



The George Herbert in Bemerton Group

George Herbert Walk

Sarum College to Lower Bemerton

(2¼ miles of easy walking)



Mitre House

Leaving Sarum College **(1)** and the Close via the High Street we can see, straight ahead of us, St Thomas' church built for the builders of the Cathedral to worship in. Continue along the High Street looking at Mitre House on the right as we reach the traffic lights. This is said to be the site of a temporary house built by Bishop Poore while the Cathedral was being built. Certainly it was the custom from 1451 for the Bishop of Salisbury to robe in Mitre House prior to being taken to the Cathedral for his enthronement.

Continuing down Crane Street, the three houses (95, 97 & 99) on the left immediately before the bridge form Church House **(2)**, formerly the diocesan offices. In 1630 the property was bought by Lord Audley, Earl of Castlehaven. When he was executed in 1631 the property became 50% owned by the Bishop. It was used as a workhouse from 1637-1879 when it became the diocesan offices. Unfortunately the building has since been sold and is not open to the public.



Church House

We continue over Crane Bridge, a C15th structure (since widened) and walk along the pavement or through Queen Elizabeth gardens towards the pedestrian Long Bridge. We know that George Herbert regularly walked from Bemerton to the Cathedral but we do not know the route(s) he took. The direct route to Bemerton past the railway station did not exist in Herbert's day and so the most likely alternative routes would have been along the main Wilton road or across the water meadows. The paths may have been different in his day, but many English footpaths are of great antiquity and this seems the most likely route across the water meadows.



Cathedral from the Water Meadows

We cross over Long Bridge **(3)** over the river Nadder, looking upstream towards the former Fisherton Mill House and then continue along the town path. On either side we can see the Harnham water meadows with the complicated array of ditches and sluices traditionally used to flood the meadows in the winter. This system of irrigation was just being introduced at the time of George Herbert and is now preserved by the Harnham Water Meadows Trust. As we walk along the path **(4)**, look back towards the Cathedral. John Constable painted one of his views of the Cathedral from this path.



The Old Mill at Harnham

As we reach the end of the Town Path we see Harnham Old Mill with its various sluices and mill pool. The Old Mill **(5)** is now a pub and restaurant. There is some discussion about the age of Harnham Old Mill with Wiltshire Tourist Board claiming it dates from 1135 and was originally an ecclesiastical building. RCHM believes it dates from C1500 and was probably built for paper-making (there are four fireplaces inside). The mill is part built in the traditional south Wiltshire style of chequered flint and ashlar. The river flowing under Harnham Mill is another stream of the River Nadder.

Leaving Harnham Old Mill, we continue past the old Mill House until we meet Middle Street where we turn right. and continue on until the road takes a sharp turn to the left, where there is a sign post pointing right saying Bemerton **(6)**. This is the start of the Broken Bridges footpath.

The path initially has a lower or upper section. The lower path is easier going. We continue along to the Spring Bridge **(7)** where the path narrows to a single track, and go over the bridge and along the path for half a mile. This is the most rural part of the walk and we may be lucky enough to see a kingfisher, water vole or owl. Certainly, as we reach the far end of the path and reach another former mill stream **(8)**, there are often Little Egrets to be seen fishing.



Spring Bridge



Manor House with Green Shutters

At the end of the path, we turn left to enter Lower Bemerton. Across the road, setback, we will see the Manor House with green shutters **(9)** which would probably have been in existence in Herbert's day, although it is much altered.

Continuing along through Lower Bemerton we come to a point walk where the road narrows, and on the left (southern side) is the Old Rectory, George Herbert's residence and now a private house. The building was restored and partly rebuilt by George Herbert in the C16th, and much extended in the C19th. It is now in private hands.

On the northern side of the road is St Andrew's church **(10)**, also restored by Herbert and where according to his biographer Izaak Walton, he is buried 'in his own church, under the altar, and covered with a gravestone without any inscription'. As we enter and sit in the calmness of the little church, it is worth reflecting that the walk we have just completed is one that George Herbert is said to have done habitually twice a week during the three years of his ministry in Bemerton.



St. Andrew's Church

MAP OF WALK

