

Chesham & Ley Hill Walk

Summary

This walk was produced for the Historic Pathways Project of the Thames Valley Network of U3As. It covers the history of both Chesham & Ley Hill and the highlights include the local brick making industry, old routes and the changes in the landscape made by man.

Start: Off road parking area in Ashridge Lane, Ley Hill GR SP990019. Nearest Postcode HP5 1UY

Distance: 4.9 miles with c160m of ascent

Terrain: A moderate walk with three climbs. Stile free

Maps: OS Explorer 181 and Chiltern Society 17

Refreshments: The Crown and Swan pubs in Ley Hill. The Crown offers a walkers menu for groups

Public transport: Bus 73 between Chesham and Whelpley Hill

Route

From the pubs, walk towards the road junction and turn left into Kiln Lane. Continue along for 750m to Cowcroft Grange.

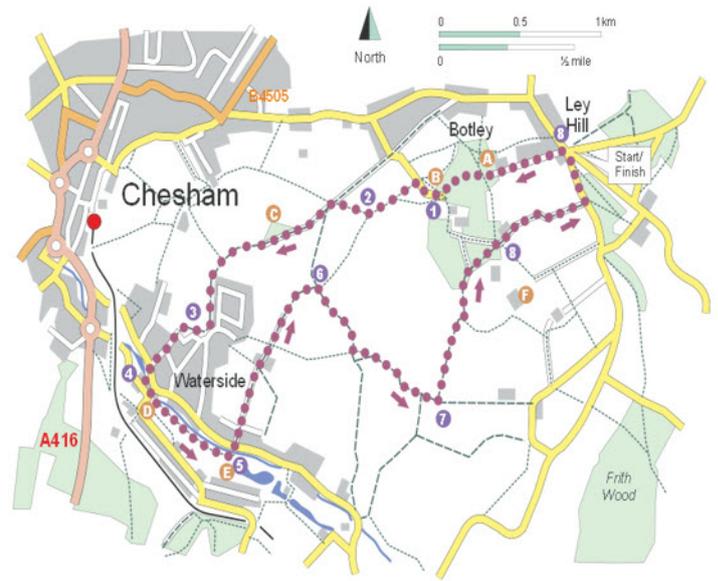
1. Turn right downhill past St George's Church and take the gate after the last house on the left. Cross the field, through the next gate and straight on to the right of a hedge.
2. Where that ends turn right downhill. At the bottom, turn left on a bridleway and fork right uphill on a wide track; Trapps Lane. At the top go into The Big Round Green. Follow the path through the wood and rejoin the track. Turn right for 600m to emerge into Chessmount Rise.
3. Follow the now surfaced Trapps Lane round to the right as it descends across two roads to the bottom. Turn left, cross the road and the river via the footbridge. To the left are the remains of Lords Mill. Keep straight ahead and cross the road towards the swimming pool.
4. Bear left along the pavement past the tennis courts and cross Bois Moor Road and the footbridge to Chesham Moor. Turn left and follow the riverbank for 500m to reach a waterfall. Ahead to the left is an information board.
5. Turn left past the waterfall and walk up the slope to a road. Cross to Hill Farm Road and climb up and past Hill Farm. Stay on this wide track for 500m as it drops down to a major track at the bottom.
6. Turn right for 400m to a crossing path. Drop down left towards White End. Follow the field edge to a hedgerow and go through a gap onto a bridleway. Turn left uphill. At the top, continue along for a further 250m to a kissing gate on the left.
7. Go through and follow the bridleway along the left hand edge of the field. Where that ends stay in the same direction to go through a gate. Turn left and follow the track between hedgerow and fence past a concrete triangulation point for 500m to a noticeboard in Cowcroft Wood.
8. Turn right out of the wood and then immediately left and follow the bridleway for 500m to a lane; Blackwell Hall Lane. Turn left to return to the start.

History and Points of Interest

Ley Hill – The first section of the walk looks at the local tile, pottery and brickmaking industries. This is reflected in such names as Tyler's Hill and Kiln Lane. In nearby Joiners Close a late medieval tile kiln was discovered. The Swan pub was built in around 1520 and is thought to be one of the oldest in Buckinghamshire. In WWII it played host to airmen from the American air force base at Bovingdon and played host to a number of well-known people including James Stewart and Clark Gable.

A Cowcroft Wood & Nature Reserve

An ancient wood, part of a complex of woodland known as Tylers Hill. The clay soil has been worked for three centuries to supply material for the local tile and brickworks. On either side of the walk through the



woods there this is evidence of such workings. In the wood Oak and beech are predominant but other species include wild cherry, ash, birch, sycamore and hornbeam. The ground flora includes wild orchids, bluebells, lesser celendine, dogs mercury and occasional primroses.

B Tylers Hill

The name relates to the past tile-making industry here, utilising the London Clay. St George's Church was built in 1871 as a mission church from Christchurch, Waterside. The two churches are only a mile apart as the crow flies, up a country lane and over the fields. In the old days the vicar used to travel from one to the other on his horse!

C Trapps Lane

Part of an old route between Chesham and Berkhamsted. Also used as access to Lords Mill. In Chesham it connects with an old lane called 'The Backs'. The Big Round Green was once owned and used as a pound by Lord Chesham, and later as a children's play area. The full extent of the original Big Round Green is not known.

D Chesham, Waterside & the Moor

There is archaeological evidence to show that there have been people living in this area since 8000BC. The town is known for its four Bs; boots, beer, brushes and Baptists. Most of the buildings in the town and surrounding area were made of local bricks. Between the wars there were 23 brickworks in the Chesham area. It was during the 18th and 19th centuries that the town grew with the development of manufacturing industry. The local area is called Waterside and over the years it has had many industries including lace making, straw plaiting and milling. Chesham Moor was originally swampland and manorial waste and is now designated as common land. The playing field area has been reclaimed from a rubbish tip.

E. River Chess & Canon's Mill

The River Chess is a chalk stream - a rare habitat found only in southern England, northern France and New Zealand. The Chess has some of the purest water of any such streams as it emanates from the many groundwater springs along the chalk outcrop in the slopes of the 'dry valleys' that run down into Chesham. The Chess is also unusual in that it takes its name from the town. Such clean water is ideal for the growing of watercress and there were many sites in the area. The waterfall and surrounding brickwork is all that's left of Canon's Mill. There were a number of mills along the length of the Chess and were used for corn-milling, fulling and papermaking. Canon's Mill dates back to Saxon times and even referred to in the Domesday Book. It was owned by the canons of Missenden Abbey from the early 12th century. Last worked in 1937 and demolished around 1960.

F. Duntons Brothers Brickworks

They were last remaining manufacturer of traditional handmade bricks and clay roof tiles in the Ley Hill area. The site has now closed.



This walk has been sponsored by Chess Valley and Chiltern U3As as their contribution towards the Historic Pathways Project of the Thames Valley Network of U3As. The University of the Third Age (U3A) is a dynamic, outward looking organisation which has a positive and creative approach to retirement. Activities, which usually take place in the day-time, are organised mainly in small groups that meet regularly. Members share their knowledge and experience and develop their own capabilities by learning from each other. No qualifications are required, and none are given. All you need is interest and enthusiasm. If you would like further information on these local branches then please contact Chess Valley at www.chessvalley-u3a.org.uk and Chiltern at www.chiltern-u3a.org.uk