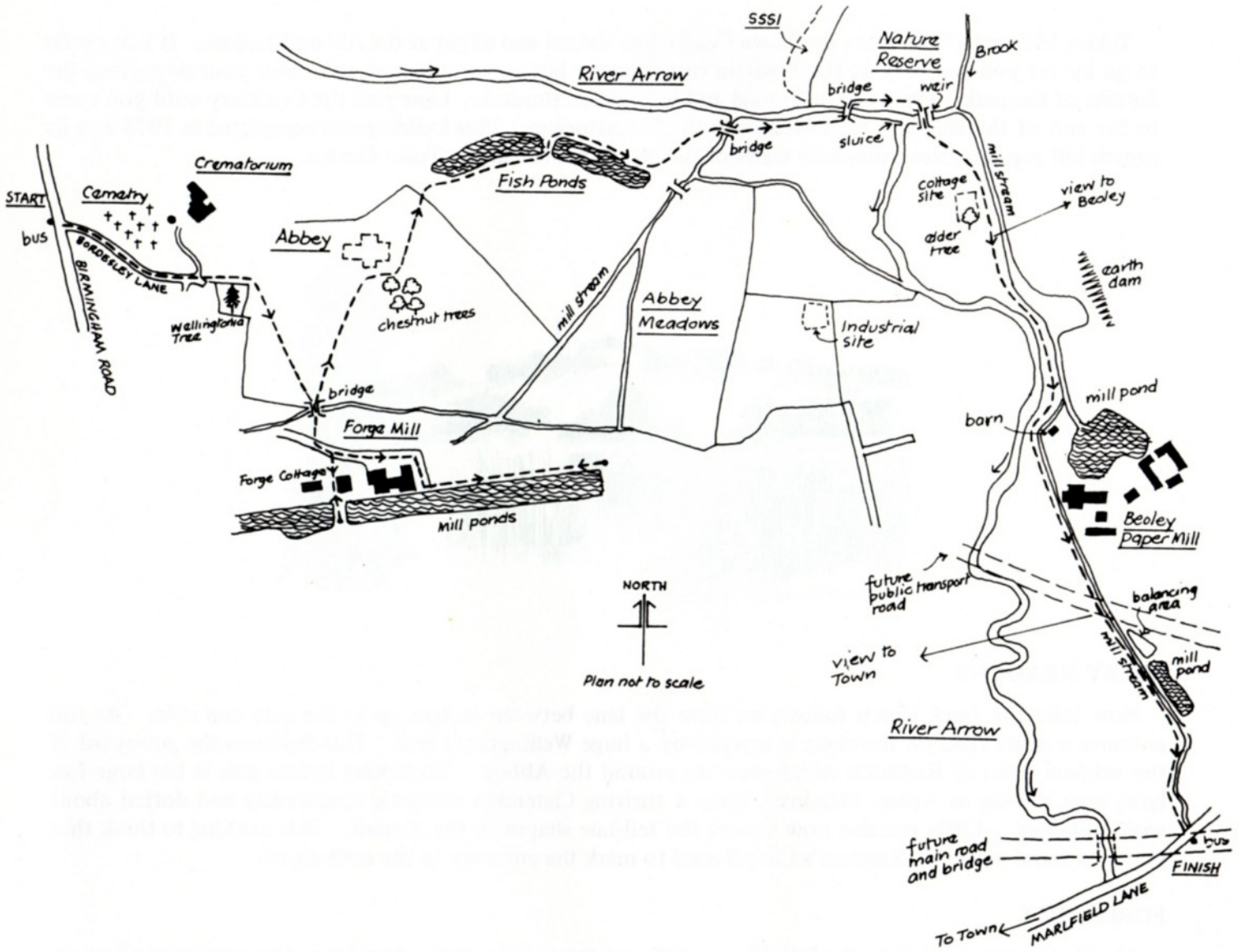


REDDITCH NEW TOWN WALKS No.2



NEW TOWN WALKS No. 2

In this second walk of the series the route is a circular one in more rural surroundings and takes in Bordesley Abbey, Forge Mill and the River Arrow in the northern part of the Arrow Valley Park. The first and last parts of the route by bus.

A detailed account of Bordesley Abbey and the origins of Redditch, by John Rollins, was featured in the 'Indicator' on 4th July 1975, and is printed with the walk in leaflet form.

The route is about two miles and you should allow 1½ - 1¾ hours from getting off the bus to catching a return bus in Marlfield Lane.

Take a 142 or 147 bus from the Town Centre bus station and alight at the Abbey Stadium. If you prefer to go by car you can park at the Stadium or Cemetery but you would have to retrace your steps from the far side of the park. Cross the main road and walk down Bordesley Lane past the Cemetery until you come to the end of the lane and the entrance to the Crematorium. This building was completed in 1973 and its superb hill top site gives panoramic views of Beoley, Gorcott and the Town Centre.



ABBEY MEADOWS

Now take the track which follows on from the lane between hedges up to the gate and stile. At this entrance a small field on the right is marked by a huge Wellingtonia tree. This field was the graveyard of the original town of Redditch which grew up around the Abbey. Stretching before you is the large low lying area known as Abbey Meadows, once a thriving Cistercian monastic community and dotted about with buildings. Little remains now except the tell-tale shapes in the ground. It is exciting to think that you now stand where St. Stephen's Chapel used to mark the entrance to the settlement.

