

# The Hills & Beyond

## A Rail Journey Between Worcester and Hereford



*Through the Hills to Colwall & Ledbury*

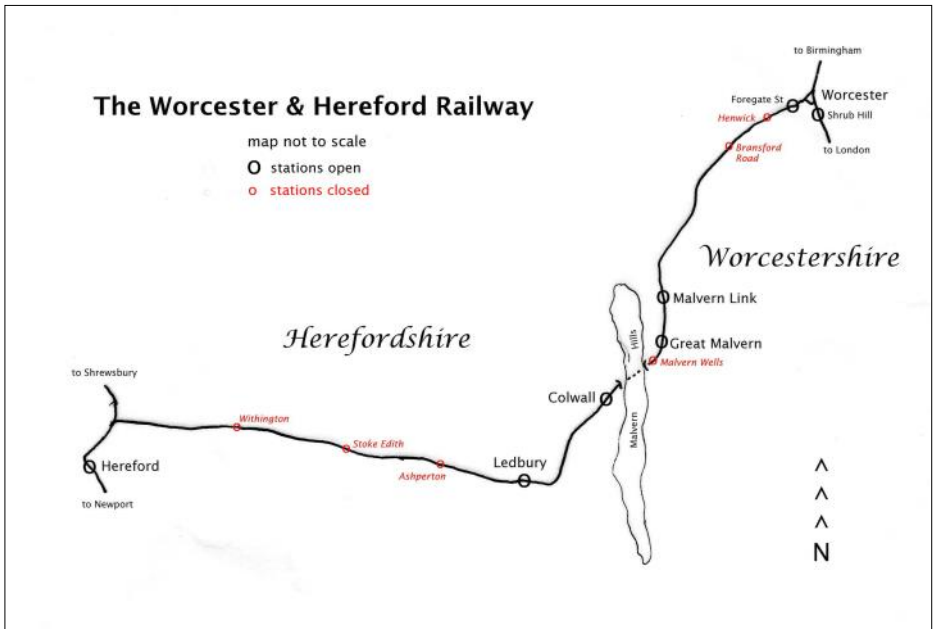
*An eclectic collection of writings for the discerning traveller by train through this beautiful and historic part of central England leading into the Welsh Marches.*

*Between Severn and Wye  
Atop these Hills of stone once fire  
Faithful Worcester stretches east  
And to west magic Herefordshire.  
Calan*

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# Introduction

This book is the result of cooperation between two Community Rail organisations for the Worcester to Hereford Line. These are the Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership, formed in 2019 and Beyond the Hills Community Station Partnership representing Herefordshire and formed in 2022.

Post pandemic, the rail industry has seen a drop in commuter travel although this has been offset by an increase in leisure and tourism journeys in some areas. Promoting rail travel is one of the important ways of securing the railways' future at a time when their value to the nation is vital in the context of climate change and the need to move towards more sustainable and healthy ways of travel.

With this comes their importance to the communities served and the need to strengthen the relationship between railway and those communities. That is one of the main aims of Community Rail and Community Station Partnerships.

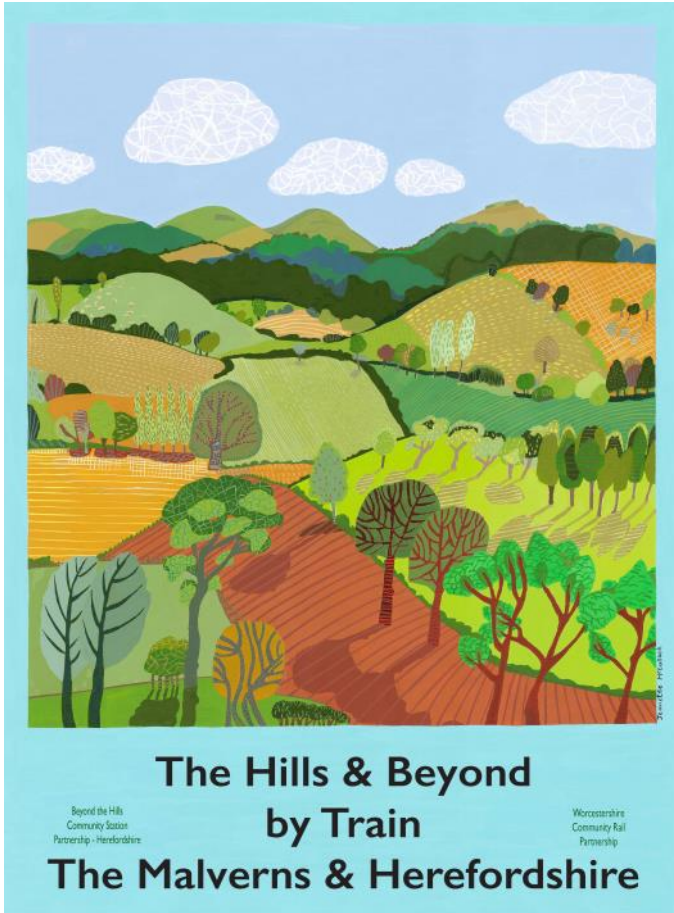
The railways of Britain have a long and fascinating history. Equally, the varied landscape through which they pass has a history and character all of its own. This book explores the landscape, geology, flora, towns, villages, myths and legends of the beautiful land through which the Worcester to Hereford Railway passes.

We are grateful for the support given by West Midlands Railway and Great Western Railway to the production of this book. We are extremely grateful to the contributors for sharing their knowledge and wonderful enthusiasm together with their willingness to put pen to paper.

We hope you enjoy the book and use it as a companion whilst viewing through the train window this quintessentially English part of Britain - Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

Fiona Saxon: Worcestershire CRP Officer

Gareth Calan Davies: Beyond the Hills CSP Lead Manager



*Poster by local artist Jeanette McCulloch BA, MA (RCA) specially commissioned to celebrate the Hills & Beyond. It is available for sale in A2 and A4 sizes. (available from Beyond the Hills CSP: Contact details on last page of book)*

# **The Worcester & Hereford Railway**

## **A Brief History**

**Gareth Calan Davies**

The Worcester & Hereford Railway (W&H) was authorised by Parliament in 1853. Although an independent company it was backed jointly by the larger Midland Railway (MR) and London & North Western Railway (LNWR). However, Parliament was suspicious of large groupings of railways in the hands of one dominant company, and it struck out all the clauses in the Bill giving powers of subscribing for shares, or for working arrangements, by the LNWR or the Midland Railway.

As a result the Worcester and Hereford company was unable to raise the necessary capital and for a number of years the company stagnated. Eventually, it was the Oxford, Worcester & Wolverhampton Railway Company (OWWR) that came to the rescue and construction started in 1858 towards Malvern from a station on the west bank of the river Severn at Henwick. In 1860 the bridge over the river was completed and trains were able to access the City of Worcester.

Also in 1860 the OWWR amalgamated with the Newport, Abergavenny and Hereford Railway (NAHR) and formed a new company named the West Midlands Railway (WMR). With interests in the Midlands and South Wales the WMR was not slow to appreciate the importance of the W&H as an important link in the network and it was quickly absorbed by the WMR.

All this activity aroused the interest of the Great Western Railway (GWR) which was perturbed that the WMR should fall into the hands its rival, the LNWR. In a surprise move the WMR was absorbed by the GWR in 1863.

The line was completed in 1861 with the opening of the tunnel through the Malvern Hills from Malvern Wells to Colwall. It is a heavily engineered line with both this tunnel and a narrow bore tunnel through an outlier of the hills at Ledbury. This is followed by a thirty arch viaduct spanning the wide valley of the River Leadon at Ledbury.



*Part of the 30 arch viaduct seen across the meadows of the River Leadon.*

The line was double track from Worcester to Malvern Wells, single track through the Malvern Hills tunnel, double track between Colwall and Ledbury North End, single track through Ledbury Tunnel and double track from Ledbury to Shelwick Junction, Hereford, where it met the line from Shrewsbury to Newport.

