

Walk 1 – Red Lion – Adders Lane – Sodom Lane – Drift Lane – Grims Ditch - Aldworth Road – School Lane – Beckfords – Darby Lane.

This is a 4 mile walk which you should be able to do in a couple of hours. The terrain is mixed and you'll need sensible footwear in the summer and walking boots and or wellingtons in the autumn / winter months. There are lovely views all over this walk as well as an awful lot of History and (hopefully) some interesting facts. The good news is that it starts and ends at a pub, the bad that the pub is currently looking for new custodians to take on its running....

1. Red Lion Public House

Every walk should start and finish at a pub. The building that you are standing next to has been there since the 17th Century (with considerable alterations over the years) with the early references to be found in a court case of 1728 and the Enclosure map of 1809. At one point the pub had serious competition in the village with a further three listed in the census returns of the early 20th Century. Now it stands alone and is a popular local meeting point. The name 'Red Lion' is the most popular pub name in England although for a short period time in the mid nineteenth century the pub was known as 'the Morrisons Arms'.

Cross the road and begin your walk down Yattendon Road

2. Lion Meadow & Basildon Common

Across the road from the pub and on the left hand side of Yattendon Road is Lion Meadow. This was the site of village fairs and gatherings dating from the early 18th century and quite possibly earlier. Village Fairs were held in the fields all the way between here and the village green by St Stephens Church.

As you now walk down Yattendon Road look at the large field on your left. This is Basildon's old common and originally it covered the area you can see plus the land up to and beyond where Emery Acres is now situated. It would have been used for animal grazing and would have also acted as a right of way for people moving about the Parish.

Move to the right hand side of the road and look for the Bridleway on your right

3. Large Oak tree

As you enter Adders Lane you should see a large Oak tree on your left. It measures over 4 metres in circumference and dates to somewhere in the mid / late 18th Century. In the Spring of 2015, the Parish Council kicked off a small project to measure the larger Oak trees within the Parish. The results were interesting and showed a concentration around the top of Aldworth Road and the surrounding lanes. The data has also been shared with West Berkshire Council with a request to begin the process of acquiring tree preservation orders for those larger trees currently unprotected. As you walk around today, you'll pass another 4 of the village's oldest trees.

Follow the lane through the copse

4. Adders Lane

You are now walking along Adders Lane, a one time main road between Upper Basildon and Ashampstead. This however is only half the story. As you walk through this muddy copse with its

brambles, odd yew and Oak tree you'd be forgiven for thinking it's nothing more than a rutted track. However, it marks an old Parish boundary (which would date it to the 9th century) and is locally believed to be an even older Roman trackway making it somewhere approaching 2000 years old.

If you are walking Adders Lane in Spring, keep an eye out for carpets of bluebells in amongst the trees. Don't look down too much though as there's plenty to see.

5. Yew Trees

Towards the end of Adders Lane you will start to descend sharply to meet up with the road at the bottom of Kiln Hill. On your right you'll see Yew Trees here and there, notable for their unusual coloured bark which when I last visited was red and black. To estimate the age of a yew you measure the circumference with every metre representing 100 years.

Caution – you are now at the bottom of Kiln Hill and there is on occasion fast moving traffic. Turn Left at the bottom of Adders Lane and then right 50 yards later when you see a large silver gate. There is footpath there and we'll be heading up it, however, let's talk about witches first.

6. Witches / Wych Elm Bottom

There is a story that both Basildon and Ashampstead had covens of witches. One night there was a disagreement and the Basildon Witches chased their counterparts to the bottom of Kiln Hill. Here, the leader of Basildon cast his staff into the ground and issued a spell which banished his foes back where they had come from (Ashampstead, I assume) Afterwards a large Wych Elm grew; when it came down in the 19th century it was said to be full of bees and there was an abundance of honey for anyone in the area!

7. Aldworth Road / The Normans

The Ashampstead Parish Council walking leaflet comments that the Aldworth Road in front of you is prehistoric which would suggest that it provided a link to the Ridgeway.

In his book 'Around the valley of the Pang', Dick Greenaway talks about the Norman invasion Of 1066. Having won the Battle of Hastings, the Normans needed to cross the Thames in order to get at London from the North. They had allies at Wallingford and were able to cross at Streatley, not before they caused a trail of devastation on the way. Mr Greenaway talks about the journey of the Normans and suggests the 'bottom road' between Bradfield and Aldworth was the more likely route of the Norman march as the current A329 would leave the army vulnerable to hillside attack whilst having the Thames as an obstacle to the right of them. As a result, as you stand by the silver gate facing the bottom road, imagine the scene over 950 years ago as a victorious army marched by and changed English history forever.

Now look over the road (and into the parish of Ashampstead.) Straight across the road is a footpath curving gently to the right. This runs parallel with a ditch that would have been a 13th century deer park complete with hedge or fence on top to keep the animals from straying. You'll struggle to see much now from your current view point but as you climb Sodom Lane you'll see Breach Field across the roads and through the trees which was inside the deer park.

Go in past the gate and begin the walk up Sodom Lane.

