

When they returned to England George enlisted in the Grenadier Guards. By Christmas 1914 his father had been told he was dead. Perhaps it was worse; the wounded George was treated as a hostage in reprisal for Churchill's treatment of German submariners. His exchange was secured by the American ambassador. In November 1915 George arrived at Fenchurch Street. His father had been pacing up and down for an hour. George walked slowly with the aid of a stick and the two men shook hands. Even by stiff-upper-lip standards, it seems a little restrained. Leaning on his father's arm, George was whisked away to hospital.

The Times obituary could have been kinder to George; *"he charmed his way through life with every gift but that of bread-winning."*

His wife Vivienne's life offered rich experiences for three books. She had spent much of her childhood here at Hesterworth.

Aged 22, her father twisted her arm to accompany him on an eighteen-month African safari. He was to obtain big game trophies for Bern Natural History Museum. In the first seven months they covered 1,250 miles on foot. Vivienne was diarist, photographer and camp nurse. Pursuing a wounded lioness, her father was mauled and dragged himself back to camp. She tended to him in his dying hours and she dug his grave, on the banks of the Ishasha in Uganda. Before his death, she had never shot an animal. Yet she fed the 50 porters, and completed the museum's assignment.

This dramatic safari is the subject of her first book 'Out in the Blue'. Undaunted, she returned to Africa to pursue her private dream *"to go into the wild unarmed and, to win the friendship of the beasts. Life itself, I thought, is glorious only when you live it dangerously, accepting the challenge with glad faith, risking all, giving all with both hands, ready to greet the unseen with a cheer."* Two more books followed.

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You won't have to visit the battlefields to experience Shropshire's part in the First World War. 20 walks cover the war years and the aftermath throughout the county. The printed guides will form a complete set by the end of 2019.



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# War Walks on the Home Front



## Walk 2 George Goschen

## Walk 2– To Berlin (via the quietest places under the sun)

**Distance:** 3½ miles, 2 hours • **Grade:** Easy  
**Terrain:** Hard surfaced tracks, meadow paths and minor roads

- 1 From the car park of Aston on Clun Village Hall 1 Broome Road turn left and turn left again at the T junction.

On your left is one of the three round houses built by an eccentric at the turn of the 18th/19th century. It is said there are no corners for the witches to hide.

- 2 Cross the B4368 well before the bend and continue towards Mill Street and the Arbor Tree.

The tree's story is on the round pillar.

- 3 Turn right up Mill Street passing the second of the round houses and a couple of non conformist chapels.

Go round the bend beyond the bungalows and through the galvanised metal gate taking the gentle uphill field path. This is the Firs.

We may be following the village postman's round: John Stockton, with three years prior service in the Shropshire Yeomanry, was stationed at Fort Rowner, Gosport in the War. He lived in the now ruinous cottage above you just beyond the shed and greenhouse. The parish magazine records he was the first from the village to sign up for further active service. Alas, we can't all be heroes. In 1922, father of six children, he was charged with stealing money and postal orders from the post. He was sentenced to 12 months hard labour. At the time of his death in 1941 he was living in Mill Street.

A little further up the hill you can see down the Clun Valley to the right. Ahead the village school and more to the left, a large white building. Aston Hall, one of 3,000 Red Cross Auxiliary hospitals during the war. There were others at Walcot and Stokesay Court. The patients were less seriously wounded and needed to convalesce. Servicemen preferred



them to military hospitals; they were less crowded, the surroundings more homely and discipline more relaxed. Local women volunteered as Voluntary Aid Detachment members (known simply as 'VADs'). They were trained in first aid and nursing. The volunteers were usually too old or too young to work in a military hospital.

- 4 As you come to the slight bend in the track

The fields of Shropshire experienced a revolution during the war. The insatiable demand for men changed everything. The government bought tractors from the USA. Nationally, towards the end of 1917 over 250,000 women were working as farm labourers, with 20,000 in the Women's Land Army. German POWs were used in ones and twos on local farms. Converted farm outbuildings provided a dormitory and kitchen. The men would walk to wherever their labour was required and then return in the evening.

Ahead and to your left are the specimen trees in the grounds of Hesterworth a grand Victorian country house. Across the lane to Hopesay is The Burrow, an iron-age hillfort.

- 5 From the waymark post, veer slightly to the right. Soon after a second short waymark post look out for a depression with gorse and nettles.

What could this be? Locals referred to it as "Coffee Pot Hall." Look for clues: the overall shape, what the structure appears to be made of? The answer is at the end of the guided walk.

- 6 Follow the little track down to the left and the corner of the wood. Waymark post on the corner fence post. Take care for the roots across the track. In May this wood has bluebells. At the end of the wood is our first stile.

Pause to admire the full extent of Hesterworth. Built by the Beddoes family and later acquired by the Habershons. At the lowest point you can see a pool. Here clay was extracted for brick-making – before the railways many small kilns existed. The yellow bricks can be seen in the building with dormer windows to the right of the main house.

- 7 Keep following the contour to another stile in a boundary fence. Go over the stile and follow the path in the wood up a little before a steep downhill section to a footbridge and gate. This is Perry Gutter.
- 8 Turn right for a few yards to the stile on the other side of the road. Follow the boundary hedge of the cottage. At the top go through the kissing gate and start downhill diagonally towards the corner of the fences. Between the trees is a stile where we join the revised route of the Shropshire Way. Go over the stile across the meadow to another stile. Go over the stile and across a footbridge over the Caudibrook, through the ancient kissing gate to the lane.
- 9 Turn right. When you come to the Shropshire Way fingerpost turn left for the church.

St Mary's is open from about 9am to 6pm in summer closing at dusk in winter. Turn to the back page.

- 10 After the visit to the churchyard, return to the main street of the village and turn right until you come to the Shropshire Way circular walk and bridle track on your right. Follow the track until the meeting point of four tracks (point 11) and take the one to your left back to Aston-on-Clun. On the edge of the village go straight ahead to the lane. Turn right down to the bridge.

Occasional glimpses of the chimneys and rooftop of Aston Hall [auxiliary hospital] to your right. Over the bridge and return to the car park.

The mystery building at point 5? Was the third of the eccentric Clun round houses built of rubble stone.

## War and peace in a Shropshire churchyard

In Hopesay churchyard stand with your back to the church porch and take the narrow path on your half right. Pause by the wooden crosses to the Habershons and look at the headstone by the hawthorn. Sharing a marital grave is the most adventurous couple in Shropshire. Reported dead, taken prisoner, used as a hostage, invalided home, George Gerrard Goschen had an unlucky war. Yet his wife's African adventures make George's war sound tame.

Have you ever wondered how a war begins? George knew better than anyone. He was on the spot in the final hours of peace before the war to end all wars began. In August 1914 he was an attaché at our embassy in Berlin. His father was the Ambassador. As the minutes of the British ultimatum ticked away, a mob attacked the Embassy. Father and son saw those "lamps ... going out all over Europe" [Sir Edward Grey Foreign Secretary].