

# SELF-GUIDED HISTORY WALK 3

## Roman Roads of Abbots Langley Parish

This 12km (7½miles) walk starts at the school in Bedmond and using public rights of way follows the Roman Roads in the Parish. The map on the page 7 shows the layout of the roads which are derived from the text and maps in the book “Roman Roads in the South-East Midlands” by the Viatores. There is also an optional extension to the main route of an extra 5.8km (3½ miles) which follows more of the alignment of the Roman Road to Elstree.

This walk takes you along four Roman Roads in Abbots Langley Parish. Sometimes you are walking on the line of the route and sometimes it is in an adjacent field. A Roman soldier would walk about 30km a day complete with weapons, pack and enough food for a week. So you could go round a few times if you want the authentic feel. Roman Roads were about 10m wide.



The walk starts in Bedmond by the School. Go down the side of the school and round the play area, after going through the hedge you will see a fence on your left. In the wood beyond the fence is The Holy Well of Bedmond which was a

site of regular religious pilgrimage as it formed part of Breakspeare Farm, which is according to tradition, where the only British Pope, Nicholas Breakspeare (Adrian IV) was born c. 1100.



Continue to another hedge, follow it along to the gap and go down the path. Follow this path until you reach a lane. This is the site of Sheppey’s Farm after which the lane is named. The Roman Road from Verulamium (St Albans) to Silchester (which is about 10km south-west of Reading in Berkshire) crossed this lane near to this point and continues down the valley. Please turn right onto the lane and continue about 200m to where a footpath goes off to your left. Take this footpath. Please note all the flints in this field – have they come from the



Roman Road? Go over the motorway and continue until you reach another track.

You are now on the land which formed the Ovaltine Farm. In 1929 A. Wander Ltd bought Parsonage Farm & Numbers Farm. The model dairy



farm is on your left and these fields provided food for the cows. Turn right and make your way along the track. At the next junction take the right fork and go on to the road over the Motorway. As you stand on the bridge looking to the left, the Roman Road would have been on your left running parallel with the Motorway.

Follow the road down the hill and go past the wind turbine. The white building was the Ovaltine



Model Poultry Farm. The egg farm had a laying flock of at least 50,000 pullets bred from pedigree white leghorn stock. It is now the Global Head Office of RES a leading company for renewable energy projects.

Continue to follow the road, under the railway bridge until you come to the main road.

In front of you is Roman Gardens where a substantial Roman villa and other out-dwellings were found. This early farm estate was one metre deep and discovered when digging foundations for the new housing estate. Tessellated paving and coins dating from Claudius 1 (AD41-54) to Valens (AD364-378) were found.

The road in front of you aligns with a Roman Road which branches from Watling Street at Edgware and continues to Cirencester. The main walking route continues right along this road but if you wish to walk the extended walk then turn left. The description of the extended walk is included after the description of the main route on page 6. Please be careful on this road as you will need to cross it a number of times as there are sections where the pavement is only provided on one side.



Soon you will be standing outside the former Ovaltine Factory. In 1865, Dr. George Wander, a Swiss chemist based in Berne, established the high nutritional value of barley malt. He then began to manufacture malt extract and launched the food drink, 'Ovomaltine'. In 1900 his son, Albert, took over the business and in 1909 established the British company A. Wander Ltd. The name Ovomaltine was changed to Ovaltine for the British market and became very popular with doctors as a health product. In 1913 a small factory was built to

manufacture Ovaltine in Kings Langley. The factory opened with an original workforce of just thirteen. The business expanded rapidly throughout the 1920s and by the end of the decade the factory was extended to almost its present size.

In the early 1920s Saward Baker & Co. Ltd, the appointed advertising agents for Ovaltine introduced Horace Bury to Wander. He went on to create Ovaltine advertisements for the next 40 years incorporating slogans for health, country, family, quality and sleep. The most famous Ovaltine marketing came with 'The Ovaltineys Show', with one of the best-remembered radio jingles of all time. The Ovaltineys was a secret club for children that started in 1935. Every Sunday there was a special broadcast on the radio especially for children that contained singing, secret codes, puzzles

and stories. The club was very popular and by 1939 there were 5 million members. Children applied for membership using forms found inside Ovaltine tins, they were then sent a badge, rule book, secret code and signals and a list of the special rules that all members must abide by.

