

Drovers' Walk: Where two routes crossed

LOCAL
STORIES
AT
THE
AMERSHAM
MUSEUM

WALK 3

An 8 mile country walk
following
historic drovers' routes

Where two Drovers' routes crossed near Amersham

Amersham was near a crossroads of two important drovers' routes, the Barnet route and the Uxbridge route. The ever-expanding population of London needed food and the driving of live animals across the country had been feeding London in the 16th – 19th centuries until the railways enabled the transport of livestock on wheels. Livestock were being driven on many different routes; some short distances from the village to the common, some longer distances to a local town or regional centre. This walk will follow a section of the two long distance routes into London and will explore the crossing place for the two routes. A herd of 100 cattle could be controlled by a team of men or boys with dogs, walking at about two miles per hour covering 20 miles a day. The drover would often ride ahead on horseback checking the route and arranging where to stay overnight. The drover would blow a horn to warn farmers to look out for their livestock. (Cattle are herd animals and will tend to follow another group if given the chance.) What would happen if two drives met at this crossing point? There must have been an informal rule of the road to avoid chaos.

The Barnet Route

This route was used by drovers coming from mid-Wales and heading to Barnet. They would have crossed the river Thames at Goring, climbed into the Chilterns at Watlington and passed through Winchmore Hill and Coleshill to cross the river Misbourne a mile and a half below Amersham. After leaving Little Chalfont, the Barnet route would move on to the common at Chorleywood, continue towards Rickmansworth and Watford before eventually reaching Barnet.



The Uxbridge Route

The route from the Midlands came through the gap in the Chilterns at Wendover, continued to Great Missenden where the river Misbourne rises and the valley becomes muddy. Walking through mud slows the animals and makes them lose condition so the route climbed out of the valley, keeping on high ground through Hyde Heath and Amersham Common. To avoid the muddy terrain at Denham, the route crossed the Barnet route in Finch Lane, forded the river Misbourne and climbed the other side to pass through Seer Green and Gerrards Cross.

Points of interest

White Lion Drovers' Inn 1

The first documentary evidence show the inn was run by John Batchelor in 1753. Opposite it is a pond which was much bigger in the 19th century maps. Cattle needed a great deal of water, drinking 20 litres each per day. Many of these ponds have disappeared but looking for ponds on old maps is one of the ways to trace a drovers' route.

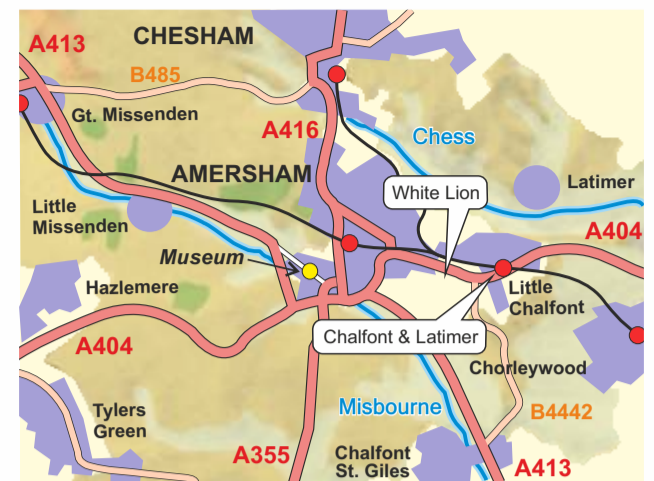
The Ivy House Drovers' Inn 4

A drover named Henry Lee Uff who became bankrupt in the 1820s had his account book confiscated by the court at Aylesbury. The accounts show that he rested on many occasions at 'The Ivey House' (sic). The book is now in Buckinghamshire Archives.



Drovers' Walk: Where two routes crossed

The walk starts and finishes from Chalfont & Latimer railway station.



Trains: The station is served by both the Metropolitan Line from Aldgate and Baker Street and the Chiltern Line from Marylebone to Aylesbury.

