

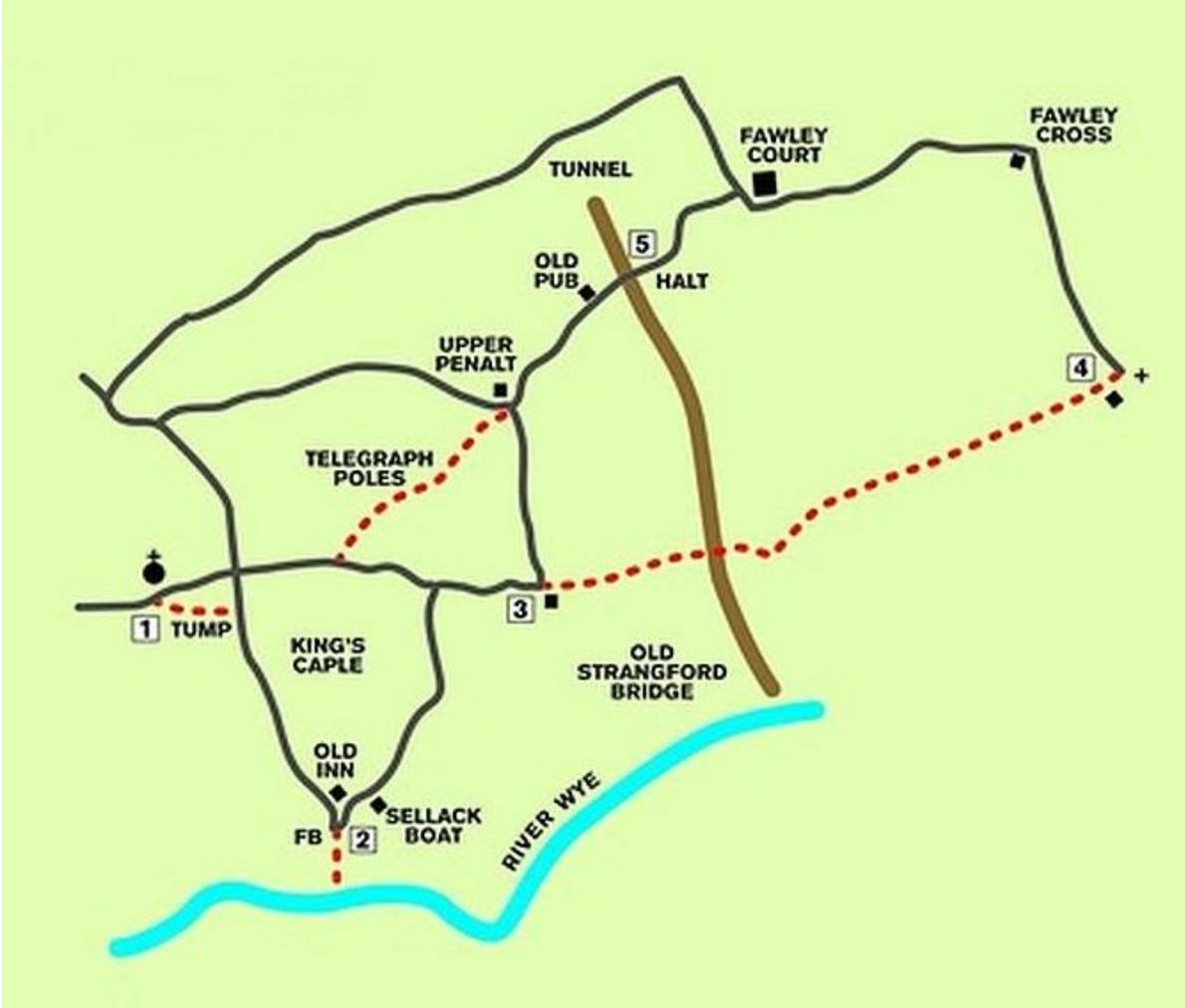
# Herefordshire Railway Walks

## Walk Two - King's Caple

- 6 mile energetic walk. Quite long stretches of road walking
- Quiet country lanes, bridleway
- OS Map - Hereford and Ross-on-Wye (Explorer 189)

