

## Walking the Drover's road around Amersham

Amersham was near a cross roads of two important drovers' routes. The ever expanding population of London needed feeding and the driving of live animals across the country into London had been going on in the Middle Ages and into the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteen centuries until the railways enabled the transport of livestock on wheels.

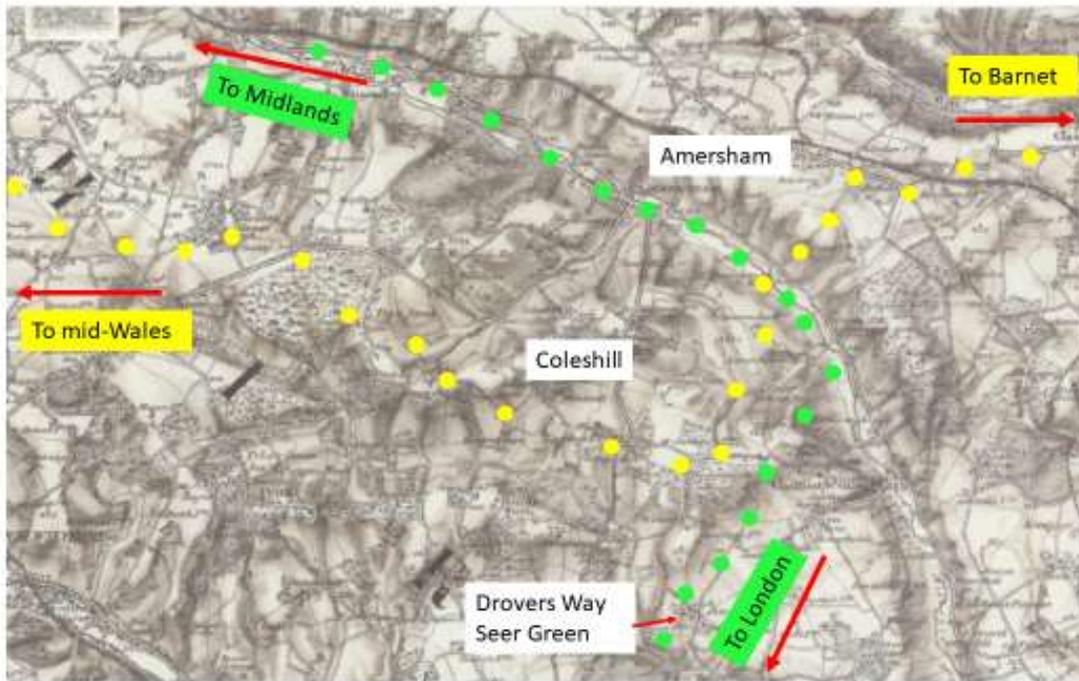
It's obvious that the gap in the Chilterns at Wendover would make the Misbourne Valley an important route into London from the Midlands. What I had not realised was that there was another important route from mid-Wales to Barnet which crossed the river Misbourne just downstream from Amersham.



Detail of a map copied from *The Drovers* by Shirley Toulson, Shire Press 2011

This circular walk - about 12 miles - follows stretches of both these routes with a connection which probably formed a local drove route between Little Missenden village and Wycombe Heath common.

Except at natural (or man-made) pinch-points these drove routes would be very wide and would become even wider in winter as travellers, including drovers, avoided the boggiest stretches. As droving died out some of the route became roads, with metalled tar mac surfaces only after the popularity of motor cars in the early twentieth century, others became tracks and others were maintained as rights of way, either as bridleways or footpaths. This walk follows all of these.



<p><b>Start in Amersham High Street.</b></p>	<p>We usually say that the width of the street was to allow the twice yearly fair. It was clearly helpful to have this space for livestock pens, but I suspect that another (perhaps the main) reason was to allow cattle to be driven through the town. Cultivated fields on either side of the valley would have forced a large detour if animals could not be driven straight through.</p>
<p><b>Walk towards Tesco.</b> You are following the Midlands, Aylesbury to London drove route. <b>Opposite Tesco car park, at the former Bury Farm take the footpath on the right which leads under the by-pass and, keeping to the valley floor.</b></p>	<p>You will pass a new small lake which has been created by the Environment Agency to encourage bio-diversity (to compensate for the loss of habitat caused by work on HS2).</p>
<p><b>Continue towards the London Road Recycling Depot.</b></p>	<p>On the left side of the river there is a short road called Drovers Lane which is part of the other mid-Wales to Barnet route. This would have continued up Finch Lane to the White Lion and then followed the high ground to Chorleywood dropping down to Rickmansworth and continuing past Watford to Barnet.  <i>I imagine that where two drovers' routes crossed there might be a danger of confusion. I wonder whether livestock which had come from the Amersham direction would be travelling on the left bank. The mid-Wales to Barnet drovers would have travelled for a few hundred yards up the right bank and forded the river at this point. There would still be confusion if two drives met at the same time. Each drive had someone riding ahead and blowing their horn to warn farmers to look out for their livestock. This would alert other drovers and I expect</i></p>

there was some informal 'rule of the road' that would lead one drive to give way to another.

**Continue to walk down the valley to Lower Bottom Lane.**

Because of the HS2 works at this point, I suggest you **continue walking down the valley beyond these workings for about half a mile.**



HS2 are constructing a ventilation vent in this valley. This bridge takes construction vehicles over the river.

The route from mid-Wales would have come down Lower Bottom Lane and, I think, would have cut the corner following the contour above what is now Lower Bottom Farm and then going a short way upstream before fording the river at Drovers Lane and continuing up Finch Lane (shown below right).



