

# Country Walks Around Halesowen's Green Borderland



Circular walk No. 1

Woodgate Valley to Lapal and Illey

*A self-guided circular walk from Woodgate Valley Country Park "Over" Lapal Tunnel, through "Abbey Lands", returning via Illey Village*

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

Some sites of interest A-N, as indicated on map overleaf

## **A** Woodgate Valley Country Park

A picturesque valley of former farmland, drained by the Infant Bourne Brook. Many of the ancient hedgerows, which enclosed the original patchwork of medieval arable and dairy meadows, still remain today

Three Prehistoric "Burnt Mounds" have been discovered in the valley - one dating back some 4000 years making it amongst the earliest discovered in the British Isles.

Birmingham City Council decided in 1984 that 450 acres of the valley should be granted Country Park status, and also provided a Visitors Centre, which was opened in 1987. Linked to the park is the site of "Quinton Meadows", a nature reserve and valuable wildlife corridor.



**B**

## Lapal Tunnel and Shaft Mounds

The high ground of the Northfield/Sedgley Ridgeway has been recognised as a prehistoric trade route. However, the builders of the Dudley Extension Canal, encountered this rising ground at

Lapal, and drove a narrow single bore tunnel, some 2.2 miles (3.47 km) long, to link their waterway with the Worcester and Birmingham Canal at Selly Oak.

The tunnel was completed in 1798, and throughout its long history suffered numerous roof and side wall collapses, finally closing to traffic in 1917, and officially abandoned in 1953.

As many as 30 shafts were sunk for the purpose of driving the tunnel, resulting in surface "mushrooming" of spoil mounds at each location. The remains of one of these mounds is still visible, (although now tree covered) nearby to the car park at the Visitors Centre.



**C**

## Lapal Tunnel - Air Shaft

One construction shaft only was formally left open for ventilation purposes.

The circular blue brick shaft tower was about 2.2 metres in diameter and was topped with a domed iron grating and spike.

The tower was demolished, and the shaft infilled around 1978, and the grid taken to the Black Country Museum.

Unfortunately there is no visible trace of the tower or its location

## **D** Moor Street

Only a few of the original cottages remain today of the old hamlet of Moor Street, situated on high land, at the crossroads of Ancient Highways; Watery Lane and Lye Close Lane which have been dated back to the 13th Century. Carters Lane and Woodgate Lane are part of the old 18th Century Northfield Turnpike, but their origins probably go back to Prehistoric Times, as part of an Ancient Ridgeway.

Although farm work was probably the main occupation, the 1851 Census records 20 nail makers cottages in Moor Street. A high proportion, considering the village in 1881 only consisted of around 30 dwellings.

## **E** Lapal House

Lapal, up to the end of the 19th Century, was a sparsely populated rural Parish, consisting mainly of farmsteads, cottages and one or two "Gentleman's Residences".

One such fine residence, "Lapal House" in Lapal Lane was where John Scott Hylton lived from 1753-1793. His closest friend, William Shenstone, of the Leasowes, helped him shape the extensive gardens. The house still stands today, and was opened in 1983 as a residential care home.



**F**

## Lapal Tunnel & site of Western Portal (3795 yards - fourth longest in Britain)

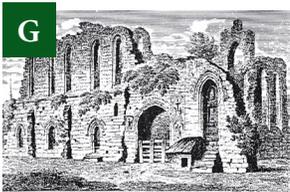
The canal at this point is buried some 7m (23 feet) under the spoil that was used to fill in the approach cutting up to the tunnel portal - the extent of which can be made out by

the wide flat area and changing vegetation on the field just beyond the hedgerow.

Looking back to 1909 as depicted in the old photograph, one can only imagine what an idyllic spot this must have been. Life working on the canals was hard and dangerous, especially in the winter. But perhaps on a warm summer's evening - with the boats tied up at Lapal Wharf, and the horses safely stabled for the night - a quiet stroll down the towpath and drink at the Black Horse pub could be well enjoyed and appreciated.

However the next morning would be an early start, as the first passage through the tunnel would be at four o'clock. With no towpath the boat had to be "legged" through the tunnel, originally taking over four hours to complete the journey. From 1841 help was at hand, and boats were assisted along by a current of water created by a steam powered pumping engine and paddle wheel, situated not far from the tunnel's "mouth".

*Leaflet Published by: Halesowen Abbey Trust  
C/O Leasowes Walled Garden, Leasowes Lane, Halesowen B62 8QF*



### G Halesowen Abbey (Also called St. Mary's Abbey)

In 1214, King John returned to England from the French military campaigns, and as an expression of gratitude, signed a deed, so as to grant the Manor of "Hales" to Peter des Roches, Bishop of Winchester

for services rendered.

