

Country Walks

Around Halesowen's Green Borderland



Circular walk No. 2A Leasowes & "Abbey Lands"

**Main sponsor: thanks to
COOMBESWOOD CANAL TRUST**

A self-guided walk via the line of the Dudley No. 2 Canal to Abbey Lands, returning through the Leasowes Landscape.

<http://halesowenwalks.wix.com/halesowenwalks>

Some sites of interest P-X, as indicated on map overleaf

P



Fordrove Bridge (site of)

A "hump backed" brick single arched bridge originally constructed Circa 1797, to allow an ancient green lane or fordrough to cross over the Dudley Canal.

Theory has it, that the very close proximity of Manor Lane Bridge

built to accommodate the newly improved and probably realigned Turnpike Road, would make the "old route" redundant over Fordrove Bridge.

Although Fordrove bridge was retained for many years, probably for use of the local farmer, it was demolished around 1965 when part of the canal was filled in. Very little evidence remains today of the bridge, however a small section of the original hedgerow of the old green lane still exists, adjacent to the playground area.

Q



Manor Lane Bridge (site of)

Where the busy A456 (Manor Way) dual carriageway "crosses" the line of the canal, it is hard to imagine that here there was originally another single arched hump backed bridge to accommodate the narrow and leafy Manor Lane Turnpike.

At this strategic crossing point the canal company built a wharf and the original Black Horse Public House, parts of which still remain today. However very little evidence remains of the area around the bridge being the former small "outlying" industrial area of warehouses, manufactories, workshops, an iron foundry, and a Colliery, all originally attracted to the water's edge of the canal.

The original brick bridge was completely rebuilt in reinforced concrete during the 1930s when Manor Lane was widened. Following the abandonment of the canal in 1963 the bridge was totally demolished shortly afterwards and Manor Lane, widened again to become the new "Manor Way" "dual carriageway."



Disclaimer

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- This leaflet is only a guide and is in no way intended for use with concern to boundaries and ownerships whatsoever.
- "Walk at your own risk". The authors and their agents will not be responsible for any claims for any damage or injury to persons or property however sustained - i.e. "Enter and walk at your own risk"

R

Manor Lane Colliery (site of)

The levelled off spoil mound is all that remains of this small Colliery, which was served by a branch of the Dudley canal; virtually opposite the Black Horse Public House.

In the 1860s the sinking of deep trial shafts here and at the foothills of the Clent hills to look for the 30 foot seam of Black Country coal, was all to be in vain. The entrepreneurs involved concluded that with only a few thin seams found, all hopes of profitable coalmining to the south of Halesowen were to be abruptly ended.

By a twist of fate, the countryside remaining at that time was thankfully saved from the ravages of all that is associated with coalmining and the "urban sprawl" that would have followed in its wake. Some coal was brought to the surface at Manor Lane, extracted from two long galleries which extended northwards towards Coombeswood, from 1871 until the mine closed in 1887.

Walk Information

Start & Finish:	Leasowes Car Park Off Mucklow Hill, Halesowen B62
Distance:	Approximately 3 miles (4.8 km)
Time:	Allow 1½-2 hours dependent on viewing time

Acknowledgements

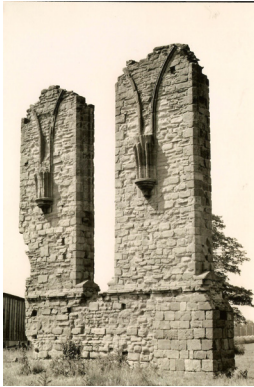
- We wish to thank Dudley MBC and Worcestershire CC for their kind permission to use their base maps which were used to prepare this leaflet.
- Photos - Credits: Halesowen Abbey Trust archive.
- Original concept of walk March 1989
- 1st Revision: October 2013
- Authors: Roy Burgess and Mark Hemus
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We wish to thank the following for their support in the production of this leaflet:

**COOMBESWOOD CANAL TRUST
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HALESOWEN NORTH & SOUTH COMMUNITY FORUM**

S Halesowen Abbey
Founded 1215 - dissolved circa 1539



This once grand and magnificent 13th century Abbey is now all but a few remnants of stone encapsulated within the curtilage of Manor Farm. Although most of the foundations are still intact just below the ground, the only upstanding remains are parts of the walls of the Abbey Church, parts of the dining hall and remarkably one complete building which has been called "The Infirmary".

