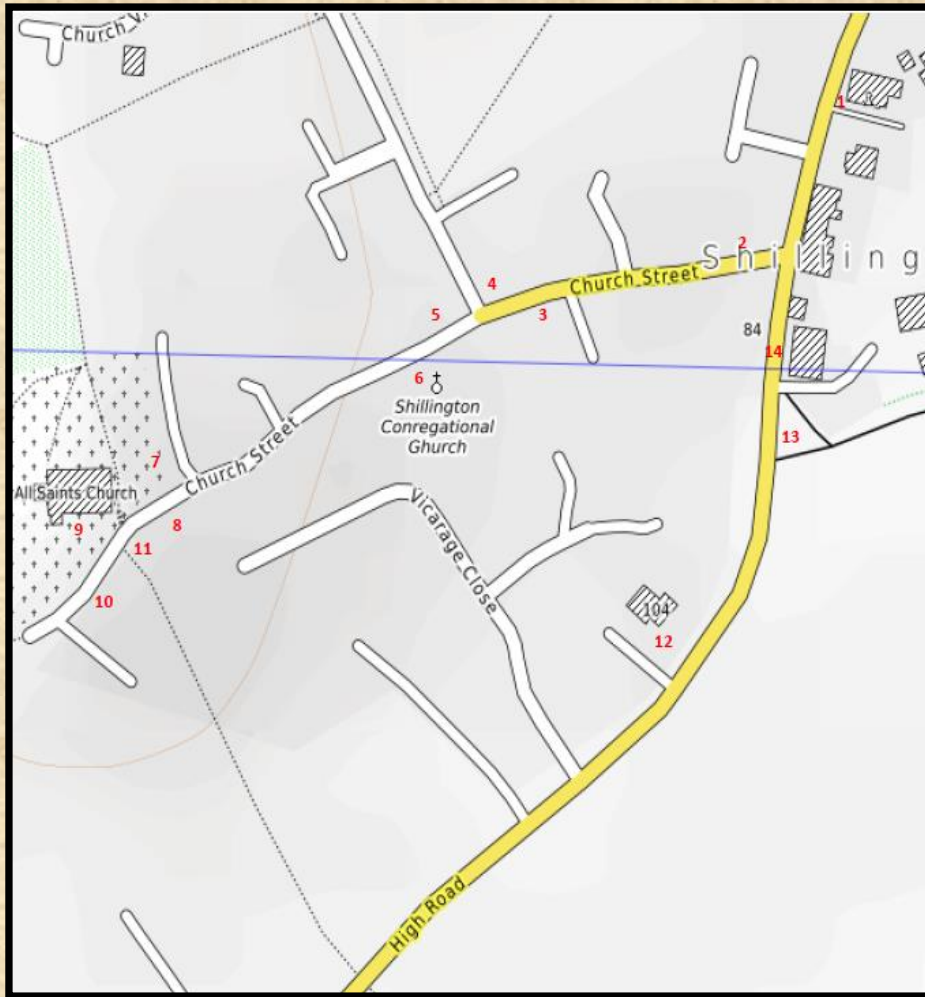


A self-guided walking tour of Shillington

A walk of approximately 1 km around the village centre
which will take around an hour to complete.



Human activity in Shillington can be traced back at least 240,000 years! A flint hand axe from that time, sharp enough to fell trees, was found locally in 2017. It would have been used by nomadic hunter gatherer people. Pieces of 3,000-year-old pottery indicate Bronze Age people may have been the first to settle here.

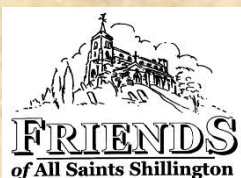
Shillington takes its name from a Saxon called Scyttel who was the local leader, probably in the 700s. The village took shape as people moved from their separate family farms to live together along what is now Church Street.

For many centuries, most Shillington people were poor farm workers, but the local economy boomed in the late 1800s. The soil around parts of the village contained coprolites, the fossilised dung and other remains of prehistoric creatures. They contain phosphates which can be made into a valuable fertiliser. Coprolite diggers could earn more than farm labourers and many young men came to the village for work. Soon there were fourteen pubs. It was clearly thirsty work!

Today there are about 800 houses with 1,900 people living in them.

We hope you enjoy the walk and finding out a little more about Shillington's long history.

