

St Margaret's Church, Abdon, SY7 9HZ (SO57538660) to St Catherine's Church, Tugford, SY 7 9HS (SO55718706)

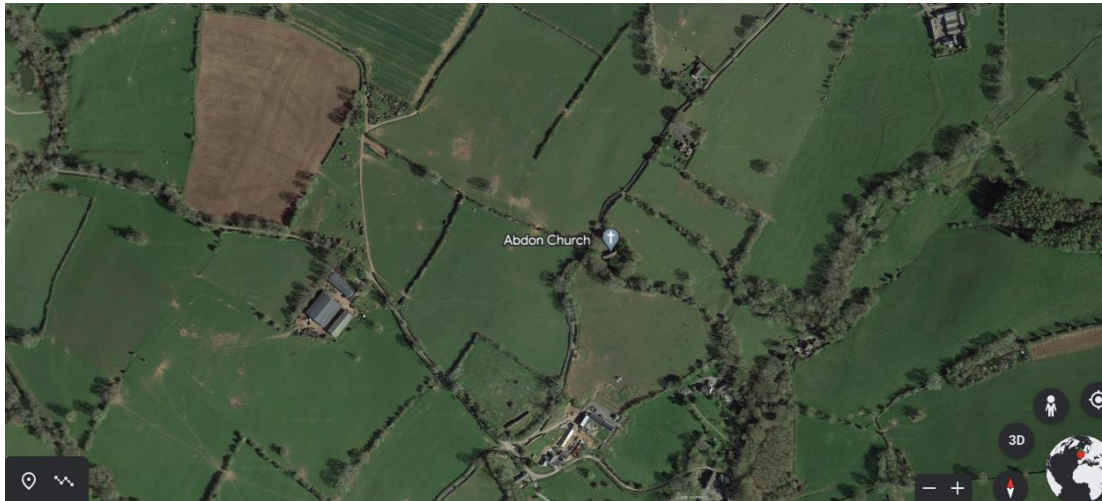
Use Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Explorer 217 or 1:50,000 Landranger 137

Distance: about 3 miles (4.8km) by footpath and 1.5 miles (2.4km) by road.

Those in groups with two (or more) cars can park one near St Catherine's Church and then drive together in the second and park in the layby beside St Margaret's Church in Abdon or in the car park of the Village Hall, a little way up the lane and on the right. A defibrillator has been provided. A contribution in the nearby donation box would be appreciated.

Check whether rain is forecast and if it is take wet weather gear and a drink. For some, a stick would be useful. There are a number of stiles along this route, some of which are awaiting repair so be careful as bottom steps might be missing. These will be repaired over the next year.

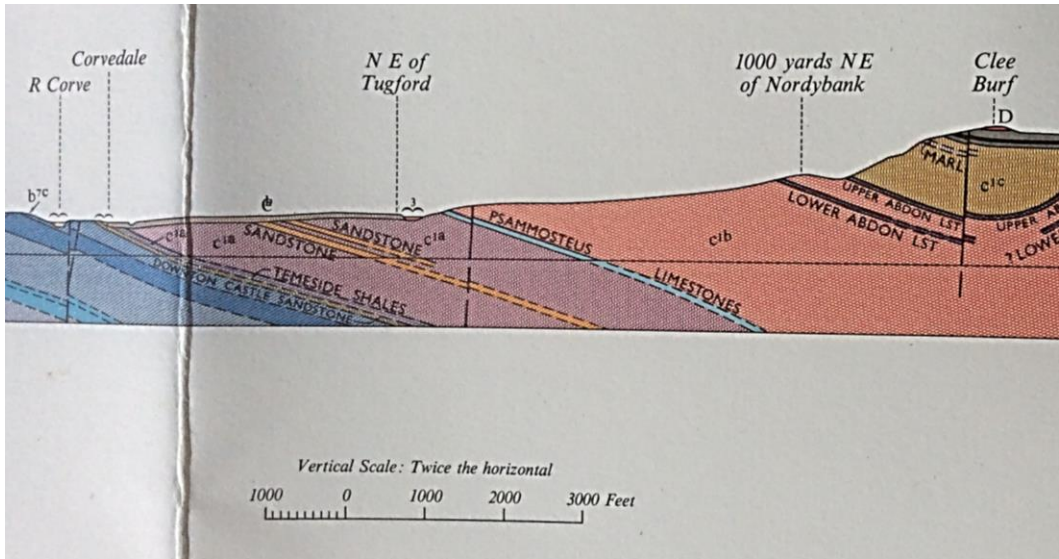
The route has been cleared but it is possible in places that branches and nettles have grown over the path. Cattle, sheep and horses graze the fields so dogs **MUST** be under close control. If your dog cannot get over the stiles, you will have to lift it. In places the route can be very muddy so use appropriate footwear (walking boots or wellies) and extra care needs to be taken to avoid slipping on slopes. There will be plenty of animal droppings to avoid.