The Cannons that occupied the Abbey were established from an Order founded originally by St Norbert at Premontre in France. They preferred secluded and remote rural locations and found that the site chosen at Halesowen would ideally meet their needs.

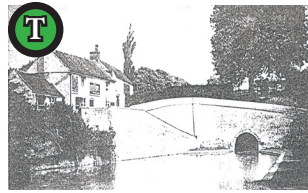
The abundance of numerous tributaries of the River Stour rising up in the nearby hills would also provide the opportunity for the monks to construct a vast number of fishponds in the locality.

The Abbot held sway over some 10,000 acres of land and also use the ponds to provide "controlled water" for his various corn mills.

Remnants of the earth dams of the former fishponds and the remaining countryside surrounding the Abbey ruins still provides a special setting that has probably remained virtually unchanged in parts for some 800 years or so.

Perhaps, in this modern world, that has been compared to an "upturned anthill" we could reflect our thoughts to a 7th Century Gaelic Monk who wrote in this prayer:

*"I wish, O son of the living God, O ancient eternal King,
For a little hidden hut in the wilderness that it may be my dwelling
An all grey lake to be by its side
A clear pool to wash away sins through the Grace of the Holy Spirit.
Quite near, a beautiful wood, around it on every side to nurse many voiced birds,
hiding within its shelter.
A southern aspect for warmth, a little Brook across its floor.
A choice land with many gracious gifts such as to be good for every plant.
This is the husbandry, I would take, I would choose and will not hide it.
Fragrant Leek, Hens, speckled Salmon, Trout and Bees.
Raiment and food enough for me, from King of fair fame,
And to be sitting for a while, praying to God in every place."*



T Lapal Tunnel and site of Western Portal

Prior to the tunnel being closed to through traffic in 1922, the canal here was certainly to have been a "hive of activity" with the passage of endless trains of horse-drawn narrow boats transporting heavy cargoes of coal,

iron and other general merchandise.

Just above the portal were displayed the Tolls and Sailing Times on black and white noticeboards fixed to the front of the delightful Tunnel Keepers Cottage.

Almost next to this cottage was situated some lime kilns used to reduce limestone to lime; used mainly for agricultural and building purposes. Not far along the towpath were a pair of red brick houses built for employees (and their families) of the canal company.

As Lapal tunnel had no towpath, boats have to be manually propelled through by the action of (usually) two persons lying on the boat and literally walking along the walls of the tunnel, a process known as "legging". With the tunnels narrow bore, traffic was restricted to one way working only and the dark two mile plus claustrophobic journey could take up to 4 hours to leg a boat through.

However in 1841, stop locks were installed at both ends of the tunnel. Not far from Manor Lane a 12 foot diameter scoop wheel driven by a steam engine would lift water from one side of the nearby stop lock, thereby creating a current, which would assist boats in their West to East journey through the tunnel, in less than three hours.

The current then could be reversed for East to West passages by releasing the raised water level through a sluice gate in the Manor Lane stop lock. In 1842 the canal superintendent Thomas Brewin was presented with £50 worth of "plate" for his assistance in this "ingenious contrivance". The scoop wheel finally ceased operating shortly before 1917 when a major roof fall occurred in Lapal tunnel.

Following the closure of the tunnel for commercial traffic in 1922 the canal remained as a very pleasant stretch of water in a rural setting from Lapal to the Leasowes Park. Not only was this stretch a haven for wildlife it also became a well-used facility for public benefit and recreation, in the form of walking, fishing and boating etc.