The double line sections were worked by absolute block



signalling, the single lines by electric token. The sections through the tunnels were signalled by an early form of tokenless block under the GWR. Rationalisation of the line started in 1967 with the singling of the line between Colwall and Ledbury North End. This was followed in 1984 with the singling of the line between Ledbury and Shelwick Junction leaving Ledbury station as a crossing loop. The original tokenless block system is still in operation.

*The interior of Ledbury signal box, unchanged since Victorian times.*

The train service under the GWR comprised a mixture of Cardiff to Birmingham

semi-fast trains, Hereford to London express trains and local services, some of these running through to Gloucester via a branch line from Ledbury. The line saw heavy use by freight trains between South Wales and the Midlands. A banking engine was kept at Ledbury to assist these trains on the stiff 1 in 80 climb through the tunnel and up to Colwall. Working through the narrow tunnel in steam engine days was somewhat hellish. Today the train service is hourly between Hereford and Birmingham via Bromsgrove, operated by West Midlands Railway, and a small number of Hereford to London through trains via Oxford, operated by Great Western Railway.

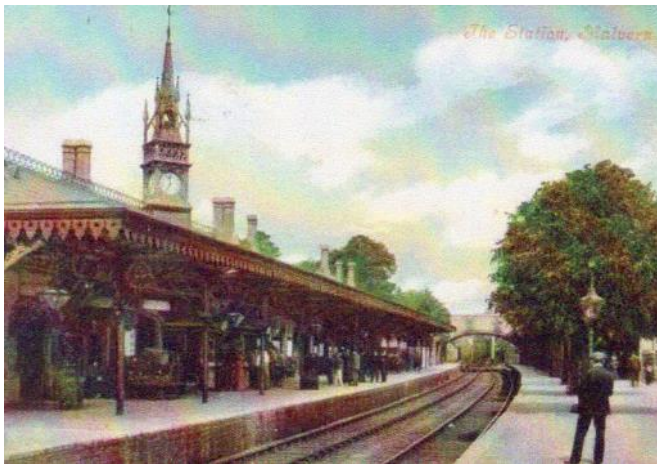


# Great Malvern Railway Station

Michael Pritchard

It took several years of arguing between local railway companies to agree a railway from Worcester and Hereford to include Malvern and Ledbury so the line was not completed until September 1861. As well as company bickering there were major engineering difficulties; the Malvern hills consist of granite saturated with rainwater making tunnelling extremely difficult and both a bridge over the Severn at Worcester and an extensive viaduct at Ledbury were needed.

A temporary timber station was designed by engineer Stephen Ballard in 1859 and completed in 1861, but Malvern was becoming an increasingly popular spa town, so a new prestigious building was needed to impress visitors who were coming for the 'water cure'. As a result, water cure promotor Dr James Gully and wealthy landowner Lady Edith Foley commissioned Malvern architect Edmund W Elmslie to design



*Early postcard of Great Malvern Station.*

both a new station and an adjacent luxurious hotel (the Imperial Hotel) for their clients. These were both built in the fashionable neo-Romanesque style with a clock tower on the station platform 1. This

was ornate Gothic in style with four clock faces. Unfortunately, it became increasingly unstable and it was taken down in the 1950's.

Elmslie also designed Malvern Link station and adjacent station hotel, now demolished, to cater for excursion trains carrying day trippers. These terminated at Malvern Link.

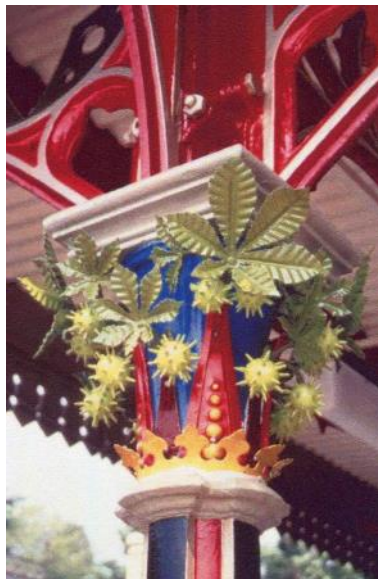
The water cure was a fundamental part of rapidly expanding Malvern but unlike spas elsewhere where the water contained iron, sulphur, various salts and so on, in Malvern the water was not coming up from underground sources but had spent many years trickling through micro-fissures in the granite of the hills so was as pure as distilled water. As they said at the time; "Malvern water, says Dr John Wall, is famous for containing just nothing at all".

Lady Emily Foley owned most of the local land and her influence is still apparent today. The excellent Lady Foley's Tea room on Platform 1 was her private waiting room and the fact that the railway runs through a cutting at least as far as Malvern Link is said to be due to her insistence that trains should not be visible from the town. She liked the idea of trains but not the reality of smoke, noise, dirt and other people. However, this requirement had the unexpected advantage that the various road bridges, including the one by the station carrying Avenue Road, which was also designed by Elmslie, remain level.

The station was completed in 1863 using random Malvern granite with dressed Bath stone around the windows and doors. Elmslie's characteristic embellishments included stone carved heads, animals and foliage, but in particular the floral capitals on top of the cast iron pillars supporting the roof trusses. These pillars are hollow and are in fact drainpipes. The



*Doorway architecture, Great Malvern Station.*



*Floral capital, Great Malvern Station.*

statuary and the floral capitals were designed by the firm of Forsyth Brothers, Scottish sculptors then living in Worcester who were close associates of Elmslie.

These floral capitals are the best-known features of the station and are unique in their complexity. They were made of wrought iron at the Vulcan works in Worcester to the design of William Forsyth. There are thirteen on each platform, all brightly coloured and although they appear different there are twelve designs so each has been used more than once. They represent local botanical specimens, both flowers and trees, and it is possible to recognise such features as oak leaves with acorns, chestnuts with conkers, water lilies and so on.

The hotel closed in 1919 and is now Malvern St James Girls' school. When it was a hotel, it was linked to the station by two unique features, the first being a covered walkway with gates at

the Worcester end of Platform 1 leading into the basement of the hotel. Passengers alighting from the London train could therefore move under cover, together with their luggage, to the hotel. This saved them having to travel outside and risk getting wet, ironic since the whole point of going to the hotel, where Dr Gully's water cure was based, was to get extremely wet.!



*The worm, Great Malvern Station.*

This walkway is known as the worm, an appropriate name if viewed from the Avenue Road bridge. It is a semi-circular structure with cast iron windows and a corrugated iron roof. Although corrugated iron seems a modern cheap material it is in fact a Victorian invention and was

taken seriously at the time. Unfortunately, the worm is in very poor condition. It no longer has any use as a passageway and is blocked off half way. Numerous plans for its restoration have been put forward but even though Grade 2 listed, the worm remains in disuse.

The second unique feature linking the hotel and the railway was a very short line, only a few yards long, which branched from the down main railway line just north of Platform 2. This led to a turntable on to which an engine could push a wagon, which was then rotated degrees and the wagon winched into a tunnel into the hotel basement. It is not clear how the wagon got back out again. This was a convenient method of delivering

salt from Droitwich for the spa baths and later it supplied fuel for the hotel boilers. The tunnel entrance itself is still visible from the north side of the Avenue Road bridge and is another example of how the community at the time could influence the railway companies.

The traditional platform clock did not work for several years. It is assumed that this dates from 1910 or thereabouts although must have been upgraded after the war since it has BR(W) on the face. The clock was fully functional but the problem was that it needed weekly winding. To get round this the clockwork has now been replaced by an electronic automatically adjusting mechanism which should not require any attention at all.

