

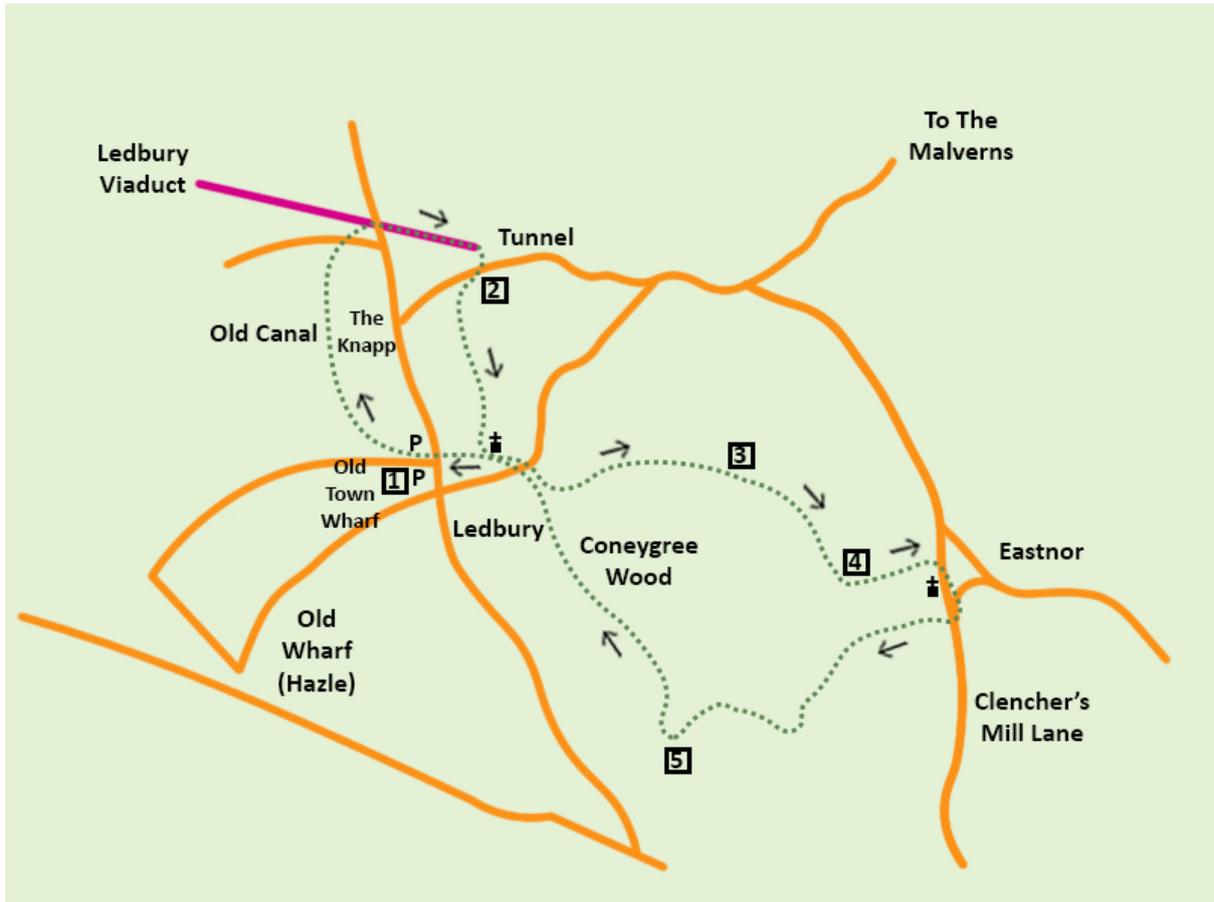
# Walking with Alfred Watkins

## Walk Six - Ledbury and Eastnor

- 5.2 mile moderate ramble, one stile only
- Disused canal, dismantled railway, town, village, views
- OS Map - Malvern Hills and Bredon Hill (Explorer 190)