For even more information about the Village's history: www.shillington-history.org.uk



Supported by Shillington Parish Council



1. Begin at the Village Hall.

Members of the Hanscombe family (spellings vary) have lived in this area for 800 years. William Hanscombe, the final Lord of Shillington Manor, donated land for the village hall which opened in 1911. After he died in June 1922, it was known as the Hanscombe Memorial Hall. The builders had to remove the large, ornate hood over the door when they constructed the entrance extension.



The Hanscombes also provided the area for the war memorial which adjoins the Hall. It was unveiled on the 22nd of August 1922 in memory of 26 brave Shillington men who died during the First World War. World War Two claimed another eight local men whose names were added later.



2. Cleaver House, 2 Church Street.

For much of Shillington's past, produce from farms was processed locally and this house was home to one of the village butchers. Animals were dispatched in the yard at the back and their meat sold in the shop. The butcher made home deliveries until the business closed in about 1990. There were at least 17 shops in Shillington before the first world war. Very few people had cars or refrigerators at that time and most had to shop locally and often.

Many of the houses across the street date from the prosperous late 1800s during the coprolite boom.

3. Liberal Hall

Look carefully for this 1840 building which was originally a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel. It provided a popular alternative to services at All Saints' Church and the congregation reached 180. It closed in 1867 when a replacement was built (see 14 below). Many Shillington people supported the Liberal Party and acquired the building for meetings. Party membership fell after the First World War with the rise of the Labour Party, but people hired the hall for concerts, dances and family parties. Use of the building fizzled out in the 1990s and it became a private dwelling in 2007.



4. The Old Bells

The Five Bells Pub took its name from the peal of five bells at All Saints' Church. The beer came from J.W. Green's brewery in Luton. Many Shillington people took jobs in Luton when the first bus services began. On VE Day (8 May 1945) when the Second World War ended, drinkers rolled the piano outside. Mrs Curry played it and 'Joby' Jenkins jumped on top and sang to a large and relieved crowd who joined in and celebrated into the evening.

The 'Bells' became a freehouse in 1978 but closed in 1984 and is now a private home.

5. 20-22 Church Street

This is a very old timber-framed house hiding beneath a modern exterior. It was originally thatched as can be seen in this colourised photograph. In 1925, Doctor Hedges' home and surgery were here. His predecessor had the unfortunate name of Killham Roberts who did his rounds on a motorbike with sidecar. With his stocky build and coat billowing in the wind, residents said that he resembled the Michelin man!



The practice moved to Lower Stondon in the 1970s, much to everyone's dismay, and the house was modernised.

6. The Congregational Church

In the early 19th century ministers from Hitchin tried to establish non-conformist worship in the village, a place 'notorious for the wickedness of its inhabitants'! Non-conformists are Christians but not members of the Church of England.

In 1822 a Rev. Stoper began taking services in a barn between the Old School and the Old Post Office (see 8 below). His successor, Rev. John Wayne, built up a large and attentive congregation. The villagers proved less wicked than anticipated!

The Church Street Union Chapel was built in 1840 at a cost of £520. It attracted large attendances. To increase capacity, a balcony was added in 1851 and the building was extended at the rear in 1896.

7. 52 Church Street

Several monks assisted at All Saints' church in its early days and the Brotherhood House where they lived probably occupied this site. Churchwardens' accounts mention a church store in the late 1500s that may have also used the same premises. The building you see dates from the 1600s. A previous owner speculated that a tunnel once linked the cellar to the crypt of the church.

By the 1700s, it had become the White Horse pub, which closed in 1914.



8. 91 Church St, the Old Post Office

John Bunyan had toured this area in the 1660s, preaching his Puritan ideals, and gained much support. However, it was illegal to express views that undermined the Church of England. He was arrested and spent 12 years in prison. He went on to write *The Pilgrim's Progress*. After the law changed to allow dissent, a Baptist meeting place was registered in Shillington in 1706 but we don't know where it was. Between 1822 and 1840, Congregationalists met in the garden here in a building that now looks like a summerhouse.

The house itself is 17th century. In 1847, the village post office was here with its sign and entrance visible in this early 1900s postcard view.

The telephone exchange was also here when the network reached Shillington in the 1920s. Only businesses and the wealthy could afford a telephone until the 1960s.