Buses: Little Chalfont has a regular bus service, for further details go to traveline.info

Parking: If travelling by car, the route can be shortened by parking in roads near the White Lion. There is a bus stop near the White Lion.

Maps:

Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 172 and Chiltern Society Map 6.



Photographs in this leaflet were mainly provided by Linda Gould

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The Misbourne Valley 10



The top of the hill is the point where the cattle would have been driven down the side of the valley to ford the river. The evidence is a short road 'Drovers Lane' on the other side of the river, which you will see later in the walk. The line between houses and field indicates Finch Lane.

Finch Lane 12

Drovers' roads were wide enough for two cattle to walk side by side. Where the track seems too narrow, look again and you will often see that the track has become overgrown and the track was wider than it now appears.



Drovers' Walk: Where two routes crossed

An 8 mile country walk following historic drovers' routes

[Note: The walking route keeps as close as possible to the drovers' routes by using official footpaths]

Start: Leave the Station from the Aylesbury/Chesham platform to join the Barnet Route.

Walk along to the main road, with the shops on your left. After 200 metres cross over a zebra crossing and continue along White Lion Road for 300m to a set of traffic lights.

On the road you are walking along, you may have been confronted by droves of 100 cattle coming towards you on their way to Barnet. It would be your responsibility to get out of their way.



Crossing point of the two drovers' routes (point 2 on the map)



A ford over the river Misbourne

1 At the White Lion, turn left into Finch Lane to continue on the Barnet route.

2 Continue down Finch Lane for 500m to where the track becomes a narrow path. Here the Uxbridge route crosses the lane – pictured above centre. Turn left through a gate on the crossing path to join this Uxbridge route.

3 When you come to a road, turn right along it for 100m and fork left along a footpath between hedges onto a golf course. Watch out for flying golf balls! After crossing the first stretch enter the edge of a wood, immediately take a right turn out of the wood and follow the path straight downhill until you reach a main road. You will emerge next to The Ivy House – another drovers' inn.

4 Cross this main road (A413) and turn left along the pavement for 75 metres. The path bends right downhill to the old Lower Bottom Farm Lane which crosses the river Misbourne. Immediately after that, turn left along a footpath which follows the river. After 350m you will see a footpath joining from the left where the drovers would have forded the river.

5 Continue ahead for about 130m and turn right on a footpath through the trees to a wide path between fences. (Pay close attention so you don't miss this turning!)

