After Wilfred visited Nellie, a former maid at Plas Wilmot in September 1911, he wrote, "Spent the time very pleasantly in recalling our reminiscences of the 'old Home.'"

Edward Salter
Mary / Edward Shaw
Emma
Susan / Tom Owen

Wilfred with mother, Susan and Grandfather, Edward Shaw (Top Hat)

WILFRED EDWARD SALTER OWEN was born on the 18th March 1893 in Oswestry at Plas Wilmot, an idyllic, stylish home, built in 1830 by his great grandfather, Edward Salter, the son of an Oswestry timber merchant.

In 1897, following the necessary sale of a much-loved home, the family eventually settled in Birkenhead, with his father Tom being appointed stationmaster. A young Wilfred, aged 7, began attending the local institute. In 1907, the family moved once again to Shropshire following Tom’s promotion.

After a time in Dunsden (Sep 1911 - Feb 1913) as a Vicar’s lay assistant, Wilfred left to teach English in France, returning in 1915 to enlist with the Artists’ Rifles - he was later commissioned to the Manchester Regiment.

In 1917, he fought on the front line in France. Soon home suffering shell shock, he was treated at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh, where he met established poet, Siegfried Sassoon. In August, he returned to France and was awarded the Military Cross for bravery. Wilfred was killed in battle on 4th November 1918, just days before armistice. His family received the news on the very day the church bells rang out to mark the end of the war.

In Oswestry, Wilfred is commemorated in a number of ways at the Wilfred Owen Town Trail. On your visit to Oswestry, you will be able to follow a Short Trail and a Longer Trail, exploring the town and learning about the life of the great poet Wilfred Owen.

The Wilfred Owen Town Trail was kindly funded by Oswestry Town Council, Oswestry Borderland Tourism Ltd and Lights Out Trefonen.

Our kind thanks to The Owen Literary Estate for photo permissions.

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THE SHORT TRAIL - 60/90 MINS

1. VISITOR & EXHIBITION CENTRE

The ORIGINAL building of Oswestry School, founded in 1467 by the Bishop of Llandaff, this Grade II listed, classical villa was the birthplace of Wilfred Owen. The insignia at the centre of the plaque was Wilfred’s monogrammed design for his cigarette case.

Go left through the gate at the end of the Broadwalk, and continue on past The Cross monument - and the original indoor Powis Hall Market on the Bailey Head (replaced by the currently hall in 1963)

2. ST. OSWALD’S CHURCH

In 1891, Susan Shaw looked to marry the man she loved, Tom Owen. Family finances were ebbing away, her beloved mother Mary had just died, and there was a desperate need for some stability in the family.

And so, on the 8th December, Susan, still in grief, wore black at the wedding and was married at St. Oswald’s.

NOTE: wheelchair access to ground floor only

Leaving the Visitor Centre, go across the churchyard to the entrance of St. Oswald’s church.

3. PLAQUE & STONE BENCH

COMMISSIONED by the Wilfred Owen Association in 1993 to mark the centenary of his birth, this beautiful steel plaque includes the Artists’ Rifles insignia and is engraved with two of Wilfred’s most famous poems; Anthem for Doomed Youth and Futility. The striking stone bench was designed and made in Oswestry, by Mark Evans.

At the commemoration of the plaque, poet Ted Hughes - a great admirer of Wilfred Owen - read from Futility.

Go left through the gate of the end of the Broadwalk, and continue on past The Cross Church Street to the Park Gates of Cae Glas Park (60m).

4. WWII/II WAR MEMORIALS

AN EXTENSIVE RESTORATION of Oswestry’s fine War Memorial was unveiled in August 2014. The restoration of the pillar commemorates those Oswestry men who died in WWII, with WWI commemorations on the reverse, just inside the gates.

Also inside, to the left, is a memorial to those men who worked for the Cambrian Railways killed in WWI. It’s a most graceful work by sculptor Allen G Wynn. The piece, originally sited at the Railway Station, was moved to the park and re-dedicated in 1975.

Go through the gates into the park. Straight ahead, on the right is the park gate leading up to the Wilfred Owen sculpture (50m).

5. WILFRED OWEN SCULPTURE

“WILFRED WILL KNOW HE HAS COME HOME” - words written by Peter Owen, Wilfred’s nephew, on the black granite plinth.

The sculpture, by local artist Tim Taylor, is a life-size bronze statue of Wilfred Owen in the world and was cast at Castle Fine Art in Spain. The design was commissioned by YM Mochmar in commemoration of his death on 4th November 1918.

The statue stands in a dynamic pose of Owen on the front foot, the book in his right hand and his words from Owen’s poetry, and that of local schoolchildren, the words cascading down a gabled and broken tree onto the mud and sandbags at Owen’s feet.

Return back through the park gates, going left along Church Street for 145m to the second zebra crossing (on your right). Continue on past The Cross monument (on your left), towards Llwyd Mansion at the bottom of Bailey Street (45m).

6. LLWYD MANSION

ONE OF OSWESTRY’S MOST impressive buildings, Llwyd Mansion dates to 1604, built by John Lloyd of Llanforda. Wilfred’s relative, Joseph Salter 1735-1800, lived and worked here as a watchmaker and general dealer. He was reputed to have been the town’s first printer. His eldest son Robert wrote The Modern Anglcer which was published by his son Jackson. So, it seems Wilfred was not the first writer in the Salter clan!