Google Earth image of St Margaret's Church, Abdon

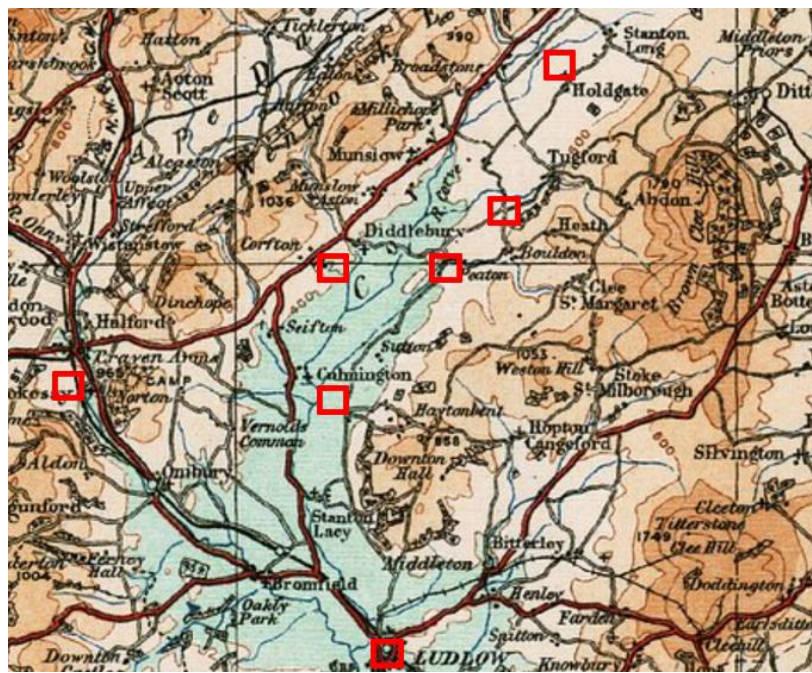
There is a shorter walk (about 1.5 miles/2.4km) along the road south down the hill from St Margaret's Church to the crossroads. Turn right and continue northwest down Marshgate (Lane), over Abdon Bridge and into Tugford where, once past Tugford Farm, St Catherine's Church is on the left.

The longer walk, about 3 miles (4.8 km) takes you over part of what geologists term the Heath Plateau, flattish land about 800 feet (c.243m) above sea level, with views over Abdon Burf, the Brown Clee and Upper Corvedale. The rock is predominantly the Ditton Series of Old Red Sandstone deposited during the late-Silurian, about 419 million years BP (before present) and the earliest Carboniferous period, about 358 ma BP, when this part of the world was south of the equator, roughly where Namibia is today.



Extract from Geological map of Church Stretton Sheet 166. (Pink is the Ditton series of Old Red Sandstone. Purple is Downton Series of Old Red Sandstone.)

St Margaret's Church dates from 1138, contemporaneous with St Catherine's Church in Tugford and Heath Chapel (a must-see for locals and visitors). The 1086 Domesday Book recorded the Saxon landowner of Abdon as Wulfwin who rented land to two villagers, two smallholders, two others. There were three slaves. The Norman landowner was Reginald the Sheriff of Shropshire who allowed Azo the Bigot to benefit from the rents. Once the Saxon landowners and peasants accepted foreign rule (there was a Norman motte and bailey castle at Holdgate), it was common to replace a wooden Saxon church with stone, brought from the fields and nearby brooks or rivers by the peasants. Which St Margaret the church was dedicated to is uncertain.