Until 1961 there was a branch line to Ashchurch and Tewkesbury via Upton. This line, which belonged to the London Midland Railway, had its own bay platform on the other side of platform 2. The Malvern to Upton section was closed to passengers in 1952, but the bay was not removed until the station was rebuilt in 1987. It had some uses as a siding, for example, it was used for the weekly pigeon train when hundreds of homing pigeons were released for national races. The sidings at the Hereford end of platform 1 had facilities for unloading wagons from the end as well as the side. This allowed animals and horse drawn carriages to drive straight on to the platform via a ramp.

This rebuild was needed due to a serious fire in the platform 1 buildings in 1986, severe enough for British Rail to consider demolishing the station and rebuilding a simpler one as had happened at Malvern Link. Fortunately, there was overwhelming local opposition and the station was repaired and repainted the following year. The current booking office was built and the bay platform was removed to be replaced by

the current hedge and lower carpark.

The colour scheme is remarkably bright and red in particular is unusual on stations. The current refurbishment follows the colour scheme shown in the photos of the newly painted station in 1987 after the fire and rebuild. The only colour information available before that is from photos taken by Catherine Moody, daughter of local artist Victor Moody. She undertook a detailed study of the decorations which she wrote up in a notebook in 1970 but with reference to the station centenary in 1961. These show the structural ironwork to be plain grey with brightly painted florals similar to the recent colour scheme. It is not clear if this grey was the original colour or not as only black and white photos are available before that time. However, Miss Moody was mainly interested in the colours of the floral capitals rather than the background ironwork and she wrote that she had 'treated it as an archaeological problem and filed down the layers of paint finding bright green, scarlet, gold, blue and plum'. Older black and white photos show more contrast on the pillars than the all over grey of her photos so the origin of the grey paint is unclear.

Names of the past station staff are recorded. The most celebrated was Mr Thomas R Franklin, the luxuriantly bearded stationmaster from 1873 until 1909. He had turned down the job at Paddington to remain at Malvern and was presented to Princess May who became Queen Mary on a visit to Malvern who gave him a tiepin. He ran a large staff of 16 men as shown in regular group photos at a time. The importance of the railway at the time was that it was the sole means of transporting both goods and people so had a telegraph office, a parcels and ticket office, left luggage depot, waiting rooms, porters' rooms, stationmaster's office and so on.

Today's station is a greatly simplified version of that of a century ago but it remains Grade 2 listed and is mentioned in the '100 Best Stations in Britain', (Simon Jenkins; publisher Viking, 2017). Station staff has shrunk to a single, weekdays only, booking office clerk and a ticket machine. The sidings have all gone along with the numerous sets of points. So has the signal box, bay platform, clock tower and the covered area outside the main entrance to the station for vehicles to allow passengers to alight under cover. The connections to the Imperial Hotel have also gone.

There is still a lot left. The floral capitals, currently being repaired, remain and the stone carvings are still present. The stonework and woodwork are original, even with some stained glass. Some of the rooms are now occupied by Age UK and Lady Foley's tea rooms give a glimpse of earlier times. The canopies are being upgraded and repainted while retaining the same appearance as before.

The station has always been popular with photographers and several dozen photos are available from late Victorian times to the present day which are invaluable for tracing structures which have been changed or have disappeared entirely. Subtle traces of the history can still be found: there is still a fingerpost sign to the telegraph office, the ramp at the end of the sidings at the Hereford end of Platform 1 is still present behind the bicycle park, the stone faces and plants are visible and the footprint of the awning outside the entrance is still cobbled. Also, the upper part of the car park on the down platform side (Platform2), which was originally a turning circle for collecting passengers from London and Birmingham trains, still has the original circle of kerbstones. The lamp standard in the middle, periodically damaged since it is now in the middle of the car park, is also still standing. The lower part of the car

park was once sidings from the bay platform.

The station is on the main line to Birmingham and London and remains well used. This is the modern dilemma with all heritage stations, how to fit modern passenger requirements into 150 year old Victorian buildings with pressure from conservation groups to maintain heritage standards. Health and Safety requirements, non-existent in the 19th century, are now stringent and have dictated changes in materials and fittings. Fortunately Network Rail, who are currently refurbishing the station, regularly meet with all the interested parties, Malvern Hills District Council Conservation Officers, Railway Heritage Trust and ourselves, the Friends of Malvern Railway Group so hopefully the finished result will satisfy all the interested parties.



*Great Malvern Station, main up side towards Worcester and London.*



# Geology & Landscape of the Malvern Hills

## Dr Adrian Burden, Malvern Hills Geocentre

As you arrive by train from Worcester into Malvern Link, the Malvern Hills are clearly seen looming ahead to the right of the train. These hills rise dramatically from the eastern lowlands of the Severn Valley and form a distinct ridge running north south for about 10 miles.

The landscape and geology in this vicinity is fascinating because low lying sedimentary rock in the flood plain meets



*View looking north along the Hills.*

ancient igneous and metamorphic rock thrust upwards to form the hills. This narrow band of raised rock then falls away again to the west to lower lying undulating land enroute to Ledbury and Hereford.

The geology of the Malvern Hills is complicated, to the extent that it is known as the Malvern Complex. The

oldest rocks formed some 680 million years ago when the land mass was located in the southern hemisphere about 30 degrees from the south pole. These rocks are the oldest in England; there are older rocks in Scotland for example.

Ancient man took advantage of the landscape by staying high, dry and safe on the hills. The Herefordshire Beacon towards the south of the formation has the distinctive ramparts of British Camp. These features originated from the Iron Age



about two thousand years ago when tribes lived on and defended the hills.

More recently, in 1085, the first phase of Great Malvern Priory was constructed and monks settled and worshipped in

*British Camp on the Herefordshire Beacon.*

the building. The town of Great Malvern and its surrounding villages began to grow thereafter. The various springs around the hills, also a consequence of the geology, helped to anchor settlers by providing a ready source of fresh drinking water.



Malvern's water also helped to establish the town as a Victorian health spa in which visitors could arrive from London for fresh air, exercise and an early example of healthcare tourism in the form of the Water Cure. This involved being dunked in ice-cold baths of the water to reputedly help restore good health!

*The Bifurcating Spout.*

Today the landscape of the Malvern Hills still attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors who enjoy hiking, cycling, hang-gliding and other outdoor

pursuits. The Malvern Hills and Commons are managed by the Malvern Hills Trust, and the flora and fauna is protected and monitored.

Alighting at Great Malvern station, one can walk steadily uphill



through the town centre and onwards up to the hills. The Route to the Hills has been marked with pavement studs and information boards, which describe the interesting history of the

*View from the top looking down on Great Malvern.*

The wildlife around the Malverns is diverse, with buzzards and kites often seen on the thermals hunting small animals below, and creatures hiding in the wooded lowlands including rare dormice and bats. As the lower wooded areas give way to the higher scrub, and bracken, different creatures benefit from the change in habitat including adders, butterflies and small birds.

In later spring, some of the Western slopes of the Malvern Hills are adorned with English bluebells and wild garlic carpets the floor of much of the wooded area. By late summer, the hilltops are often brown and parched, and during the winter it is not uncommon for the upper slopes to be covered in snow even if the town below is largely ice free.

The weather around the Hills can vary dramatically; dense mist in the vicinity of the central cutting between Malvern and



Colwall whilst sun bathes the rest of the Hills, snow falling on the western side making roads impassable when there has been no snow in Great Malvern, and fascinating cloud inversions in which the surrounding valleys, towns and villages are flooded with a sea of mist and the peaks

*Snow on the Malvern Hills.*

punch through to clear blue skies and bright sunshine.

Travelling south from Great Malvern station, the railway line climbs steadily, but not sufficiently to scale the hills. Instead, it passes through the centre of the ancient rock to emerge on the western side just before Colwall Station. The single-track tunnel in use today is actually the second of two tunnels. The first was constructed in in the 1850s, opening in 1861. However, a partial collapse meant a new larger and less inclined tunnel was built in the 1920s which is the one in use by trains today. The first tunnel is now closed and home to bats, although there has been interest to reopen it as a cycle path to connect the two sides of the hills.

