

Walk 2 - PUB START - ALDWORTH ROAD, ASHAMPSTEAD ROAD, KILN HILL, HOOK END LANE (TOP), BETHESDA STREET, FOOTPATHS TO BLANDYS LANE, ST STEPHENS CHURCH, ALDWORTH ROAD

Our second walk is mainly on roads and is suitable for pushchairs and most footwear although in the autumn /winter months the footpath section between Bethesda Street and Blandys Lane may be wet. This walk is around two and a half miles in length and aims to show you the key features within Upper Basildon. We will start at the Red Lion Pub as we did in our first walk.....

Note: For those of you who completed the first walk, you will find six duplicate items within this walk as the routes touch in a couple of places (Items 1 and 2 in particular).

1. Red Lion Public House

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. In no particular order these were The Farriers Arms and Beehive (village green) and The Bird in Hand (just off the Triangle). The name 'Red Lion' is the most popular pub name in England (ours is one of 944 across the UK).

Look Across the road at the fields to the left and right of 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.

To the right of you and across the road is Basildon's old common. This originally 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.

Now turn right in the direction of Aldworth and head up the hill

3. Aldworth Road

The section of road you are walking on is hundreds of years old. It appears on the 1809 Enclosure map and can be seen on a 1761 map of the Parish. It served as a link road / path to Aldworth and also represents the most direct route from the Basildon area to the Ridgeway at Aldworth which would suggest its presence for hundreds if not thousands of years.

Take the first left and walk up Ashampstead Road

4. Ashampstead Road

Ashampstead Road also appears on the 1809 Enclosure map and 1761 Parish map and runs up to the cross roads (where we turn right) and eventually meets Whitemoor Lane and Drift Lane. One of its key purposes would have been to transport cattle to the common from the surrounding area with the common at one point lying on either side of the section of road you are now walking down.

5. Oak trees & Emery Down Wood

As you walk up Ashampstead Road, 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 as well as the county Archaeology team to aid their understanding of the area. As you walk around today, you'll pass more of village's oldest trees, including one just after Emery Down wood on the right hand side.

Emery Down wood was been purchased by the community for use by the school and local residents. The 1.5 acre plot contains a variety of attractive mature trees and a maze of paths and wild flowers. If you have time, go in and enjoy the space.

Go up the hill towards the cross roads.

6. Early Basildon

As you walk up the Ashampstead Road and up the hill towards the summit of Kiln Hill, look both ways at the fields on either side of the road. It's believed that there was an old (possibly Iron Age) settlement here which later sat on the edge of the later Basildon Common. It would have had a link to Lower Basildon via Hook End Lane which itself is a track dating back to at least Roman times.

You are now at the top of Kiln Hill.

7. Kiln Hill

Looking ahead and to the left you'll see what looks to be a wood. Here, on and off for 2000 years bricks were produced and used both locally and further afield. You can walk around the woods and still see odd remnants such as large clay pits and in places even the odd concrete structure from the later plastic extrusion factory. There is evidence of occupation of the site by the Romans with a number of finds discovered as well as Lower Palaeolithic evidence from half a million years ago!

Turn Right and follow the Road past the postbox.

8. Walcroft House

Straight after the post box on the right hand side is a large detached house named Walcroft. Walcroft was originally built in the early 19th century and later was residence for the owners of the brick works behind you at Kiln Hill. It later played its part by being the residence of Ms Hilda Corsolles Jones who had the house as a country retreat during the 1920's and 30's. Ms Corsolles Jones was an active Parish Councillor who helped ensure that the footpaths created during the time of the Morrison estate remained available to the public after the sale of the estate and the later Right of Way Act of 1934 came into effect. The Parish Council have records of stormy meetings and footpaths being blocked with barbed wire and broken glass – quite the change from the grassy byways and paths we have today...

9. Red Villa Stores and the Phone Box Library

Across from Walcroft is Red Villa House. Until 1987 this was a village shop. Over the road is the old public telephone box which has now been turned into a book library / exchange by the local Parish Council. It works on a swap basis with people bringing a book for stock and taking one away in return.

Follow the road to the Hook End Lane crossroads.

10. Upper Basildon's largest Oak tree

Standing at the crossroads, look left and note the large Oak tree at the 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 and is at least Roman in age. The number of large Oak tree's either side of the road illustrate how little has changed in the last couple of hundred years.

Now turn right and take the second left into Bethesda Street.

11. Bethesda Street and Bethesda Cottage

According to a letter to the Reading Mercury in 1958, the street took its name from 'Bethesda Cottage' which was built around 1830. Bethesda Cottage doubled as a house and school room and was named Bethesda due to a pond in the garden which the schoolteacher Mr Martin somewhat ambitiously compared to the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. However, there's more to this than meets the eye. In the gospel of John, an angel blesses the Bethesda pool and Mr Martin shortly after moving in married a 'Miss Angel'. The rest as they say is history.....