Medieval castles and motte and baileys in southeast Shropshire

If you have time, visit the site of the deserted medieval village of Abdon. It is situated in the field between the church and the Village Hall (what used to be Abdon School).

The lumps and bumps are house platforms and hollow ways (sometimes spelled holloways). A combination of environmental and economic problems led to the villagers to either die from disease

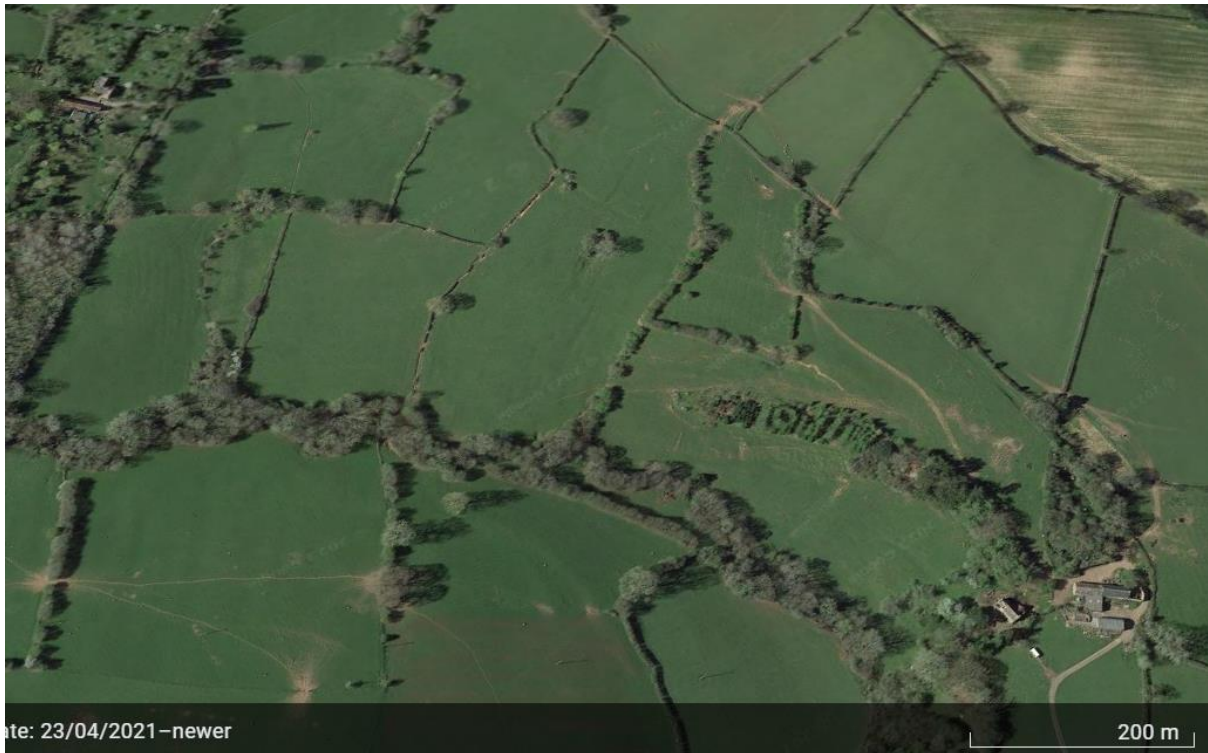
or starvation or be forced to move for employment reasons. The houses and vegetable plots were deserted. Useful stone and timber was 'robbed-out', taken to be used elsewhere. Other timbers rotted, the roof fell in and the plot was overgrown, leaving a mound or platform. The hollows between the house platforms are the paths or lanes. Deeper hollow ways, sometimes called Green Lanes when there is no metalled road, are found on steeper slopes where heavy rain has washed out the soil eroded by the hooves of cattle, sheep and horses and cart wheels.