The deed granted to des Roches, specified that its purpose was to enable him to found a religious house of his own choice. This was to be the Premonstratensian Order from France, also known as "The White Canons". King John confirmed the grant to them on the 8th August 1215.

As Lords of the Manor, the White Cannons for some 320 years held control over some 10,000 acres of land, managed by 10 outlying Granges. Around 1538 the Abbey was surrendered to the Crown, and the buildings partly demolished. The site is now in private ownership, and what very little remains above ground is under a Guardianship arrangement with English Heritage. The ruins, however, are very special as they stand surrounded by an historic landscape, together with the extensive chains of former fishponds.



The Abbey Site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument of National Importance, and interestingly the original Court Rolls are stored in the New Central Birmingham Library.

### H Illey

Illey is an old parish of Halesowen, and at one time belonged to the nearby Abbey. The place name "Illey" is derived from the Anglo Saxon "Hilla", a masculine name, and "Leah" - a woodland estate or clearing.

The pattern of farmsteads would suggest that the area was sparsely populated. Then, with the coming of the 18th Century Turnpike (Illey Lane), the "village" evolved at the crossroads of the old, green lanes, centred around the Black Horse public house. The Grandfather of William Shenstone, renowned poet and landscape gardener, was born in Illey.

During the Second World War, a "model" factory (with lights etc) was set up in the fields nearby, in an attempt to "decoy" the German Bomber Raids.

### J Lowlands and Illey Meadows

As the name "Lowlands" suggests, the meadows here are prone to be very wet, and have survived modern deep ploughing techniques. This probably is the reason that the "Ridges and Furrows" are still visible today.

This was a medieval practice in the meadows to show ownership, or tenancy of, allocated strips of land. By ploughing with oxen, each strip would have a raised ridge, with a furrow at either side for drainage. The meadows are also designated as a "Site of Importance for Nature Conservation".

### K Cooper's Wood

Originally shown on the Tythe Map as "Poyners Wood" and later purchased by a Mr Richard Cooper. This is an "Ancient Woodland", i.e., a remnant of woodland that covered most of Britain since the last Ice Age some 8000 years ago. Left uncleared, as the valleys of the fast flowing woodland streams make the land unsuitable for agriculture, in this location.

The stream to the East of the wood, which rises in old water meadows, at one time supported watercress beds.

### L&M Lanes, Marker Stones & Earth Mounds



A Green Lane or "Holloway" is a very ancient track way, usually with hedges on either side. Some can be dated back to around the time of the 13th Century Abbey. Some may even be pre-Roman.

According to Alfred Watkins in his book "The Old Straight Track", "Marker Stones" and "Earth Mounds" are to be associated with these old green lanes,

Here at Illey we have all the ingredients to tempt further research, for alongside the lanes are two earth mounds, and by two stiles there are huge stones, which may be markers of the original track way.

Note: the earth mounds can only be "viewed" from the public footpaths, as they are on private property. They may only be geological features, but could possibly be prehistoric burial sites.



### N Kits Well (site of) - NOT on walk route

Near Kitwell Farm, in Woodgate, there was an ancient "Chalybeate" or iron bearing well, known as Kits Well.

Local Historian and artist, the late Horace Wilson depicted in a sketch a shrine at the "Holy Well". He thought that pilgrims may have visited the well on their journey to Halesowen Abbey, and then onto St Kenelm's Well in the Clent Hills.

There is no trace left of the well or farm, as all remains are now buried, following recent developments of Housing and a Sub-station.

**Walk Information**

**Start & Finish:** Woodgate Valley Country Park  
Visitors Centre  
Clapgate Lane  
Birmingham B32 3DS

**Distance:** Approximately 3½ miles (5.6 km)

**Time:** Allow 2½-3 hours to take in view points and "Abbey Detour"

This walk is part of a connecting network of six circular walk 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.

