

Ashton & Germoe Circular

Time: Allow 3 hours.

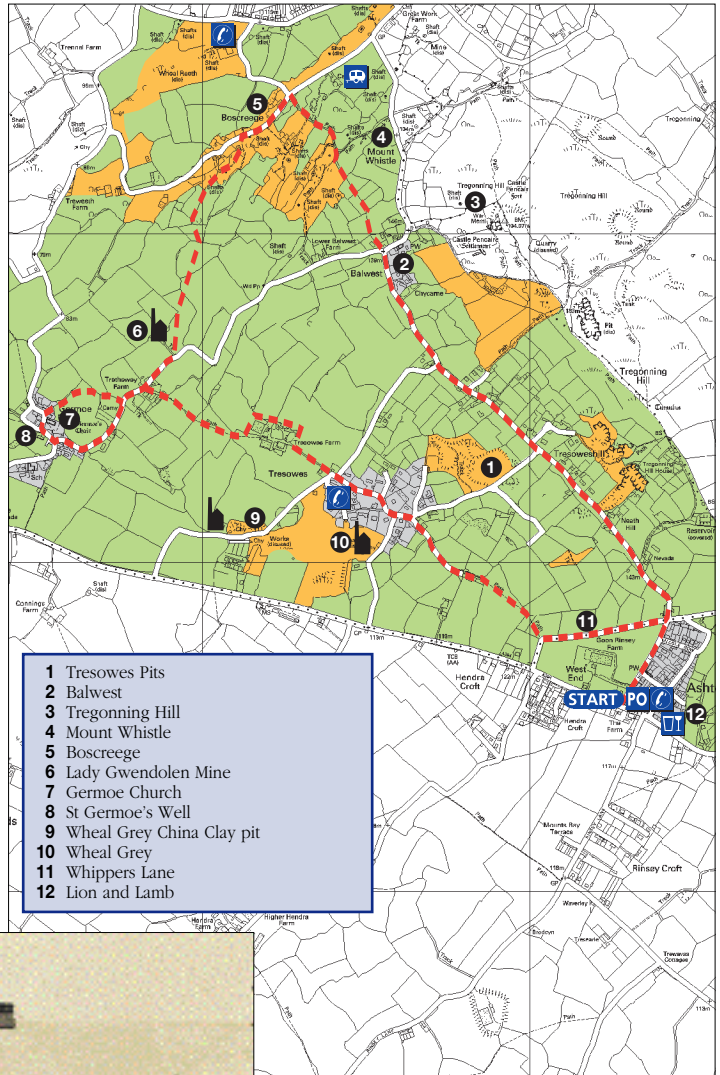
Difficulty: Moderate.

Length: 6½ miles.

Location: Take the A394 Penzance-Helston Road and at Ashton park near the Post Office.

Parking: Roadside parking is limited.

Refreshments: At Ashton you can eat at the Lion & Lamb or buy snacks at the Post Office. In summer, Tresowes Farm serves cream teas.



- 1 Tresowes Pits
- 2 Balwest
- 3 Tregonning Hill
- 4 Mount Whistle
- 5 Boscreege
- 6 Lady Gwendolen Mine
- 7 Germoe Church
- 8 St Germoe's Well
- 9 Wheal Grey China Clay pit
- 10 Wheal Grey
- 11 Whippers Lane
- 12 Lion and Lamb



Ashton post office c1940.

This gentle walk explores the countryside between Ashton and Germoe. Stretched out along the main road, the countryside around Ashton was once a hive of industry, with quarry horses pulling carts laden with granite down from Tregonning Hill or bricks from Wheal Grey china clay pits. Tucked away in a sheltered valley, is Germoe village with its ancient church that has changed little over the centuries.

Start your walk from the middle of Ashton at the Post Office.

Loosely translated the name Ashton means *'the place of the ash tree'*. Today the Post Office is the only shop left in the village. In the past there were at least 6 shops, including an undertaker and a blacksmith, as well as a school, a church and four chapels. One shop had a lending library and sold wallpaper, paint, paraffin, knitting wool, reels of cotton.

