

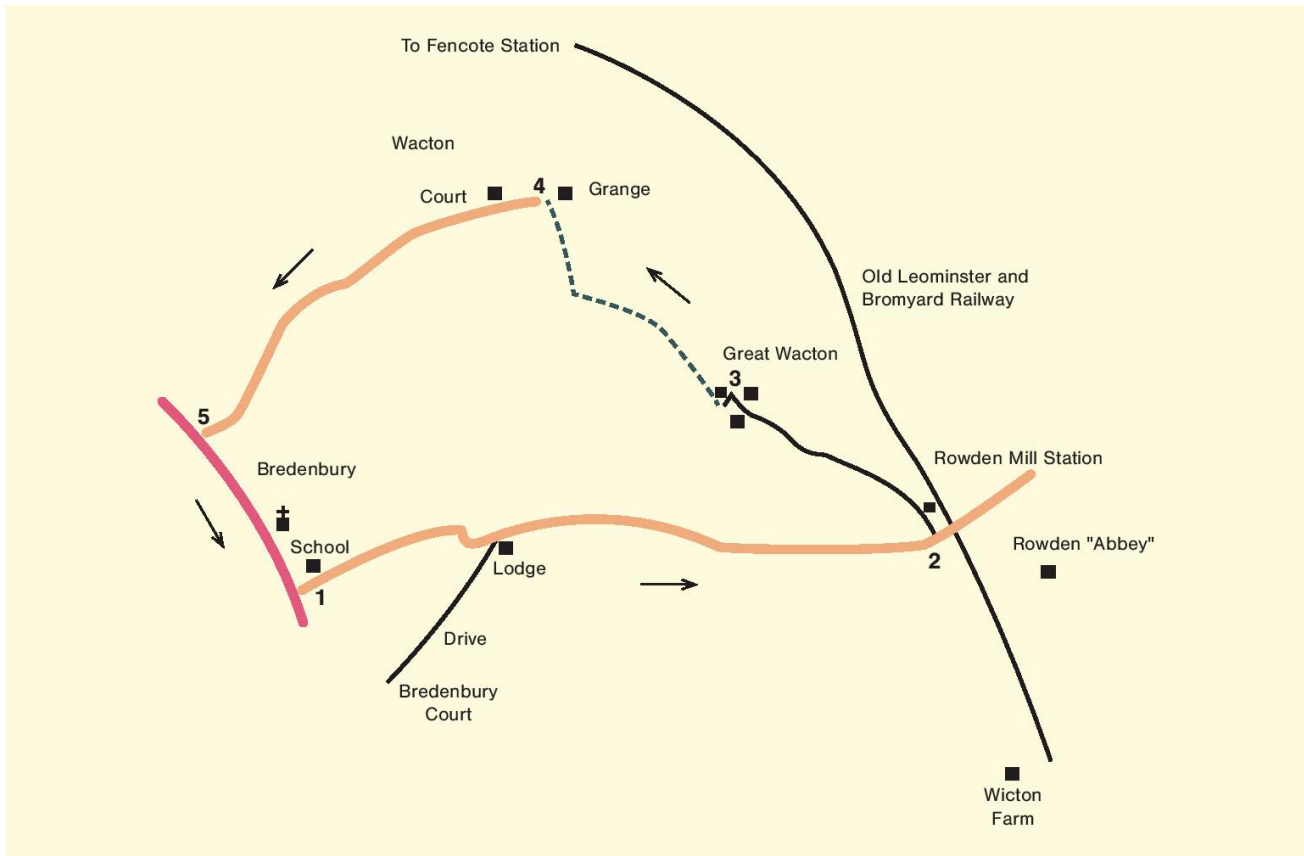
Herefordshire Railway Walks

Walk Eight - Bredenbury and Wacton

- 3 mile easy walk mostly along country lane. Two pastures, one footbridge, three stiles
- Rowden Mill (old) railway station
- Ordnance Survey map - Leominster and Bromyard. (Explorer 202)

The Route

1. From roadside parking by Bredenbury Primary School, pass Valley View as if for Edwyn Ralph. Bend R and L, continuing downwards, past North Lodge to Bredenbury Court and Greswolde's back drive. Pass Rowden, Overdine, and Wiggall, beyond which the views open out ahead, giving a perspective of how the old railway was cut into the valley. Rowden Abbey marks the lowest point. (View to Wicton Farm (R) where the engine driver "nipped out for his eggs.") Reach the left turn along the country lane to Great Wacton Farm. Proceed a few steps ahead to
2. Railway Bridge. Gain a perspective of Rowden Mill Station from the parapets and roadside beyond. Return to, now, TR along the lane for Great Wacton Farm. Pass Station Cottage, up lane, Great Wacton Hop Kilns (announcing the importance and handiness of the railway for hop pickers of old), to point on hard stand between stables (L) and farmhouse.
3. (Landowner's preference is, now) before last barn on left, TL on hard stand to put that barn on your right. Immediately beyond that same barn, TR into pasture, over crest, angling left. Aim for bottom left corner. Pass through farm gate. Head up R edge of pasture, two-thirds of its length. TR across footbridge, brook and stile, up through gate. Go up through henhouse enclosure, through metal gate, L edge of pasture, two stiles, immediately L of drive to (what is) Wacton Grange. Reach road.
4. Wacton. TL up lane, past drive behind you which goes to Little Wacton Farm, The Henhouse. Pass Wacton Court. Carry on three-quarters of a mile up to Badger Heights and Tree Pines Garage.
5. Bredenbury. TL past the Barneby Inn into the village along nearside pavement. Pass Parish Room and War Memorial at St Andrew's Church- including the name of 18 year-old William Aldridge a casualty in Afghanistan in 2009. Just beyond, TL for Edwyn Ralph to start point.



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.