

# Skelsmergh Walks

## No. 4 Skelsmergh South

Grant aided by Cumbria County Council and Skelsmergh & Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council



Distance: 5 miles

*Skelsmergh Church - Summerhill - Gilthwaiterigg - Must Hill - Oakbank - Burton House - Skelsmergh Hall - Dodding Green - Skelsmergh Church*

**P** Below the Community Hall



*Skelsmergh Church*

Skelsmergh Church was built in 1871. The large stained glass window is a memorial to the Morton family of Skelsmergh Hall who were very successful shorthorn cattle breeders here and in Australia. The adjacent vicarage was built in 1874 but part of it was rebuilt in 1988 as more economical accommodation and the older part was sold. The Community Hall was built in 1897 and recently upgraded in 2008 with lottery funding.

Follow the road downhill and take the signposted footpath to the right before you reach the river. Turn right before reaching Millcrest caravan site to exit at the Summerhill lay-by and follow the A6 towards Kendal. In the group of houses set back from the road on your left is Summerhow. During Queen Elizabeth I's reign it was owned by Kendal merchant, Christopher Sprott, father of Thomas Sprott, a Catholic priest born here who was executed at Lincoln in 1600.

Cross the road near the Kendal sign at the access road to Gilthwaiterigg. There is a stile on the right about 100 yards down. Head over the rise to reach a footbridge by a pile of

stones. The sandstone pillars and iron gates here indicate that you are crossing the Thirlmere Aqueduct that carries water to Manchester. Cross the footbridge and follow the Gilthwaiterigg beck upstream. Turn left through the next gate and left again to go over a stile into a field where the beck flows through. From the footbridge it is easy to see that the field has been hollowed out here and was once a millpond.

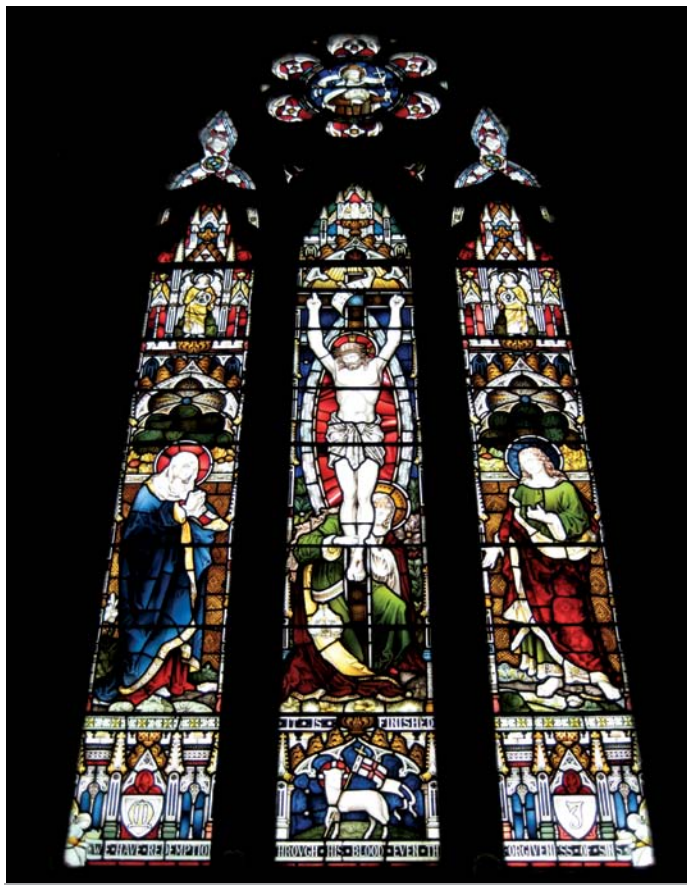
The square building with the Manchester coat of arms in the field you have just left is an aqueduct valve house and is situated next to a small siphon bridge over the beck. Follow the beck – the line of the former headrace (millstream) can be picked out here. Take the ladder stile into Gilthwaiterigg, passing the surviving millpond, and wind through the garden via a gap in the wall into the drive of a bungalow. A medieval corn mill formerly occupied this site, closing in the 1920s. The much altered 15th-century house on your left was the birthplace of James Duckett, a Catholic bookseller who was executed at Tyburn in 1602.

Turn right at the road and after a few yards take the left turn to Must Hill. Go through the yard of this working farm and take the left-hand gate beyond the 18th-century farmhouse. The track contours to the left and then right.

The ruined barn that eventually appears to your left is all that remains of a farm called the Redman Tenement. Turn right when you reach the field next to Sprint Bridge and at the road turn right and immediately left for the footpath to Sprint Mill. Before the bridge there is a gate and stile to your right. Follow the Dales Way signs to the former mill terrace at Oakbank. The large house on your left was built by the bobbin mill owner, Robert Seed in the 1840s to house his family and apprentices.

Turn right at the road and at the junction with the Kendal to Burneside road take the footpath to your left through some traditionally-managed fields and copses. Cross the footbridge but ignore the footpath by the barn to your right and stay on the Dales Way, crossing a stile to your left and going up along the hedge. The track crosses several fields and descends to a stream.

Once over the footbridge turn left towards Burton House. Go into the yard, turning right beside the 17th-century farmhouse. Before crossing the road pause by the magnificent ash tree. Up Stocks Hill to your left is Stocks Mill garage, once a bobbin mill. The beech trees on the corner over the road ahead mark the site of a 19th-century inn and the corner wall covered with ivy is a clue to the existence of the Stocks cottages that were once here. Cross the road with care and take the bridleway opposite. It contours below the wood pasture called Chester Hag and



*The Morton family memorial window in Skelsmergh Church*



Cleaved oak gate near Oakbank

takes you down to Kiln Croft. The houses here were conversions from the Hall farmbuildings.

Take the farm track up to your left which will give you a view back to Skelsmergh Hall, a tower house held by the Leyburne family from the 12th century, although it was sequestrated for treason in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and taken permanently from the family after the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion.

The path takes you past a fine sycamore pollard to Dodding Green. This house with a chapel was used by Catholic priests in the 17th century and still contains hiding places. In 1723 Robert Stephenson left it and all the rest of his property to a secret Catholic charity he established. There was a resident priest until 1990 but it is now a community for rehabilitation run by the Catholic Cenacolo charity. The footpath goes through the wall here and over the field below the house. At the road turn right to return to the start.

For a rest before departing you have a choice between the bench on the west side of the church that has a panoramic view towards the Western Fells or the east-facing bench in the newer cemetery looking over the River Mint towards Benson's Knott.

