

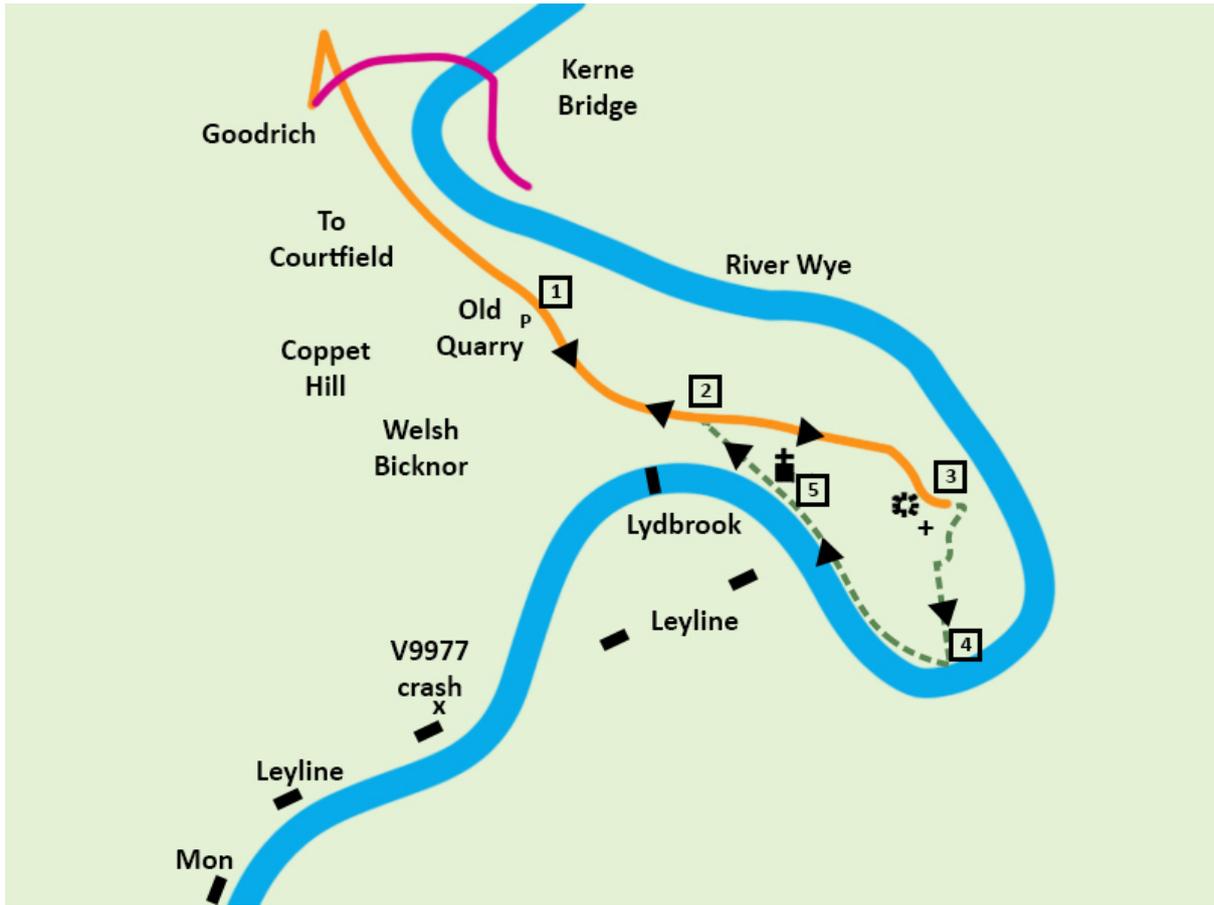
Walking with Alfred Watkins

Walk Three - Beautiful Courtfield and the Wye

- Three mile easy walk but with one short sharp climb towards the end
- Optional return trip of one and a half miles to memorial
- Fine views and straight tracks on good terrain
- OS Map - Wye Valley and Forest of Dean (OL14)

