



## Wetherby and the River Wharfe

**Around a handsome country market town and along a stretch of the mature River Wharfe.**

**Distance** 3.5 miles (5.7km)

**Minimum time** 2hrs

**Ascent/gradient** 65ft (20m)

**Level of difficulty** Easy

**Paths** Field paths and good tracks, a little road-walking, 1 stile

**Landscape** Arable land, mostly on the flat

**Suggested map** aqua3 OS Outdoor Leisure 289 Leeds

**Start/finish** SE 405479

**Dog friendliness** No particular problems

**Parking** Free car parking in Wilderness car park, close to river, just over bridge as you drive into Wetherby from south

**Public toilets** Wetherby

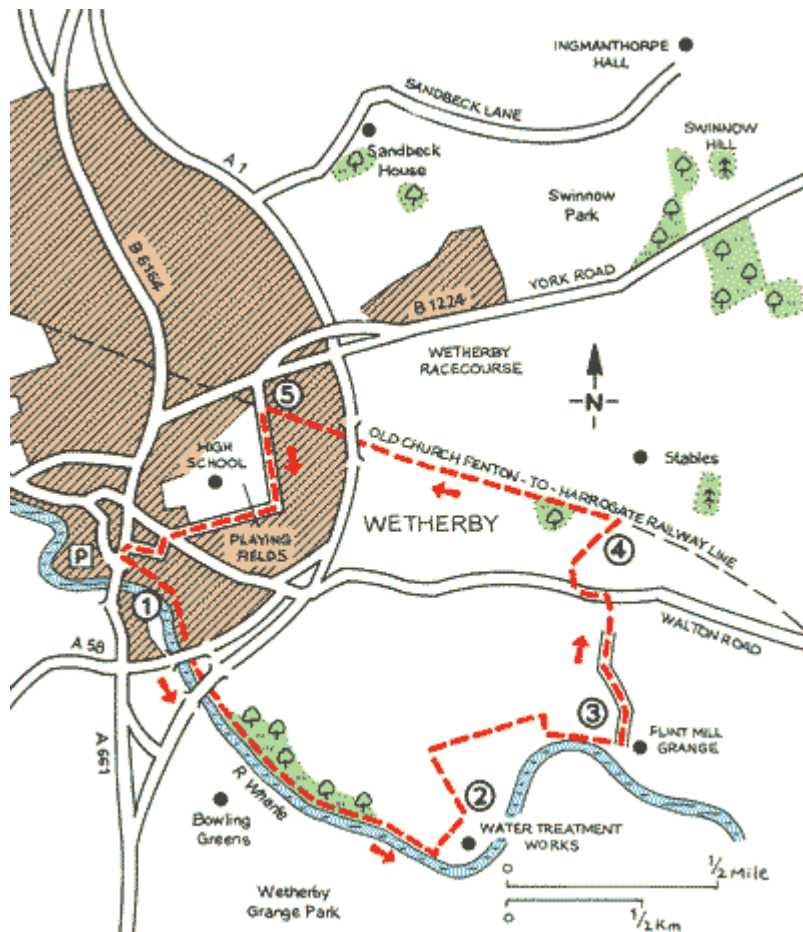
Wetherby, at the north east corner of the county, is not your typical West Yorkshire town. Most of the houses are built of pale stone, topped with roofs of red tiles - a type of architecture more usually found in North Yorkshire. With its riverside developments and air of prosperity, the Wetherby of today is a favoured place to live. The flat, arable landscape, too, is very different to Pennine Yorkshire. Here, on the fringes of the Vale of York, the soil is rich and dark and productive - the fields divided up by fences and hedgerows rather than dry-stone walls.

The town has a long history. A brief glance at an Ordnance Survey map reveals that Wetherby grew up around a tight curve in the River Wharfe. Its importance as a river crossing was recognised by the building of a castle, possibly in the 12th century, of which only the foundations remain. The first mention of a bridge was in 1233. A few years later, in 1240, the Knights Templar were granted a royal charter to hold a market in Wetherby.

At Flint Mill, visited on this walk, flints were ground for use in the pottery industry of Leeds. The town also had two corn mills, powered by water from the River Wharfe. The distinctive - and recently restored - weir helped to maintain a good head of water to turn the waterwheels. In general though, the Industrial Revolution made very little impression on Wetherby.

The town grew in importance not from what it made, but from where it was situated. In the days of coach travel, the 400-mile (648km) trip between London and Edinburgh was quite an ordeal for passengers and horses alike. And Wetherby, at the half-way point of the journey, became a convenient stop for mail and passenger coaches. The trade was busiest during the second half of the 18th century, when the town had upwards of 40 inns and alehouses. Coaching inns such as the Swan, the Talbot and the Angel catered for weary travellers and provided stabling for the horses. The Angel was known as 'the Halfway House' and had stables for more than a hundred horses. The Great North Road ran across the town's splendid arched bridge, and right through the middle of the town. With coaches arriving and departing daily, it must have presented a busy scene

When the railway arrived in the 1840s, Wetherby's role as a staging post went into decline. The Great North Road was eventually re-routed - to skirt around the town, rather than run straight through the centre. Even the name was lost, with the road now being known, more prosaically, as the A1. When Dr Beeching wielded his axe in 1964, Wetherby lost its railway too. Ironically, a town that had once been synonymous with coach travel is now a peaceful backwater, re-inventing itself once again as an upmarket commuter town. The area around the River Wharfe is being renovated, to provide riverside apartments, pleasant walks and picnic sites. These days most people will probably know the town from listening to the racing results.



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**1** Walk to the far end of the car park, to follow a path with the River Wharfe on the right and cliffs to the left. You pass in quick succession beneath the shallow arches of two modern bridges, carrying the A58 and A1 roads across the Wharfe. Go through a kissing gate to continue on a riverside path, soon with open fields on your left. Take another kissing gate to arrive at Wetherby's water treatment works.

**2** Go left here, up a track around the perimeter fence. After 150yds (138m) you meet a metalled track at the works' main entrance; go left here. At the top of an incline, where the

track bears slightly to the right, you have a choice of routes. Your path is sharp right, along a grassy track between fields. You soon approach the wooded slope that overlooks the River Wharfe. Take a stile, and follow the line of trees to a farm, Flint Mill Grange. Enter the farmyard and take the farm access road to the left.

**3** Meet Walton Road and walk left for 75yds (68m); then go right, along a metalled drive (this is signed as both a bridleway and the entrance to Wetherby Racecourse). After a gate you have a choice of routes, bear left here, downhill, to join the trackbed of the old Church Fenton-to-Harrogate railway line, which carried its last train in 1964.

**4** Go left, to enjoy level walking along the railway trackbed, until you approach the A1 road, raised up on an embankment as it skirts around Wetherby. Take the underpass beneath the road, and bear right along Freemans Way, until you meet Hallfield Lane.

**5** Walk left, along Hallfield Lane, which bears right around the playing fields of Wetherby High School and back into the centre of Wetherby.