8. Sodom Lane

You are now walking on another old path which is now a pleasant bridleway and climbs from the valley floor to Quicks Green. This was once a path to the Methodist chapel which you'll get to in a bit, for now though enjoy the countryside and look for the views as you level out at the top. According to Ashampstead Parish Councils footpath leaflet Sodom Lane derives its name from a local joke about the 'hell fire' preachers at the Chapel.

Follow Sodom Lane to Quicks Green – stay on the main path

9. View to the top of Kiln Hill and Kiln Ride.

As you reach the highest point of Sodom Lane you will see a footpath leading off to the right. Stay on your current path but note where this other one goes. This path leads to Kiln Ride which sits amongst the trees towards the top of Kiln Hill. Once there was a thriving brick works here and it's said that Kiln Ride is built on the top of a former Polish camp. We'll talk about the brick works in a bit more detail later. As you follow the path around to the **left** and towards Quick Green you'll see a lovely view of the valley on your left.

10. Quicks Green Methodist Chapel

The path drops and then climbs quickly over cobbles and rocks. As you climb this section of the path you will suddenly be confronted by a beautiful old Methodist Chapel. This is now a private dwelling so avoid the design to jump the wall and have a good explore! Built in 1872 the Chapel was one of a handful in the area (Burnt Hill and East Ilsley both have ones). It provided Sunday services until its closure in 1972. At its peak it was said to attract large crowds from the surrounding villages (a couple of hundred) with many people getting there as you just did by Sodom Lane. On arrival, they'd hear travelling preachers (it didn't have its own minister) with the minister using an attached stable block to leave his horse for the duration of the service. It replaced a previous building thought to have been too small which was on the same site and built in 1851. There was also a chapel built in 1834 although it's not certain if this was at the same site.

Go to the End of the footpath, turn right and stop.

11. Quicks Green

You are now in Quicks Green. This was / is a small Hamlet in the corner of a Parish. In centuries past poor people with nowhere else to live were allowed to settle in these spaces and in return paid an annual fine - this over time became a rent. In addition to the Chapel there was once a Bakers which according to the Ashampstead Village book ceased baking in 1914. You'll have passed that as you reach the end of the footpath (on the left).

March up the hill (Whitemoor Lane)

As you go up the hill and leave Quicks Green, you'll follow a tree lined single track road up the hill. This is another very old lane in the Parish and some of the lumps and bumps you'll see on particularly the left side represent the ends of old field systems. After about a quarter of a mile you'll also see a footpath which crosses the road. Stop here and let me tell you a little bit about bricks....

12. Basildon Brickworks

To your right you'll see trees and beyond them modern houses. On this site was the Basildon brickworks which produced bricks right up until the Second World War. There were 4 kilns at site, capable of holding 77,000 bricks. Additionally, there is evidence of Roman brick making at the site, illustrating the quality of

the local clay. Brick making came to an end 70 or so years ago and in its place Teneplas extrusions took over. Initially making Spitfire parts in North London, they settled in Upper Basildon following bomb damage to their factory in the early 1940's and stayed up until 20 years or so ago. The site is now a small development of new homes and only the houses they built for the workers (Teneplas Drive) remains.

Now note the footpath through the field to the left and towards the trees. This would have been the old workers path which provided a shortcut from the Brickworks to the bottom of Quicks Green Hill and the Fleece and Feathers pub. It's still used today by ramblers, unfortunately though the Fleece and Feathers pub is now a private house.

13 Old Oaks – Whitemoor Lane

As you reach the top of Whitemoor Lane, you'll pass two lovely old Oaks just the other side of the stud farm fence (on the right). These oaks have overlooked Whitemoor Lane for the last 250 years and were included in the Parishes survey of largest oak tree's.

At the top of Whitemoor Lane the road turns sharply to the right. Turn left here onto Drift Lane and follow the lane to the houses at the end.

14. Drift Lane.

Drift Lane links Hartridge and the old Basildon common and takes its name from 'Drove' as cattle would have been driven down this lane to new fields etc. Just before the first copse on your right there is a lime pit which would have been used for making mortar for house building.

Pass the houses on the left at the end of the road and go down the footpath. The path becomes a track which goes down White hill (passing another Lime Kiln) and turns sharp left turn at the bottom. Now follow the footpath to the right (there is a footpath sign) and head up the field along the track in the middle of the field. As you reach the top of the hill turn around and enjoy the view.

15. Enjoy the Views

Like something from a postcard, as you turn around you'll see copses and houses dotted before you. On the other side of the valley sits Ashampstead and the road running through the valley links Aldworth and Bradfield and is the one we saw at the bottom of Adders Lane earlier. Stand for a while and you'll see Deer who like the copses and lazily potter between them. To your right is a 14th century copse which was the result of the black death and the reduction in land required for farming. Down on the left you may see the old Bakery which was in action until the mid 1980's.

