

Tom Pickering Benchwalks

Places to linger and love the landscape in Little Wenlock

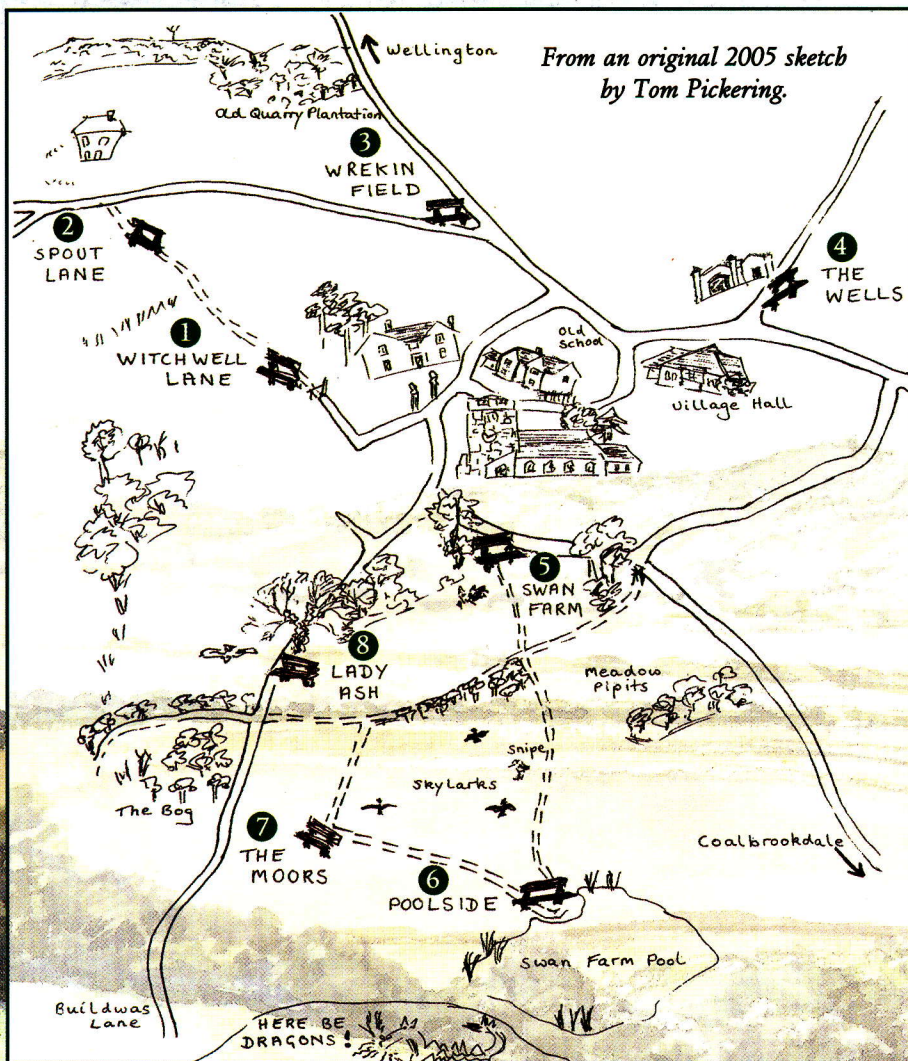


A Little Wenlock parish project inspired
by and dedicated to a true country boy
from Dawley. Made possible by the
hard work of his many friends with the
generous support of the Shropshire Hills
AONB Partnership and E.ON UK.

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Shropshire Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Little Wenlock Parish Council would like to thank all those who gave so freely of their time, talent and knowledge to create this fitting memorial to Tom Pickering.

Special thanks go to Larry Jones and his colleagues for their excellent woodcraft skills, Caroline Glanville for her superb illustrations, Neil Clarke for his historical insights, the Ironbridge Power Station team for their unstinting labour, and both E.ON UK and Natural England through the Shropshire Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund, without whose financial support none of this would have been possible.

