

# SELF-GUIDED HISTORY WALK 1

## Abbots Langley & Kitters Green

This 1.5 mile walk starts at the Henderson Hub which is just a short walk from the free Causeway Car Park.

The map on the last page shows the locations mentioned in the text.

### 1. The Henderson Hub

The “Henderson” in the Hall’s name comes from Henry William (Harry) Henderson who had the Hall built over 100 years ago for the benefit of the people of Abbots Langley, in memory of his wife, Elvira. Sadly, Elvira died in childbirth with her 5th child. She was only 31 and her husband donated the funds to build the Henderson Memorial Hall for the use of the villagers. It was opened in 1902. (You can see a photo of Elvira with her children, on display inside the Hall – in Elvira’s Foyer.). The Henderson Hall has provided a venue on Abbots Langley High Street for educational, cultural, social and leisure activities ever since. In May 2016, the Henderson Hub took over the running of the Hall, and has equipped it with new sound, lighting and projection equipment, and undertaken large capital refurbishment to create a new gallery space and foyer to allow access during the day to local residents.



### 2. The Lych Gate & Church

Continue along the high street to the Lych Gate which was built in 1902 as a memorial to Queen Victoria. Walk through the gate into the church yard.



There has been a church in Abbots Langley for almost 1,000 years. It was dedicated to St Lawrence in 1154, the same year that the only British Pope, Nicholas Breakspear, was elected as Pope Adrian IV. He was born in the neighbouring village of Bedmond. The checkerboard Corpus Christi Chapel was originally separate from the church and was built between 1307 and 1327. The Chapel originally belonged to the Guild of Corpus Christi dating from Saxon times. The present day Chancel replaced the Saxon church in 1400 and is now linked to the Corpus Christi Chapel. The roof, organ and choir were damaged by fire in 1969, restored and rededicated in 1971.



Go along the access drive to the rear of the church. On your right hand side you will find Elvira Henderson’s grave stone and on the left the former vicarage, which was built in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The house was used as a location for an episode of Inspector Morse in 1989 (Masonic Mysteries – series 4 episode 4).





The Breakspeare Room was opened by the Bishop of Hertford in October 2016. It provides disabled access, toilets, coffee mornings etc. The stable block became the Citizens Advice Bureau in 1976.



The Booksellers' Triangle: burial ground for the early residents of the Booksellers Provident Retreat, which is at the bottom of Abbots Road. Now continue along the avenue of lime trees and follow the path straight between the houses until you come to a field.



### **3. A Wander Ltd's Farm**

In 1929 Numbers Farm and Parsonage Farm were acquired by A Wander Ltd to provide fresh eggs, milk and barley for the factory. Of the 460 acres, about 100 acres were set aside for the dairy farm



Turn right along the Hertfordshire Way and continue until you reach an access road.

### **4. Ovaltine Dairy Farm & Tithe Barn**



A Wander Ltd created a Model Dairy Farm, which emulated the style of the farm built by Louis XVI for his queen, Marie Antoinette. The buildings were formally opened on 20 September 1932 by Lady Hague (wife of Sir Harry Hague, whose partnership with Albert Wander drove



the expansion of the Ovaltine brand). If you have time, turn left on the Bedmond Road to have a closer look at the buildings. Then come back again!

The Old Tithe Barn is around 600 years old and is 120 feet long (36.5 metres). During the redevelopment of the Ovaltine Farm in 1932 the barn was re-floored and fitted with tubular steel loose boxes for the cows.



Most of the ancient roof timbers and tiles were retained. It is the oldest secular structure in the parish. When the barn was converted into apartments in the 1980s, the structural timbers were surveyed by Adrian Gibson, the county's leading expert on ancient timber framed buildings, and by examination of core samples (a process called dendrochronology) he was able to certify that they dated from around 1400. Many of the

timbers have unrelated notches and dowels and some show signs of having been impregnated with salt, so it could be speculated that they originated as ships' timbers in Tudor times.