9. All Saints' Church

Described by John Betjeman as 'The cathedral of the Chilterns', All Saints' Church dominates the surrounding landscape. People may have used this prominent hilltop as a sacred site long before Christianity reached Britain in the 7th century. Multi-stemmed yew trees like the one near where the bridleway begins can live for thousands of years and are often associated with Christian and pre-Christian sacred sites.

To the south, the view of the Chiltern Hills inspired the 'Delectable Mountains' that Bunyan mentions in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. They dominate the horizon from Pegsdon on the left and round to the right as far as the flat wooded top of Sharpenhoe Clappers in the west. Rare wildflowers grow in the steep, ancient pastures which are nature reserves. The views continue north towards the wooded Greensand Ridge.

The Church is usually open during the day and welcomes visitors. There are guides books inside. Look out for the ancient graffiti and the many memorials to the Hanscombe family.

10. The Old School.

A school master called Creak was teaching in Shillington in 1578. The churchwardens' accounts of 1583 and 1601 mention repairs to a 'school room' which later burned down. Its location is not known.

The National Society (established in 1811 to run Church of England schools) opened this school in 1856. It could accommodate 120 children. There was one classroom for boys and another for girls. By 1875, 200 pupils crowded in and the building at the rear of the car park was added. It was still overcrowded and some lessons took place in the church.

Bedfordshire County Council ran the school from 1903. Inspectors visited regularly and often found that conditions were poor and the heating inadequate. Cold winter winds battered the school in its exposed location and the poor children had to wear their coats to keep warm. One year, the water pipes froze!

Eventually, in 1964, older children moved to a new and better-heated school in Greenfields but the infants remained here until 1972. The buildings are now residential.

11. The Twitchell.

Twitchell is a word for a path between (twixt) walls. Look for other terms for alleyways enclosed on both sides when you travel elsewhere in Britain!

Walk down the Twitchell and turn left at the bottom along High Road passing the Old Vicarage on your left. This large building dates from the early 1800s and demonstrates the wealth of the Church of England at this time. It became a private house in 1977.



12. The Crown.

Charles Taylor was landlord here from 1929 for 10 years. He set up one of the earliest bus services taking workers to Hitchin and Welwyn. Two of his coaches stand in front of the Crown in this later newspaper picture.

During the Second World War, the village fire service was based in a barn here (since demolished). A team of four men slept next to the water pump ready to respond if one of the village fire wardens raised the alarm. Fortunately, they were never called into action!

13. The Village Green.

This small green was once much larger. Until tractors replaced working farm horses, there were two blacksmiths making and fitting horseshoes nearby. One was by the field entrance and the other where the petrol station stands now. The village sign refers to the 'Ends' or small settlements that formed separately away from the village centre about 1,000 years ago. 'Ends' villages are quite common in Bedfordshire, but village greens are not.



This postcard shows children playing here in the early 1900s.



14. The Wesleyan Chapel and Sunday School

In 1872, this huge Wesleyan chapel replaced the small, earlier one (see 3) at a cost of £600. It was registered for marriages on 22nd November 1897.

In the latter part of the 20th century the congregation dwindled and it closed in 2004 and became a home. The post office and shop occupy the former Sunday School building.

Note the inscriptions above and either side of the shop doorway.

Further resources: -

Publications: -

- Lanham P (2001) The Ringing Grooves of Change – Copies on sale in All Saints' Church
- Walton JS, A Historical Parish: Shillington Beds – Bedford Central Library
- Cooper HW (1950) The Shillington Congregational Church 1825-1950 – Bedford Central Library

Websites: -

Shillington History Website: -

www.shillington-historysociety.org.uk

Shillington pages on Bedfordshire Archives: -

<https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityHistories/Shillington/ShillingtonIndexOfPages.aspx>

Listed Buildings in the Village: -

<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/england/shillington-central-bedfordshire#.Yw30YfiMLcu>

Shillington War Memorial: -

www.roll-of-honour.com/Bedfordshire/ShillingtonVillageRollofHonour.html

Shillington Pubs: -

<https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityHistories/Shillington/ShillingtonPubs.aspx>

Video guided tour of All Saints' Church: -

[The Church on the Hill: A guided tour of All Saints' Church, Shillington - YouTube](#)

