



Shere and Gomshall: Two Tillingbourne Villages

Distance: 5 km=3 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Surrey

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Author: Fusszweig

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Refreshments: Shere, Gomshall

Map: Explorer 145 (Guildford) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Villages, sheep meadows, water, woodland, high hills, views

In Brief

The two historic villages of Shere and Gomshall sit snugly in the Tillingbourne Valley at the foot of the North Downs. They are tremendously popular with trippers, although most visitors know little about the history of these two villages.

The North Downs are a huge draw for hikers. The North Downs Way is the best-known long-distance route but this walk makes use of some of the many lesser-known paths that go through National Trust woods. Because of the open views and clear paths, this is an excellent walk for all seasons.

There are four excellent pubs on this walk, all serving food. Booking may be necessary on a weekend at the *Gomshall Mill* (ring 01483-203060), although it's worth noting that the more rough-and-ready *Compasses* in Gomshall is also very highly regarded. In addition, there are restaurants in both villages.



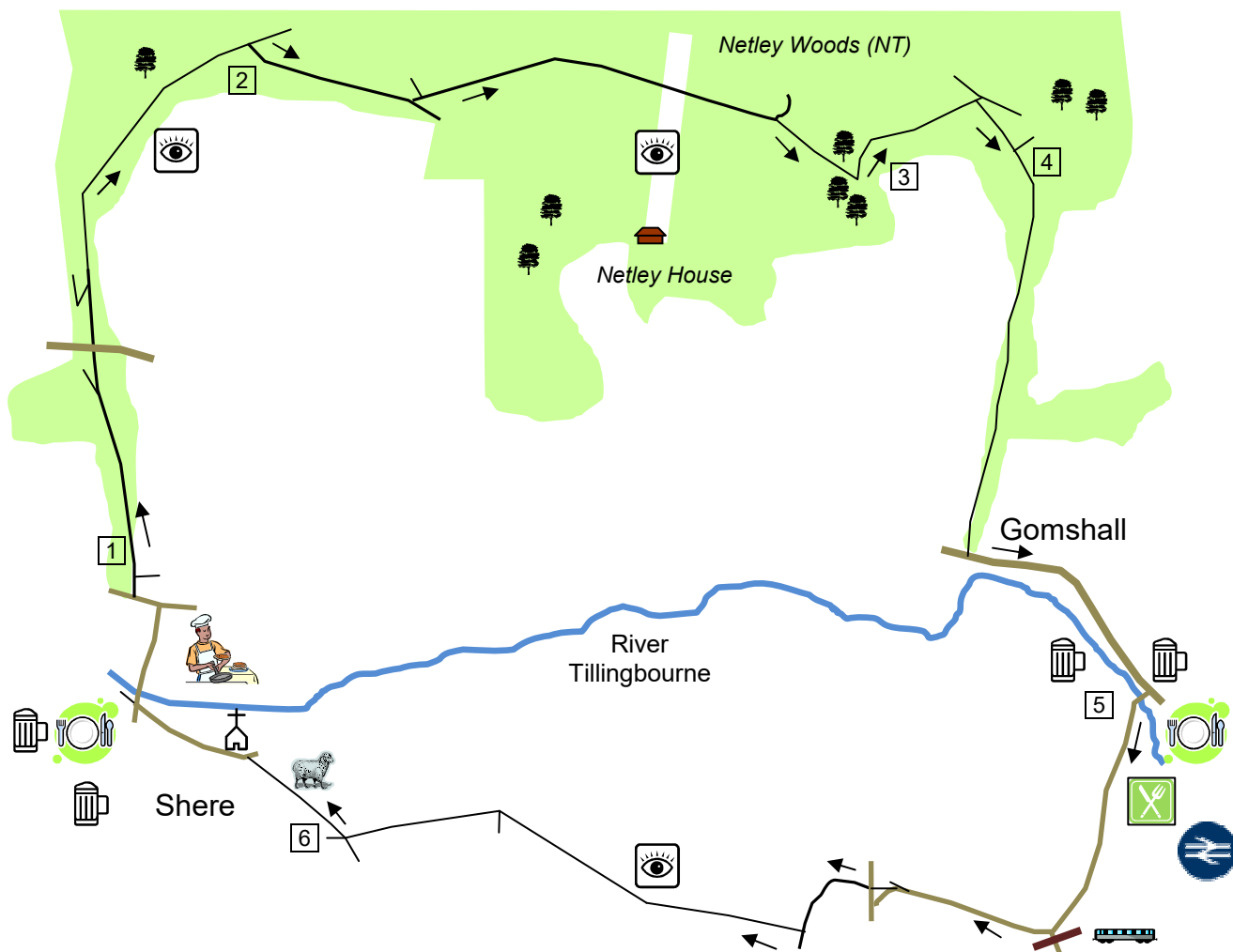
All the paths on this walk are well-made and clear of any nettles or undergrowth, so wearing shorts is not a problem. There is relatively little by way of water or mud along the paths, so except in a very wet winter, boots are only optional. Your dog will also enjoy this walk.