Travelling south, on the right-hand side of the railway line before reaching Colwall station is the site where Schweppes once bottled Malvern Water for wide distribution, making full use of the copious fresh spring water that is “famous for containing nothing at all”. Today, the site is now a gated

housing community, but those wishing to buy water from Malvern can instead source Holywell Malvern Spring Water which is taken from the Holy Well, due east from Colwall station but high up on the other side of the hills.

The geology extending away from the hills from Colwall is Silurian comprising the sedimentary limestones and softer shales. The undulating landscape was probably carved during the Ice Age, leaving a broad valley between Colwall and Ledbury. Approaching Ledbury station via another tunnel constructed in the late 1850s, this time through the limestone of Dog Hill, you will have crossed the fault line to reach the Red Sandstone rocks from the Devonian era that the town is built on.

The underlying and changing rocks across this area often manifest themselves in the buildings and walls within the towns and villages. Disused quarries are also visible on the sides of the Hills where stone was extracted and transported



*Gardiner's Quarry with exposed rocks and fault line.*

for construction, some of which occurred relatively recently as the last quarry closed in 1977. Today, nature is reclaiming these scars on the landscape, and they can be interesting places to visit to see up close the exposed geology of the hills.

For anyone interested to explore more about the geology and landscape of the Malvern Hills, and how this has in turn influenced the history of the towns and villages as well as affected the flora and fauna on display, there are numerous resources available. As a start, browse information from the Malvern Hills Trust (<https://www.malvern hills.org.uk/>), Abberley & Malvern Hills Geopark (<http://geopark.org.uk/>), Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (<https://www.malvern hillsaonb.org.uk/>), and Visit the Malverns (<https://www.visitthemalverns.org/>). Stepping off the train, why not visit Malvern Museum of Local History (<https://malvernmuseum.co.uk/>) and Malvern Hills GeoCentre (<https://www.geocentre.co.uk/>).

A black and white photograph showing the silhouettes of two people walking on a hill against a bright, low sun on the horizon.

Information, refreshments & free wi-fi  
near the Wyche Cutting  
[www.geocentre.co.uk](http://www.geocentre.co.uk)

A square QR code located in the bottom right corner of the banner.

# Malvern: A Brief History

**Brian Iles**

Malvern originally Moel Werne 'Bare Hill' or alternatively 'Place of Judgement'.

The Malvern area has been inhabited for thousands of years. Ancient Malvern by local bronze age and iron age tribes farming around the fertile land around the hills. They would have constructed the iron age British Camp and Midsummer Hill earthworks on the southern end of the hills and the bronze age ditch that runs along the length of the Hills.



*Great Malvern Priory.*

Medieval Malvern was centred around the Benedictine monastery of Great Malvern Priory, founded in 1085, it was a daughter church of Westminster Abbey. The rural village grew around the monastery. The Priory church was gifted a west window by King Richard III and following his visit, with his son Arthur, the Magnificat window in the north transept by King Henry VII. The great east window is one of the largest in the country and still contains medieval glass. The Priory has a great collection of stained glass from the medieval period up to 20<sup>th</sup> century windows. The monastery produced encaustic tiles, (some

of which survive today). Two sets of carved medieval misericord seats also survive. The Roman Catholic monastery continued until King Henry VIII's dissolution in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At the time the village worshiped in the small church of St Thomas and wanting a better place of worship they purchased the Priory church for £20.00. The church has continued as the town's parish church until the present day. The only other monastic buildings to survive the dissolution were the Guesten Hall, demolished in 1842 after being used as a barn, and the Priory Gatehouse, today the home of the award winning, Malvern Museum of Local History. The pond in Priory Park would have been the monastery fish pond.

The church fell into disrepair over the next three centuries until several renovations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the last by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, the result of which is the beautiful church we see today. Well worth a visit.

There was also a smaller monastic establishment at Little Malvern Priory.

In 1831 the Duchess of Kent and her daughter the 12 year old Princess Victoria stayed at Holly Mount for the summer. Victoria would be seen playing on the hills or riding around the town in a pony cart with her pet dog. Her first public act was, by walking it, to open the Victoria Walk up to St Ann's Well.

Although Malvern had already been known for its waters it was following the visit of two doctors, James Wilson and James Manby Gully, that in 1841 Malvern became a spa town and its population grew from a village to the town we know today. Wilson and Gully established their hydropathic establishments followed by others to create the spa town famous for the Malvern Water Cure. The town became one of the pre-eminent spa towns in the country attracting many of the great and good





*Early depiction of taking the waters.*

of the day including, Florence Nightingale, Charles Darwin, Charles Dickens, William Wordsworth, A C Swinburne, etc. Patients would be subjected to a rigorous diet (including drinking quantities of Malvern water), daily exercise and various treatments involving bathing in water,

being soaked in wet sheets and having water sprayed on, dropped on and doused upon the body. It seems to have some beneficial effect because many patients returned time after time, (e.g. Florence Nightingale returned about ten times and Charles Darwin four times).

Local people and visitors still ‘take the waters’ from the various springs in the town and around the Hills. Water is bottled at the Holy Well in Malvern Wells spring which historically was one of the very first recorded bottling plants in Britain.

Much of the lands in and around Malvern were part of various landed estates of local family landowners - Foley, Beauchamp, Hornyold, etc. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century these estates sold much of the greater portions of their estates. Lady Foley made various conditions when selling her lands. Any new houses had to be of a certain size and quality having a minimum size of garden. These estate and family names are often reflected in the current names of roads, etc.; Foley

Terrace, Hornyold Road, Graham Road, Beauchamp Road, etc.

After the demise of the Water Cure some of the hotels and guest houses became the homes of private schools. E.g. The Imperial Hotel became Malvern Girls College (now Malvern St James).

Malvern College was established in new purpose built accommodation in 1865.

The need for a place of public entertainment was answered by the opening of the Assembly Rooms in 1884. Performers of the period included local singer Jenny Lind, the 'Swedish Nightingale'. This establishment continued until it was replaced by the Winter Gardens and Theatre in 1928. This new venue quickly became the home of The Malvern Festival, initially created by Sir Barry Jackson. The festivals honoured George Bernard Shaw, nineteen of whose plays were performed there, six of them for their premieres, including *The Apple Cart*. Up to 1939 sixty-five plays were performed at the festivals with many famous actors appeared on stage including, Wendy Hiller, Stewart Grainger, Robert Donat, Errol Flynn, Cedric Hardwicke,



The theatre continues today as Malvern Theatres and is still putting on plays with well known actors of stage and screen. The original cinema, then called the Picture House held one of the first ever film festivals.

Other famous visitors to the town have included Evelyn Waugh (who based his *Brideshead Revisited* at nearby Madresfield Court), C S Lewis, J R R Tolkein, Dame Laura Knight, T E Lawrence, Compton

*Sir Edward Elgar.*

MacKenzie, Stanley Baldwin, etc. Malvern's most famous resident was Sir Edward Elgar who drew inspiration for some of his music from the Malverns. He enjoyed walking, cycling and kite flying on the Hills. Some of his local friends were the subjects in his famous composition the Enigma Variations.

To cater for the greatly increased number of visitors the railway was built to Malvern. At one time Malvern boasted four railway stations, operated by the Great Western Railway and Midland Railway companies, of which two remain, Malvern Link (1859) and Great Malvern (1860). Great Malvern station is still regarded as one of the very top heritage station buildings in the UK. It is worth a visit even if you are not planning to travel. You can enjoy a cup of tea and a snack, at Lady Foley's Tearoom, and just enjoy the surrounding beauty of the station. Malvern Link has been rebuilt in modern times. It boasts its own small nature reserve wildlife area, (thought to be the only railway station in the country with its own nature reserve).