The main grocery shop sold *niffling*, which would be hung from the shop ceiling. Niffling was dried salted Newfoundland cod, which after being soaked was cooked and served with mashed potatoes. Fish sellers from Porthleven called *jowsters* would call daily in their pony and traps, selling the catch of the day.

Horse drawn buses, and later, early motor buses and charabancs, all operated from the area next to the garage. These buses ran to the main towns of Penzance and Helston. The men of the village would have been employed locally at Great Work and Boscreage Mines, the clayworks at Tresowes or on local farms.

Today none of the original four chapels in Ashton are used for religious purposes, reflecting a general trend in falling attendances. The old chapel in Prospect Row now houses the Men's Institute, they originally used a wooden building located in front of Palm House. The local blacksmith worked from another in Chapel Row, and this is now used as a net loft. The others in Middle Row and West End have become dwellings. Ashton Church is still used and the bricks around the windows were made at Tregonning Hill.

Take the road up the side of the Post Office signed for Balwest. Just before the sharp left bend at the edge of the village, turn left onto a path, just before a gate signed Trevaskis. This path is known locally as Whippers Lane because farmers once drove their cattle through here.

After about 400 yards, where the path bends to the left, go over a stile on your right by the side of a gate. Go straight across the field and through a line of trees, then across the next field to a stile in the far right corner.

Follow the hedge on your right to the corner of the field then round to the left a little. Go over the stile and immediately bear right through the gate, taking you to the side of a cottage (Higher Chyguins Farm).

Go through the next gate and in the next field, follow the hedge to your left until you reach a stile. Go over the stile onto a track and go right. Soon you reach a cottage and just past this turn left down a tarmaced road between bungalows.



The Lion & Lamb pub.



Ashton c1900.



Red Campion.



Chaffinch.

Cornish hedges

Havens for wildlife, in spring Cornish hedges are a riot of colour when Bluebells, Red Campions and Cow Parsley are supreme. You might spot lizards and slowworms basking in the late afternoon sun, or hear busy voles and shrews foraging in the undergrowth. Look out for familiar garden birds too, such as the Chaffinch, Robin, Blackbird and Great Tit.

Go straight across at the next junction and follow the road round to the right. Soon you'll arrive at Tresowes Green junction. Just before this junction is Moors Lane, a traditional horse route to the quarries on Tregonning Hill.

Moors Lane would have been busy with horse-drawn carts carrying granite from the hill and clay from the pit. In the early days of road building, quarrymen on Tregonning Hill each had his own pile of granite boulders, all sorted by size. Naughty boys would often shift the boulders around between piles, disrupting the system and causing havoc.

With the telephone box on your left, ignore the first right signed to Balwest & Godolphin and go straight across taking the road to Tresowes Farm. On your left is stack of Wheal Grey and views to the sea.



Wheal Grey China Clay Pit workers, pre-1919.

Wheal Grey was the last place to produce china clay in the area. There were two pits here within a couple of hundred yards of each other and the clay they produced was taken to Porthleven for export. It is said there was also a kiln for making bricks and slabs for domestic fires. As the clay was cleared, alluvial tin deposits were found in the lower pit. In addition, there was a tin-bearing lode here, mined until the early 1870s. These underground workings were kept dry from the pumping engine house that still stands near the spoil heaps.

The lower pit is now stocked with coarse fish and used by a local fishing club. The lake is also

home to eleven species of Dragonflies and Damselflies with such evocative names as the Azure Damselfly, Beautiful Demoiselle, Emperor Dragonfly and Large Red Damselfly.

At Tresowes Farm follow the footpath around the farm complex. At the end of the farm buildings go across the field, following the hedge to your right, go over the stile and across two more fields.