The walk begins at **Gomshall Railway Station** or the car park in **Shere**, Surrey, postcode **GU5 9HF**. The village and its car park get very congested at popular times, so you may find it easier to park in Gomshall which has plenty of roadside parking. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

If you are beginning this walk in **Gomshall**, begin at section **5**. If you are beginning at **Gomshall Railway Station**, go down the approach road, keep ahead on the main road and turn **left** at the *Gomshall Mill*. (If alighting on the side coming from Dorking, you can exit through a narrow footpath-cum-drive and turn **right** on the road instead of using the space-age footbridge.)



The River Tillingbourne runs from its source near Tilling Springs north of Leith Hill to the River Wey in Shalford near Guildford (see the “Chantries, Shalford, Blackheath” walk in this series). It runs through Friday Street, Abinger Hammer, Gomshall, Shere, Albury and Chilworth. The Tillingbourne runs at right angles to the natural slope of the land, seeking out the sandy, less-resistant rocks. (The geological term for this is a “subsequent stream”.) It is joined by four principal tributaries: the Friday Street stream at Wootton House; the Holmbury St Mary stream at Abinger Hammer; the Sherbourne Brook from the Silent Pool and Sherbourne Pond; and the Law Brook near Albury. In history, the river was an unfailing power source for innumerable water mills (including gunpowder and paper). It supported trout fisheries (and still does, by a habitat improvement scheme) and almost rivals those famous Hampshire chalk streams (see the “Hampshire” walks in this series).

1 From the Shere car park, without exiting to the village, take a footpath near the entrance, by a strong metal barrier. This sunken path runs through a woodland of tall maples. [2015-18: this path is constantly flooded by a water leak (only *just* bypassable); please add your voice to the Thames Water complaints dept. at 0800-714614 quoting job ref. 101674658.] Soon you will see an underpass ahead with the sound of the main road. Keep **right** to go under the road. Just 15m after the underpass, ignore a steep path up the bank on your left and continue ahead on this hard chalky path which begins to rise steadily. After 250m, a thinning of the trees on your right gives you some views over the valley as your path begins to curve right. After a total of 450m from the underpass, you reach a very definite junction on the right, with a massive sawn trunk and a wooden barrier.

2 Turn **right** at this junction, following a yellow National Trust (“NT”) arrow, onto a handsome wide path under yew trees. You are in Netley Woods, part of a huge area of NT woodland stretching along the North Downs. After 200m, you reach a major junction of paths by a notice board and a WW2 pillbox, one of a large defensive line built at the start of that war. Take the **left** fork, heading a fraction uphill, immediately ignoring another path on your left, both bearing a “NT” arrow. Suddenly, after nearly 300m, you reach a wide vista looking down to Netley House and beyond, with a well-placed bench seat. A memorial stands here to two sons of the family killed in WW1. Like an ominous shadow, another pillbox from the war that followed is poised on the slope above. In 200m, you pass close to another pillbox. Keep **right** here on a narrower downhill path, following a NT arrow. In 100m or so, you come down into a deep sloping forest of tall beeches and maples.



3 Turn **left** uphill as directed by the yellow arrow. In 50m your path bends right, continuing uphill to run near the top of a large meadow. In about 150m, you reach a junction of paths by a post clearly visible ahead, marked with several yellow arrows. **Care! the next turn is important.** Do *not* turn right on a level path directly beside the marker post. Instead, turn sharp **right** on a narrower path, slightly downhill, just 2m **before** the marker post. This path will lead you direct to Gomshall.