Head into Bowlers Copse / Broom Wood. As soon as you enter look left and right

16. Grims Ditch

You should be able to see a bank of earth with a ditch running below. There's trees and brambles growing over it now but you'll soon make it out. This ditch is well over 2000 years old and was left by our Celtic ancestors in the Iron Age. It is believed that it was a boundary marker due to its size rather than for military purposes and archaeologists have offered a date of circa 300BC for its construction. The name Grim is Saxon rather than Celtic and refers to their God who they believed cut the ditch into the earth. The ditch runs through Broom wood and can also be seen at other points in the local area. It is not the only Iron Age connection Basildon has – Lower Basildon has a mortuary enclosure where the dead would be left in the open as part of a (possible) religious ceremony (see walk 3). Additionally, a small hoard of

Celtic Gold Stater coins were found in Upper Basildon and dated to 50 BC. These coins are in the Museum at Newbury.

Grims ditch is a scheduled monument today to ensure its preservation.

Follow the path to the main road (Aldworth Road) and turn right.

17. Aldworth Road

You are now on the Aldworth Road and heading back towards Upper Basildon. As you join it note how you are in the middle of a couple of sharp turns. Elsewhere this has been an indication that at some point the road has been moved to accommodate something – near Ashampstead a similar piece of road avoided a deer park. Could the same be the case here?

Follow the road for 200 yards

18. Hare Green

After a couple of hundred yards, you'll see a turning on your left which leads to Hare Green. 150 years ago this was a thriving community and not the isolated house of today. The 1851 census lists 9 families and around 50 people including Mr Cripps who was a 'beer seller', if only there was a pub there now... Today all that remains is a farm and a path (which once was wide enough to take carts) which takes you onto Hook End Lane. The census backs up the path being more akin to a road in times past by starting at the bottom of Hook End Lane and detouring to Hare Green before returning to Tomb Farm. Today we'll stay on the main road and as you walk down Aldworth Road you'll see the top of the farm poking above the undulating field on your left.

19. Nan Carey – yet another witch!

As you wander down the road to Upper Basildon you'll suddenly go down a short sharp hill. To your right is reputed to be the copse where Nan Carey lived in the 18th century. Nan Carey was a witch (more likely an old lady who made medicines etc). It is said that her Ghost haunts the area and there's a good story of a local artist being blown off his bike near this spot and blaming her.

Follow the road past Rushdown Farm until you reach a crossroads.

20. Upper Basildon's largest Oak tree

Standing at the crossroads, look right and note the large Oak tree on the right hand side of the road. This is the largest Oak tree in Upper Basildon and has a circumference of over 5 metres. This gives it a date of the late 1600's but it could easily be older. The crossroads you are standing at was on the main through road from Lower Basildon to Ashampstead and beyond. The number of large Oak tree's illustrate how little has changed in the last couple of hundred years.

Make your way across the crossroads and look left

21. Meteor Jet Crash Site

In October 1953 a Meteor jet crashed behind Bethesda St into a copse that is now replaced by a number of bungalows. The pilot was tragically killed but did manage to avoid the primary school after his plane ran into difficulties. Residents at the time reported to the press a sound similar to a bomb going off and a fireball going across the sky towards the school from the direction of the pub.

Pass Emery Acres on your left and stop when you get to School Lane (also on your left)

22. Emery Down Wood – preservation

The wood on your right hand side has been purchased by the community for use by the school and local residents. It contains beautiful Oak trees and a maze of paths and wild flowers. If you have time, go in and explore.

Turn left down School Lane and stop by the School Entrance. There are two things to see....

23. Basildon CE Primary School

The school was built in 1876 by the Morrison family to educate the children of Upper Basildon. To the left of the original building is the old School House which originally gave a home to the headmistress. Today, the school has grown significantly and has more than 140 children in attendance.

24. The old Pumping station

Looking down the hill, you'll see a building on the left hand side. This is the old pump house which pumped water to the village from a borehole in the Streatley area (Woods Farm). Thames Water now pump the water direct to the village from this site and the pumping house is now a private dwelling.

Walk down Beckfords

25. Houses of Note

As you walk down Beckfords there are a number of pretty pre WWI semi detached cottages. These were built for Major Morrison who owned most of the Parish for a period of approximately 20 years after inheriting it in 1909. The houses are believed to have been designed by Sir Edwin Luytens who also designed the Cenotaph and also parts of New Delhi. If you look carefully you'll see the odd date and the initials of Major Morrison (J A M).

As you pass Maple Lane, you'll walk past Wellesley Cottage which was built in the 1920's and is a fine example of an Arts and Crafts House. Further on you'll see Emery's Farm on the left which stood alone at the bottom of Beckfords in the early years of the 20th century and is now surrounded by houses as the village has expanded. This farm dates to at least the mid 16th Century with Victorian additions and amendments later. In the 1891 census it is listed as being owned by the Osborne family who as well as farming also made bricks at the site. A clear indication of the abundance of local good quality clay.

Turn Right and follow Darby Lane to the Red Lion Public House to complete the walk.

Further Reading

There are a number of books covering the Basildon area; the following were consulted in addition to my own knowledge and observations:

Basildon, Berkshire - Clive Williams

Around the Valley of the Pang – Dick Greenaway

Ashampstead, A Berkshire Parish – Various

Parish Council Archives

Country Neighbour Archives

The Berkshire Chronicle (October 1953)

Census returns – 1841-1911