

HALESWORTH NEW REACH TRAIL

An easy
walk of
about
one mile



The New Reach is a section of waterway that passes through the centre of Halesworth. It once formed part of the Blyth Navigation, which ran for seven miles from Halesworth to the port of Southwold. The Navigation was constructed in the middle of the 1700s, following the course of the River Blyth. Sections were straightened and dredged, new lengths dug parallel to the river, banks strengthened, and five new locks were built. The construction was financed by businessmen who wanted to develop commercial traffic in and out of the growing industrial and market town of Halesworth.

THE TRAIL

START AT THE WOODEN FOOTBRIDGE BY BLYTH MEWS

1 The Town Quay

The new houses you can see from the bridge form part of the Langley's Quay development. This goes through to Quay Street and is on the site of the original Town Quay, opened in 1761. Wherries (large wooden sailing barges of up to 35 tons) once unloaded cargoes of coal, timber and other heavy goods here, and in return took malt and grain down to Southwold harbour for onward transit to London. The large basin where the wherries moored was on the east side of the quay which housed grain bins, a lime kiln, coal stores, and a coke oven, as well as office and other buildings. The basin was filled in and in 2010 the few remaining buildings demolished to make way for new homes, although several impressive Georgian tradesmen's houses still face the original entrance on Quay Street.

Patrick Stead Lock

Beneath the bridge where you are standing are the remains of the lock, which marks the beginning of the trail. The lock formed a navigable barrier

between the New Reach and the Town River which itself forms part of the River Blyth. The gates of the lock have been removed, but the brick walls, base and sill (where the river overflows into the Reach when the water level rises) can still be seen. The lock was built in 1837, and enabled wherries to sail up river to Patrick Stead's maltings in Bridge Street. In the 1800s, growing demand from the London breweries for Suffolk's celebrated pale malt led to the building of several new and bigger maltings in the town. These maltings were in turn heated by coal also brought by water from Southwold harbour.

FOLLOW THE COURSE OF THE WATERWAY FROM THE LOCK

Here you can join the beginning of the towpath. The bend in the Reach marks the entrance to the original quay basin. The waterway silts up here when the river overflows the lock, and forms a bank of sandy soil. The Environment Agency dredges the New Reach every few years for flood prevention. Continuing on the towpath, with a willow hedge on the opposite bank, you pass the Town Park and skateboard area on your right and then arrive at a footpath that leads to River

Lane and the town centre. **2**

There were once commercial buildings here, and looking towards River Lane you can see where there was a cut to take wherries to George Maltings, which have now been converted to housing. The steps from the towpath into the Reach were installed for canoeists in 1992. This spot also marks the beginning of the Millennium Green, some 50 acres of open space that was acquired by a local trust in 2000. The all-weather track leads to a railway level crossing at Mells and is used by cyclists and walkers all year round.

CONTINUE ALONG TOWPATH

Walking along the towpath with the railway embankment on your left (don't forget to wave) you will see a ditch on the opposite bank that is fed by spring water, which in turn feeds the New Reach. After 100m you approach

3 White Bridge,

which carries a track from the waterway up to Holton Road. The track passes under two bridges, one of which carried the Southwold Railway from Halesworth to Southwold until 1929. The sluice under White Bridge maintains the water level of the New Reach at about 2-4 ft. At times of high rainfall, the Reach comes over the towpath and floods the neighbouring water meadows on the Millennium Green. Below the bridge there is a wooden bench where you can see the sluice and in summer admire the water lilies.

CONTINUE ALONG TOWPATH

You are now approaching a railway bridge **4**. It was this railway (opened 1854), together

with the silting of Southwold harbour, that sounded the death knell for the Blyth Navigation, when heavy haulage moved from canals to railways which were faster and more efficient. Go through the gate and join the all-weather track. After 100m, go through another gate on your left and pass under a small railway arch (no. 462) which opens onto Blyth Meadow where cows graze in summer. The Reach is on your left and re-joins the Town River. There is no visible towpath from this point. Follow the course of the river until you reach a fingerpost and stile. This is the site of Halesworth Lock.

5 Halesworth Lock,

built in 1760, is an early example of English canal engineering. All that remains today are the original brick walls and some timber posts. The lock was used to raise the wherries onto the New Reach section and the river looped around the lock. The loop was filled in and the river straightened in WWII to provide more farmland but you can still make out its course. There were four more locks between here and Southwold, now sadly gone, but it is still possible to follow the river on foot to Blythburgh and Southwold. After the New Reach fell into disuse towards the end of the 1800s, it continued to be used for pleasure boating and as a local amenity. Today the New Reach is maintained by a group of local volunteers and remains an important feature of the town. And here our trail ends. Re-trace your footsteps to take you back to the Town Park.

HALESWORTH NEW REACH TRAIL



The wildlife of the New Reach

A summer walk along the New Reach will offer the chance to see a variety of wildlife. The patch of water lilies beside White Bridge is an impressive sight and attracts a variety of dragonflies and damselflies. You can also spot the more modest flowering water-plantain, water forget-me-not and branched bur-reed. A number of invertebrates - such as backskimmers, pond skaters and the great diving beetle - live under and on the water. In the evening, you may be rewarded with the colourful sight of glow worms on the far bank. These small creatures share the New Reach with larger animals such as pike, water vole, kingfishers (watch out for a flash of blue) and grey wagtails, who nest under the bridges during the spring. If you're very lucky you might see an otter.



Patrick Stead: local businessman and benefactor

In 1821 Patrick Stead, a Yarmouth maltster, bought his first maltings in Halesworth and later built several more. Other businessmen followed his example and the town became a prosperous malting centre, largely due to the quality of the local water and barley. Stead became a River Commissioner in the 1830s and built a new lock and extended the Town Quay and basin to bring in the coal and other supplies for his expanding business. He eventually supplied Trumans brewery and others with malt from his new steam maltings on the quay, but in 1849 could see that the canal was failing, sold up, and retired to Scotland. His family fortune was eventually bequeathed to the town of Halesworth and was used to build the hospital that today bears his name.

Key

- - - New Reach Trail
- Millennium Green
- Key Trail Points
- All Weather Track
- Water
- Railway

For more information, go to:
www.millenniumgreen.halesworth.net
www.halesworthmuseum.org.uk