Stretching out in front of you is Mounts Bay and on the headland in the distance is Tater Dhu lighthouse. Look for Paul Church tower above Newlyn and Creegbrawse engine house (often mistaken for Ding Dong) profiled on the hills further to the right. Down in valley is Germoe Church tower – where we are now heading.

The path comes out through a complex of old buildings at Trethewey. At the road turn left down the hill and soon you'll be in the picturesque village of Germoe.

Where the road bears left up the hill towards the school, go straight across the junction towards Germoe church. You'll find the gate into the churchyard on your right, if you want to explore this ancient building. Continue along the road following the perimeter of the churchyard. As you near the tower, tucked off to the left at the top of a narrow track, is St Germoe's Well.

The original well was recorded in 1538 when Leland visited the area. He described "St Germoe's Welle a little without the chirchyard". When the road next to the church was widened and the level raised in 1905, all trace of the well was lost including the trough stones. As part of Germoe's Silver Jubilee of Elizabeth II celebrations in 1977, the well was reconstructed. The new well taps into a vigorous spring, possibly the original source!

Continue along the road until just past the church tower where the road bends to the left. Here go right up a track next to Churchtown Cottages and



Old cottage at Germoe.

Germoe Church

Well worth stopping at, the oldest parts of this ancient church are 12th century and built from Breaca granite, a soft stone found on Tregonning Hill that was easily worked by Norman church builders. In the 14th century, the church was extended to accommodate a rapidly growing congregation, including a north aisle of six arches on five columns and a staged tower with elaborate pinnacles at the top springing from angels. Watch out for the Germoe Monkeys - these sculpted onto the outer door ward off the powers of evil and mischief!

The church is dedicated to St Germoe who came over from Ireland with other missionaries around 460 AD. According to Leland (1540) they landed near Hayle, but were attacked by a local chieftain named Teudar. After escaping up the River Hayle, they took refuge on Tregonning Hill where they later founded a Celtic settlement. Germoe and his sister Breaca both stayed in Cornwall. The churches at Germoe and Breage are dedicated to them.

The Celtic church believed saints were more important than bishops, which could explain the origin of St Germoe's Chair. Said to be the saint's throne, others believe it was part of mediaeval Palm Sunday celebrations. Whatever the answer, its true origin is unproven. John Betjeman (1964) wasn't sure either, he described it as having *"two pointed arches and round granite columns, its triple seats within and roughly carved head looks more like a late seventeenth century romantic folly than pre-Reformation."*



into the field at the end. Follow the footpath diagonally across field and over the stile. Go over the next field and over another stile. Here you'll find yourself back on the road at Trethewey.

Go left up lane, past the old buildings on your right. A little further up go over a gate into a field on your left. Straight ahead of you is Tregonning Hill with its monument on the top. As you get towards the top of field, head for the left corner and go over the wall. Keep to the left, then go through the second and open gateway on your left. The large concrete structure clearly visible to your left once belonged to Lady Gwendolen Mine.



St Germoe's Chair.

St Germoe Church.

William Lemon

Born at Germoe in 1696 and baptised at Breage Church the same year, he was educated in the village school. He then became the clerk to Mr Coster of Bristol, who started deep mining for copper. When William Lemon married Miss Isabelle Vibart of Gulval – a lady of some property – he was able to finance his far-sighted mining ideas.

Famously, he conceived the idea of working mines on a large scale. At Poldice Mine he was the principal adventurer and provided the capital to solve the mine's water problem. Whilst John Williams planned the construction of a deep drainage tunnel (*adit*) to naturally drain the mine, Lemon campaigned in Parliament to get the duty on sea-borne coal dropped. When this duty was dropped in 1741 it became economic to buy steam pumping engines, and an order was immediately placed for 5 Newcomen engines. Deep adit construction played a vital role in dewatering Cornish mines and at its peak, the County Adit drained an estimated 13 million gallons/day from over 40 mines around Redruth and St Day through 38 miles of adits.