Malvern Link was an early centre of the motor industry in Britain. T C Santler built his Malvernia motor car in 1887, which is said to be the first petrol engine four-wheeler built in Britain, (this vehicle still exists today). H F S Morgan produced his first Morgan Runabout prototype in 1909 followed by the first production car in 1910. Morgan cars are still producing their iconic sports cars today to enthusiastic customers all over the world.

During the Second World War the radar scientists of the Telecom Research Establishment were relocated to Malvern and based at the commandeered Malvern College. They later moved to the then redundant H M S Duke facility and the scientific research facility still remains in Malvern today as QinetiQ. *(This is the subject of a separate chapter in this book).*

Modern Malvern still attracts many visitors and tourists. It is a centre for those walking the Hills and attending the many events held at the nearby Three Counties Showground, (RHS Spring Festival, RHS Autumn Show, Royal Three Counties Agricultural Show, motoring events, dog shows, flea markets, etc.) The town centre has regular Farmer's markets and craft fairs. Each autumn the long standing annual Autumn in Malvern Festival provides a varied programme of the arts and music. The Malvern Spa Association organises the annual Well Dressing festival in May and Malvern Civic Society organises events during Civic Week (Midsummer Malvern) and Heritage Open Days. On Sundays in Priory Park, during the summer, you can enjoy the Bands in the Park where you can take your own picnic to enjoy while listening to the music. There is also a popular annual Walking Festival with a varied programme of long walks and more gentle short local walks.



*Great Malvern Priory Gatehouse.*

# Scientists Come to Malvern

**Mike Burstow**

In May 1942, two top secret radar establishments were evacuated in haste to Malvern. The Telecommunications Research establishment (TRE) occupied Malvern College and Army Defence Research and Development Establishment (ADRDE) occupied the Admiralty Buildings at Pale Manor; the incumbent RAF Signals Training Unit was summarily evicted. Each organisation brought nearly one thousand scientists. Accommodation was requisitioned and new power lines were installed. Many of the support staff chose to remain on the South Coast where they had been based, so a priority was recruiting replacements in the local area. A notice appeared in the Malvern Gazette inviting women to volunteer. An invitation from the 'Emergency Services Organisation' in Tibberton Road, Malvern invited women of Malvern to join the part-time war effort. They were told "the first £80 a woman earns annually will be free of tax even when her husband is already paying tax. Part-time work at the expense of your comfort is front-line duty."

TRE was responsible for airborne radars for the RAFs Bomber, Coastal and Fighter Commands. ADRDE provided radars for the Army to be used for anti-aircraft defence.

A young Malvern girl, Marie Fletcher, had aspirations of becoming a professional musician but that hope was dashed in 1942 when she was unexpectedly sent to a secretarial college in Worcester to learn to type. Having passed her exams she was directed to TRE where she was set to work typing up training material in The Monastery. It was here in 1943 that she was to meet her future husband, Norman Williams, who had also been

sent to TRE after a shortened two year degree course in Radio Science. Many TRE reports have the typist's initials on the last page; look out for LMF...

When Laurie Hinton arrived at Great Malvern station in 1943 he was not sure where TRE was, but fortunately he spotted a friend from his university in a similar quandary. Two months before, while waiting for their results from their two-year degrees in Physics, they had been interviewed by two gentlemen from the Ministry. Laurie said he wanted to join the RAF but was told firmly that he was needed to work on secret projects that could not at this time be divulged to him. Some days later he received in the post a brown envelope with a rail warrant to Great Malvern Station in Worcestershire.

Around the same time John Hooper whose father ran the television shop in Ledbury was speaking to a friend about his job in Malvern. His friend couldn't really say anything about what he did but suggested that John should go to TRE and see if they would give him a job. He was immediately asked what he knew about the place but after he explained that his friend worked there and he knew a bit about electronics they gave him a job. His girlfriend and later wife worked at the Army Radar and Defence Research Establishment (ADRDE) as a trainee draughtswoman.

Most of the design ideas for the planned radars were conceived before the scientists came to Malvern but the means of making them, the technology, had not been invented. In Malvern new very high frequency (microwave) radars were perfected. These proved critically important in guiding our bombers to their targets and in the long battle against German U-boats. Hitler declared that 'it was a single invention, the radar, which defeated the U-boats' and thus his intention to starve Britain

into defeat.

On 14<sup>th</sup> August 1945, the day before VJ Day when the Allies declared victory over Japan, the press were called to a special briefing. At this event, the Minister for Aircraft Production, Sir Stafford Cripps declared “Friends, the whole world has recently been talking very much about the atom bomb and the part it played in so suddenly bringing the offer of surrender from the Japanese.....but today we are going to reveal for the first time the story of an invention, radar, which has played a greater part in the whole war than the atom



bomb itself. Radar more than any other factor has contributed to the final victory over Germany”.

Now the war was over many of the TRE and ADRDE scientists went back to research in their universities. However, the case for keeping a centre of excellence on physics research in Malvern was seen as important both by the government and the local council. Thus began the steady growth from 1000 to 3000 staff at Malvern and with the Cold War taking shape vital research was needed. This period reshaped Malvern as a growing technically based work force and housing grew rapidly in response.

TRE and RRDE, as ADRDE became, were merged in 1946 and became the Royal Radar Establishment at HM Queen Elizabeth’s visit in 1957. The scientists conducted urgent research to modernise the national air defence system. In 1954 an above



*HM Queen Elizabeth II visit.*

ground replica of one of the ROTOR National air defence buried bunkers was constructed on the St Andrews Road site.

It was urgently constructed in non-stop shifts working under arc lights at night. This was used for experiments to improve

Britain's detection and plotting of hostile aircraft and operated with Two Type 80 radars and two type 13 height finders to help the ROTOR tracking system. Later, the large experimental radar appeared on site, familiar to local people for many years. The radar dish features as our charity's logo. The scientists designed the sensors in our ballistic missile defence system, Blue Streak and worked with Allies on understanding how to detect the entry from space of ballistic missiles. Their work on new sensors led to a host of new electronic materials which resulted in many inventions that we take for granted today, unaware of their origin.

One such invention in the mid 60s was the touch screen. With the introduction of faster jet aircraft, the need to speed up reporting of hostile aircraft to launch defending fighters was critical. A Malvern scientist demonstrated the world's first touch screen in 1965. It allowed the operator to rapidly compose and dispatch messages. It would take another thirty years for this idea to be commonplace.

Around this time Malvern scientists were assigned to the Ministry of Technology under Wedgewood Benn. Following a visit to Malvern, his Minister of State for Technology, John



Stonehouse MP, requested that RRE begin a research programme on alternatives to the very expensive colour CRTs



used in radar displays. RRE began the urgent programme and several technologies were explored before Professor Gray at Hull University found a stable liquid crystal in 1972. Peter Raynes at RRE invented in 1974, the first

practical liquid crystal known as E7. After many developments at Malvern the flat panel LCD screen became an everyday item.

A major research programme at Malvern invented two families of heat (infra-red) detectors. The low cost uncooled detectors went into service in the late 1970s to help protect military bases. This technology is very familiar today and most homes have a least one PIR detector switching on garden lights or acting as a room sensor. The expensive cooled thermal imagers were extremely sensitive and deployed on battle tanks in the Gulf war. Both types of detector are now in cameras used by fire fighters, and other emergency services.

This rich period of innovation led to the strong growth of Malvern as a technology centre and as a charitable trust the Malvern Radar and Technology History Society (Charity No 1183001) hope to go on celebrating this history and inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers. You can find out more at [www.mraths.org.uk](http://www.mraths.org.uk)

# **The Flora & Fauna of the Malverns**

## **an Introduction**

**Brian Iles**

The Malvern Hills are over 60 million years old and comprise ancient rock, some of the oldest in England at nearly 700 million years old (see separate essay in this book).

