

WELWYN-HATFIELD ROTARY WALK 2018

POINTS OF INTEREST

The route of the WHWalk is clearly marked with arrows attached to trees etc. The numbers in these notes are to be found alongside some of the arrows marking the Routes and on our Map.

The WHWalk starts and finishes at the Campus West Car Park.

Campus West Arts and Conference Centre, Welwyn Garden City, was opened December 1973 by Dame Flora Robson, after which a concert was given in the Theatre by the band of the Scots Guards and a sixty-voice choir. The complex also included a large exhibition hall, now Roller City and a banqueting hall, currently an up-to-the minute conference facility. The Campus Library was opened separately by Sir John Betjeman when he was Poet Laureate.

1. Disused Railway: The Luton & Welwyn Railway went from Hatfield to Luton/Dunstable, and was active from 1860 - 1965 when it was closed under Dr. Beeching. This wide pathway goes through the edge of Sherrardspark Woods, an ancient woodland which is an SSSI, recognising its ancient hornbeams & sessile oak trees. It is now a part of the Sustrans national cycle network.

2. The Red Lion pub (opened in 1715 as "The Shoulder of Mutton") and the nearby Waggoners pub: (opened in 1851 to replace "The Angel") were both formerly on the old Great North Road before the A1(M) was opened. Remains of the old road can be seen in front of both pubs. Both pubs were old coaching inns and were an important stop on the London to York road for changing horses after the hard pull up the hills from either side.

Ayot Green is a delightful old village nestled around a very picturesque village green. *The route takes the left hand fork of the road and follows the road around past the Saw Mill and down a narrow road with attractive houses on either side.*

About 400 yards past the saw mill the route leaves the road to go right and down a sloping path to a stile crossing leading into a small bluebell wood. The path picks its way through the wood up to a field which is crossed to get to the Ayot Greenway Path (again part of the disused Luton & Welwyn Railway). A left turn and the route follows the Greenway to . . .

3. *Hunters Bridge Walk marker. At this point the short WHWalk continues along the disused railway path and the long Walk takes a sharp turn right towards Ayot St Lawrence.*

Short Route - *WHWalkers continue along the Ayot Greenway path, under Sparrowhall Bridge (after approx. 600 yards) and on for a further 500 yards to the Greenway gate posts where the route turns sharp left and goes down a wide path to join the Lee Valley Walk. At this point the short route turns left to rejoin the long route (from note 8. below) for the return to the finish.*

Long Route - *From Hunters Bridge, WHWalkers on the long route now follow a path along the edge of a field and through a woodland path between Bladder Wood (to the left) and Warren Wood (to the right). Emerging from the wood the path now follows the edge of Fish Wood (to the right) across lovely open countryside up to the Codicote Road crossing*

4. Codicote Road Walk marker. Take extra care crossing the road.

From the road there are two alternatives. The main bridleway path climbs gently uphill along the side of Stocking Springs Wood. This can be a very muddy bridleway and in bad weather a much better route is to go through the attractive wood on the winding path which runs roughly parallel to the bridleway.

Stocking Springs Wood is an interesting old wood looked after by the Woodland Trust and the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust and typical of the coppiced hornbeam woodlands which once dominated the county's landscape. Ancient woodland indicators abound here too, including wood violets and yellow archangel. The wood is still coppiced using a traditional rotation system, so each tree is coppiced once every 16 years. Visit in spring for wild daffodils and bluebells, and look too for the towering oak standards which are popular with nesting tree creepers, nuthatches and woodpeckers.

The path then opens up to a broad bridleway to the village of Ayot St Lawrence. Crossing the road (with care) the path now goes behind Shaw's Corner (seen on the right through the hedge).

5. Shaw's Corner. A National Trust property, originally built as the new Rectory for Ayot St. Lawrence church in 1902. The Church Commissioners decided it was too large so rented it in 1906 to George Bernard Shaw and his new wife Charlotte. They later bought it, together with the surrounding land, for £6,000. In the lower garden near to our path, is the famous revolving writing hut converted from a summer house and recently refurbished by the Engineering Dept. of the University of Hertfordshire. Shaw's and other contemporary plays are performed in the grounds in summer.

From Shaw's Corner the route follows a well-defined path through Harepark wood to a path crossroads where WHWalkers should take the left hand turn towards Lamer House via Lime Avenue.

6. Bride Hall Estate: You may notice that the fields on the left have a mowed area forming a grassy edge path around them. This is part of the "extended garden" of the Hall, which is occasionally open to the public and well worth a visit. Bride Hall was formerly part of the extensive estate of Lamer Hall (see below) and used during WW II as officers' quarters for the Special Operations Executive.

Lime Avenue and Lamer Hall: *This avenue was part of the grand planting designed by Sir Humphrey Repton.* The existing house is nowhere near as grand as its predecessor, an 18 C. mansion to which the lime avenue led and home to Apsley Cherry-Gerrard, an Antarctic explorer, and author of "The Worst Journey in the World" describing the ill-fated journey of Scott's Expedition to the South Pole.

From Lamer House the path now turns due south along a well-defined thoroughfare. The fields to the right usually have some delightful Shetland ponies. To the left was a golf course. It is important to look for the 'kissing' gate on the left as the route passes through this to cross what was Lamer Park Country Club golf course. The route departs via a second 'kissing-gate', before (carefully) crossing the Codicote Road.

7. Old disused gravel workings, and waste tipping. This section of the route has been much improved recently and is now a broad, well drained gravelly roadway with recent tree planting on either side.

After the disused workings the path goes downhill, to join the Greenway; at this point the route is at its nearest to Wheathampstead and the Cory Wright Way (Wheathampstead by-pass). Turning left along the Greenway avoids the treacherous sloping path that follows the water meadows along the River Lee, which we no longer recommend to WHWalkers!

8. Walk marker. At this point the long WHWalk route is joined by the short route for the return to the finish.

9. Water End House is the fine brick mansion alongside the ford here, built by Sir Robert Jennings in 1610 as a family residence and occupied by them at least until 1660 when a daughter Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough was born at the house. By 1702 she owned all of the Manor of Sandridge in which Water End was then situated.

Water End Farm owned several barns which were situated alongside the old ford across the stream. In 1938 one of the barns, which had fallen into disuse, was relocated to St Albans as the Waterend Barn Restaurant.

The River Lee or Lea: rises just north of Luton, and although very rural here, becomes an important navigable waterway beyond Hertford, serving the industry of the Lee valley, as well as many reservoirs, before emptying into the Thames in east London.

10. Brocket Hall, originally a mediaeval manor now a major conference centre, was rebuilt in its present form by James Paine for Sir Matthew Lamb in 1751 -1755. The famous Palladian bridge and waterfall were also Paine's design. The wife of a subsequent owner, Lady Caroline Lamb, became infatuated with Lord Byron. Former Prime Ministers, Lords Palmerston and Melbourne were also owners. During WW II it was used as a maternity hospital; in more recent times it was home to Lord Charles Brocket ("I'm a celebrity, get me out of here").

11. *Important course marker. The route turns sharp left here and crosses several of the golf fairways (please take great care) before the sharp uphill of Cats Gallows. The route leaves Brocket Park at the Waggoners*

12. The Waggoners and Red Lion pubs: see under **2.** above, must have been good resting points for horses having struggled up Digswell Hill from Welwyn or Hatfield, and maybe for WHWalkers too!

From the Red Lion, across the road there's a nice gentle downhill back along the disused railway to the finish.

Compiled by Dr John Perren (1920-2015) who instigated the Welwyn-Hatfield Walk, 1998.