

High Street/ Oakshaw

Start at the front entrance of **Paisley Museum and Art Galleries**. Facing the museum turn right down the High Street. Take the second on the left and at a steady pace walk up **Church Hill**, a steep cobbled pedestrian road. At the top you will find **Oakshaw Trinity Church**. Follow the path round the right hand side of the church and then round to the left behind the church. Continue along **Oakshaw Street** to the end of the road, passing **Coats Observatory** on the left. At the end of the road you will find a large imposing building with a big dome, the former **John Neilson Institute**. A cobbled lane leads off to the right and a road to the left. Take this road leading downhill to the left of the building, this is **West Brae**. At the bottom of the hill turn left onto Well Meadow Street and continue until you reach the front of the museum again.

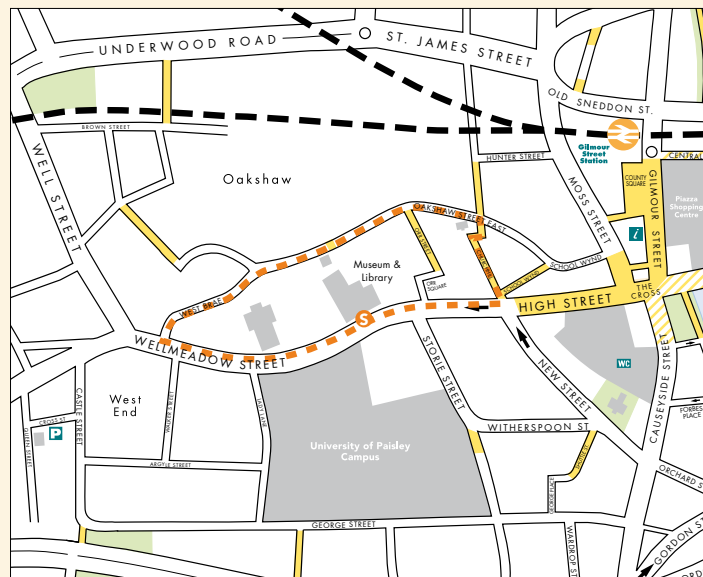
walking to health



High Street/ Oakshaw

walking to health

Distance: 1.2kms Approximate time: 15 mins





A little local knowledge

In the late 1860's Paisley's Philosophical Society was having difficulty housing all its books and other treasures. In 1866 the government passed the Free Libraries Act and Sir Peter Coats offered to pay for a building to be run by the local authority as a museum library. This was Scotland's first municipal museum and the third public library.

The church at the top of Church Hill is **Oakshaw Trinity Church** but is often referred to as the High Kirk, presumably due to its lofty location. It was the second parish church to be built in Paisley after the reformation. It was built in 1754 although the steeple and its bell were added later in 1776. This caused a great outcry as the Town Council decreed that the bell couldn't be rung without permission. The case ended up in court - where the church won!

Look up at the copper dome of **Coats Observatory** on the south side of Oakshaw Street West. In the 1880's Thomas Coats overheard some members of the Paisley Philosophical

Society discussing their interest in astronomy. He then decided to make a gift of an observatory to the Society. This turned out to be his last gift to the town as he died only a couple of weeks after the opening in 1883. The observatory contains not only a telescope for observing the night sky



but also a weather station where information about the weather has been recorded daily since 1884.

Three months before his death John Neilson, a Paisley grocer, signed a trust deed for £18,000 to endow a school. The school was opened at the west end of Oakshaw Street in 1852. Boys attending the school had to be orphans from families so poor that they could not afford to educate their sons. In 1872 education was made compulsory and all the charity schools came under the same management. Gradually the smaller schools were closed down and the children sent to the **John Neilson Institute**. Its domed roof gives it its local name of the 'porridge bowl'.

The John Neilson School was built on the site of a former bowling green, the site of a foul murder in 1780. William Waterston a respected house painter began to pay attentions to a Miss Stewart. Unfortunately she was already betrothed to Archibald Paisley, a wealthy merchant. One evening Paisley's drinking friends James Orr and Walter Corse persuaded William to take a walk to the bowling green. A fight broke out when William refused to stop seeing Miss Stewart.

Corse hit him on the head with a rock, a blow which fractured his skull and from which he died a few hours later. Although they were tried for murder both Orr and Corse were acquitted.