#### Acknowledgements

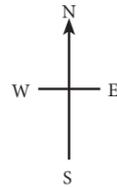
- We wish to thank Dudley MBC and Worcester CC for their kind permission to use their base maps which were used to prepare this leaflet.
- Photos - Credits: Halesowen Abbey Trust archive.
- Original concept of walk March 1989
- 1st Revision: October 2013
- 2nd Revision: May 2019
- Authors: Roy Burgess and Mark Hemus
- Copyright 2014 Roy Burgess
- Disclaimer
- The majority of the land indicated is in private ownership and the representation on this leaflet of any road, track or path is no evidence of the existence of a right of way.
- 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"

# Country walks around Halesowen's Green Borderland

## Circular walk No. 1: Woodgate Valley to Lapal and Illey

Start & Finish: Woodgate Valley Visitor Centre, Clapgate Ln, Bartley Green, Birmingham B32 3DS **A**

Key: **A** Points of Interest  
**1** Check Points



### Directions

#### Section 1: Over Lapal Tunnel to Abbey Oaks

From the visitors centre, head towards the main exit of the car park. **1**

Note: On the right of the car park look at the earth mound within the trees - this is the spoil from the workings of Lapal canal tunnel, brought up from one of the shafts used during the construction. **B**

Leave the car park; turn right into Clapgate Lane and right again at the island. Now cross over and turn left into Lye Close Lane. **D**

Note: Here we are now almost directly over Lapal tunnel (some 50 metres below). You are also now at the site of the old village of Moor Street. On the right hand side is the New Crown public house.

Proceed and go past the old Lapal Lane (on your right) which was cut off when the motorway was built. This lane was the original route that took canal horses "over the hill" as the tunnel had no towpath.

Pass by Nailers Close (on your right) which is aptly named because of the nailing cottage industry that was once in this area. Proceed over the M5 motorway bridge and turn left at the junction. Walk along Lye Close Lane for a short distance and approach a public footpath sign and a marker post with a yellow top, just before the junction of the old original Lye Close Lane; at this point turn right up the bank, between the fence and hedgerow. Go up this little path (map ref no. 69) by the hedge and cross the first stile. At this stile turn left. On your right are some stables, stop for a moment and look at the view. **2**

Note: (On a clear day) On the left horizon is Frankley Beeches and moving to the right, you will see Waseley, Romsley, Walton and Adams Hill, which are all part of the Clent range and the last hill to the right is Wychbury, distinguished by the stone obelisk, also known as Hagley Monument.

Proceed through the "horse gates", open & close "hooks" follow the hedge in a westerly direction and at the end of the hedge bear right and there is another stile. Crossing over this stile, look in a northerly direction (to your right) and you can just see in the valley "Lapal House".

Note: Lapal House and nearby Lapal Farm with the Boat Cottages, are historically considered as the old "village" of Lapal parish. **E**

Proceed downhill and observe on the left a mound. Approach a farm gate and stile. Go over the stile and go straight across the green lane to the next stile. **M**

Note: At this point observe the view of Halesowen church and its grand spire. Look just to the left of the pylon, you should see the site of St. Mary's Abbey (Halesowen), set in a beautiful sheltered and fertile valley as favoured by the monks of the 13th Century.

After the stile, turn right and go down the field path (map ref no. 55), past some cottages (behind the hedge) on your right which have been aptly called "Boat Cottages". The stables here would have accommodated in the past the "canal boat" horses, in connection with Lapal canal tunnel and Lapal Lane.

At the bottom of the field near Lapal Lane, turn sharp left onto another field path (no. 50), keeping the hedgerow to your right. Continue to the next stile. **3**

Note: If you look to the right of the stile this is where the western portal entrance to Lapal Tunnel was sited. The "approach" canal cutting was filled in from spoil during the construction of the A456 trunk road in the 1960s. There is very little visual evidence remaining of the canal or Lapal Tunnel. **F**

From the stile walk along the field path with the hedge still to your right. Cross over the ditch on a little bridge and up onto the bank of another field. Within a few yards, turn right down a slope and over another stile. Follow the field boundary hedge which should be on your left and the dried beds of the former Abbey Fishponds to your right. At the end of the hedge, there is a stile on your left. **4**

**Optional small detour:** A good view of the Abbey ruins is best seen by taking a short forwards walk, slightly veering to the right over a small stream on a bridge and by standing on a dam of the dry fish ponds. Look to your left and you will see the ruins. There is no public access to the Abbey from this or any other footpath - the Abbey is only open to the public on very limited open days. **G**

To continue the walk, just backtrack to the stile at the end of the hedge row.

#### Section 2 Abbey Oaks to Illey village

Go over the stile onto the field path heading towards an oak tree. (Footpath map ref. 54a) **4**

Note: This field was at one time called Abbey Oaks and was believed to be a deer park belonging to the Abbey. On this field path, if you look to your right, which is in a westerly direction, you can see the Abbey Site.

At the end of the footpath, cross over a stile, over a small ditch and up onto a bank.

Note: If you look to your right and observe the valley, you will see more series of the former fishponds. You will also see the detached building of the Abbey, known as the "The Infirmary" which in 1989, was restored by English Heritage.

Remember there is no public access to the Abbey Site.