In 1964/65 the canal was filled in from the tunnel entrance to Manor Way with spoil from the construction of the A456/M5 link road. Unfortunately this brought not only the demise of the canal but loss of public access along this stretch. Very little evidence remains of the tunnel or canal today except a colour change of vegetation in the nearby fields, indicating the difference in soil quality of the filled in areas.

U Canal Horse Path

The original horse path (or track) from the entrance of Lapal tunnel, is just visible between the overgrown double sided hedgerows. Boat horses were quite often led over the hill whilst boats were being legged through the tunnel. The route taken West to East would be up Lapal Lane to Moor Street, through Woodgate village and then down the original Clapgate Lane via Broad Hindley and Juggins wood. Finally arriving at the tunnels mouth, just past the village of "California" near Weoly Castle Ruins.



V Viewing Point at Stennels Fields

Looking across the pleasant Leasowes Valley towards the Stour Valley the scene not so long ago would have been so very different. The backdrop of the Black Country then was "red by night and "smokey" black by day". Perhaps one of the only reminders of that era is the

still standing brick Chimney Stacks of the world-famous Walter Somers's Heywood Forge.

On a clear day some 47 km (29 miles) in the distance is the distinctive hump backed hill known as "The Wrekin". It is of volcanic origin and is over 600 million years old.

W Heart-Shaped Pool

Also known as "Lovers Pool" a notable feature on Shenstone's "Grand Tour" of the Leasowes. However there was a practical purpose in the construction of the Pool as it was used as a reservoir, topped up from a spring in the Top Wood via a long leat. Because the stream in the South Valley was at times very sluggish, Shenstone would instruct his gardener, on the arrival of visitors, to open a sluice from the pool and thereby increase the flow of water. So as to form "delightful cascades" in the stream, as it "tumbled down" to Priory Pool.

X Walled Garden

William Shenstone (1714-63) enhanced the natural beauty of his family's farm, known as "The Leasowes" and created a parkland which was very famous in the 18th century.

However around 1778 a Mr. Horne demolished Shenstone's original house and built the present property (now the golf club house), including a 2 acre walled garden.

The sheltered wall of the garden and the heated greenhouses provided a perfect environment for the growing of fruit, vegetables and flowers. It is recorded that the household, workers and visitors were always well provided with produce from the garden.

Following a period of change and decline during the 19th century, The Leasowes (including the walled garden) was purchased in 1934 by Halesowen Council and then "transferred" to Dudley Council in 1974. The walled garden was subsequently "transferred" to Stourbridge College.

When the garden became surplus to the college's requirements, a successful fund raising campaign was launched by the Halesowen Abbey Trust, who became the new proud owners during November 2014.

The Trust's plans for the future are to restore and enhance the gardens, together with planned special Public Open Days.

Country walks around Halesowen’s Green Borderland

Circular walk No. 2A: Leasowes & “Abbey Lands”

PLEASE ENSURE YOU FOLLOW THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE!

Start & Finish: Leasowes Car Park, Mucklow Hill, Halesowen, West Midlands B62
Directions

Go back towards Mucklow Hill and go to the left on the path to cross over the old canal on an earth dam and turn left to follow the canal tow path. Continue along this path, as you bend to the right you will pass an old stop lock (see steps going up to Ladypool Close). Keep going still following the line of the old canal bed until you reach a tarmac path, turn left and then immediately first right past a small children’s park.

Note: this is near the site of the Fordrove Bridge, (P) demolished in the 1960s. It was an old brick built bridge carrying a farm track over the canal.

Carry on along this path which veers to the right and arrive at the A456 dual carriageway. (Q) Turn right to the end of the bus layby and see the gap in the central reservation barrier. Cross here to the other side and turn right and then turn left to a stile, at the sign post and notice board.