On the front of the building is a commemorative double-headed eagle. It was awarded to a Lloyd’s ancestor who helped to recover an Austrian emperor’s standard in 1190 at the siege of Acre.

Walk up Bailey Street for 60m, keeping a look out on your right, for this next curious art deco building.

7. THE IRONMONGERY

NO.16 BAILEY STREET was the ironmongery business for almost 100 years over by Edward Shaw, Wilfred’s grandfather. They specialized in fustians and tinware, and was a great success.

He’d arrived in 1850 from Shobden, near Leominster, and married Mary Salter. He was soon elected to the Town Council, becoming Mayor in 1869 and Justice of the Peace. For the borough, he died in 1879 at Plas Wilmot.

Bailey Street would have been the man’s main shopping route. 1849 saw the opening of both The Cross Market – the fine building next to The Cross monument - and the original indoor Powis Hall Market on the Bailey Head (replaced by the currently hall in 1963)

Continue to the top of Bailey Street (75m), then bear left across Bailey Head to the Guildhall steps (25m)

Go up the steps or around to the left of the building for wheelchair access.

8. GUILDHALL & TOWN MUSEUM

BUILT IN RENAISSANCE STYLE, the new Guildhall at Oswestry Town Council was opened in 1892.

At least three of Wilfred’s relatives were councillors, two of whom were Mayors: Jackson Salter and his grandfather, Edward Shaw.

Visit Oswestry Museum (3rd floor/lift is available) to glimpse Oswestry’s rich history and heritage from pre-history through to the 1990’s.

Through the main doors follow the corridor straight ahead, bearing left for 3m to see the brass panel of past mayors including Edward Shaw and Jackson Salter.

9. CAMBRIAN RAILWAYS

BORN 1862, IN NANTWICH, John Stalworthy, Wilfred’s first biographer, was taken on as a junior clerk by Great Western Railway (GWR) and posted to Oswestry. By 1864/05, an amalgamation of railways in the region had formed Cambrian Railways with Oswestry selected as the headquar.

Late in 1880, Tom, aged 18, set sail on the SS Benalder for the family, they retained strong emotional ties to Plas Wilmot naming their house in Shrewsbury, Wilmot House.

In 1897, the old railway station building was moved to the park next to The Cross monument - and the original indoor Powis Hall Market on the Bailey Head (replaced by the currently hall in 1963)

Follow the Guildhall steps, return across Bailey Head to the top of Bailey St, but then bear left down Albert Hill. At the bottom of Albert Hill, go right along Leg St (65m) to the crossroads junction.

Then, go left onto Oswald Road for 200m - you will see Cambrian Railways housed in what is now the Old Station Building on your right.

10. WILFRED OWEN GREEN

THE GREEN was opened and dedicated to the memory of Wilfred Owen on 23rd July 2010 by Peter Owen, his nephew, who spoke of Wilfred’s ‘great love of children and nature’.

The site has stunning wildflower meadows, trees, footpaths, a play area and a 40m grass labyrinth, one of the largest in the world.

Shelf Bank, now a Local Nature Reserve, once housed a Royal Observer Corps WWll look-out and Cold War bunker because of its superb view at the summit.

Returning over the railway track, bear left along Black Gate Street, until you come to Salop Road; turn left and continue along the church, Holy Trinity, on your right.

11. HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

www.holytrinityoswestry.co.uk

HOLY TRINITY became a central pillar in the life of the Owen family, with many family members going to Sunday School. Tom got involved too, while Susan was an enthusiastic and strong Evangelical. From an early age, Wilfred would sit with his mother to read the bible together.

Follow the arrow signs along Roff St, then right along Lower Morda Road. Cross over the traffic lights into Morda Rd. Walk about 420m along Morda Road, till you see the church on your right. Take a left, just after the zebra crossing, along Weston Lane, keeping on this road for 3.5m till you reach Plas Wilmot on your right.

12. PLAS WILMOT - BIRTHPLACE

NOTE: This is a PRIVATE RESIDENCE with no public access, so please be respectful and do not trespass - thank you.

BUILT IN 1830, this Grade II listed, classical villa was the dream of Edward Salter, Wilfred’s great-grandfather who died before completion.

Wilfred was born here on 18th March, 1893, in the same room as his mother, Susan. It was 30 years later, the day before, 17th March in 1867.

Following the death of his maternal grandfather Edward Shaw, the house was auctioned on 16th March 1897, the day before Susan’s 30th birthday. Whilst deeply upsetting for the family, they retained strong emotional ties to Plas Wilmot naming their house in Shrewsbury, Wilmot House.

English Heritage wrote of Plas Wilmot that, “It is clearly the place which meant most to him (Wilfred) from the period in which he was forming as a poet.”

Retrace your steps back along Weston Lane, and go right along Morda Road, all the way back to the junction, go across the traffic lights onto Church St and along into the town centre.

13. OLD OSWESTRY HILLFORT

OSWESTRY HILLFORT is one of the oldest border settlements in the country, and it is thought that the town’s name was formed from ‘Old Oswestry’.

In the Spring of 1915, following the outbreak of war, Oswestry quickly became a key strategic military training facility with around 21,000 soldiers including 4000 officers stationed there.

Thousands of soldiers were drilled in trench protocols using an extensive circuit of training trenches on top of the hillfort, prior to being posted to the battlefields.

In 1917, Wilfred returned to Park Hall Camp (which was located across the bypass from the hillfort) to attend a musketry course - he was a first class shot.

More info at VISITOSWESTRY.CO.UK