The Hill range are designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty much of which is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest, comprised of nationally important geological and wildlife areas of hills, woodland, grassland, etc containing many rare species of flora and fauna. The area also includes the adjacent commons around the Hills. The Hills have been governed and protected by the Malvern Hills Conservators (now operating as the Malvern Hills Trust) since 1884 by several Acts of Parliament,

Local Victorian organisations such as the Malvern Naturalists' Field Club and the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club have studied and recorded their finds which have been invaluable to current naturalists and botanists in comparing the changing flora and fauna through time.

Once on the Hills the distant views become apparent affording vistas over the surrounding countryside to the Lickey Hills, Clent and the Cotswolds to the east and the Shropshire Hills and the Brecon Beacons to the west. The weather is ever changing and this changes the character and appearance of the Hills and the views beyond. Every time you visit and climb the various peaks the Hill look different which is probably why they appeal to landscape artists.

Apart from artists the Hills have inspired many people

throughout the ages including William Langland (Piers Plowman) in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and Edward Elgar in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Hills have also attracted other famous visitors like C S Lewis and J R R Tolkein.

The flora changes though the seasons from bluebells, foxgloves, rosebay willowherb, ragged robin, harebells, valerian, herb Bennett, herb Robert, various buttercups, gorse, broom, green alkanet, heath bedstraw, bog pimpernel, wild garlic, bracken, male fern, lady fern, lemon scented fern and various different grasses, (you may notice the pink haze of wavy hair grass). There are 15 species of wild roses in Britain, 12 can be found on the hills. Various species of orchid including bee orchid, heath spotted, green winged, southern marsh, autumn lady's tresses. Many fungi; chicken of the woods, dryad's saddle, birch polypore, King Alfred's cakes, green elfcap, turkey tail, fly agaric, slime moulds, boletes, puffballs, earth balls, earth stars, stinkhorns, parasols, field mushrooms and colourful waxcaps can be seen plus many mosses, liverworts and lichens.

The rosebay willowherb often grows on areas that have been subjected to wild fires, (NB it grew on city bomb sites during the Second World War when it became known as 'fireweed').

The carpets of bluebells around the Hills, in the early summer, are a joy to behold and many people make a special visit to the area to see them in the spring.

There is an old saying that 'kissing is in season when gorse is in flower'. The Hills have two types of gorse, either of which can be seen flowering through autumn and winter and into summer providing an almost continuous 'kissing season'! During hot sunny weather you may notice that the gorse blooms smell of coconut. The upper slopes have bilberry

berries fruiting in July and August. You can always recognise people who have been picking and eating the bilberries by their stained hands, lips and tongues.

The woodland to the lower slopes provide everchanging colour throughout the seasons. Many species can be found including, beech, oak, yew, black poplar, birch, sycamore, wild cherry, horse chestnut, sweet chestnut, hornbeam, hawthorn, hazel and lime.

Much of the flora supports the invertebrate population including more than 20 species of butterflies like; peacock, small tortoiseshell, red admiral, orange tip, comma, holly blue, common blue, meadow brown, gatekeeper, ringlet, small heath, brown argus, green hairstreak, small copper, little skipper,



*Grayling butterfly.*

marbled white, white letter hairstreak, silver washed fritillary, painted lady, brimstone, grayling, etc. The grayling has benefited greatly by the recent work of local volunteers improving their habitat, Also dragonflies

including; migrant hawkler, broad bodied chaser, ruddy darter, beautiful demoiselle, azure damselfly. Many crickets, grasshoppers, bees, wasps, hoverflies, shield bugs, spiders, snails, etc are present.

Many of these insects, in turn, support the birdlife.

Several of the redundant quarries now contain pools with coarse fish including rudd, perch, chubb, roach, eels and crayfish.

Various reptiles and amphibians are present, adders, grass snakes, slow worms, common lizard, frogs, toads and all three species of newts. You may see some of the adders have been fitted with radio locators as part of a programme to record their habits,

The mammal population numbers more than 40 species including, polecats, voles, moles, badgers, rabbits, hazel dormice, wood mice, yellow necked mice, weasels, stoat, rats, shrews, hedgehogs, fox, 4 species of deer, 14 of the 17 species of British bat including lesser horseshoe, brown long eared, whisked, daubentons, natterers, brandts and pipistrelle. The old redundant railway tunnel through the hills contains a colony of 600+ and another roost of 700+ in a house basement (the largest bat roost in the West Midlands). There are also

grazing sheep and cattle used for grassland management.



*Peregrine Falcon.*

There are more than 50 species of birds either nesting or visiting the Hills including meadow pipit, linnets, ravens, crows, jackdaw, blackcap, chaffinch, whitethroat, redwing, redstart, redpoll, blackbird, robin, pied wagtail, grey wagtail, blue tit, great tit, coal tit, long tailed tit, green finch, chaffinch, skylark, yellowhammer, jay, spotted flycatcher, wood warbler, willow warbler, stonechat, wheatear, magpie,

swift, swallow, house martin, kingfisher, tawny owl, barn owl, green woodpecker, greater spotted woodpecker, treecreeper, nuthatch, coot, lesser grebe, tufted duck, teal, Canada goose, grey heron, plus some rarer winter visitors like waxwing, snow bunting and ring ouzel. Once common local birds such as the skylark, little owl, small spotted woodpecker, wood warbler, have suffered in recent years and have few if any local breeding sites. Hopefully their situation will improve in the future.

Apart from local people, the Hills are visited by over 1 million visitors annually.

The importance of the Malvern Hills being properly protected and managed cannot be underestimated and should not be taken for granted.

When you visit the Hills, enjoy your visit but please take nothing away apart from your memories and perhaps some photographs (and your litter). Leave the flowers, etc for others to enjoy.

For a more detailed guide please refer to the book - 'The Nature of the Malverns, an Ancient Landscape Steeped in Wild Life' published by the Malvern Hills Trust and Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - Pisces Publications/Naturebureau - 2018.



**Malvern Hills Trust**

[www.malvernhills.org.uk](http://www.malvernhills.org.uk)

# Myths Legends & Curiosities

## Anonymous

The Malvern Hills, the Severn Plain and the rolling landscape of Herefordshire all have their myths, legends and curiosities. Local sayings such as *All about Malvern Hill a man may live as long as he will* and *Blest is the eye between Severn & Wye* for the area lies between those two great British rivers.

The landscape of the Hills includes some interesting features with names such as Raggedstone, Midsummer Camp, Herefordshire Beacon (British Camp), Wynd's Point, Pinnacle Hill and Perseverance Hill. There are a number of interesting stories attached to them.

The legend of Raggedstone relates to a monk from Little Malvern Priory who fell in love with a local girl despite his vows of chastity. His punishment was to crawl to the top of Raggedstone Hill every day. The monk cursed the hill and anyone on whom its shadow should fall.

The obelisk, visible for many miles, is a monument to the eldest son of the first Earl Somers. The son was killed in the Peninsular War. From here can be seen the nineteenth century mock castle built for Earl Somers and designed by the architect Sir Robert Smirke

Herefordshire Beacon, more commonly known as British Camp, is reputed to have been the place in 50AD of the last stand of Caractacus against the Romans. Wynd's Point below the hill was the last home of Jenny Lind (1820-1877) the famous singer otherwise known as the Swedish Nightingale. Here she had a small rustic arbor built in a Swedish style where *The oldest rocks the earth can boast are here in my little garden*, a direct

reference to the volcanic origin of the Malvern Hills.

The Red Earl's Dyke is an embankment visible along parts of the Malvern Hills Ridge. It is believed to have been built by Gilbert de Clare the Earl of Gloucester between 1287 and 1291. The Earl owned Malvern Chase and was in dispute with the Bishop of Hereford over the boundaries of their lands. The legend goes that agreement was reached that the boundary be the ridge of the Hills. However, the cunning Earl built the ditch boundary slightly down hill to the east so that the Bishop's deer would have an easy leap over it into his land!

Pinnacle Hill is a crossing place on the forbiddingly steep ridge of Malvern, for the road breaks across the hills in the narrow gap to the north of the hill, and railway tunnels have been dug beneath Perseverance Hill joining east and west.

