Holywell and Greenfield Valley Circular
Walk through time in the Greenfield Valley. Explore the ruins of old mills and factories and discover the history of a once important site of industry. More ...

To start the walk click 'next' below the table.

Walk details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start point:</th>
<th>Bankplace car park, B5121, Holywell town centre</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greenfield Valley Heritage Park</td>
<td>01352 714172</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ordnance Survey:</td>
<td>Explorer 265, Landranger 116 - SJ186760</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance:</td>
<td>5 km walking</td>
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<td>Time:</td>
<td>approx. 1.5 hours</td>
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<td>Extra info:</td>
<td>To see what the symbols mean, please visit the key</td>
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More info
Take in the waters at St Winefride's Well and enjoy the ruins of Basingwerke Abbey. Along the way look out for buzzards, peregrine and sparrowhawk as you pass through the oak and beech woods. There are a wealth of birds to be found in the valley - listen out for their song.

Getting there
By Bus: From the bus station make your way to Bank Place car park which is the start of the walk and the old Holywell railway line. For bus times to and from Holywell call 08706 082608 or click here for online information - www.traveline-cymru.org.uk.

By Car: Park in Bank Place car park, just off B5121 in Holywell town centre, walk down the hill and under the old bridge.

Directions to Bank Place car park: From A55 take the Holywell turnoff (Junction 32a) and follow A5026 into Holywell (Halkyn Road). At the traffic lights turn right and follow the road north. The road sweeps round Holywell town centre, passes a sign for the hospital and you turn right into Bank Place car park under the barrier.

From Denbighshire: Follow A548 (coast road) through Mostyn and turn right up Greenfields Road (B5121)
signposted for Holywell. Pass St Winefride's Well on the left and continue to the top of the hill. Turn left and then take the 2nd left into Bank Place car park under the barrier.

From Flint: Follow A548 (coast road) turning left at sign for Holywell (A5026) and go up Coleshill Street. At the top of the road turn right, pass the sign for the hospital and then take the next right into Bank Place car park under the barrier.

**Walk conditions**
The disused railway line is now an all terrain path. There are a couple of steep muddy paths down to the mills and weirs, and a number of detours suitable for buggies and wheelchair users. The return route has a slow but steady incline and wheelchair users may need assistance.

**Health & safety information**
Head under the archways

History around Holywell
Starting from the car park just off B5121 in Holywell town centre, head down along the path of the old railway track towards the double archway which bridges the parkland.

The geology of Holywell and Greenfield Valley was formed in the last Ice Age. The spring that rises at St Winefride’s Well that has been a place of religious significance since the 8th century, and the water from the spring has contributed to the area’s rich industrial past.

Large scale activity began in the late 16th century, when early industrialists attempted to utilise lead and other ore deposits found within the surrounding limestone rock.

Their efforts were not wholly successful however, and Brian Taylor, Chairman of the Friends of the Greenfield Valley Association, explains what happened:

"In 1590, Samuel Flete smelted lead with charcoal, causing fumes which de-nuded trees, killed fish and animals and caused a local nuisance. Local landowners and tradesmen demolished these buildings. A similar event took place in 1733 when Madam Kaye used a similar process but was closed down as a result of law suits brought principally by the Mostyns."

The height of prosperity for Holywell Town and the Greenfield Valley was around 1800. Holywell was the largest town in Flintshire with over 5,500 people living in the parish. There were over 60 shops, 20 inns and beer houses, and a post office.

By the later part of 18th century the valley had factories running from St Winefride’s Well down to the wharf at Greenfield, including corn, paper and cotton mills, copper-rolling and wire mills, and a brass-making works.

Water power

The water power in Greenfield Valley comes from the Holywell Stream; this was first harnessed by the monks at Basingwerk Abbey - using it firstly for fuelling mills and the grinding of corn.

The Industrial Revolution brought great advances in engineering, producing machinery that could harness water...
energy which greatly increased productivity and profits.

Water was the cheapest and most consistent form of power known at the time and could be used and reused as it passed down the valley. The Holywell stream provided water at a constant flow and temperature throughout the year.

The water from Holywell stream, the distance to the coast and the proximity of the port of Liverpool were major factors in the success of the milling and processing industries in the area.

The railway

This walk follows the old route of the standard gauge railway that ran down the valley. It was built in 1869 to revive industry in the area.

In 1912 it became a full passenger service known as the 'Little Train' and was the steepest conventional passenger railway in Great Britain. The line was eventually closed in 1954.
St Winefride's Well
At the fork in the path, turn back towards the left and go through the kissing gate. Continue along the path though the yard, and turn left on to the road to St Winefride's Well.

Brian Taylor, Chairman of The Friends of the Greenfield Valley Association, explains some of the well's history:

"St. Winefrides Well is a 7th century religious site. This being continuously a place of pilgrimage with royal connections to today and is known as the Lourdes of Wales."

"The castle that was built above the Holy Well - a small motte and bailey, not much more than a guard post - was built by Ranulf III, Earl of Chester 1210c and lasted only a year or two and was intended for the protection of pilgrims. Henry II rebuilt Basingwerk Castle 1157 and stayed there whilst visiting the well."

Through the ages
The well remained popular throughout skirmishes between the Welsh and English, and pilgrims continued to visit the waters during Protestant and Catholic monarchies alike. Various attempts were made to discourage visitors, including the closing of all lodging houses and inns during 1636 but these were largely unsuccessful.