FORGE MILL

Ahead you can see, just to the left of a magnificent group of horsechestnut trees, the encampment where work is in progress on the excavation of the Abbey Church itself. Before visiting the ruins, it is worth having a look at Forge Mill, so bear off down the field to the right over humps and hummocks, which are awaiting exploration by the archaeologists towards the Mill which shows above the foliage. Cross the stream at the bottom by the footbridge and thence over two stiles onto the lane. Over the lane, at the side of Forge Cottage you can go out onto the bridge with its old sluice gate controlling the water level in the Mill ponds. These ponds are fed by water from Hewell Grange, laid down by the monks.

Now if you go back to the lane turn right into the forecourt of Forge Mill which is the first building. There is little to see outside but inside is a wealth of original machinery still powered by an immense water wheel at the rear. If you want to see inside you will have to return on an Open Day or contact John Rollins (Redditch 64460). Continue on past the joinery works and round to the right to the Mill pond. A pleasant walk along the bank beneath alders and willows and you may see the lilies and irises and various water birds. There is no way out at the far end, so you will have to retrace your steps back to the Meadows.

BORDESLEY ABBEY

Head off towards the excavation encampment where you may be disappointed to find that all is securely enclosed by a wire fence. The site is being excavated by the University of Birmingham after two previous excavations in 1863 and the 1960's and has to be kept safe so that vital evidence will not be disturbed. If there are archaeologists there, they would, I am sure be pleased to give you information and perhaps show some of the 'finds'. More than likely you will have to be content with a look through the fence to see the massive walls and beautiful column bases of the Church. It is worth remembering that this stonework dates back to 1140 A.D. The Abbey itself being destroyed in 1540. All around outside the fence are the ground shapes which mark the sites of other buildings such as the Cloister, Farm and Chapter House.

FISH PONDS

Bear left now round the back of the enclosure towards the gate in the corner of the field. Through here you can walk along the side of the reconstructed fish ponds - fish being an essential part of the monastic diet. The ponds are pleasantly fringed with rushes and willow trees and contain a selection of carp and roach and also a pair of swans.

THE RIVER ARROW

The River Arrow lies on your left, do not cross the brick bridge over the mill stream unless you want to go and look at the ancient industrial site in the far field. A little excavation has been done there. Instead head towards the Arrow and cross the stream to the right over a metal bridge. Continue along the bank of the Arrow, overhung with lime and alder trees until arriving at the footbridge taking you over onto the North side. You will now be in the area designated as a Nature Reserve because of its special character. Part of this land on the West side of the field you are in has also been declared by the Nature Conservancy as an area of special scientific interest on account of its rich plant life.

Whilst at this bend in the river you will notice the remains of an old weir and sluice gate, a long brick barrier with regular holes through it and originally spanning right across to the bank you are on, where there is a deep pool. This was used to control the amount of water taken from the river to supply the complex series of mill streams and ponds further South. See how many ruins of other such things you can see on the rest of the walk, for the whole area was at one time very complex.



old weir and sluice . R. Arrow

MILL STREAM AND PONDS

The walk continues South following the mill stream which is heavily overgrown with reeds. Just in this place you may spot the ruins of an old cottage, marked by its garden hedge and fruit trees. There is also an unusual elderberry tree which is a true tree shape rather than the usual bush form. Anywhere on this stretch of the river you may if you are lucky (and quiet) see a Kingfisher or two.

Through the short grass water meadows the path then becomes heavily enclosed by overhanging alders and hawthorns. It is really a quite beautiful and mysterious place - let's hope it remains so. Far out on the left a glimpse of Beoley Church on the hill is gained, whilst nearer to us the recent grass embankment forming a storm water retaining dam. When you come to a metal fence bear away to the right round the back of a small brick out-building and then along the edge of the grounds of Beoley Paper Mill. This partly timber framed building dates from the 18th century and is now used as a paper warehouse, although it was originally a water powered mill. You can normally recognise an old mill by the absence of any chimneys.

The path now follows the outflowing mill stream at the edge of the meadow. At a point roughly 100 yards down stream a new road will eventually fly over the area, this will be the Public Transport road, and a path will be routed up onto it. For the present though you should continue on towards the mill pond, noting that just before you reach it there is a new 'balancing' area on the left side of the stream. A balancing area is a sunken area which receives storm water in times of heavy rain and lets it out gradually, in this case into the river Arrow over on your right. From the path you can get a good view of the town skyline and the water tower at Headless Cross.

Alongside the mill pond, which has been cleaned out to provide some fishing stations, the path is rather muddy and you may have to make some detours. Eventually you arrive at the outlet of the pond where there is an old timber sluice gate. It is a short distance to Marlfield Lane following the stream line but construction work on a new road may mean that you will have to find the new route which will be provided. Access to the rest of the Park will eventually be under a new road bridge at the River Arrow.

Across Marlfield Lane is a bus stop and an R9 bus will take you in 5 minutes back to the Town Centre. They run about every half hour.

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TEL: REDDITCH 64200