The Wyche cutting is a natural pass through the Hills that was once part of an iron age salt route, hence the name Wyche. From the Hills the landscape spreads afar, east across the level stretch of the Severn Valley contrasting with the west and the more rugged character of Herefordshire stretching towards the Welsh Marches.

Malvern, long before its genteel phase was notorious for its witches. The Priory is meant to be connected to Worcester Cathedral by a secret passage. The misericord here has a notable carving of a monk driving away the devil by inserting a bellows in his backside. The Priory also has a series of pictures in glass showing episodes in the life of St Werstan who founded an oratory in the third century. The saint arrives in Malvern and angels show him where to site the oratory.

Even into the nineteenth century it was custom for funeral processions to stop at cross roads, put down the coffin and for



bearers and mourners to stand still. Funerals at Malvern Link stopped at the cross roads just below the station for the bearers to put the coffin down, stand still for a while and then change places. At least one undertaker tried to stop this but the bearers insisted they carry on.

In the middle of Colwall village lies Colwall stone. A number of



legends emanate from this notable landmark. One account relates to a boundary dispute between two giants. An agreement was reached whereby one of them should throw a stone from the Malvern Hills and where it landed would be the agreed boundary. Another explanation surrounds the story of a giant who observed his wife with another man on Colwall Green and in his anger hurled a stone at her. The stone killed her and where it landed and she is buried underneath. Yet another legend is that the devil was carrying the stone in his apron when the string broke and the stone tumbled into

*The Colwall Stone of many legends in the centre of the village.*

Colwall. The stone is also reputed to tun around nine times when it hears midnight strike!

Along the lanes and at Colwall church can be found the Ale



*The Colwall Church Ale House.*

House. Built in the early 1530s it was originally used to sell ale to raise funds for the Church. It was sold by the church in 1614 after the Bishop decreed too much ale was being consumed. It

became an almshouse for the

poor of the parish and following that has had a chequered history and then was turned into a garden store. In the 1980s the Rector raised funds for its restoration and in 1989 it became the Church Hall.

Further along the lane towards Ledbury can be found a Moorish gateway and minaret, the last remains of the exotic Hope End House built by Edward Moulton Barrett. The house, was the childhood home of the poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning before the family moved to London. A nineteenth century railway guide described Hope End Park and country house as being near the West Midlands Railway between the stations of Colwall and Ledbury.

The old town of Ledbury has many fine heritage buildings including the well known seventeenth century Market House in the High Street, reputedly the work of John Abell, the king's carpenter. For character, the old Talbot Inn is a must. Located in New Street and dating from the late sixteenth century, it has what must be the finest Elizabethan wood panelled dining room in the county. It was the scene of a skirmish during the



English Civil War and the holes made by musket and pistol shot can still be seen in the woodwork.

St Katherine's Chapel was erected in honour of a pious lady named Katherine de Audley. Tradition records that, in consequence of a revelation that she

*The Talbot Inn Elizabethan dining room.*

should not abide in any place until she came to a town where the church bells should ring of their own accord. She was satisfied that this occurred at Ledbury, where a merry peal saluted her ears while the doors were shut and no ringers were present. It was here she consequently stayed, enclosed in an anchoress cell.

A little way out of the town can be seen the impressive thirty arched viaduct that carries the Worcester to Hereford railway across the valley of the River Leadon. The viaduct is the work of local engineer Stephen Ballard.

The Marcle Hill to the west of the town was the scene of a great landslip in the sixteenth century. It is locally known as 'The Wonder' and a local account states: *The Hill which they call Marcle Hill did, in the year 1575, rouse itself, as it were, out of sleep; and for three days together moved on its vast body, with an horrible roaring noise; and overturning everything in its way, raised itself, to great astonishment of the beholders, to an higher place.*

For those who wish to explore further the stories and legends of this area, the following will be of use.

Palmer, Roy: *The Folklore of Hereford & Worcester*, Logaston Press 1992

Timmins, H.T: *The Nooks & Corners of Herefordshire*, Lapridge Publications 1992

Moore, A: *Curiosities of Herefordshire*, S.B. Publications 1992

Howes, N: *Herefordshire Curiosities*, ARCH Publications 1990

From the Vision of Piers Plowman  
by William Langland

In a summer season when the sun was mild  
I clad myself in clothes as I'd become a sheep;  
In the habit of a hermit unholy of work  
Walked wide in this world, watching for wonders.  
And on a May morning, on Malvern Hills,  
There befell me as by magic a marvellous thing:  
I was weary of wandering and went to rest  
At the bottom of a broad bank by a brook's side,  
And as I lay lazily looking in the water  
I slipped into a slumber, it sounded so pleasant.  
That I was in a wilderness, nowhere that I knew;  
But as I looked into the east, up high towards the sun,  
I saw a tower on a hill-top, trimly built,  
With ditches deep and dark and dreadful to look at.  
Of human beings of all sorts, the high and the low,  
Working and wandering as the world requires

(Translated from the Middle English by E. Talbot Donaldson)

# Placenames Along the Line

## Compiled from various sources

**Worcester:** The name has been translated as the 'Roman town of the Weogoran'. The *Weogoran* are thought to be a local tribe dating back to pre-Roman times. However the name is Old English, a derivative of Anglo Saxon and here is paired with the word *ceaster*, a derivative of the Roman *castra* meaning a fort or a town.

**Bransford:** An Old English name denoting a ford or stream crossing. It is connected with a hill-spur named Bragen perhaps from Old English *brægen* used as a transferred topographical term or from an undetermined pre-English element. Bransford was once a junction for the branch railway line to Bromyard and Leominster.

**Newland:** Middle English *newe* 'new' + land 'land' from the Old English *nīwe* land, denoting someone who lived by a patch of land recently brought into cultivation or recently added to the village or a habitational name from any of a number of settlements called Newland for this reason. Newland was once the site of a large railway permanent way depot.

**Malvern Link:** The ancient name 'Link' refers to a ridge in the slope of the Malvern Hills on which it is situated, from the Middle English *hlinc* meaning a ridge of land, or a hill. The word 'link' can also mean 'Rising ground; a ridge, a bank'.

A popular folk tale about the origin of the name is that it arose because the Victorians used to link up more horses to the carriages so that they could be pulled up the hill on the A449 to Great Malvern.

**Great Malvern:** The name Malvern is derived from the ancient

British or old Welsh *moel-bryn*, meaning 'Bare or Bald Hill', the modern equivalent being the Welsh *moelfryn* (bald hill).

**Malvern Wells:** Self explanatory as there are a number of natural wells or springs in this area, the most famous being the Holy Well.

**Colwall:** Nestling below the western slopes of the Malvern Hills, this large village has an entry in the Domesday Book as *Colewelle* which is translated as a cool spring. This is very appropriate as the springs of the Malvern Hills are renowned for the purity of the water. The impressive Iron Age fort named British Camp on the Malvern Hills is testimony to the area being settled even before the Celts arrived.

**Ledbury:** The Domesday Book records it as *Liedeberge*, the *Liede* part referring to the River Leadon which runs to the west of the town. Bury is derived from *burh* or *burg* which originates from *byrig*, all of which relate to important dwellings grouped as in a town. The modern equivalent is seen in the word borough. The main streets of Ledbury were divided into numerous burgage plots, long narrow strips of land leading off the street frontage. These can still be glimpsed today in the many alleyways that remain.

**Ashperton:** This linear village is located on the A417 road some five miles NW of the town of Ledbury. The suffix has been translated as the Old English *peretun* meaning a pear orchard, the *aesc* being an ash tree. The settlement is mentioned in the Domesday Book as *Aescpereta* and was part of the lands belonging to the Norman family of Grandison. Ashperton once had a railway station on the line.