1 Witchwell Lane

Under the gaze of old man Wrekin, breathe in the breath-taking beauty of the Shropshire Hills as you cast your eye down the very grain of its pastoral landscape.

The full stretch of the Severn Vale lies tranquil before you, with 'blue remembered hills' famed for their geology and ecology as far as the eye can see.



2 Spout Lane

Take a well-earned rest just off the main medieval route to Shrewsbury where the roadside springs disgorge the raw power that once drove the mills of Leighton.

Look out over Buildwas Abbey hidden on the Severn below to the patchwork of fields, hedges, small settlements and semi-natural woodlands that define this historic landscape.



3 Wrekin Field

Sitting on the edge of the medieval open field, the whole imposing 1,300 ft glory of The Wrekin fills your horizon beyond the wood-healed scar of the Old Field limeworks.

Older than Everest, Iron Age capital of the Cornovii, long-time stone and charcoal production centre, and species-rich environment – the iconic hill that's a true Salopian treasure.



4 The Wells

With the old wellhead at your back, look down on the tell-tale earthworks of the earliest coal mining bell pits and the legacy of more recent basalt quarrying immediately below.

Hidden now, the industrial fields of Coalmoor that served the Darby furnaces at Coalbrookdale and one of the country's first railways connecting them stretch out before you.

5 Swan Farm

Perch on the very edge of the previous Coalbrookdale Road and ponder its loss, with the original village hall, into the opencast pit immediately beneath your feet.

The new pool and its machine-sculpted landscape create a tranquil foreground to the faux-brick cooling towers of Ironbridge Power Station rising from the Gorge beyond.

6 Poolside

Reflect on the healing powers of nature, in a world of your own at the water's edge where dragonflies dance, swallows swoop and mallard and moorhen continually squabble.

It's hard to believe this hidden haven was so recently a coal mine; difficult to imagine previous industry all around, and impossible to picture the original medieval Timber Wood.



7 The Moors

You're at one with an altogether different, almost upland environment here in the windswept gap between the village and Braggers Hill where the local gallows may once have stood.

From the second of the village's three medieval open fields, hear the twittering of soaring skylarks, the occasional 'phroak' of wheeling ravens and the haunting cry of a lone curlew.

8 Lady Ash

Take in the full beauty and tranquillity of the Shropshire Hills under the protection of the Lady Ash along the ancient prehistoric trackway from Buildwas.

In your mind join the generations travelling the main road from Wenlock Priory over the monks' Buildwas Abbey bridge to their mineral-rich sister community on the hill.



The Benchwalks

Our benchwalks seek to build on Little Wenlock's strong sense of 'place', providing opportunities for all to sit and savour the wonderful surroundings of the Shropshire Hills, protected and managed as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Made from oak and chestnut from a sustainably managed local coppice by an experienced local craftsman using traditional techniques, the benches are each dedicated to the memory of a local loved one.

Looking south from the village they reveal the best east-west panorama of the Shropshire Hills and their setting you can see.

Across from the urban Black Country horizon in the east, the mast-topped Clee Hills rise in the distance above the limestone spine of Wenlock Edge. Ragleth and Hope Bowdler Hills stand back. Craggy Caradoc and Lawley stand out. The backdrop of the Long Mynd gives way to the Stiperstones, Earl's Hill, the Long Mountain and finally the massive Breiddens before the ever-present Wrekin demands your attention.

The agricultural heritage of the south and west contrasts with the industrial past to the north and east. Beneath the reclaiming veil of mother nature lie old lime works, quarries, trackways, charcoal platforms and everywhere the all-pervading whiff of more than seven centuries of Shropshire coal mining.

Linger and enjoy everything Little Wenlock's surroundings offer your every sense; find out more about our benchwalk places at www.littlewenlock.org; and do please add your own views and knowledge to the site by e-mail to editor@littlewenlock.org.