## **5. Mansion House Farm & Cecil Lodge**



At the junction where the path joins the Bedmond Road, turn right and on your left you will see Mansion Farm. In 1851, this farm was 185 acres and part of the Cecil Lodge estate.

Continue to the mini-roundabout. On the left of the roundabout is the site of Cecil Lodge, which was built as a summer villa in about 1760; in 1773 it was given as a wedding gift to Lord Cranborne

who became the Marquis of Salisbury at Hatfield House; between 1832&48 it was owned and occupied by Mr J Muir and after him his two daughters. Eleanor Muir wrote children's stories and in 1831 her book the Three Bears had illustrations based on Cecil



Lodge. The story was published anonymously in 1837 by Robert Southey as Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Then between 1864&72 it was owned by W H Smith, son of the founder of the book chain.



Now follow the pavement round to the right past the Abbots Langley school grounds.

## **6. Library, Langley House & War Memorial**

On your right, outside the library is a large rock made of Hertfordshire Pudding Stone, which was excavated whilst building the M25 in 1986. This local form of



stone is of glacial origin, it is a conglomerate consisting of fragments of rocks held together by natural silica and sand cement.

The library is on the site of the original village schools. In 1641, Francis Combe bequeathed an acre of ground next to



the churchyard together with income from properties in the village to provide education and support for the poor of Abbots Langley. The boys' school was rebuilt on the site in 1853 and the girls' built alongside in 1868. Both schools were financed and run by the church. In 1923, the schools were



amalgamated and in 1949 sold to Hertfordshire County Council. On the opposite side of the road, is Langley House. Its grounds ran from the mini-roundabout all the way down the left hand side of the high street. It was built in about 1750 by John Cope Freeman, a wealthy owner of a large slave plantation in Jamaica and County Sheriff of Hertfordshire. In 1759, he had the road diverted so that it didn't run close to his house and he purchased an alehouse at the front and had it converted into a lodge. In 1787, his wife, Susanna, set up a charity school. On her death in 1803, she bequeathed £200 to

Parish charities for the education of girls and another £200 for children's bed linen for mothers, all presumably out of the proceeds of slavery. The house was owned by William Bagot between 1830 & 1844, he helped to raise funds locally to build a village school on the site of what is now the library. Between 1906 & 1923, the house was owned by Sir Robert Molesworth Kindersley, (Lord Kindersley). Amongst other things he was: Director of the Bank of England; Member of the Court of Fishmongers' Company; Lieutenant of the City of London; Governor of the Hudson Bay Company; President of the National Savings Committee; High Sheriff of Essex & Officer of the Legion d'Honneur. In 1929, the house was purchased by the Salvatorian Fathers of Wealdstone and later became Breakspear College, a Roman Catholic Seminary. In 1986, the house became an allergy clinic and Hospital for Environmental Medicine and in 2016 luxury apartments. The Catholic Church is just next door. Return to the war memorial next to the library



The war memorial commemorates those that fell in the first and second world wars. The village project "Back to the Front" researched those who had fought in the First World War and as a result extra names were added in 2019. As you walk round the village you may see signs saying where the soldiers lived.

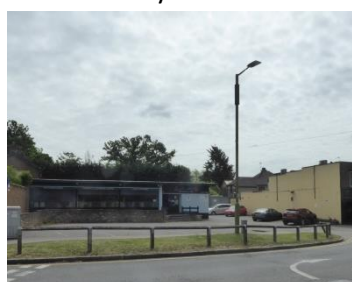
A Serviceman of the Great War Lived Here



1914 - 1918  
Back to the Front Project

### **7. The Old Abbots Langley High Street**

A workhouse was established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century opposite the church (behind where number 15 is today). The shops in Abbots Langley were originally situated opposite the church from 1832 and included a butchers and baker. A narrow two storey yellow brick Public House was established in 1852. It was originally called the Rose and Crown but is now the "Boys Home".



The Pin Wei is on the site of the Kings Head established from about 1779, which was positioned right on the edge of the road and demolished in 1965. Beside the pub was the village forge.