There is a stile opposite the layby which leads west down Furnace Lane to Abdon Bridge. However, it is difficult to cross the fence onto Marshgate due to overgrown vegetation. This was the route taken by workers who camped in the deserted medieval village whilst working at the iron furnace in Furnace Wood near Abdon Bridge.

The recommended route is to take the lane by St Margaret's Church down the hill past the Red Barn (Abdon Rambler's Retreat, self-catering cottages) and the renovated old Rectory to the T-junction. Don't follow the lane left or right, or the track opposite to New House Farm, climb over the stile by the fieldgate on the opposite side of the road and follow the hedge down the slope towards Abdon Brook, a tributary of the River Corve. **Look out for circular white waymarkers on posts and trees.**

You can see some large flat stones which may have been carried from the bed of Abdon Brook to be used as upright boundary stones which have subsequently fallen or been pushed over. Before the bottom of the field you can see a deep pond, probably a spring used by the animals or a small sandstone quarry, and the hollow way running down from New House Farm, over the brook and up the opposite side of the valley towards Heath.

Cross the footbridge, taking care if wet as the wood can be slippery. Keep left and make your way up the winding track uphill, keeping the hollow way to your left. There may be tall nettles in summer. Knock them over with a stick. The small hazel coppice was planted about thirty years ago, replacing a field of pasture. Much of the Clee Hills was coppiced. Hazel trees were cut at the base to promote tall, straight, smooth branches which were used for fencing, poles, fork, spade and rake handles, brooms and charcoal (for Abdon iron furnace). Follow the waymarker signs up the hill with the hollow way to your left. The undergrowth has been cleared but be aware that there can be patches of reddish brown wet mud. The old field drains have been clogged by tree roots.



Google Earth image of route between Upper (top left) and Lower Norncott

When you see Upper Norncott, a 15th century farmhouse on your left and the drive up to Heath, turn right and cross the stile near the fieldgate. (There are plans to replace this stile with a single gate for walkers.) Continue westwards following the 800-foot [243m] contour to the opposite hedge where you will find a stile. Cross the stile and continue in the direction of the waymarker on the stile and walk through the gap in the hedge below the oak tree. Keep level along the northeast facing slope of the valley.

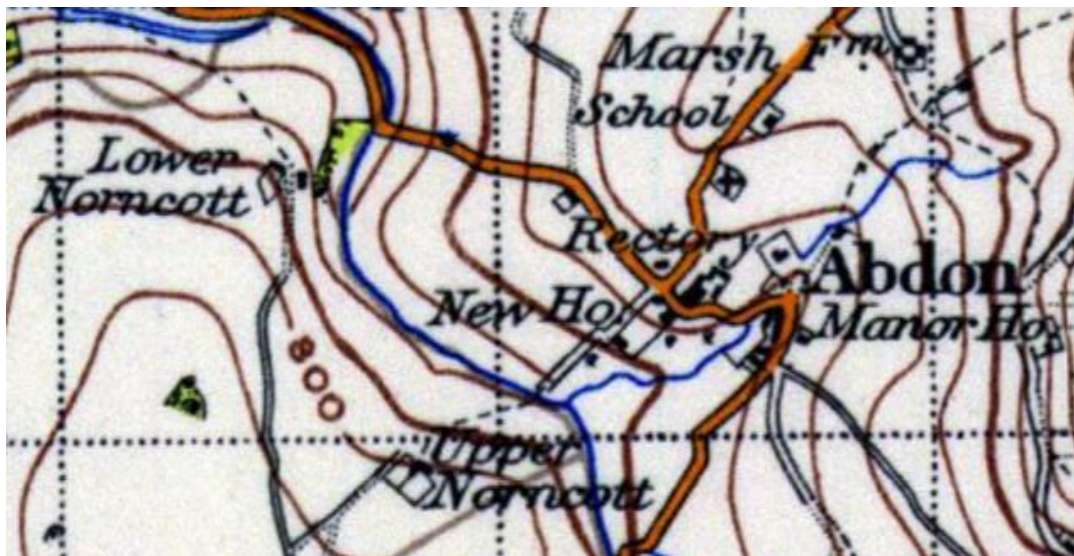
You will walk across a deserted medieval settlement between Upper and Lower Norncott with fine views over Abdon Burf, the highest hill in Shropshire at 540m and Upper Corvedale. Centuries of grazing and ploughing have removed much of the evidence of the house platforms but the lumps and bumps in the field show the location of houses and field terraces, flatter areas levelled for arable farming.

