



## The Arts Society Bowdon Ruby Anniversary Walking Trail

Welcome to your walking trail!

As members of The Arts Society Bowdon, Bowdon is a place we all have in common. Some may have been born in Bowdon, left and returned, others may have lived in the area all their lives, married, raised families here. Others, like myself, will be occasional visitors to the monthly arts society lectures, to visit friends, to walk their dog on the Devisdale, or perhaps to visit the local pubs.

This is a walking trail in the vicinity of our meeting place, The Bowdon Rooms. As you follow the trail, many will be familiar with the local landmarks and know much of the local history so this is perhaps not so much a trail of discovery but one of familiarity that will provoke memories, thoughts and feelings associated with the roads you will walk along and buildings you will pass. I hope that the trail provides the scope for much discussion about your own personal associations with Bowdon and its history. I would love to hear personal anecdotes, stories and for the gaps in my knowledge of the area to be filled.



What better place to start the walking trail than at The Bowdon Rooms? The Arts Society Bowdon has met here for lectures since its inception in 1982, the first meeting being on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> September; the lecture was Chippendale. Does anyone remember this lecture?

This grand Edwardian building with its magnificent ballroom was originally called The Assembly Rooms and was a gift to the village of Bowdon from Spencer Henry Bickham (we will meet Mr Bickham again on our walk). The building was designed by the architect Frank Brookhouse-Dunkerley of Timperley and was described by The British Architect Journal as "one of the best examples of assembly hall design we have met with".

During the First World War the building served as an annexe to Altrincham General Hospital for the treatment of injured soldiers. Under recent new management, it is now an award-winning wedding venue, conference centre and Premier Events Hub, and of course the meeting place of The Arts Society Bowdon, as well as other clubs and classes.

What is your outstanding memory of an Arts Society lecture at The Bowdon Rooms?

Visit [www.thebowdonrooms.co.uk](http://www.thebowdonrooms.co.uk)

Before we proceed on our trail there are two other local facilities we should mention. Sharing parking space with The Bowdon Rooms is The Jubilee



Community Centre, home to local community groups, and located close by on St Mary's Road is Bowdon Croquet Club. The club moved to this location in 1911 but was originally when founded part of the tennis club on Winton Road. Many of the grand houses in the area did indeed at that time, have their own croquet lawns! Is anyone a member of Bowdon Croquet Club?

Does anyone know the names of the two forms of the game of croquet? Follow the trail and find the answer to the question at the end!

[www.bowdoncroquet.co.uk](http://www.bowdoncroquet.co.uk)



Turn right out of The Bowdon Rooms and walk down The Firs. At the end of the road, stop and take a look at the beautiful building that is Bowdon Shul. The synagogue was first founded in South Manchester in 1872. Services were first held in this building in 2002.



Do you know which member of the Royal Family opened Bowdon synagogue? The only synagogue in the country to have been opened by a member of the Royal Family. The answer is at the end of the trail.

<http://bowdonshul.org.uk/>

Now cross over The Firs and walk back towards The Bowdon Rooms on the other side of the road admiring the villas set back from the road. You may notice (discreetly of course) a blue plaque on one of the houses. Hans Richter, conductor of The Halle Orchestra between 1899-1911, lived here. Did you know that Richter could play every instrument in the orchestra?

At the end of The Firs turn right onto Green Walk.

This was once a private coach road from Dunham Massey Hall to Bowdon Parish Church. It is still a lovely walk to Dunham Massey over Dunham golf course and the adjoining fields to Dunham village/Dunham Massey, certainly one I have enjoyed in the recent pandemic.



Wander down Green Walk past Bowdon Lawn Tennis Club. There are two tennis clubs in Bowdon, the other being a Bowling and Tennis Club situated on Winton Road with the entrance on St Mary's Road.

Carry on until you reach Denzell House and Gardens. This really is a tranquil oasis away from the busy A56 Dunham Road. Turn into the gardens through the lych gate entrance.



Take a walk around the gardens, stop for a rest on a bench, breathe and admire them whatever the season.

The house is now offices but was built in 1874 on 10 acres of land bought from the 7th Earl of Stamford. Adjacent to the gardens is The Devisdale, which we won't walk on today but is a popular place for dog walkers.