Cross over the stile, proceed along the path, with the hedge to the left and look at the built up mound of spoil workings from the former Manor Lane colliery. (R) also to your left. Carry on over the next stile, Halesowen Abbey ruins are now slightly to your right. (S)

Note: There is NO PUBLIC ACCESS to the Abbey site ruins from the existing rights of way. There are however, occasional ‘open days’ subject to arrangements by the owners and English Heritage.

Go diagonally left. You will notice raised earth mounds - these were the dams of the former Abbey fishponds. Cross a bridge over a small stream and carry on to your left, slightly uphill (note the old dried beds of the fishponds on your left).

Note: the stile to your right at the end of a hedge - this is part of walk 1). On the left you will see a row of trees and beyond a trimmed hedge, which is on the embankment of the old canal.

Continue to follow the path uphill (ref H50) and keep the hedgerow to your right. Go along the path to the end of the fishponds, bear slightly right, over a stile, enter an open field and turn immediately left, go over another stile and cross the little bridge. (At this point look back at the view of the Clent Hills).

Turn left and carry on to the next stile following the field path. Cross over the stile and continue along the field path, keeping the hedge to your left.

Note: 15 yards past the stile, by the trees here, is the site of the Lapal Canal Tunnel west portal and entrance. (T)

Follow the path to the corner of the field, to a metal gate, with a stile. Cross over the stile and turn left along the tarmac road (Lapal Lane South).

Note: Opposite the white cottage (on your right) is the original horse path for Lapal Tunnel. (U) This area is part of the original Lapal Village and includes Lapal House, Lapal Farm and Boat Cottages.

Continue up the road until you reach the dual carriageway (A456 trunk road), where there is a gap in the barriers on the central reservation. Cross over and go through the gap in the opposite hedge and turn left up the hill (Lapal Lane North) to the last junction by a post box and turn right up the road (Manor Lane).

Note: Look left across the road; you will see a low metal fence, possibly the only remnants of Webbs Green Farm, where now stands the Abbeyfields’ housing estate.

After a short distance, cross over Manor Lane at the pedestrian crossing island and turn right and go just past the bus stop and proceed to the gap in the hedge. Turn in here and go through the squeeze stile into Stennels Fields within the Leasowes Park.

Note: From this viewing point; you can see the Wrekin Hill in the distance. Stennels pool is to your right. (V)

Proceed slightly to the left downhill towards a field gate and at the bottom the slope continue to the left of the gate, along a stoned surface path. Pass through a squeeze stile adjacent to a gate and at the end of the path turn right through the gap by another gate. Head down a woodland path and then turn sharp left at the next junction.

Note: As you walk down on the left, look at the Sycamore tree, approx. 60-80 years old, growing through the stump of an old Oak tree (approx.300 years old).

Keep going and turn right over a wooden bridge, keep going straight up, keeping the golf course on the left. Pass the “heart” shaped pond to your right (W).

