Wootton's Musical Heritage

Welcome to Wootton Bridge. This leaflet is one in a series of five walks designed to help you explore some of our village's history and beautiful surroundings. Enjoy your walk.

Distance: Approximately 2 miles.
Timing: 1 hour.
Nearest car park: Brannon Way.
Bus routes: Ryde - Newport No. 9, Ryde - East Cowes No 4.
Suitable for disabled.
Start and finish: Mill Square at the bottom of the High Street.
Taken at a gentle pace this walk is easy going over good surfaces.
This walk commences at the slipway in Mill Square at the bottom of the High Street.

1. In days gone by this was ***Wootton Quay*** where both cargo and passenger vessels used to dock.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement and great preacher and hymn composer, twice landed at the dock and walked on to Newport and other places to preach. He first came here on 6 October 1758 and some twenty-five years later in October 1783 he made another visit to the Island, no doubt relieved to feel dry land beneath this feet after a rough crossing by wherry from Portsmouth.

Walk through Mill Square, past the Sloop Inn.

2. Before turning to walk up the High Street take a few steps up the unmade road in the corner of Mill Square where you will see two modern houses. This was once the site of the Unity Hall, where from the 1930s, the annual Christmas Show was performed by the local school. Also many concerts, dancing and other social events took place.

Now walk back into Mill Square and up into the High Street.

3. After a few steps you will see the laundrette on the other side of the road. Adjacent to this once stood the Queen Victoria Golden Jubilee Fountain. Originally erected in 1887, it supplied water and on the right hand side had a bowl to drink from, whereas the left was used for filling buckets. The monument was dismantled in the late 1960s and is now in the garden at number 80 High Street which will you will pass on the right hand side as you walk up the hill to the traffic lights at The Cedars.

4. Although on private land, the fountain can be viewed from the footway.

Continue straight on at the traffic lights and up the hill until you reach the entrance to the ***"Doorstep Green"*** in the recreation ground on the right.

5. Enter through the metal gate and follow the delineated footpath through the landscaped area.

During July of each year the local villagers get together here for the "Party in the Park", a fun afternoon fete followed by a 'music picnic evening', with local bands suiting all musical tastes.

6. Exit through the car park and turn right into Footways and then left into ***Church Road.***

7. After a short distance St Edmunds Church comes into view, at the end of Church Road. There has been a church on this site since Norman times. In 1892 an organ was purchased and erected in its present position under the Early English Arch which used to lead to the Chantry.

8. Adjacent to and behind St. Edmund's are the fields of ***Wootton Manor Farm,*** which were the site of the 1969 Pop Festival. This was the second of three Island Pop Festivals, the effects of which resulted in an Act of Parliament, which restricted attendance at any subsequent event.

The residents of Wootton Bridge that weekend were greeted by the tramp of thousands of feet and unexpected guests sleeping overnight in their gardens. A reputed 100,000 flocked to see the likes of The Who, Tom Paxton, Moody Blues, Pentangle, Julie Felix, and Bob Dylan and maybe rubbing shoulders with such celebrities as members of the Beatles and Rolling Stones, Jane Fonda, Elton John and Cilla Black. In 2004 The Who returned to the Island to play at the Isle of Wight Music festival in Newport.

Return back along Church Road and walk right along to the junction with the High Street. Cross over into ***Station Road*** and then take the first turning on the left into Fernhill.

9. A little way into Fernhill you will see an unmade road to your right and this leads to the site of what was Fernhill House, built in 1794, but sadly destroyed by fire in 1938. Carry on walking down Fernside Way and on the first bend is the entrance to Cycleway no. 22.

10. Beside the cycleway is lovely woodland known as the Ornamental Walk, which was the drive to Fernhill House. It is composed of a diverse belt of trees and shrubs. Here the composer Joseph Haydn records in his notes a visit to Fernhill House during the celebrations to mark Lord Howe's victory over the French Fleet in June 1794.

Albin's "History of the Isle of Wight" offers a fleeting glimpse of life at that time. The lawns and gardens of Fernhill House were crowded with respectable parties of Island inhabitants and inside was hospitality loaded with tables of delicacies and refreshments.

Follow the cycleway down to the Mill Pond. There are distant views across to Havenstreet and Ashey Down. When you reach the bottom of the hill, turn left onto bridleway N1 until you reach the junction with the High Street.

Cross the road with care and walk into Mill Square and on to the Sloop Inn.

11. During the 1960s ***The Sloop Inn*** was the venue of the Island Folk Club. Through its front door passed the likes of Billy Connelly, Gerry Rafferty, Ralph McTell, Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger. Members of Steeleye Span and Fairport Convention also appeared in various combinations.

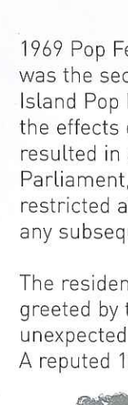
Through the 1960s the legendary Island Folk Song Club was held every Friday night in the Old Boathouse at the back of the inn. The pub itself has changed a lot since those days but at the far end of the bar on the left overlooking the creek is where the performers would have stood.

In 1967 there was the phenomenon when the Folk Song Club was involved with a move for independence due to the Maud Report on Local Government, which if implemented, would have placed the Island under the control of Portsmouth. That was too much for most Islanders and a move for independence was planned.

The Folk Song Club brought it to the forefront of local politics when Lauri Say wrote the song "UDI for IOW", a rousing call to arms, with the chorus:

"We'll pick up our pitchforks and give
them such a fight when we declare
independence on the Isle of Wight!"

With that, the walk ends here!



Acknowledgements

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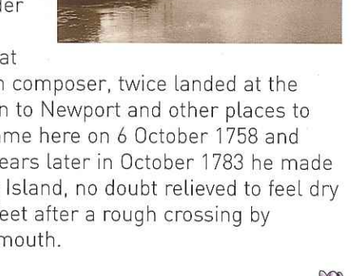
Walks about Wootton

MUSICAL HERITAGE

Local Heritage initiative

People and places



Hidden Britain South East

Heritage Lottery Fund

The Countryside Agency

Wootton Bridge PARISH COUNCIL

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