### The Route

1. Start opposite Kings Caple church next to Caple Tump. With your back to the south face of the church, walk right of the tump and TL along the waymarked path. Go through galvanized gate under tree, cross drive and stile. Follow R edge fence of paddock. (Wave to May Hill). Go through k-gate on to road. TR down lane, with Sellack Church ahead of you. After 670m pass by Shieldbrook, which was once an inn called The Old Boar serving barge workers.
2. Loop at bottom of lane. (Take quick detour along footpath to Sellack Boat suspension bridge? And return without crossing). Follow loop in road around to left. Pass Millditch Cottages, up to reach islanded T-junction. TR, with fine drive to Poulstone Court on your right. Go down and up to left turn in road.
3. Bridle path to Fawley. Go straight ahead along the wide, grassy path at (what is) Ingsbury Cottage, through gate. Follow L edge of field. (After 100m, level with farm gate, the view to Strangford's old Wye bridge, right, is in line with May Hill on the skyline.) Drop under the old railway line, through gate, just R of pond, then half R up bank through bridle gate. (Strangford Bridge now back to right.) Bear L up bank along L edge of pasture to marker post. Cross track, going left, to put hedge ahead on left, 60m, through gate. Go straight ahead across huge crop field, through gap in hedge other side and gate. Follow next long field, with views to Strangford on other side of Wye. Keep ahead along drive left of barns.
4. Fawley Chapel area. TL at road, with Tremelza in front of you. Trudge up half a mile to Fawley Cross T-junction. TL along road for half a mile to reach Fawley Court. Bend R a few paces to imposing gates, then TL, for King's Caple and Hoarwithy. Cross cattle grid, along unfenced road through the common. Cross next grid.
5. Site of old Fawley Halt. Cross old railway again. (Fawley Halt was down to L, and Fawley Tunnel a couple of hundred yards R, shrouded in trees). Keep ahead past old British Lion public house, now Fawley Orchards. Go down and up to "boulder" island T-junction, left of Upper Penalt. Go very slightly L over stile into enclosure. Cross next stile, slightly R, and make way on same line through crop field towards an area with three hedge sides. Just R of T-pole go through gap in hedge. Follow telegraph line as far as the one with etchings where you go a little further L (and of houses) to road at Caple Avenue. TR before it, past Kings Caple Primary Academy. Go ahead at crossroads, past King's Caple Court, back to Caple Tump.



## Origin of the theory of Leys

Alfred Watkins conceived the idea of Ley Lines “while riding across the hills near Bredwardine”. You’d be surprised how many scholars have told us that a blinding flash came to the sixty-five-year-old up on Merbach Hill. Indeed, the cromlech known as Arthur’s Stone lends a satisfying mystique and intrigue to that area; after all, Watkins did decide that two ancient trackways ran straight through it. The reality is a little more prosaic, however: Watkins was sitting in his car at Blackwardine crossroads.

Blackwardine is a former Roman settlement on high ground between Stoke Prior and Humber, about three miles south-east of Leominster. Sadly, there’s no bewitching cromlech - but there is a cattery. And apart from the aptly named dwelling called “Fairview” that’s about all, really. Yet the fairly uninspiring crossroads which we arrive at on this walk is where it all happened, when the venerable Herefordian, ordnance survey map in hand, gazed across Luston to the ridge of Croft Ambrey.

We are in the centenary of that 30th June 1921 revelation.

“Suddenly”, his son Allen would recount, “the scales fell from Watkins’ eyes and his mind was flooded with a rush of images forming one coherent plan. The realisation came to him that over many long years of prehistory all trackways had been marked out in straight lines by experts on a sighting system”.

The ley ran, he suggested, from an initial point on top of Croft Ambrey, down Croft lane, through the Broad, a hamlet south of Luston, up to this point at Blackwardine crossroads, over Risbury Camp all the way to the old Roman station on the high ground of Homend Bank at Stretton Grandison. So, the The Blackwardine Ley was the first one ever proposed. (It was only ever a “ley” to Alfred and not a “ley line.”)

As for the Iron Age Risbury hill-fort, or Camp, even though the walk takes us directly below the bank and ditch on its western approach, it’s remarkable for its ordinariness. It has a tree-clad nature in a low-lying position beneath more imposing heights. If it wasn’t marked on the map, you wouldn’t notice it was there. As you walk from the camp to Blackwardine cross and try to keep aware of the camp’s position behind you, you’re likely to lose track of it. If you stand on the bank at Blackwardine cross by the “Give Way” sign, and look through the gap in the hedge, Lo! the ley north-west to Croft Ambrey can be observed. But if you nip back to the post on the other side and stand on the bank (don’t try this at home), you probably can’t see Risbury Camp.

So, on the ground - at this seminal vantage point, it’s clear that Alfred was placing a heavy reliance on his map. It’s also true that if you are looking south from Croft Ambrey itself, you’ll get a better perspective of the sighting points along the 20 miles to Stretton Grandison - towards Ledbury.

Our five-mile investigation of this unheralded area takes us across rolling countryside. Some of the arable field paths are quite testing during the growing season, but none of the gradients which also skirt the Humber and Holly brooks are particularly demanding. Whatever we make of ley lines, placing Alfred Watkins at Blackwardine, rather than Bredwardine, gives that modest settlement a unique claim to fame in the wayfinding firmament. So, it is here that we find the seat of the conception of “The Old Straight Track” theory.