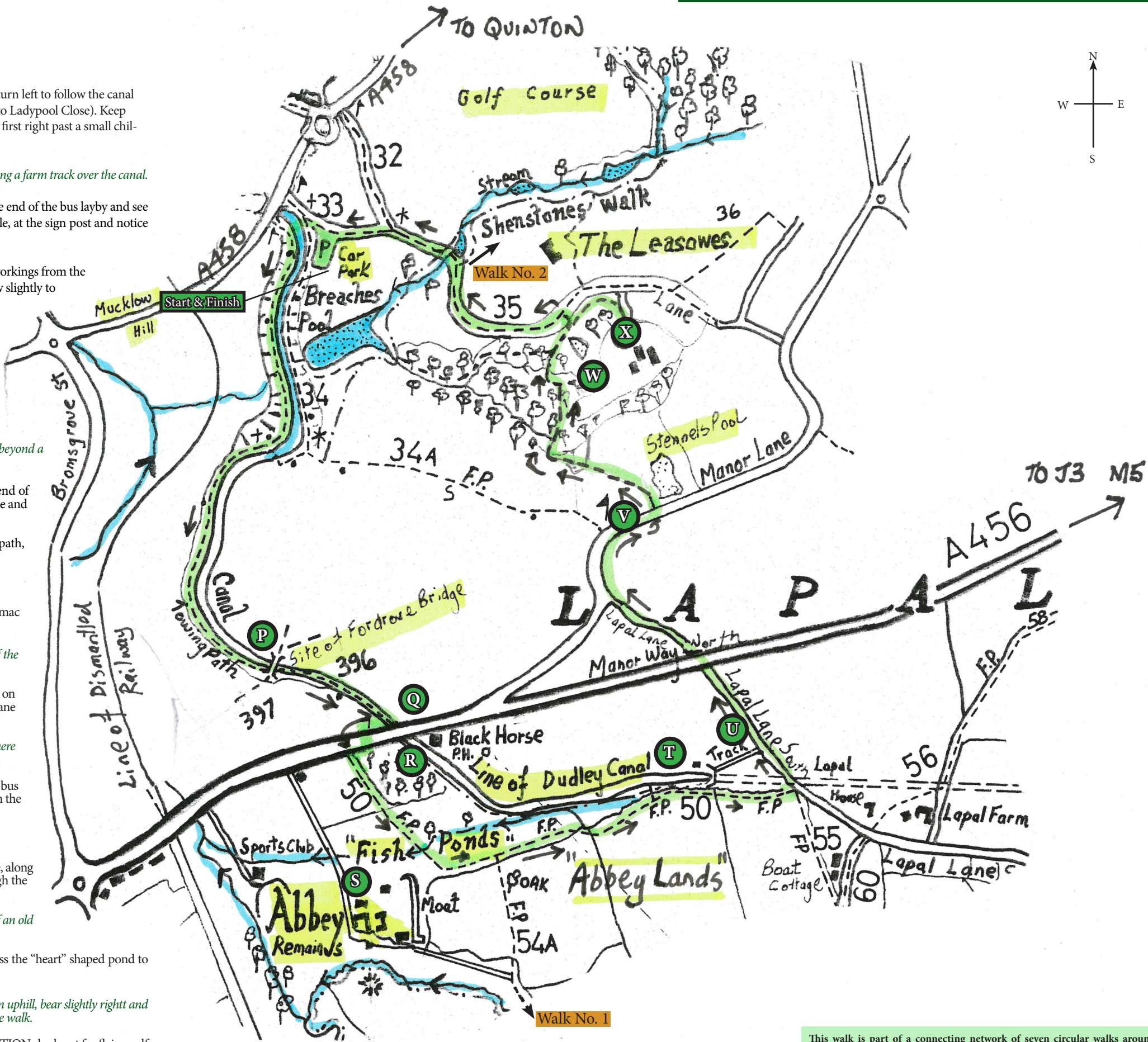
Note: To visit the Walled Garden (if open) (X) take a slight walk detour at the gap in fence on your left - go straight on uphill, bear slightly rightt and the gates of the walled garden are situated on a tarmac roadway. After visiting, return back to gap in fence to continue walk.

Go through the gap in the fence and turn left onto the tarmac road (ref H35) going through the golf course (CAUTION- look out for flying golf balls!). Go into the woods, past the pond on your right, over the bridge, head straight uphill, through or past a gate, past some houses and turn left at the sign post and junction.

Note: This section is part of the original turn pike road of Mucklow Hill.

Go down the road to the finish at the Leasowes car park.

End of walk.



This walk is part of a connecting network of seven circular walks around “Halesowen’s Green Borderland”, all on the western edge of the mighty West Midlands conurbation.

You may be surprised at the varied and diverse landscape, with its outstanding views, steeped in ancient history and rich in all kinds of vegetation and wildlife. Some parts include steep slopes and steps etc. and can be muddy at times.

Appropriate sensible footwear and clothing is recommended.