Historically this area of land has an interesting past including being used in the eighteenth century for The Bowdon Wakes and as recently as 1966 for The Altrincham Agricultural Show.

Does anyone remember The Altrincham Agricultural Show being held here?





The gardens are maintained by both Trafford Council and The Friends of Denzell gardens (who meet every Monday morning) and they are a delight.

Walk from the lych gate entrance towards the house and the sunken garden. There is an information board detailing some of the plants to be found here.

If you walk on the main path around the gardens and down towards the ornamental pond you may spot a heron, a regular visitor. Keep to the main path (some of the smaller paths are a bit uneven and potentially muddy) and walk clockwise round the pond and back up towards the house.

How long you explore the gardens, its plants and bird life and the exterior of the house is entirely your choice but when you are ready to continue find your way back the the lych gate.

[About Denzell Gardens \(friendsofdenzellanddevisdale.com\)](http://friendsofdenzellanddevisdale.com)

Now, cross over Green Walk and have a little look at Bickham House. Bickham House was the home of Spencer Henry Bickham who gifted the village of Bowdon with the money for The Assembly Rooms to be built. Originally it was called Gorsefield but the name was change to Bickham House in 1948 following the death of Spencer Bickham's daughter Helen at her request. Also, at her request the house, grounds and property were to become a "home for elderly people or distressed gentlefolk". Miss Bickham also donated to Bowdon Cricket Club in memory of her brother Ernest Bickham who played for the club, and to the lawn tennis club. The house remains a residential care home today and is still a charity run by a board of trustees.



Spencer Bickham had an herbarium and the gardens of Bickham house are said to be excellent. Has anyone visited them?

[www.bickhamhouse.co.uk](http://www.bickhamhouse.co.uk)

Continue along Green Walk back towards the village centre and take in what can be seen of the magnificent mansions, old and new, hidden behind walls and trees. There is a wealth of history to these grand mansions. One, Woodside (now demolished), was owned by Jesse Hawarth. Jesse bequeathed both his ancient Egyptian collection and the funding to house it to the University of Manchester Museum. The Jesse Hawarth building, thanks to his generosity, displays "one of the best collections of Egyptology material in Britain."

Head in the direction of Bowdon Parish Church of St Mary. St Mary's is an impressive church in a prominent situation and has a depth of history. The Domesday book of 1086 refers to a church at Bogedone. The church was rebuilt in 1100, 1320 and partially rebuilt in 1510. The church you are walking by today was completed in 1860. This walk cannot alone do justice to the history of the church and churchyard.

Inside the church is the Stamford Chapel devoted to the memorials of the Booth and Grey families of Dunham Massey Hall. A notable grave within the churchyard is that of William Wood of Bowdon who died in 1868 and is known as "the chimney boys' friend" due to him pressing for legislation to prevent children from having to climb and clean chimneys.



For more information about the church contact the Parish Centre or visit [bowdonchurch.org](http://bowdonchurch.org)



The free booklet Guide to Bowdon Parish Church and the Surrounding Area is a comprehensive guide and one that I have found extremely useful in my research.

An interesting fact in the booklet refers to the ancient custom of Yclepping on Mothering Sunday where the congregation hold hands and embrace the church building. Has anyone participated in this or know more about the origins of this tradition? Is it a local tradition?

The trail is almost over and concludes, as good walks often do, at either of the public houses situated opposite St Mary's Church!

Traditionally The Stamford Arms was frequented by the gentry and The Griffin by their servants but in modern times the choice of where to have a drink or bite to eat is entirely yours!

<http://www.chefandbrewer.com/pubs/cheshire/griffin/>

<http://thestamford.xyz/>



Many thanks for walking the Arts Society Bowdon Ruby Anniversary Trail! We hope that you have enjoyed your walk and that it has created discussion about the area surrounding The Bowdon Rooms.

<http://www.bowdon.theartssociety.org/>

Acknowledgements:

Many thanks to The Bowdon Rooms, friends of Bowdon Churchyard, Friends of Denzell Gardens and the Devisdale and the committee of The Arts Society Bowdon for their support and ideas in bringing this trail to life.

## Q&A

**Does anyone know the names of the two forms of the game of croquet?**

*They are Golf Croquet and Association Croquet*

**Do you know which member of the Royal Family opened Bowdon synagogue?**

*Prince Charles*