having rested here the traveller may either retire to one of the two public houses or catch the bus back to Sheffield.

¹³ Red Oak was extensively used as a forest tree in Europe in the 19th Century and in Britain after 1920.

¹⁴ No longer in use, December 2020.