

The Sitwell Trail.

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For devotees and novices alike, this trail gives an introduction and insight into the extraordinary Sitwell family and their connection with Scarborough.

The main players in our tale are: Sir George Sitwell, who became the fourth baronet when he was two years old, on the death of his father. Sir George's mother, Lady Louisa Sitwell. His wife, Lady Ida of the rich and powerful Londesborough family. Sir George and Lady Ida's three children, Edith, Osbert and Sacheverell, who all became writers and poets.

The main focus of this trail is **The Crescent [Grid ref G10]** with some other places of interest beyond this immediate area.

Start at:

Sitwell Street, Falsgrave [Grid ref E4]. Here we find the House of Hope, always known as the Red House. This was established by Lady Louisa Sitwell for young girls in need of care, who were kept in employment at a laundry. It was originally a fine property, probably with surrounding iron railings, but is now flats and is a sorry sight. Still in use in 1911, it was closed by 1914. Dr Joseph Rablah was one of the consultant surgeons. Edith Sitwell was very disparaging of the set-up in her autobiography, *Taken Care Of*, suggesting her grandmother kidnapped 'unfortunates' off the street and put them to work 'tearing up our laundry'.

If we continue down Falsgrave [Grid ref E4 - G7] towards the centre of town, just past the turning to Sainsbury's and the traffic lights there, we find...

Beaulah Terrace [Grid ref F7]. Number one was the retirement home of Henry Moat, Sir George's valet. Osbert records letters written to him at this address. Henry wrote on the wall upstairs

that he was valet to Sir George. Further on we come to the railway station. Each year, Lady Louisa would pack up family, goods and servants and hire a private train to take them all to Gosden Lodge near Shalford in Surrey, their spring residence.

*From the station we turn right down to the cross roads with **Somerset Terrace [Grid ref G9], Westwood [Grid ref G9] and the Valley Bridge [Grid ref G9].***

*Alternatively, we could begin our trail on **Filey Road. [Grid ref A10 - F10]***

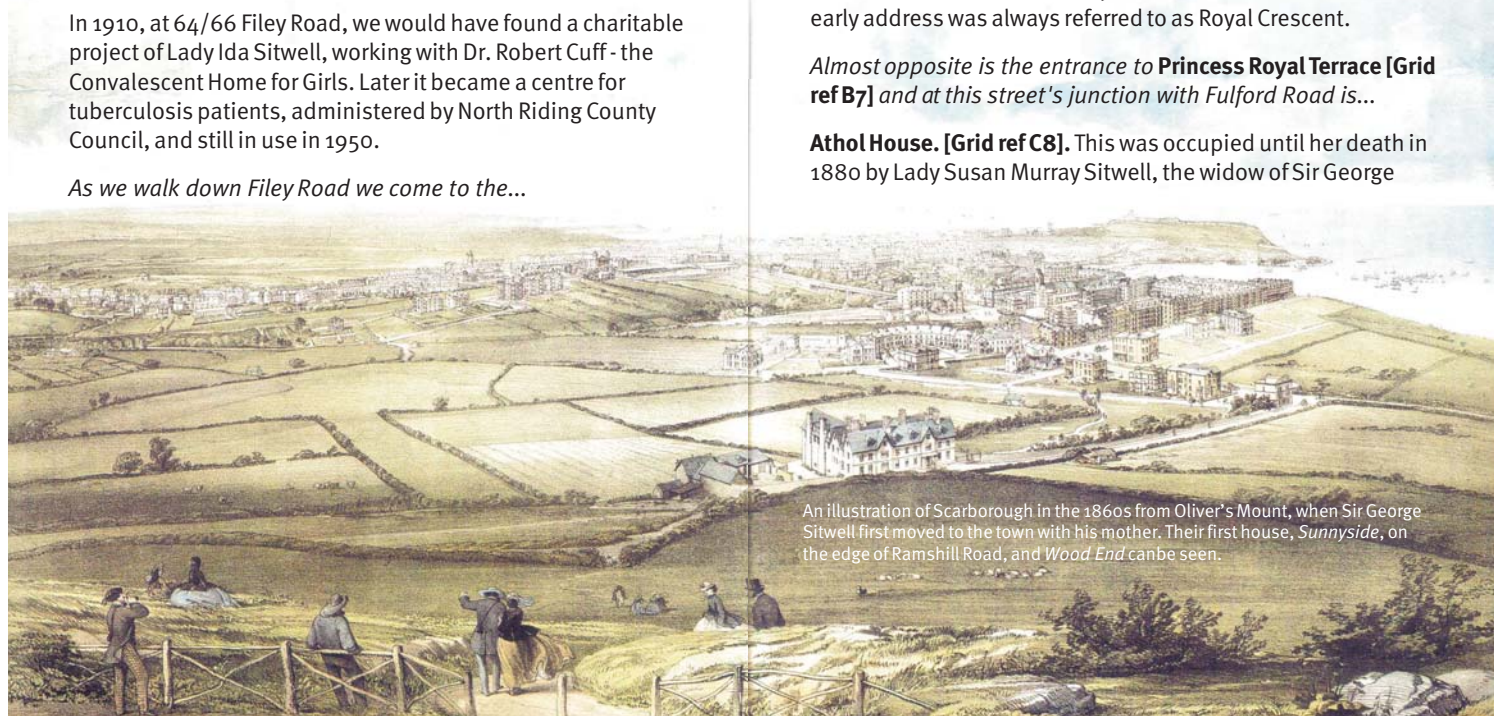
In 1910, at 64/66 Filey Road, we would have found a charitable project of Lady Ida Sitwell, working with Dr. Robert Cuff - the Convalescent Home for Girls. Later it became a centre for tuberculosis patients, administered by North Riding County Council, and still in use in 1950.