The Route

1. Old Quarry. Having left Goodrich, drive up the narrow road signed for Welsh Bicknor and Courtfield, for about 3/4 mile. Find parking for about five or six vehicles on right in quite a gloomy old quarry. (A footpath goes up to the right into Coppet Hill Nature Reserve.) Leave and walk up to right to cross cattle grid into Courtfield Estate. Now stay, strictly, on the lovely, fence-lined road surface for one third of a mile, curving down left past Primrose Cottage, to
2. Fork in lanes. Take upper surfaced lane straight ahead, soon passing Courtfield Farm, with fine views opening out ahead south and east across the Courtfield Estate park and the River Wye. Carry on for half a mile, bear right, still on surfaced lane, to point below private mound with old structure up to right.
3. The Hermitage area. Strictly private. Stay on road. Site of the inventor of ley lines, Alfred Watkins, addressing the Woolhope Club in 1922. Turn left, still surfaced, as if for Home Fisheries and Thomas Wood downwards. At telegraph pole go ahead through gate, down to fence corner. TR along the top edge, through gated gap, R edge of pasture and keep along R edge until you see a waymarked gate on R. Go through, down steps and turn immediately left. Follow this tree lined fence down to riverbank.
4. Turn right. Follow riverbank, along the Wye Valley Walk, three-fifths of a mile, passing three field divisions, to Welsh Bicknor church.
5. Pass below church, through lower park, leaving riverbank, below Youth Hostel, to find WVV information board. Proceed ahead for 35m to find public footpath going up through a strip of trees at east end of Park Wood. So, TR, steeply up through wood. At top, join lane, near a small parking bay and TL up to point 2. Continue ahead, back to quarry.
6. To extend the walk by one and a half miles, there and back, you can proceed along the right bank of the Wye from the church to make a pilgrimage to the 1942 crash site memorial stone. To do so, follow the WVV signs past the disused railway bridge, crossing a stile and down to left towards river and across footbridge. Now follow three riverside fields.



Courtfield - a family line and a very intriguing ley line

The third in our series of walks in the footsteps of the figure dubbed The Herefordshire Man takes us along some suitably straight tracks. For it was on a fine day in 1922 that the inventor of ley lines, Alfred Watkins would address an expectant meeting of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club on the Courtfield Estate. The Club was the field society of Herefordshire and its adjacent districts, and Watkins was its well-regarded president and long-standing member. The Club, an enduring source of accuracy, busies itself with antiquarianism, natural history and geology; it also prepares papers on such esoteric matters as "The bramblings in North Herefordshire."

Upon arrival, the members were met by Major C. J. Vaughan, who conducted them to the chapel, or hermitage, on a mound adjoining the mansion. Addressing 114 club members, Alfred Watkins set the scene: "The chapel and adjacent ruin date from the 18th century, and an early mention of the ruin is to be found in A Tour of the West of England in 1788. The mound, seemingly a Norman motte, flat-topped and roughly circular, on which The Hermitage is built, has steep banks, not natural, but artificial. It stands on an elevated knuckle of land, and is, in short, an artificial mound of great antiquity. Such mounds are - as I have been demonstrating lately - sighting mounds for ancient trackways. This mound is exactly on the straight line or ley which I detailed in Early British Trackways, Moats, Mounds, Camps and Sites although I did not know of it then because it is not marked on the map."

Watkins then outlined a ley whose points, including The Hermitage, are all on a straight line between Bishop's Castle and The Speech House in the Forest of Dean. "The fact of the Hermitage being a sighting mound is also confirmed by another ley, which I find on the map. It passes through as follows: The Citadel of Raglan Castle, Dingestow Church, Monmouth Castle, Dixton Church, Symond's Yat Rock, Courtfield Hermitage and on to Tewkesbury Abbey."

The map for our Walk shows the ominous route of this ley through the parish of Welsh Bicknor.

Colonel Joseph A. Bradney added, "We are assembled today on what is one of the most attractive spots in the county of Hereford, or, as it was until the year 1845, the county of Monmouth. The chief reason that this place is of great interest is, to my mind, the fact that from about the year 1570 when James Vaughan settled at Courtfield, it has been the seat of the same family in the paternal line, who have never failed of male heirs and who still, while other estates all round have changed hands many times, continue to this day to reside in the same house as their ancestors. As is well known, King Henry V was born in Monmouth Castle in 1388 and was brought to Courtfield to be nursed by Lady Margaret, wife of Sir John de Montacute."

Watkins could never have dreamt that by the 1960s all sorts of interpretations would be put on his theory of ley lines. John Michell, in his book *The View Over Atlantis* links Watkins's leys with the Chinese geomancy of feng shui; he tells how his work would spawn "countless theories of occult earth mysteries and New Age psycho-naturalism; stories of telluric lines of force that ran invisibly across countries, their routes marked above ground by megaliths and tumuli; the leys would inspire cults of goat-food gods and black-dog lines, and would be folded into theories of psychic energies, magnetic fields, aliens and other forms of extra-terrestrial presence."

Back in 1922 Colonel Bradney concluded proceedings by saying, "May I be allowed to express the hope that Major Vaughan, who has so kindly asked us here, may for generations be represented by his descendants in their ancestral seat."

The Colonel would be pleased to know that nearly one hundred years later the Vaughan family have overseen the placement of a memorial stone on their land on the riverbank below Green Farm where eleven men lost their lives. The work on radar research which they were concluding was pivotal to the War Effort in 1942.

Uncannily the Forest of Dean stone sits almost exactly on that second ley line which Watkins described at The Hermitage. The ley also pulses through another, rather Gothic-looking memorial to 1802 Wye drowning victim John Warre.