The chapel complex was built around 1490, with many parts surviving today. In 1686 James II visited the well, and ordered that repairs were made after the complex was vandalised during the Civil War. It was subject to neglect again during the early 18th century, but regained popularity during the latter part of the century as a tourist attraction.
At the path junction, take the steps to the left hand side down to the Meadow millpond and weir. Continue down the steps past the Old Meadow Mill remains to the gates below.

Chair and buggy users can avoid the steps by taking the smaller path to the left and rejoining the walk at the gates.

**Copper processing**

Brian Taylor, Chairman of the Greenfield Valley Association, explains the significance of copper to the Greenfield Valley:

"The copper process during the 17th - 18th centuries had a profound influence on Britain's trade and was mainly the result of one man - Thomas Williams - The Copper King. As a result of copper being found and mined at Anglesey in 1768, he founded the Parys Mine Co. in 1774, taking the ore to St Helens or Swansea for smelting."

"The copper ingots then came to Greenfield Valley to be made into Neptunes or saltpans and items for the slave trade, and more importantly, into copper bolts and sheets. The bolts were made to a secret formula, which many countries, including Holland, France and Germany tried to steal, held copper sheets to the hulls of wooden ships."

"The sheets prevented the torada worm from eating into the hull and causing the bottom to fall out of the ship. Both the Royal and merchant navies had copper bottomed ships and it is credited that due to this practice the ships were faster and more manoeuvrable at Trafalgar, giving Nelson his victory."

"Copper sheets from the hull of HMS Victory can be seen at the museum in the Heritage Park. The sheets, pots and pans etc. were produced at both the Greenfield (Battery) Mill and Meadow Mill, Meadow Mill also later produced a patented printing roller for printing onto muslin and other cloths. The copper industry of Greenfield Valley certainly put GREAT into Great Britain."
Continue along past the second mill pond joining the tarmac road, past Lower Cotton Mill, Abbey Mill Pond and Wire Mill. Turn right at the Environment Centre through an open gateway onto the track leading though to the Greenfield Valley Site.

The Greenfield Valley has seven national heritage monuments - more than any other area of its size. Today, priorities in valley have changed; industry is no longer the driving force and the area has become a place of recreation.

A museum, environmental centre, and farm provide opportunities for visitors to learn about the industrial heritage of the area. An old village school has been reconstructed on the site, and information boards along the valley walk give details of the various mills and manufacturing processes.

The valley is managed by the Greenfield Valley Trust under agreement with Flintshire County Council, providing the locals as well visitors with a unique glimpse into the past.

The old millponds and buildings of the Greenfield Valley create a haven for wildlife, and the valley sides support a semi-natural woodland of mostly oak and beech, with a host of flora and fauna.

To date, 107 species of bird and over 20 species of butterfly have been counted in the valley. During the winter months Pochard, Tufted Duck, Little Grebe, Pintail and Mandarin Duck can be spotted on the ponds. Early morning visitors can include Common Sandpipers, Cormorants, and Heron.

The woodland areas contain all three British Woodpeckers, and five species of Tit can be seen... Buzzards, Peregrine, Sparrow Hawk, Merlin, Kestrel, and Red Kite may be spotted circling the skies, and there is a resident Tawny owl. Along the stream, look for Dipper, Water Rail, Grey Wagtail and Kingfisher.

In the summer months the woods are alive with bird song including Grasshopper Warblers, Blackcap, Whitethroat and
Chiffchaff. In the late summer Swallows, Swifts and Martins can be seen Darting around.

In the ponds there are carp, and eel that are reputedly 3 feet long. In and around the woods are Pipistrelle, Horseshoe and Daubenton’s bats, squirrels, stoats, weasels and hedgehog.

The butterflies of the valley are logged weekly during the period March to October as part of the national Butterfly Conservation survey and twenty species have already been seen including: Purple Hairstreak, Brimstone, Small Copper, Small and Large Skippers, Holly and Common Blue. There are also several species of Dragonfly including Common Darter and Common Blue Damselfly.
Basingwerk Abbey was founded in 1131 as a house of Benedictine monks from the Savigny district of France - it became Cistercian in 1147. The Abbey was a place where pilgrims were looked after whilst visiting the well, and was protected by Royal Charter.

The building of the Abbey led to the development of the thriving economic and artistic community in Greenfield Valley. The monks were the first to harness the Holywell stream using it to power mills and grind corn. There were also malt houses, weekly markets and annual fairs.

When Henry VIII ordered the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536, large sections of Basingwerk Abbey were dismantled. The site was later granted to Henry ap Harry of Llansana, whose daughter married one of the Mostyns of Talacre. During the 18th century, the Mostyn family made part of the abbey habitable, although it subsequently fell into disuse.

Stone from the abbey was used to build the first cotton mill, after which the site was left undisturbed as industry in the valley developed.

Before walking back along the old railway track take a look at the wooden sculptured gates - part of the Millennium Sculpture Trail, and as you return to Holywell enjoy the tranquillity that the valley affords today!

Thanks to: Brian Taylor, Chairman of the Friends of Greenfield Valley Association; Alistair Hemphill, Senior Warden of The Greenfield Valley Heritage Park; and to Ray Cooper, Roy Bennett and Sarah Massey from 'Walk about Flintshire' project. 'Walk about Flintshire' is part of the national 'Walk Your Way to Health' scheme.

There are regular guided bird-watching and industrial heritage tours of the area, which are led by volunteers of The Friends of the Greenfield Valley Association.

To find out more about the birds in the valley visit the Dee Estuary Newsletter.