

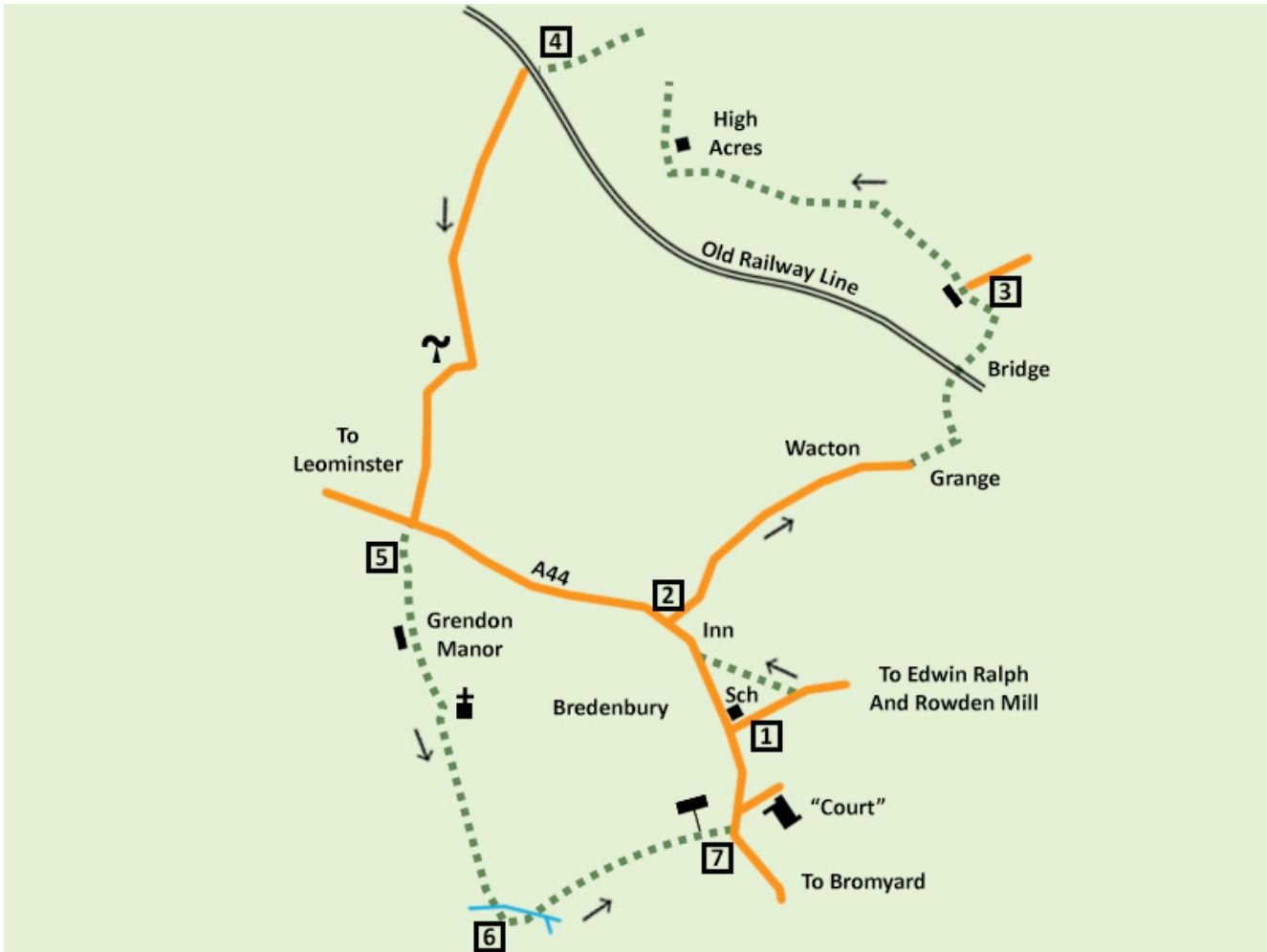
Herefordshire Railway Walks

Walk Nine - Bredenbury, Wacton, "Fencote" and Grendon Bishop

- Moderate 6.25 mile ramble with a climb near the end. Largely firm footing
- Bridle paths, a ford, one long, quiet road section, one village pavement
- Ordnance Survey map - Leominster and Bromyard. (Explorer 202)

The Route

1. Bredenbury Primary School. Start just beyond school on road to Edwin Ralph. Walk towards Edwin Ralph about 240m, T sharp L off road across stile. Follow R edge of wood, cross stile, go through gate and half R in small pasture (old Reading Room over to L) through gate on to pavement. TR to just past Barneby Inn. (Old New Inn).
2. Wacton Road. TR and follow quiet lane downhill for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. Bend L at Wacton Grange off surfaced path and keep ahead on same line through a gate. Follow R edge to marker post and TL down large pasture towards and through metal gate. Go through "tunnel" under old B & L railway, ahead across crop field and down through wooden gate in offset corner. Cross stream, go through small metal gate, beyond pretty gardens (L) out on to road by gates at Butterley Brook and Orchard Place.
3. Butterley. Go straight across road on to wide bridle path. Rise up to a crest, and gaining perspective of gradient encountered by the train, follow fine path $\frac{3}{4}$ mile through 5 gaps with hedge on L, then R in last field. At two gates, TR along tree-lined avenue, L of bungalow, down and up past The Clerks Croft to crest before bungalow above R. TL through gate into plantation. Wind L and through gateway in R corner, along R edge of 2 fields and through a gate behind "Fencote Station".
4. "Fencote Station." Bear R up to road. (Remember Fencote is private). TL for view to station from bridge. Now carry on up quiet road for $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles. Go straight across very busy A44, but with good sighting, up No through road signed The Day House to cattle grid.
5. Conifer Mast. TL around mast, down L edge/hedge, through gate in L corner, L of poultry houses and through small wooden gate by t/pole. Jump down, TL, immediately TR across Grendon Manor drive, through gate beyond cider mill by wall. Follow R edge down through gate into Grendon Bishop churchyard. (It's a solitary place). Exit via lower gate. TR along R edge/hedge past pond and across stile. Bear L across crop field and across stile in fence. Now (careful) head down the big field on a line from Grendon Manor (behind) through the 2 trees in the middle to find and cross a stile below. Go through scrub and over the f/bridge.
6. In front of gate in fence. Immediately after f/bridge, TL to put fence on your R. Ford stream (if I can, you can!) and go up through gate. Climb steeply up bank, past waymarked t/pole, through gate, up gravel drive (past Brockington Grange) to regain the A44 at Bredenbury.
7. Bredenbury. Cross road to opposite pavement. TL along narrow pavement beyond (old) St. Richard's Prep.School drive (R) - back to primary school.



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.