As we walk down Filey Road we come to the...

Ramshill Pub [Grid ref D10] and opposite on the corner of Westbourne Grove we can see the faded grandeur of what was known as Sunnyside. In a Rate List for January 1867 Lady Louisa Sitwell is shown as the occupier. She had moved here with her son, Sir George, after the death of her husband. It is thought she was the first owner since previous entries show the site as the brickyard of Coates and Barry. In the Census of 1871 the property is shown as unoccupied, supporting the date of removal to Wood End as 1870. The house is now flats. The house name is still on an upper glazed portion of the main entrance, on **Westbourne Grove [Grid ref C9]**. It should be noted that the early address was always referred to as Royal Crescent.

*Almost opposite is the entrance to **Princess Royal Terrace [Grid ref B7]** and at this street's junction with Fulford Road is...*

Athol House. [Grid ref C8]. This was occupied until her death in 1880 by Lady Susan Murray Sitwell, the widow of Sir George



An illustration of Scarborough in the 1860s from Oliver's Mount, when Sir George Sitwell first moved to the town with his mother. Their first house, *Sunnyside*, on the edge of Ramshill Road, and *Wood End* can be seen.

Sitwell, the second Baronet and our George Sitwell's grandfather, who had died in 1854. Her daughter, Blanche Sitwell, lived for a time here. Osbert records admiring this woman, his unmarried aunt, for her forthright views.

Reaching the Valley Bridge, below us in the pond is the...

Duck house [Grid ref F9], which Sir George Sitwell reportedly said he would take refuge in if the Germans attacked Scarborough during the First World War. The houses in Valley Bridge Parade were probably the models for those which appear in *Low Tide*, a short story by Osbert Sitwell.

Looking to our left we see...

Westwood [Grid ref F9]. Lady Hanmer, Lady Louisa's sister, lived down here, initially in a house called Weston (after her Northants property, Weston Hall). Osbert records going to the Westwood house with Sacheverell to receive his gold sovereign wrapped in a twist of newspaper. This house is between Langford House and Hillthorpe House. When Lady Hanmer moved, hoards of gold sovereigns ready wrapped were apparently found.

A right at the end of Valley Bridge Parade takes us into...

Somerset Terrace [Grid ref G9]. Lady Ida's mother, the wife of Earl Londesborough, Countess Edith, was the daughter of the seventh Duke of Rutland, whose family name is Somerset.

At the traffic lights we turn right into...

The Crescent [Grid ref G10]. To our left is **5 Belvoir Terrace [Grid ref H10]**, where Sacheverell was born in 1897. The Sitwells rented it when Wood End was full of guests. George Sitwell once said, *'Such a mistake to have friends.'*

Three of the four villas on the opposite side of The Crescent [Grid ref G10] all feature in the Sitwell story. Continuing round, we come first to...

The White House [Grid ref H10]. Originally called East Villa, then Belvoir House, it was acquired by the Londesboroughs in 1900. There are records showing that the Sitwells lived here on occasion, not permanently, but perhaps when work was being carried out on Wood End. Lady Louisa is thought to have lived here on leaving Wood End when Sir George married Lady Ida, before she moved out to Hay Brow, in Scalby, in 1893. This then became her summer residence and later, possibly, her Scarborough home before she removed to Bournemouth, where she died in 1911.

She developed the gardens at Hay Brow, employing a young Flemish man, Ernest De Taeye, who she brought to England when he was orphaned as a young man by the suicide of his father. Ernest particularly developed a flair for growing lilies and later married a local girl. He ended his days as the gardener at

Renishaw Hall (the other Sitwell seat). Lady Louisa used Hay Brow as an extension of her charitable work, looking after worn-out Anglican Clergymen and trying to convert young girls whom she would invite to the house.