This remnant of Lady Gwendolen Mine was once part of a large mill complex containing plant for crushing tin ore. This was one of the last mines to work the Great Work complex.

The mine itself was relatively recent as tin mines go. Serious mining did not begin here until 1907. It was worked intermittently until 1929 when an investment of £100,000 built a new mill, headgear for the two shafts and an aerial ropeway to carry ore to the mill from nearby Wheal Reeth. It worked for five years, then the mine closed after holing into the water-filled Wheal Boys workings to the east. Three men were trapped underground for three days until the water level was pumped low enough for them to be rescued. The falling price of tin along with extra pumping costs was enough to stop further investment.

Lady Gwendolen Mine in the snow, late 1920s.



The mine was named Lady Gwendolen after the eldest daughter of the Duke of Leeds who was the mineral owner after inheriting the Godolphin Estate. The Dukes of Leeds only made occasional visits to Godolphin. They are remembered in several place names notably Leedstown, where the Duke of Leeds pub can be found and Townshend, their family name. Mines were named after them too including Wheal Leeds and the Leeds & St Aubyn Mine.

In contrast to Lady Gwendolen Mine is the ancient Trebolence Mine to the north-west. Today the chimney is all that remains of the engine house, which once contained the engine for dewatering the mine and driving the stamps. Documentary evidence of the mine dates back to 1510 and Trebolence village is shown on early maps, though no trace of it exists today. With the Cornish tendency to drop the prefix name to a place name, Trebolence was locally known as *Bullens* and was famous for particularly large sloes that used to grow there. In Cornwall these large sloes are referred to as bullens. It is difficult to know if the sloe gave its name to the place or vice versa. Given the age of the village it may possibly be the latter.

Walk across the field towards the middle of the wall and climb over the stile. To your left are open fields. Straight ahead is a wooden stile, clearly visible from the top of the wall, cross the field to this stile. Then go across the next field to a gate, here bear right and then left onto the lane at Boscreage.

Go right up the lane and soon you'll reach a T-junction. Turn right along the narrow lane to the side of Rose Cottage. After a short distance, where the lane becomes a gated driveway, carry straight on along a footpath.

When you come out onto a lane, there are two options for getting back to Ashton. Either follow the lane straight ahead and round to the left, at the road bear right. This road takes you back to Ashton.

Or, you can go off-road to Balvest. Follow the lane straight ahead as far as the corner and take the footpath on the right. After a few yards go over the stile and take the footpath to the right, which takes you through fields to Lower Balvest Farm. At the road turn left, then right at the next junction onto the road back to Ashton.

Part way along on your left is the thatched Adit Cottage built around 1702 and in the 20th century home to the Lamb Swan Pottery. Next to the cottage is an adit. This has been a source of fresh pure water for many years and is safe to drink today. Many believe it makes the best cup of tea around. Water would have been collected from here in buckets to water cattle and also for horses employed to carry materials for the clay pits and quarries on Tregonning Hill.

As you enter the village of Ashton, the road takes you straight back to the Post Office.

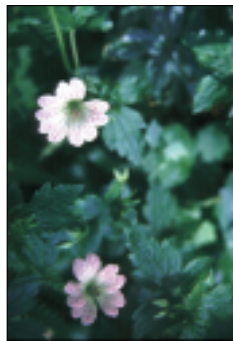
Wildlife around Germoe

Watch out for the attractive Pencilled Crane's-bill with its pale pink petals and etched with crimson lines. Wall-me, a rare fern in West Cornwall, grows on old mortared walls, whilst Lanceolate Spleenwort prefers the stone-face of Cornish hedges.

In the early 20th century, three now rare plants were commonly found in Germoe - Coral Necklace, Three-lobed Crowfoot and Pennyroyal. The first two are plants of shallow pools, whilst Pennyroyal is associated with the muddy edges of ponds. Plant records reveal a loss of good wildlife habitat in the area over the last hundred years or so.



Wall-rue.



Pencilled Crane's-Bill.