In 1967 Wander Ltd merged with a Swiss firm, Sandoz Ltd. After this, business remained the same for Wander, but in 1996 Sandoz merged with CIBA and the new firm became known as Novartis. In 1997 the Ovaltine factory had to change from Wander to Novartis.

At the Ovaltine factory, as well as Ovaltine, Options hot chocolate was made and factory became the largest liquid malt extract producer in the world, not only was it used in Ovaltine but also for the inside of Maltesers, Mars Bars and many other well-known biscuits and sweets.

Production in the factory ceased in 2002, and it has now been redeveloped as luxury apartments.



Continue along the road until you reach the Bell Inn, which dates to the early to mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. You will note that the pub and other houses on this section of the road are raised up from the current road level. This is because they are built on the old Roman Road.

Further along, opposite a free car park, you will find the Baptist chapel built 1880, which is now used as offices.



Continue along the road to Railway Terrace which was built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The road was realigned in 1960's. The Railway Arms built in 1897 is now a private dwelling. Opposite railway terrace gravel was extracted in the 1930s by the Kings Langley Gravel company. The 12



acre site was then sold to the Abbot Duplicate Book Company that made business stationary. The lake is now let to the Kings Langley Angling society in conjunction with Herts and Middlesex wildlife trust.

The skew Railway Bridge was designed by Robert Stephenson for the London & Birmingham Railway. It was built in 1837 and is Grade 2 listed. Continue under the railway bridge and continue to a Roundabout.

On your left by the river was Nash Mill. It was owned by the monks of St Albans Abbey until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. In 1811 it worked as a paper mill and was bought by John Dickinson. He invented, amongst other things, security paper with silk thread running through

it. This was used for Government exchequer bonds and also the first postal stationery, the Uniform Penny Post introduced in 1840 by Roland Hill.



By the 1911 Nash Mill was the largest producer of white and tinted pulpboard in the country. By the 1960s Dickinsons employed over 5000 people in their stationery manufacturing business. In 1989 the company merged with BIBER Holding A. G. and rationalised the remaining operations leading to the closure of the mills and their subsequent redevelopment

On your right, hidden by the trees, is Abbot's Hill House, the home of John Dickinson (1782–1869). It is

now a school.

Near this point is a junction of Roman Roads. Coming from your right, down the hill from Verulamium (St Albans) is Akeman Street which turned and continued in the direction that you have been walking and continued to Cirencester. Another road went off to the left towards Amersham.



Continue about 100m and turn right into Bunkers Lane. As you walk up this lane you may catch glimpses of the Roman Road alignment in the school fields on your right. Continue up the hill until you get to Highwoodhall Lane. Turn right into this lane and continue up the hill. About 150m from the junction you cross the line of the Roman Road.



Continue up the hill towards the school. Then take a slight left and follow the road to the right of the stable block until you get to a bungalow. Turn left and follow this track which is running parallel with the Roman Road on your left.

When you reach the main road, you have also found another Roman Road which went from Watling Street at

Elstree to the Icknield Way near Whippsnade. Cross the road and turn left and after about 150m stop at the footpath on the right. You are standing at a cross roads of two Roman Roads, straight on goes to Whippsnade via Leverstock Green, to your right Akeman Street goes to Verulamium, to your left it goes down to Nash Mills. The Roman Road behind you goes to Elstree. The current road to Bedmond deviates from the Roman Road at the corner.



Continue along the footpath which follows the line of Akeman Street until you come to a line of trees on your right. Turn right here and follow the path across the fields. Although the path has some zig-zags follow the path in the same direction towards Bedmond. The Roman Road would be on your right.



After crossing three fields, the path takes a sharp right hand turn. Follow the path and then on your left you should see the footpath going through a gate. This path and the hedge line are on the alignment of the Roman Road. Go through the gate. On your left is the land previously occupied by Bedmond House which was demolished in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century.

When you get to the lane turn right and proceed to the road junction. The Roman Road crosses the lane at this point and continues across the rear garden of the lodge house. After the road junction, look for a footpath on your left going down a steep hill. Follow this path to another road and turn left. After 200m you will find a path on your right. You are again following the line of the Roman Road to Elstree. Near this point was a cross roads with the Verulanium

to Silchester Road, which we followed earlier in the walk. Follow the path until you reach a kissing gate. Go through the gate and walk on the left hand side of chain link fence and then continue through two more kissing gates and over a stile.