### **8. Abbots House and modern High Street**

Abbots House is situated behind the brick wall adjacent to the mini-roundabout. Records indicate that between 1396 and 1401, John de la Mote, Abbot of St Albans built a Grange in Abbots Langley. This could well have been the site of it. The oldest part of the house is the south-east side (closest to the High Street) dating from around 1600. It is timber framed and probably a wing that had been added to a medieval hall. Most of the remaining structure was added later during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is of mixed construction hidden behind a neo-Georgian facade. The original buildings were likely to have been the Rectory Manor with a large hall where the Abbot's officials held court. In 1890 the house passed to Thomas Armstrong C.B, an eminent Victorian artist and sculptor, member of the Royal Academy and Art Director at the V&A Museum.



Now progress along the high street crossing over at the zebra crossing. The shops on the right hand side were built from 1886 with a pub, The Brick layers Arms, built in 1878 to the right hand side of the Henderson Hall. On the left



hand side, in 1924, part of the grounds of Langley House, known as the Plantation, was sold and developed as housing (The Crescent) and shops (High Street). The shops beyond the Henderson Hall were built



between the wars.

The row of shops set back from the high street, on the opposite side of Abbots Road, were built in



1957 on the site of another house called Causeway House.

Cross the road to the small garden in front of the Methodist Church, built in 1881. The row of houses was built in 1880.



You could finish your walk here and return to the car park or continue to Kitters Green.

## 9. Kitters Green

Until 1866, Kitters Green was a separate village to Abbots



Langley and focused around the Manor House.

The labourers and groom lived in the flint cottages just by the present doctor's surgery. Pound Cottage is a timber framed cottage



dating from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century with 20<sup>th</sup> century additions.

On the far side of Pound Cottage is a replica pound, provided by the Parish Council in 1984. Animal pounds were used to impound stray livestock (cattle, pigs, geese etc.) until claimed by their owners on payment of a fine or levy, or sold to cover the costs of impounding. They are known to date from medieval times and by the 16 century most villages and townships would have had one. They were the

responsibility of a pound keeper who fed and watered the animals until they were claimed in return for payment. The original pound was not located here it was the area outside the Methodist Church. By the end of WW1 it had moved to Kitters Green.



The Royal Oak public house was a cottage and barn owned by the Lewin family between 1717 to 1827 when it became a beer house. It has been substantially and sympathetically extended.



To the right of the pub is a housing development from the 1960s known as Castano Court. There was originally a house, convent and school on this site.

Abbots Langley had numerous ponds and springs which have now largely disappeared. The pond alongside the driveway was never very deep. Horses and carts hauled heavy loads up the hill from the station. The horses drank from the pond while their drivers drank at the Royal Oak.



In the far left hand corner of the Green, there is a timber framed house dating from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, known as Yew Cottage. The cottage has retained its white washed brick noggin and its original features and proportions.

At the end of the road to the right of Yew Cottage there were wooden buildings that served as the village laundry and there were

posts and lines on the green to hang up washing.

The final building on the Green is May's Cottage, which was home to the head gardener of the Manor House.