Turn away from the Abbey Site and veer left following the field boundary. Follow the small farm track then bear right over the bridge. Crossing a "boundary brook" (the Parishes of Lapal and Illey).

After leaving the bridge, go up a little track towards some gates and turn left following the valley, but on the high side following the hedge. The footpath map references now should be 65 and 77 and we are heading towards Illey village. Keep the hedge on your right hand side.

Note: At this point, if you look around, you will see the fertile slopes and lush meadows that have changed very little since the time of the 13th Century, in a Valley often referred to as "Abbey Lands".

Continuing along Footpath map ref 77, with the hedge on your right, you should now be walking on a grass track with a brook on your left. Continue to the end of the field approaching a farm gate. There is a stile on your right. After crossing the stile, turn left. The hedge should be on your left. Follow the field path and the cottages of Illey should be in your distant view. Follow the field path.

Note: Look through the hedge on your left and you will see a brook in a very deep and beautiful cutting. This little valley is very typical in this area and has been left free of agriculture because it has been very difficult to farm. Therefore, these little pockets of woodland and wildlife areas have been left alone. During springtime, this is notably quite prolific with bluebells and dogs mercury, indicators that the woodland is of "Ancient" origin, having survived clearance by man since the last ice age some 8,000 years ago. The bigger farm fields in this area are typical of our modern agricultural methods where most of the hedgerows are stripped out, leaving the landscape quite featureless.

Approach the next field boundary, cross over the stile and turn left slightly to follow the wooded valley.

Note: Before you do, just stand a while and look in a northerly direction (looking back) you should see the spire of Halesowen church

At the end of the field path, cross a stile and turn left onto the farm track and head towards Illey Hall Farm. This is Footpath ref 90a. Now walk straight towards the farm house of Illey Hall Farm. Just before the farm entrance, turn right by a brick outbuilding and then approach the grounds of Bartley Green Football Club. Turn left with the hedgerow and the farm on your left. You are now approaching Footpath ref no. 97. Approach a double stile, cross the right hand one and turn immediately right. The hedgerow should now be on your right after crossing the stile. There should be a row of electric wires on your right which are also following the hedge.

Now walk in a southerly direction (straight on) towards another stile. Cross over this stile and head straight across towards the next stile. **5**

Note: If you look across the fields to your right, you will see the Black Horse public house and Illey village. **H**

After crossing this stile, go down the steps and our walk then goes to the left, to return to the Woodgate Valley (However, at this point you may wish to visit the village of Illey, by turning right)

#### Section 3 "Green Lanes and Ancient Meadows"

After turning left down the steps opposite some farm buildings, head down the green lane. Approach a farm gate, go over a stile and follow the track further along; the stream should be on your left with some hedgerows and trees on your left. Ascend the bank through a gap in the hedge towards a little copse, the public footpath veers to the right and observe a stile to the right of a gap in the hedgerow in the distance. This area is called Lowlands. There was a cottage here at one time but has long been demolished.

Note: As you head towards the next stile, you will see the evidence of ridge and furrow ploughing in the pastures. **J**

After crossing this stile, head diagonally across the field (path ref 88) and in the distance there is another stile on the edge of Coopers wood. **K**

As you come over this stile, there is a very big stone, which might possibly have been a boundary marker in relation to Halesowen Abbey. You are still on Footpath ref no. 88, with Coopers Wood on your left and the M5 motorway should be in your distant view.

After a short walk, come across a stile in the hedgerow, turn left and go over this stile and then you will be in an ancient green lane, on the eastern side of Coopers Wood. Cross a small stream by way of a bridge. (Footpath ref 81) Proceed up the hill along the green lane, go through a squeeze stile.

Note: At the farm gate on your left, this is a good vantage point to view the distant Clent Hills. (On a clear day) At this point there is another big heavy "stone marker".

Proceed along the green lane, which is now a well maintained farm track and approach a "T" junction. **6**

Note: In the spring time if you look in the hedgerows along here, you will see Dogs mercury, Bluebells and Primroses, all indicators that at one time this area was covered in ancient woodland.

At the T junction to return to the start of your walk, turn right into another green lane, this is Footpath ref 71. This lane is probably again of ancient origin connecting Halesowen Abbey with Watery Lane in Woodgate Valley. Head uphill and cross a stile by a gate, proceed past some cottages, then turn slightly left up the wide tarmac road, and then turn right at the next junction. Cross over the motorway bridge, turn right at the Island and left into Clapgate Lane and left into the Woodgate Valley Visitors centre.

**Obstruction on Public Right of Way in Dudley, contact Highway Authority 01384 815424**