The Roman Road continues straight ahead but for our walk, after the stile turn right and head towards the black five-bar gate. Go through the kissing gate next to it and continue along the lane to the Bell Pub,

which was formerly called the Blue Bell, which dates from 1618 when Christopher Newman was the landlord.



The Silchester Road crossed this road junction at a diagonal going off to the left. However the walk turns right at this point back to Bedmond High Street. At the mini-roundabout turn left down Tom's Lane and after about 100m turn into Meadow Way for the school, which is the end of our walk.



**The Extended Route** follows the alignment of the Roman Road towards Edgware. It returns via the Grand Union Canal to join up again with the main route. The extended route starts and ends at the junction of Station Road and Roman Gardens.

For the extended route turn left and follow the road past the Railway Station and under the M25. Near this point this road crosses the alignment of the Verulamium to Silchester Road. Cross under the railway bridge and continue slightly round the corner to your left to view The Retreat. In 1961, a section of the Roman Road was excavated in this area which was about 30 feet (9m) wide.

Now continue to follow the “main” road up the hill to the Unicorn Public House. Prior to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century this pub occupied a prime position at the junction of Gallows Hill Lane and the route of the old London to Berkhamsted road. The building dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Roman Road went across the back of the pub.

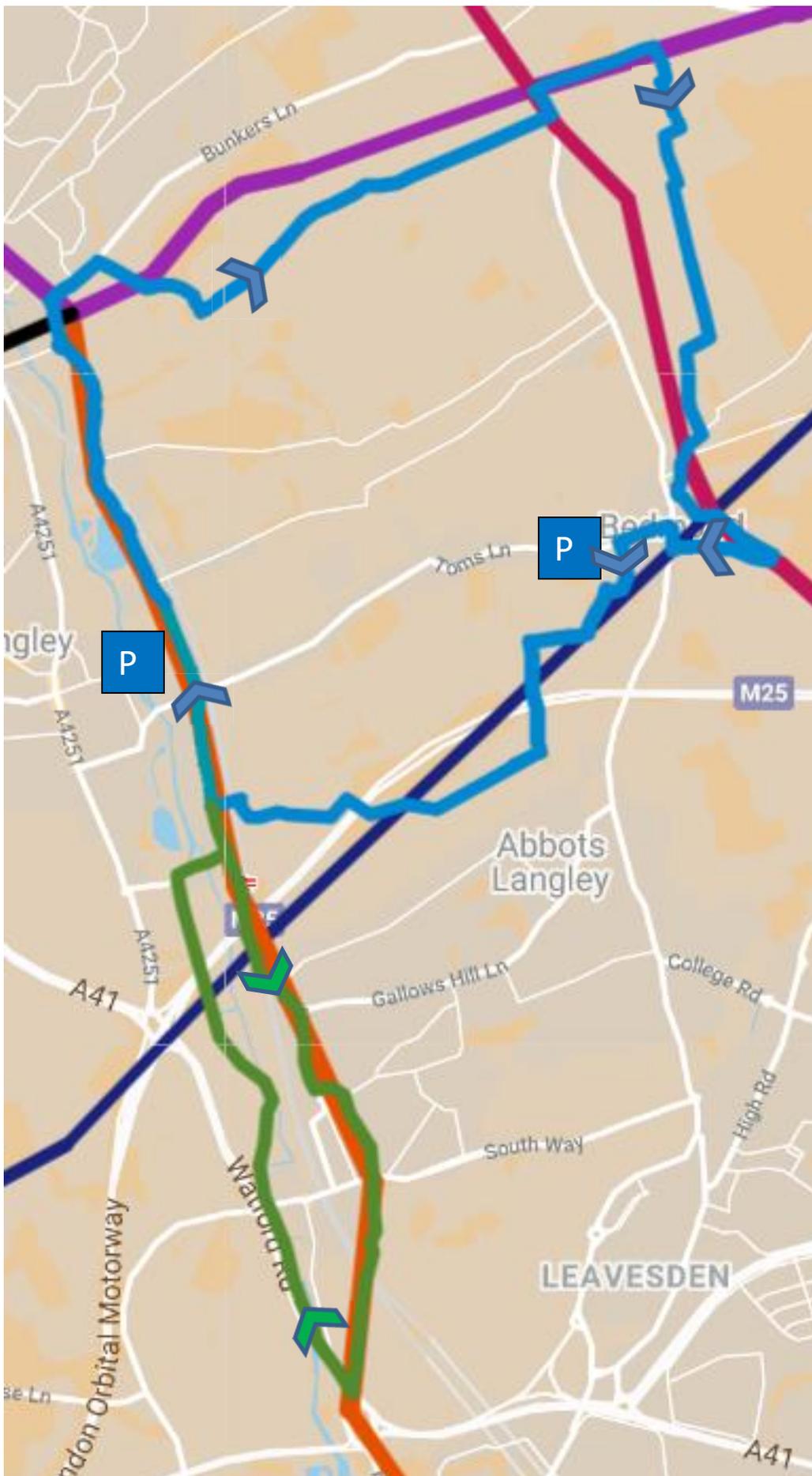
Continue along the road and take the third road on the left (Upper Highway). Take care as there is no pavement and cars will come from behind you. On the left of this road was Rosehill House, which was built in the 1820s and demolished around 1952. Continue to the road junction and turn right to remain on Upper Highway. From this point the route coincides with the alignment of the Roman Road. It is thought that this higher route was taken to avoid the marshy flood plain of the Gade valley. At the crossroads, go straight across into Gypsy Lane. Gypsy Lane was the main coaching route until the 18th century for traffic from Watford going North, as it bypassed Hunton Bridge, Kings Langley and private trackways through royal parklands.