### **10. Manor House**

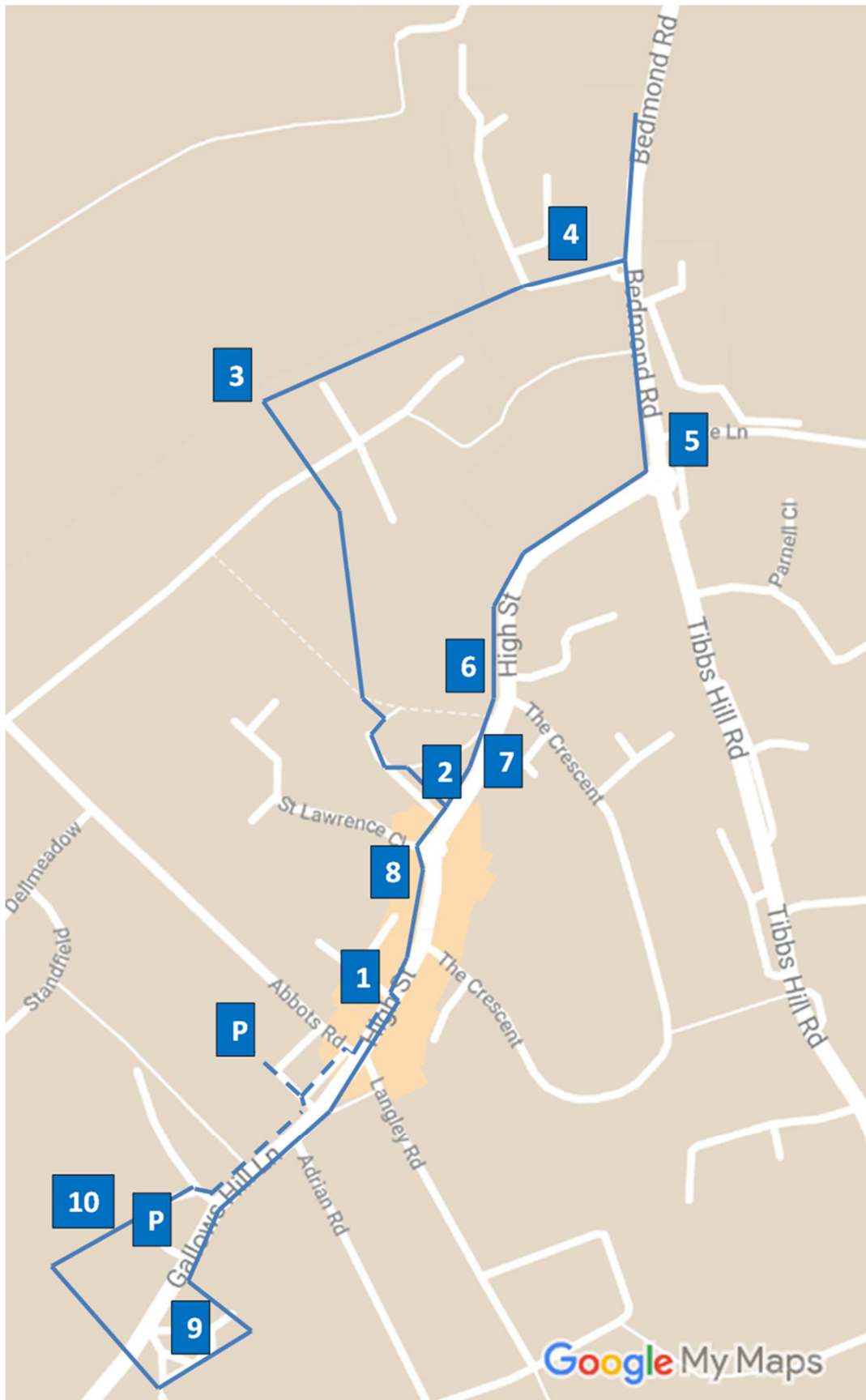
Please take extra care when crossing the road to the park. These are grounds of the Manor House.



Please go into the park and head towards the tennis courts and turn right and continue until you get to a car park. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Manor House was built on a moated site with some surviving traces from the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages. This is roughly where the community centre is now. The principal resident of the Manor House would have been the Squire of Abbots Langley and they would enjoy a social importance and an element of control over the affairs in the Parish.

In 1641, Francis Combe, a wealthy miller from Hemel Hempstead, left the Manor House and 142 acres in Abbots Langley to the university colleges of Sidney College, Cambridge and Trinity College, Oxford. The Manor House was leased back and generations of his family continued to live there until 1820. Following years of neglect after WW2 the house was demolished in 1953. Only the lodge house that in later years acted as a snooker room has survived and it is now a police station. To return to the Causeway Car Park and Henderson Hall please cross the car park and then follow the main road back to the High Street.





List of references: Abbots Langley – A Hertfordshire Village written & edited by Scott Hastie; The St Lawrence Church website; Abbots Langley Local History Society Journals; Members of the ALLHS; The Abbots Langley Parish Council; Historic England website; Henderson Hub website. All photos by Trevor Foulkes

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