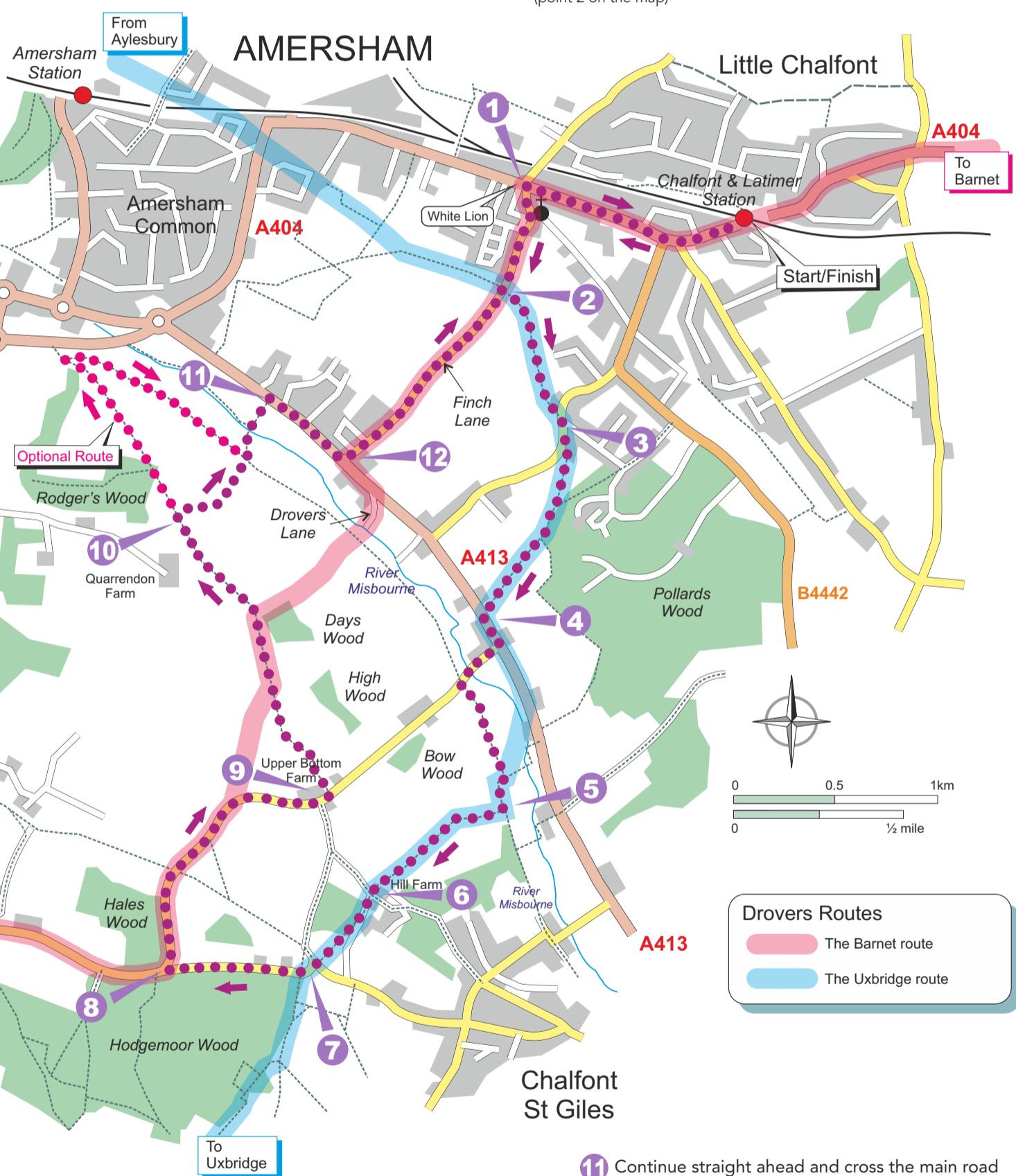
6 At the top of the hill there is a large white direction post. Turn right and almost immediately left to pass by another pond on your right. Go straight on until you reach a minor road. Follow the road straight on for 30m and follow the road when it bends sharply right.

7 You are leaving the Uxbridge route which would have carried straight on through Hodgemoor Woods. Walk along the road for 500m.

8 Turn right onto a small lane called Bottom House Farm Lane to re-join the Barnet route.

Notice how close the two routes were at this stage; the animals would have been sufficiently separated that they would not get confused.

9 Continue down this lane to the first farm (Upper Bottom House Farm) and look for a footpath to the left just beyond the cattle sheds. Take this path up hill and pass the corner of a wood on your right. Continue to the corner of the field, go through the gap in the hedgerow and continue in the same direction until you come to a crossing track to Quarrendon Farm.



10 Turn right down a farm track into the valley. Head for a footbridge over the river.

Please note: this is a well-used path but is not the official right of way, which is shown as the 'Optional Route' in red on the map. Before you head downhill, look across the Misbourne valley. The edge between houses and a large field is Finch Lane which indicates the route that the drovers took up to the White Lion Inn on Amersham Common.

11 Continue straight ahead and cross the main road to a pavement opposite. Turn right along the pavement 250m until you come to Finch Lane on your left.

12 Look for the Drovers Lane road sign 100m further down the main road. Turn up Finch Lane to reach the gate first encountered on the outward leg where the Uxbridge route crosses. Continue straight ahead to the White Lion Inn.

1 At the traffic light turn right along White Lion Road to return to Chalfont & Latimer station.