In her autobiography Edith Sitwell remembers both garden and gardener fondly.

I spent a good deal of time with ... Lady Sitwell in her small country house (Hay-Brow, near Scarborough) surrounded by flowers, like buzzing summer lights, or a sweet Mozartian tune. These were tended by her Belgian gardener, Ernest de Taeye, who would have been like a dear great lumbering bear had he not been completely bald, the result of touching a certain kind of premula. He spoke of flowers tenderly, as fathers sometimes (I suppose) speak of their children, and he touched them with an equal tenderness - the primulas had meant no harm. (Page 59).

Extract from *Taken Care Of* by Edith Sitwell
(1884-1964)

Next round The Crescent is...

Londesborough Lodge [Grid ref G10]. This was the home of Baron (later Earl) Londesborough, and was previously known as Warwick Villa. It was, therefore, the home of Lady Ida Sitwell before her marriage at 17 years of age. It was sold in 1919. The Earl of Londesborough started Scarborough Cricket Club. The family was fantastically wealthy. Through the gardens to the left of Londesborough Lodge is a footbridge over Vernon Road which is a relatively private way onto the Spa Bridge. It is said that when regal and distinguished guests were staying, the Londesboroughs laid a red carpet across these two bridges all the way to the Spa.

We pass the Scarborough Art Gallery [Grid ref G10], once a villa for a wealthy family, with Crescent Arts below it and reach...

Woodend Creative Workspace [Grid ref G10]. Here Lady Louisa moved with Sir George in 1870. Sir George moved his wife in on their marriage and the family divided its time between here and its other great seat, Renishaw Hall, in Derbyshire. Edith was born at Wood End in 1887 - her mother rushing back from a cricket match, after an horrendous argument with her own mother, to give birth.

A pencilled note found on the underside of a floorboard shows this house under construction in 1835. It was occupied by George Knowles in 1837 until it was bought by Lady Louisa. She combined three small rooms on the ground floor into one long drawing room. She also added the impressive conservatory. Sir George added the library wing and a balcony which crossed the conservatory. The bedroom above the library became the one occupied by Osbert. The house was acquired by the Corporation, the Sitwells

having moved out in 1925, and later Edith and Osbert viewed the alterations, circa 1947, as it was transformed into a Natural History Museum. The museum closed in 2006 and re-opened as Woodend Creative Workspace in 2008.

Crossing the oval of gardens at the centre of The Crescent we exit to the roundabout at the top of ...

Vernon Road [Grid ref H10]. Opposite us is a new hotel being built on the site of the old Art School, whose principal was Albert Strange (famous yacht designer and painter). Edith Sitwell was sent here at 11 years old. She did not stay very long and was very scathing of her experiences here.

Going straight on along Falconers Road we arrive at the...

Royal Hotel [Grid ref I11] (built in the 1830s, it still has a most impressive entrance hall). This is where the Scarborough branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) was set up on the 11th December 1908, with Lady Ida Sitwell as President. Though it was vice-president, Mrs Alderson-Smith, who gave 'a charming little speech' according to the Scarborough Mercury, saying the NUWSS would be non-violent and non-political and serve the 'strong body of women who were keenly anxious for the franchise.'

In front of the Town Hall [Grid ref I11] we come to...

King Street [Grid ref I12]. Here Lady Louisa founded the King Street Hospital, entirely through her own money and fundraising efforts. It was opened in 1883, originally as an Eye and Ear Hospital, with Dr GP Dale as surgeon. In the census for 1891 it is recorded as being used for a much wider series of ailments. The precise site of this hospital is difficult to locate but it was almost certainly on the seaward side as it is on occasion referred to as Kings Cliff. There is no known date for closure.

There is no trace here of the Sitwells or their times anymore. But if we linger a while at the top of **St Nicholas Gardens [Grid ref I12]** we can perhaps catch a whisper of what it was like then. In Osbert's novel, *Before the Bombardment*, he presented a lightly mocking view of a thinly disguised Scarborough, including the Grand Hotel. In his autobiography, *Left Hand, Right Hand*, he gives descriptions of the Pierrots performing on the beach below the Grand Hotel and of the jockey carriages with their brilliantly colourful drivers going up and down the front to and from the **Spa [Grid ref F11]**.

To return to The Crescent a simple walk back along the seafront road to the Spa Bridge [Grid ref G11] will lead to the Valley which you can then follow, turning off right into Crescent Gardens [Grid ref G10] just before Valley Bridge [Grid ref G9]. You can then follow these winding paths back up to The Crescent.