Behind this cottage was also the scene of an RAF Jet Crash in the 1950's.

12.. 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.

Carry on along Bethesda Street - go past Tree Cottage

13. Tree Cottage

Tree Cottage is named after the large Oak tree which is now situated across the road in the garden of a new home. It was originally on the same plot as Tree Cottage (the old lane did not follow the same course) and the Oak has been dated to 1640. The shed to the right of the cottage is a listed building having been the studio of the artist Gilbert Spencer RA (1892-1979) who lived at Tree Cottage and was Professor of Painting at the Royal College of Art. Tree Cottage itself has 17th Century origins.

14. Half Hatch

Further along the road you'll pass another old Cottage. The Cottage isn't listed but is clearly in a similar style to Tree Cottage. The 1891 census shows how little of Bethesda Street existed 130 years ago. Back then only a couple of houses are listed with resident's trades being given as Sheperd and Traction Engine Driver. Quite a difference from today....

Continue down Bethesda Street for a further 100 yards and look for the footpath marker on the right hand side. Go down the footpath and follow it into the fields.

15. Views over Reading and the far side of Thames from footpath 5 and 6

As you make your way into the field you'll be presented with a wide view of land to the North and the East. Straight ahead of you is Reading and if you look closely (and it's a clear day) you'll see 'The Blade' which is one of Reading's larger office buildings. Looking to the left a little and you'll see the opposite

side of the Thames and the houses between Gatehampton and Whitchurch as well as paddocks which make up one side of Blandys Lane.

Bear left at the fork in the footpath and walk down the path until you reach the road. You've now reached Blandys Lane.

The path you are walking on was once known as Green Lane and ran straight between Blandys Lane and Bethesda Street (reaching it at a point near tree Cottage)

16. Blandys Farm / Blandys Lane

In 1830, Blandys Farm was one of a group of farms targeted by labourers who felt that new technology was effecting their livelihood. Machinery at the farm was smashed by a drink fuelled mob who roamed around the Parish looking to wreck any machines they encountered. The labourers were caught and most were eventually let off.

Blandys Lane itself is one of Basildon's oldest lanes with steep sides and native hedging. It appears on all of the old maps and has been a link road across the Parish for centuries.

Turn Right and follow the Lane. After about a third of a mile the Lane passes between two thatched cottages. Continue to follow the lane.

17. Moorings House

On the right hand side of you is 'Moorings', a Grade II listed Thatched cottage. In a 2013 Heritage statement (see credits at the end of the walk) it is dated late 17th century with 19th century refacing and even the oldest maps of the Parish have a building shown on the site. To the left and on the corner of Mead Lane is Thatchers, which although unlisted remains a handsome cottage.

Carry on walking straight on

18. The Well

On the right hand side you'll pass Well Cottage and in front of this cottage can be seen one of the village wells. The Parish had a number of wells of varying depth; this is one of two that survives, the other being at the Well House in Bethesda Street.

Continue along the road, passing Darby Lane on your right. Pass by the phonebox – this is now a village information point and on your left is Froomes House

19. Froomes House

The main part of the house is mid to late 17th Century with later extensions added. In the early 20th Century it was known as the Bird in Hand Pub which was run by Mr Froome. Previous to that it was owned by the Albury family and was a Bakers / Shop. Just past this on the left is another old shop – this was the general stores before becoming a private residence in the 1970's. As you pass the small triangular piece of land with a Parish noticeboard on it, look back at the old stores building and you'll see some of the old signage near the roofline.

Continue along the road until you reach the village green. On your left is the old Beehive pub.

20. The Beehive

Until 2008 the Beehive was a public house in the village. Its origins are believed to be early 16th century and it is thought to be the oldest house in Upper Basildon. Approximately 50 metres on from the Beehive would have been yet another public house – ‘The Farriers Arms’. This was demolished mid twentieth century and replaced by a bungalow which was then demolished itself and replaced by the three houses we have now.

Carry on and walk parallel to the village green. The Village green was once the site of fairs with stalls with people spilling out into Lion Meadow and the adjacent fields.

[21. St Stephens Church / War Memorial](#)

At the other end of the Village Green is St Stephens Church. This was constructed in 1965 to replace a corrugated structure which was situated near to the modern recreation ground. From the air its shape is the Christian fish symbol.

In front of the church is the war memorial which was moved from Bethesda Street when the new church was built. The memorial was erected in 1931 and was paid for with public donations.

Turn around and cross the village green before joining up with Aldworth Road and returning to the Red Lion Pub. We have finished our walk.

Further Reading / Sources

Village Design Statement for Basildon – listed buildings

Berkshire Chronicle records

Parish Council records – maps and minutes

Rights of Way Summary – Edward Golton

Basildon, Berkshire - Clive Williams

Around the Valley of the Pang – Dick Greenaway

Reading Mercury archive

Heritage Statement, Moorings (2013) – Wardle / Lacey

HER Report – West Berkshire Archaeology