## The Route

1. Ledbury, Bye Street, opposite Market House. HR8 1BU. Return from either car park into Bye Street. Walk away from town centre past fire brigade and Brewery Inn. Find the Ledbury Town Trail information board in Queen's Walk in the public gardens, formerly Ledbury Town Wharf. TR along the easy footpath, over the footbridge (below Masefield's Knapp), for  $\frac{2}{3}$  mile, over road bridge to information board. Cross road. TL under railway bridge. In 40m TR over stile up R edge of orchard to crest, to find gap in top right corner. TR at path junction. Go through kissing gate and TR away from Frith Wood House. Follow path further R over railway in front of house to reach.
2. Knapp Lane. Bear R and immediately L along "No through road" at Upperfields. When reaching a seat, go ahead with fence on right, rather than descending to R, staying ahead downhill between green bench and Dog Hill Information Board at path junction. Descend steps past sub-station, take path ahead, into walled lane, to front of church. TL around church. TR along walled Cabbage Lane. TL past police station frontage. After 175m, cross road into Coneygree Wood. Climb into wood, up 19 wide steps, straight ahead, 16 narrow steps, curving L and R up stony terrain, six steps to path junction. Climb straight ahead. Bear R into field through walkers' gate. Follow L edge of field 200m down to L corner, and through gate.
3. First Glimpse of Malvern Hills - from halfway down L field edge. Go through gate at tree edge, up and down wide Geopark Way track. Proceed through gate across furrowed middle of a wide field to a gap. Go up bank to fine clearing.
4. Midsummer Hill View. A perspective of Alfred's Beacon alignments. He conducted an excavation on Midsummer Hill, which is the beacon you can see above Eastnor Church, right of Obelisk. Further left (north) is the ridged Herefordshire Beacon by Clutter's Cave. Descend the obvious track to the L of the church, down six steps onto road. TR past church, school and village green into Clencher's Mill Lane. TR past Eastnor Pottery and Eastnor Castle Estates Office, up wide drive between buildings. Go through bridle gate (L). Now follow bridle path 400m to find and go through bridle gate on R. Head diagonally L up field to cottage and pass through gate, R of it. Just beyond, turn R in front of 2nd gate and go down through gate (R). Go half R down excellent meadow, through gate into Coneygree Wood. Go straight ahead a few paces, then take 2nd bearing left and go up to find wide cross path after 150m. TL until you reach a notice.
5. Back of Forestry Commission Notice. Just before notice turn sharp R 150m up track to where it levels off. Immediately bear L downwards (unsigned). Go up bank leftwards, then take first L fork. Skirt left wood perimeter. Find old stone wall, stay L to further stone wall. (Pick up view of Ledbury Viaduct, L of church.) Hug wall down sunken lane to regain your original path into wood. Re-cross (Malvern) road to pavement, TL to Cabbage Lane. TR back to church front. TL into cobbled Church Lane by Abbot's Lodge. Reach Market House, and bear R across the Homend to park(s).



## **An extravagant ley starting in the Beacons**

As we discover in Walk One, it came to him in a flash. What Hereford man Alfred Watkins perceived was “like a chain of fairy lights”, a series of lines linking ancient features such as mounds, moats, hill forts, standing stones, wayside crosses and churches. He was convinced that Britain was interlaced by a vast network of straight trackways and proposed Leylines in The Old Straight Track of 1925. In his list of initial sighting points, he was now including beacons for the first time. The previous year saw him put forward an extravagant alignment: It ran from Clutter’s Cave, visited on Walk Four, on the Eastnor side of Herefordshire Beacon; then through the “sacrificial stone” to Woolhope Church, from there to the church and a pond at Holme Lacy, and through Aconbury Church to finish on the highest point of Aconbury camp, five miles south of Hereford.

Our sixth Watkins Walk gives a southern perspective of the Malvern Beacons which are pictured on our Home page. The pre-historic purpose of a beacon was to guide and direct. In the case of Midsummer Hill, seen from our point 4, an excavation by Watkins had revealed a platform beneath the surface where beacon fires were shown to have burned. Watkins believed that old tracks across a ridge were there not because they can be seen from below, but specifically because they provide easy travelling and are often carefully situated to conceal travellers from observers below.

First and foremost Alfred Watkins, born at the Imperial Hotel in Hereford's Widemarsh Street, was an archaeologist and an inventor of photographic equipment. His fascination with photography began with a primitive pinhole camera which he made from a cigar box. He patented the “exposure meter”, a device which contributed greatly to photography’s evolution as a mass-market art form.

When Watkins was in his mid-20s, he learned that the Hereford and Gloucester canal was going to be closed to make way for the train. Accordingly he set out with a companion on a canoe expedition of the waterway’s 34 miles to capture pictures for posterity.

At the same time, in 1881 or 1882, the budding Poet Laureate John Masefield was a small child living in Ledbury at a commodious Victorian house called the Knapp. From his seat in a big bow window he could see the canal about 200 yards below the family garden, an orchard, a field and a clump of elms with a great rookery.

For their two day excursion, the canoeists alighted for the night in Bye Street at the Ledbury Town Wharf (near our point 1). The wharf, which was soon to be subsumed, is the setting for Masefield’s work *The Widow in the Bye Street* introducing a young navy hero who was employed on building the railway.

Alfred Watkins himself had become a familiar face in Ledbury as an agent for his father’s brewery and spirits business. Among his friends was John Edy Ballard, of the Frith. His uncles Stephen and Philip Ballard had supervised the creation of the Ledbury to Hereford section of the canal. Another Ballard brother, Robert, owned the company which baked the five million bricks from which Ledbury Viaduct was built. Spanning the Leaden Valley, the 31 arches can be seen from several points on our moderate, undulating ramble over varied terrain.

The lady appointed to carry out the grand opening ceremony in June 1861 was unfortunately left behind at Hereford Station by excited officials. Another special train was speedily commissioned to pick her up, and the said Mrs Richards was able to lay the last of Mr Ballard’s bricks with the band playing *See The Conquering Hero*.