Follow the wheel-furrowed track down to a metal gate at Lower Norncott. There is a corrugated barn on the left and an abandoned medieval farmhouse on the right. Continue through the next metal footpath gate slightly to the right over the track and then walk along the side of the barn across some corrugated sheeting to another stile.

Keep looking for the waymarkers. One on the tree in the next hedge points uphill to several mature holly trees which hide a double stile with (currently) missing steps which need to be crossed. Keep to the farm track diagonally down the field to the opening in the corner near the hedge.

Underneath this slope lies a bed of what Victorian geologists called Psammosteus Limestone, formed during the Pragian Age (Devonian Period) between 412.4 and 410.5 ma BP. This calcrete deposit between 2m and 8m thick, is a soil-like cement, rather than a marine deposit, and extends along the western slopes of the Heath Plateau below the Abdon Sandstone. It was named Psammosteus after a jawless fish like a lamprey but recent geologists argue that the fossil was misidentified and have renamed the deposit Bishop Frome Limestone.

It has been quarried as a building material for centuries but during the 17th and 18th century it was used as a flux in the local iron industry. Iron ore deposits mined on the upper slopes of the Brown Clee were brought in sacks on the backs of mules or horses down Polegutter Brook valley, a tributary to Abdon Brook, to a furnace on Pye Brook in nearby Bouldon and another constructed in a quarry beside Abdon bridge. Charkers, charcoal makers, coppiced the local woods and supplied sackloads to the iron masters to be burnt. The fire, fanned by water-powered bellows, melted the iron ore. The melted limestone allowed a purer iron to run free leaving slag behind. The iron was used to make cannons and cannon balls for the Royalist armies in Ludlow and Bridgnorth castles. Later, the pig iron was sold to local iron foundries and blacksmiths. The industry ceased at the beginning of the 19th century and today there is little evidence of Abdon iron furnace.



Extract from 1-inch Shropshire 1921. The route follows the 800 feet (-c.250m) contour northwest from Upper to Lower Norncott.



Extract from 1-inch Shropshire 1921. Dashed line shows trackway from Lower Norncott. The iron furnace was in the coppice below the farm.



Google Earth image of route from Lower Norcott to Tugford

In the corner of the next field are two field gates. Go through the iron gate, not the wooden one, into a field which runs northwest down the slope. Furnace Wood is on your right. Cross the footbridge across Abdon Brook and go through a gate, ensuring it is refastened, and onto Marshgate, the lane to Tugford.

The rocks under the Bishop's Frome Limestone are the youngest beds of the Downton series of Old Red Sandstone, between 342 and 504m thick and deposited between 410.5 and 419 ma BP.



Google Earth image of St Catherine's Church, Tugford

Turn left and follow the lane past Tugford Farm to a track on the left leading to St Catherine's Church. Built in the 12th century, it was contemporaneous with St Margaret's, Abdon, and Heath Chapel. The 1086 Domesday Book made no mention of a church, only a mill, and six villagers, nine smallholders, four ploughmen and three slaves farming land belonging to Alwin. This area of upper Corvedale was controlled after the Norman Conquest by Reginald the Sheriff who allocated Tugford to Rainer of Thonglands and the monks at St Peter's Abbey in Shrewsbury. Which St Catherine the church was named after is uncertain. It is a Grade II listed building. The chancel and the west tower were added in the 14th century and the upper part was rebuilt in the 18th century. Inside the south doorway are two Sheela-na-gigs and unusual tomb recesses. The bells, restored in 2006, were installed in 1635. More details about the church's history can be found online.

You can pick up the first car, retrace your steps or walk back up the lane to St Margaret's.

Any suggested additions, deletions and photographs can be sent to Bernard O'Connor fquirk202@aol.com to improve the account for future walkers.

