

## Gumstool Hill

Just around the corner from The Market House is the famous Gumstool Hill. Why is it famous? Because this is where, every Spring Bank Holiday, the Woolsack Races take place. Gumstool Hill is very steep and at its steepest the hill is one in four.

The races take place in the afternoon when teams of young men and women have relay races from The Crown Inn to The Royal Oak on the other side of the valley. The runners, having gone well over 200 yards, have to drop their woolsack so the other runner can pick it up and run back up the Hill to the finishing line.

The weight of the woolsack for men is 65 pounds and for women, a more recent addition, 35. Nowadays the runners are cheered and encouraged, whereas long in the past when what the lads were doing was purely showing off in front of their sweethearts and comments were not so complimentary.

So that's the main reason for Gumstool Hill's fame. But this was once the main road from Bath and Bristol to Cirencester, Roman Corinium, the second most important Roman town to London itself. At the bottom of the Hill stood the Gumstool, the Ducking Stool. This was where Tetbury could always find water so there would be a large enough supply to immerse the scolds and the short-changers and whoever had upset the Beadle.

Even in the dry summers there can usually be found a spot of water. It was at the bottom of the Hill that the cattle and sheep market was built and opened in 1889, at the same time as the Railway arrived just across the road. And, indeed, just into Wiltshire, as it then was. The market finally gave up (foot and mouth was the last injustice), but not before being one of the scenes in the film, *Dulcima* a film by Brian Forbes adapted from an H.E Bates story. Now there is a proud Millennium Green and flowing water diverted into The Splash.

Finally, Gumstool Hill was the home of the Workhouse, built in 1793 and improved in 1906. It has served as a Hospital for Australian and New Zealand Forces, an old peoples home, a maternity home and a training ground for sniffer dogs. Now it is the home of Kingsley House, a nursing home.

Have a walk down – there is an easier way back up.