



Route 22

Wem to Whitchurch & Grindley Brook



Wem High Street

The new Shropshire Way

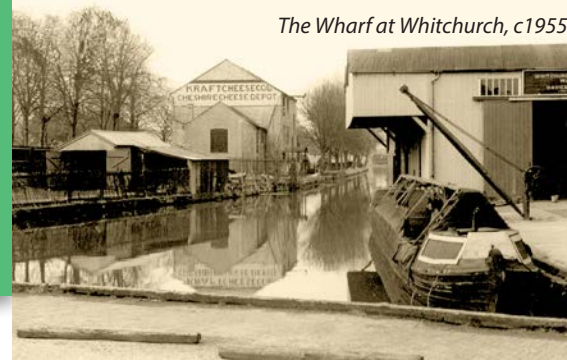
The original route of the Shropshire Way north of Wem went in a straight line up to Grindley Brook. Though direct, it bypassed such jewels as the butterfly haven of Prees Heath, uniquely juxtaposed with its wonderful truck stop cafes, the floating bogs of wild yet accessible Brown Moss and the market town delights of Whitchurch.

A wide variety of dwellings can be seen along the way. Ancient 'colonist' cottages (originally lone houses in a woodland clearing raised a couple of feet above wet ground) rub boundary fences with substantial ornate Victorian farm houses.

At Grindley Brook, just north of Whitchurch, there is an impressive flight of 'staircase' locks and a delightful tea room. This is a veritable Piccadilly Circus of long distance footpaths where the Sandstone Trail, the South Cheshire Way, The Maelor Way and of course the Shropshire Way all meet up.

Wem – so good they named it thrice

This small market town with Norman origins and the hub of seven roads is the 'home of the modern sweet pea'. It is famous for being successfully defended by its women against the Royalists in the Civil War.



The Wharf at Whitchurch, c1955

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No one quite knows whence its name derives. There are three options, so take your pick. From the old English: *Wamm* – a stain (marshy ground); *Wenn* – swelling or wart (a small hill); *Hwemm* – corner. Perhaps the first settlement was in a corner of a marsh on slight rise.

Leaving Wem heading north you will need to be quite observant to spot the delightful walkway/alley that runs parallel and to the west of the B5476. It has proved difficult to sign effectively so you will just have to discover it for yourself.

Brown Moss and Prees Heath

Brown Moss and parts of Prees Heath Common are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Attractive, though potentially invasive, woodland surrounds a number of mosses and pools. Prees Heath Common Reserve is managed by Butterfly Conservation. Its 'star turn' comes in June and July, when the rare silver-studded blue butterfly emerges. It has a remarkable symbiotic relationship with ants. The environmental challenge here is to reduce the fertility of the soil so that butterfly-friendly heathers can flourish once more.

The old control tower is an obvious pointer to Prees Heath's short life as



Brown Moss Nature Reserve

a wartime bomber airbase. If you like seriously big all-day breakfasts don't miss the truck stop cafés.

Whitchurch – mystery with chemistry

Whitchurch lays claim to be the site of the Roman town of Mediolanum. It is on a direct line between Chester and Wroxeter (*Viroconium*) and has a Roman-style street plan. The mystery of Mediolanum derives from the ancient writers who did not specify the location – they just assumed everyone knew where it was.

The route into Whitchurch from the south takes you along Dodington with its classical frontages, past the former canal wharfage and into Jubilee Park (1897). The path runs through the nature-rich Whitchurch Waterway Country Park, with an optional detour to the Greenfields Nature Reserve.

The canal arm that links the edge of town to Grindley Brook and the Shropshire Union is at the curiously named Chemistry – an area seemingly named by a combination of the personal name Chem with tree (old English for cross as in Oswestry – St Oswald's Cross) thus *Chem's Tree*.

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DIFFICULTY: some tricky field boundaries.



14¼ miles / 23 kilometres

