



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF WILLIAM GILBERTSON

When undertaking this walk please ensure that you are suitably prepared by following the Countryside Code which will assist you with visiting safely and keeping our environment and communities in mind. For more information go to www.naturalresources.wales/countrysidecode



**THE DRAMATIC
HEART OF WALES**

Neath Port Talbot

dramaticheart.wales

THE GILBERTSON TRAIL

Start point: Pontardawe Cross, Pontardawe Town Centre

Length: 2 miles

Duration: 1 - 2 hours

Parking: Follow brown road signage from A4067 for parking at the Bypass Car Park. Signage in the car park will direct you on foot to The Cross. Please cross the road carefully when entering Cwm Du Glen.

Food and Refreshments: Pontardawe Town has a range of excellent independent retailers and cafes.

William Gilbertson was a notable industrialist who can be credited with growing the local tin plate and steel making industry which eventually resulted in the establishment of the famous Port Talbot Steelworks. This walk will take you on a tour of his once grand estate.

On this walk you will find views across the Swansea Valley, sights which were once dominated by industry but now reclaimed by nature.

W Gilbertson and Company were the owners of the Pontardawe Tin Plate Works. They acquired the works in 1860 and developed it into a major undertaking. By the start of the first-world war the Tin Plate works employed the majority of the working population of the town of Pontardawe.

In 1900 William Gilbertson developed a steelworks site at Port Talbot docks, the site is now home the dramatic TATA Steelworks.

This route will take you in the footsteps of William Gilbertson himself around the estate where he lived in the town of Pontardawe.





ROUTE

Starting at Pontardawe Cross (opposite The Dillwyn Arms Hotel) head into the woods at Cwm Du Glen and follow the path along the river for approximately half a mile. Take your time and keep an eye out for different wildlife that can be found along the river. When you reach the green bridge, turn left (before crossing) and head up the steps towards the Glanrhyd plantation.

When you reach the top, you will arrive on the driveway for the old Gilbertson Estate. Turn right and follow the track, keeping an eye out for wildlife. As the track starts to bend take a right and head down to the viewing platform **1**. From here you can see across the valley into the new Gilbertson housing estate (named by a local school). Turn back and retrace your steps onto the drive. Continue to follow it around the site. Look right and you can see remains of the Gilbertson walled garden **2** where Arthur Gilbertson enjoyed much of his free time. Further along the track you will find the interpretation panel alongside the site of the old mansion **3**. A little further and you can find the remains of the stables **4** and Wales' first outdoor swimming pool **5**.

Turning left here you can follow the small track to the site of the old tennis courts **6** now turned into a woodland classroom and a perfect spot for a woodland picnic. Follow the track to the right and back onto the driveway. Turn right to visit the pond, installed during the Gilbertson's time. Back onto the driveway you can follow it back to the cross roads and turning right head out onto Glanrhyd Road and follow it down the hill. Not far down the hill you will come across a Chapel **8**, now converted into a residential property, it was originally a private chapel built by Arthur Gilbertson, and from the road you can see his Gravestone, separate to other graves within the grounds. Follow the road down the hill and turn left to return to the start.

POINTS OF INTEREST

1 Viewing platform

Installed by volunteers, this bench provides a wonderful spot to break for refreshments and enjoy looking out across the valley and through the woodlands.

2 Walled Garden

Arthur Gilbertson was a committed gardener and spent much of his free time tending to his plants within the walled garden and greenhouses. Now overgrown, the walled garden is inaccessible for safety reasons. Remnants of Arthur Gilbertson's passion for plants can be seen throughout the site with a number of non-native tree species including Scot's Pine, Cedar and Monkey Puzzle trees.

3 Mansion grounds

The interpretation panel found alongside the site of the old mansion shows pictures of how the land would have looked. However, since Arthur Gilbertson's death in 1906, the mansion underwent numerous occupancies, including use as an auxiliary hospital during the war and conversion into flats until the mid-1960's, after which it was left derelict and eventually demolished.

4 Stables

The Gilbertsons, as was common in the day, kept and maintained horses on the grounds for transport and recreation, particularly polo.

5 Swimming Pool

Wales' first outdoor swimming pool can be found here, fenced off and excavated. Many of the tiles are still visible on the walls of the pool, whilst the sloping cemented base shows a steep decline to a small drainage system. A large Sycamore tree towers over the pool and has started to break away the wall of the pool as it has grown.

6 Tennis Courts

The Gilbertson's, thanks in part to their wealth, were able to enjoy multiple recreational activities including tennis, which they played on the grounds. Now overgrown and converted into a woodland classroom for community and school use.

7 The Ponds

As part of the original estate, the Gilbertson's had two ponds created where they relaxed and enjoyed sites of swans and ducks swimming. Over the years, these became silted up and until recently, neither pond was recognisable. Now, thanks to work by local volunteers, the main pond has been recovered and connected to the site of the second pond, which remains a wetland habitat.

8 Chapel

The chapel found on Glanrhyd Road was built as a private chapel by Arthur Gilbertson for family friends and employees of his industry. Built to hold 300 people, the chapel held weekly services for locals. Since his passing, the chapel has become a private residential property, though the grave of Arthur Gilbertson can be seen from the road, separate to the other gravestones in the grounds.