4 In 50m or so, you are joined by an official footpath coming from the left. The path goes down under yews and beeches. You see a house and garden on your left and that large meadow on your right. After descending further in this wide band of woodland, you eventually come down four steps to the main road in Gomshall. Turn **left**, passing a filling station with its own shop and soon reaching the centre of the village with its pubs and mill house. Turn **right** over the Tillingbourne bridge passing the *Gomshall Mill*.



Gomshall is a favourite excursion for families and trippers, with its pubs, the “Compasses” and the “Gomshall Mill Inn”, a converted mill house with the stream running beneath the floor. Note the pillory! A little further down the road, is the Lavender Goose shop and café. A fascinating history of the village will be found in another walk of this series “Gomshall and the North Downs”.

5 Follow the lane past the cricket pitch on your right and another open space on your left, past more houses until you meet a railway arch on your left. Avoid the railway arch by keeping **right** on High View. Follow this road, passing more open space on your right, to a road junction. Leave the road here where it curves off left and cross straight over to a track, Gravelpits Lane, next to the historic *Monks House*. Stay on the lane as it bends left. After 120m, just before a house with a double garage, turn **right** on another

waymarked track, keeping right alongside a centre line of trees. In 200m, you pass an open field. You will notice that almost everyone goes through a gap into the field on the right and walks parallel, gaining better views; you have to re-join the footpath before the next hedge. The tip of Shere church comes into view. After the next field, at the corner of a wire fence, fork **right** at a marker post, heading for the church.

- 6 Your path descends between sheep pastures and comes down to a road in the village. Keep left beside the church, passing some typical cottages. The Norman church at Shere is definitely not to be missed.

The Church of St. James is spacious for such a small village and dates back to 1190. The spire, added a century later, is a "broach spire", i.e. one built atop a square tower. The lichgate was designed in 1902 by none other than that great architect Edwin Lutyens. In 1258, the Bishop of Winchester ordered some of his men to transport some of the church's valuables to France. Some local men tried to stop the theft and one of them was killed at what came to be known as the "Battle of Shere". Inside the church on the north wall is a small four-pointed aperture (a "quatrefoil") revealing a small cell which housed an "anchorite" (a walled-in hermit). The "Anchoress of Shere" was a certain Christine Carpenter. A "squint" window enabled her to view the church services whilst a grill in the outer wall was a delivery method for nutriments. In 1332, after three years in voluntary isolation, she left the cell (how is not clear) and later relented.



You quickly reach the centre of the village. The car park where the walk began is reached by turning **right** past the tea shop, loo and other little shops. But, before that, you will want to spend some more time looking around this delightful village.

The prosperous village of Shere appears in the Norman Domesday Book as "Essira" (or "Essire"). Its wealth came from two sources: the Tillingbourne River and the sheep that you see in the meadows. The river powered a series of mills and forges. The sheep produced valuable wool and many were stolen, especially in the 1830s when one of the gangs met in the "White Horse" Inn, blatantly feasting on contraband meat. The many-styled cottages of Shere go back to the 1400s. The timber-framed houses are from the 1500s and 1600s, especially along Lower Street beside the Tillingbourne. The great architect Edwin Lutyens designed various buildings in Shere, including the Manor House Lodge and Western Cottages in Upper Street and the building in Middle Street, now used as a Tea Room. The public loo used to be the village Fire Station. "Kingham's" was formerly known as "Asters Tea Shop". The "White Horse Inn" was a house called "Cripps" till it became an inn in the late 1600s. The "William Bray", was known as "Cook's Beer House", then the "Prince of Wales" until it took a name from the Bray family, who have been Lords of the Manor of Shere since 1487.

Getting there

By car: The starting point is Shere village (postcode GU5 9HF). Take the Dorking-Guildford road (A25), and turn off at the first signpost for Shere. Park in the main car park which is signed with a blue **P** symbol near the T-junction at the centre of the village.

By bus: Nos. 22, 25 or 32 from Guildford to Shere village. Check the timetables.

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