**A footpath from a footbridge will join from the left. After perhaps 50 yards turn right on a wide path between fences. (It is easy to miss but there is a wooden footpath post pointing to it a few yards further on.) Climb steadily to Hill Farm House. Turn right and almost immediately left past a pond on your right to a corner of Bottrells Lane. Continue straight on for 30 yards and then right, keeping a pond on your right to the edge of Hodgemoor Wood.**



There is a surprising direction post at the top and a good view up the valley towards Amersham.



*All the time you have been walking uphill from the river you have been on the green Midlands to London route. If you look at the first map of drovers' routes you will see that the route deviates towards Beaconsfield. This seems odd and may be a mistake...or it may be caused by an obstruction that prevented the drive continuing down the valley. There is evidence elsewhere. (quoted in *The Drovers* p. 47) that they avoided paying tolls on the turnpikes and would deviate quite considerably to save money.*

The green route continues south through Hodgemoor Wood into Seer Green (where there is a 'Drovers Road' on a relatively new estate) and then to the east of Wilton Park onto the route of the A40 before Gerrards Cross.

**Walk west along Bottrells Lane (There are no clear paths parallel to the road inside the woodland**

The turning on the right is the top end of Lower Bottom Lane which the yellow route drovers would have gone down. From this point you are walking the drovers' route back to mid Wales.

so walking on road is the only option)



**Continue along Bottrells Lane past Stockings Farm. At the point where the road goes back into woodland take a footpath diagonally to the left downhill through beech woods to the Amersham to Beaconsfield Road.**



The Harte and Magpies is a drovers' inn. Drovers were often not welcomed into inns within towns but formed the regular clientele of out of town inns. The Ivy House on the A413 is another drovers' inn.



**Cross this main road and walk up Magpie Lane opposite for about 50 yards.**

There are instructions in the 7 mile route about taking a footpath back to Amersham via Coleshill, but this is the long route.

**Turn left down a track to Ongar Hill Farm. This track bends right (west) to reach the farm buildings. There is a junction of paths near the farm. Choose the path that keeps going westwards. The path descends and then enters a small wood. When you emerge you will see Luckings Farm over a field on the right.**



Luckings Farm

To your right in the middle distance you will see Coleshill windmill.

**Continue in roughly the same direction until you come to a road.**

The large house to the left is called Hertfordshire House, a reference to the fact that Coleshill and the surrounding area was a detached part of Hertfordshire until well into the nineteenth century. Quakers often chose to live in Coleshill as it was generally out of reach of the Herts authorities.

**Turn right on the road and walk – a little over half a mile - into Winchmore Hill until you reach the common.**

**Turn right and downhill over the common towards allotments**

across the road. To the left of the allotments is a narrow path which leads into a wood – Tragoe’s Plantation.

When you emerge from the wood there is a choice of paths. Take the path that goes at 45 degrees left (heading west). You will pass a former furniture factory on your left and emerge onto a road with a village green opposite. This is Penn Street.



The Squirrel may have been a drovers’ inn



Path to left

You are near the northern boundary of an area called Wycombe Heath which stretched south to Beaconsfield with Chepping (High) Wycombe on its western edge and Coleshill on the eastern limit. It was common land and the inhabitants of **six?** parishes shared rights to use its resources for grazing livestock, collecting wood etc?

Cross the road and walk down a road opposite keeping the green on your right. Where the road bends left there is a gate into Penn Wood with a very wide path between trees. Continue on this path (north-west) to emerge on the Amersham to High Wycombe Road.



Cross the main road and enter the lane opposite.

The drovers’ route continues on a path to the left next to Blairavon Farm but the circular route leaves the yellow route at this point to return to the green Midlands to London route via Beamond End Lane.

Almost immediately fork right down Beamond End Lane and continue downhill to Little Missenden.

The parish of Little Missenden was one of six? Parishes which shared the common land of Wycombe Heath and this lane was an old route which villagers travelled – sometimes driving their livestock.

When you reach the road continue straight ahead to a crossroads in the village. Turn right and follow the road past two pubs, The Red Lion and, after a further 400 yards, the Crown.

If you haven’t visited Little Missenden Church recently it is worth a short detour to see the restored wall paintings with projections to reveal greater detail.

You are now on the green drovers’ route from the Midlands to London and you will remain on this route all the way into Amersham High Street where you started.

<p><b>Soon after The Crown inn, the road bends left but continue straight ahead on a public footpath (part of the South Bucks Way)</b></p>	<p>Opposite The Crown is another lane up to Wycombe Heath. This is called Toby's Lane.</p> <p>There is another path up to Mop End, also on the edge of Wycombe Heath.</p>
<p><b>Continue along this footpath passing the lake on your left and Shardeloes House on the hill to your right.</b></p>	<p>This was also the main road for travellers from London to Aylesbury and beyond until the road was moved to the far side of the lake as part of the re-landscaping project of Humphrey Repton in 1793.</p>
<p><b>At the cricket ground walk to the left of the pavilion and between two lodges out to the road.</b></p>	<p>The road here was replaced by the straighter and faster road when the Amersham by-pass was constructed in 1987.</p>
<p><b>To avoid crossing the A413, take a footpath straight ahead through scrubby trees. This leads to an underpass where the road bridges the river Misbourne. Follow the path round to the right and you emerge on the other side of the A413.</b></p>	
<p><b>Continue along the path beside the road for 80 yards and then follow the path as it bends left to eventually lead into Amersham High Street where the walk began.</b></p>	