Continue along Gypsy Lane over the West Coast Main Line and continue to follow the lane down until you reach a major road. The alignment of the Roman Road continues straight on roughly aligned with the Hempstead Road through Watford to Edgware.

The walk now leaves the Roman Road and goes via the Canal to re-join the main route. Turn right at the bottom of Gypsy Lane and follow the pavement round until you see pedestrian islands in the centre of the road. Cross the road using these islands. Then continue along the main road and over the canal bridge. At the far side of the bridge are steps down to the canal towpath of the Grand Union. This part of the canal was built as the Grand Junction Canal and was started around 1793 in order to create a ‘short cut’ between Brentford, on the western outskirts of London to Braunston in Northamptonshire. Unlike many of its predecessors, the Grand Junction was constructed with 14 foot (4¼m) ‘wide locks’ meaning that for the first time, boats travelling down to London were able to be breasted up, side by side in the locks, making for a much speedier passage. Before it was built, most canal freight had been travelled via the Oxford Canal, which only had narrow locks, and which was plagued with interruptions to its water supplies from the beginning.

Turn left and go under the bridge. Continuing along the canal tow path you will shortly pass through the village of Hunton Bridge.

Continue along the canal, under the M25 bridge. Then go under the old and new road bridges and turn left away from the canal and go upwards to join the road. Turn left, cross the canal and continue up to the main road. Turn left and after about 100m you will re-join the main route where you left it.



Base Map provided by Google My Maps.

The car park in Bedmond is off Tom's Lane by the sports and social club and is 100m from the start point.

The car park in Primrose Hill is off the route by the play area.

The lighter blue line is the main part of the route and green line shows the extended route.

The Roman Roads shown here are derived from maps in the book "Roman Roads in the South-East Midlands" by the Viatores. This book numbers and describes section of the Roman Roads. To aid cross referencing, I have coloured the lines to align with the numbers used in the book:

RED 169: Watling Street at Elstree to the Icknield Way near Whipsnade

DARK BLUE 163: Verulamium to Silchester via Maidenhead

PURPLE 16a: Verulamium to Cirencester (Akeman Street),

BLACK 163A: Nash Miles to Amersham,

ORANGE 169C: Watling Street at Edgware to Nash Mills.

#### References:

"Roman Roads in the South-East Midlands" by the Viatores

<http://narrowboatinfo.co.uk/the-grand-union-across-the-chilterns/>

Abbots Langley a Hertfordshire village- written and edited by Scott Hastie

<http://www.kingslangley.org.uk/ovaltine.html>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1100891>

#### Photographs:

All photographs taken by Trevor Foulkes

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