**Tarrington:** First mentioned in the Domesday Book as *Tatintune*, it is translated as the estate belonging to *Tatin*. The

village has examples of both Elizabethan half-timbering and Georgian brick. The station, nearly a mile from the village was named Stoke Edith Station. The *stoke* element is derived from the Old English *stoc* meaning a dependent settlement. Interestingly the history books give *Edith* as the wife of Edward the Confessor who held this estate prior to the Norman Conquest. The station was once a private flag station for the Foley family, dominant landowners in the area. A flag station was one where the landowner had the right to flag down any train for his/her own convenience.

**Whitestone:** The Domesday Book entry gives it as *Widingtune* which is translated as a settlement by a willow marsh. The land is low lying although the imposing church is on a low ridge separating the broad valleys of the Rivers Lugg and Frome. There was once a station here and a large pottery works specialising in Victorian encaustic ceramic tiles.

**Shelwick:** The name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon suffix -*wīc*, signifying 'a dwelling or fortified place'. Such settlements were usually coastal so it is surprising to find one inland. This one indicates the dwelling of Scula or Scealc.

**Hereford:** The old city and cathedral occupy the north bank of the River Wye where there are a number of shallows in its course, hence the translation of the name from the Old English as a ford suitable for the passage of an army. The Welsh name is *Henffordd* meaning the old way. The ford was later supplanted by a substantial medieval stone bridge. The city has evidence of successive occupation by the Celtic Welsh, the Romans, the Saxons and the Normans. It was once walled with a substantial castle in its south-east corner.

## Cyder in Literature

**In memory of Ledbury characters who were fond of a cider or two or three or....!**

Like it or not, alcohol as a beverage has been around for many years. Perhaps it started with Adam and Eve. After all it is reputed that there was an apple involved in the whole affair and perhaps it should have stopped there. At least Thomas Hood (1799-1845) the poet thought so:

*When Eve upon the first of Men  
The apple press'd with spacious cant,  
Oh! What a thousand pities then  
That Adam was not Adamant*

But the humble apple has been around for a long time and so has that wonderful drink derived from it which we British commonly know as Cyder or Cider. It is one of the most ancient beverages. The Chambers Journal of 1896 gives an indication of the ancient origin of the word cider:

*Our English word, which appears as cidre and sithere in 14th century writers, is by the best authorities believed to represent the Greek word sikera, used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew shēkar, usually rendered in the Old Testament 'strong drink'.*

The word cider, however, specifically refers to the fermented juice of apples and it is as such that we know it in Britain. The enjoyment of and at time dependence on alcohol spans the whole range of society across time. But perhaps most interesting and fascinating has been the role of alcohol in literature. It has fuelled the production of some great works; it has stimulated the imagination but it has also lead to the early destruction of some famous writers.



Thus at times it is a veritable stimulus to inspiration, at others the total destroyer of the muse and artist alike. Beer, spirits and wine all have their place in the literary scheme of things. but it is cider that holds the most romantic image. This drink, the potent product of the humble apple, is possibly the most mentioned drink in British literature. Whereas beer and spirits are perhaps associated with the coarseness and ugliness of the industrial era, and wine is considered to be a continental influence, cider retains that place in the image of rural Britain. It is an image that us British hang on to dearly. It is the rural idyll of a green and fertile land, of apple orchards and the golden harvests in the fields, of blue skies, warm days and a flask of cider.

In this article we explore the mention of cider in literature through a few select references and quotations. There are many more examples, too many to enclose, but we hope this short piece will more than ‘whet your appetite’.

Although not Herefordshire, an appropriate start is this extract from Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd*:

*Jacob stooped to the God-forgive-me, which was a two handled*



*tall mug standing in the ashes, cracked and charred with heat: it was rather furred with extraneous matter about the outside, especially in the crevices of the handles, the innermost curves of which may not have seen daylight for*

*God-Forgive-Me and early cider jug.*

*several years by reason of this encrustation thereon - formed of ashes accidentally wetted with cider and baked hard; but to the mind of any sensible drinker the cup was no worse for that, being incontestably clean on the inside and about the rim. It may be observed that such a class of mug is called a God-forgive-me in Weatherbury and its vicinity for uncertain reasons; probably because its size makes any given toper feel ashamed of himself when he sees its bottom in drinking it empty.*

Literary personages upon passing through Herefordshire sampled the local 'apple juice'. It is reputed that a certain William Wordsworth got more than a little merry imbibing the local cider when visiting his wife's relations at Brinsop Court in western Herefordshire. Thankfully it did not have too dramatic an effect, otherwise we may not have had such beautiful poems as 'Lines composed above Tintern Abbey', written whilst he was in the area.

His contemporary, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, also travelled through the great cider producing county of Herefordshire. In his days of impetuous youth and already labelled as a dangerous radical, he stayed at the King's Arms at Ross-on-Wye where he scratched democratic verses on the window shutters speaking of "wine cheer'd moments". What a vandal and I have no doubt the wine he mentioned is the 'Wine of the West', the name given to good quality cider (almost a champagne) produced in this part of the country.

John Masefield, who was Poet Laureate from 1930-67, was born and spent his childhood in the small market town of Ledbury.

*Then, who forgets the bristled corn  
When sloes are blue among the thorn?  
The harvest reapers stretched for luncheon*

*About the wooden cider-puncheon  
Backed on the sunburnt golden stooks  
New-cutted by the fagging-hooks,  
For sickles did the reaping then  
In those old days, when men were men.*

In later years Masfield was to remember many childhood scenes of life in this rural area:

*Then, more September memories  
Of apples glowing on the trees,  
Of men on ladders in the sun  
Gathering apples by the ton,  
Of heaps of red-fleshed cider fruit  
Wasp-pestered at each apple root  
And smell of pommace warm in air  
From cider-presses everywhere.*

Masfield also was to highlight the evils of drink, no better put and powerfully transmitted than in his epic poem 'The Everlasting Mercy'. To read it is a sobering experience in itself.

Cider making in the county of Herefordshire is still very much of a tradition and thankfully today is enjoying something of a revival. Apples, orchards and cider are steeped in folklore:

*When apple trees blossom in April and before May  
You can put all your barrels away,  
But if they blossom at end of May beginning June  
You can get all your barrels in tune.*

A Twelfth Night custom is that of the 'Wassail'. Here, bonfires are lit, cider is poured over the apple tree roots and with great gusto shotguns are fired up through the trees. The idea is that this was to 'bless' the trees and provide for a good crop in the

coming year. Sounds highly dangerous but the main reason is probably the excuse for a good sampling of the hot cider and ginger punch normally associated with cold winter evenings - Whey Hey!

Daniel Defoe in his tour through England was amazed to find that in Herefordshire he could obtain no beer or ale in the inns and taverns. However, he was agreeably surprised to find that the cider was of a very fine quality and remarkably cheap. Many houses in this area remained cider-houses well into the 20th Century. In many instances the drinking area was little more than an outhouse with crude wooden seats and earth floor. The cider was sold in jugs and brought from the cottage or farm in huge pottery pitchers or earthenware flasks. Only a very few of these hostelries remain today. Modern environmental and food laws together with the sometimes over protectiveness of health and safety legislation has put paid to many an old custom!

Across the county boundary from Ledbury lies the small village of Dymock in Gloucestershire. It was here, during a short period just prior to the First World War that there gathered a number of young poets. Perhaps with a foreboding that the Great War was going to change things forever, here they met to write and recite poetry, talk and debate during:

*the long summer evenings of deepening blue, where shadows chased the light to mingle with the myriad stars that at times issued .*

Then unknown names such as Edward Thomas, Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfred Gibson and the American poet Robert Frost ate and drank those evenings away. The cider jug was never far away and at times they were joined by others; W.H. Davies, John Drinkwater, Rupert Brooke and Eleanor Farjeon. For some, such as Edward Thomas they were the last days of

heavenly bliss (Thomas was to die on the battlefields of Flanders). For others, such as Robert Frost, it was the start of a brilliant literary life. Although returned to his native New England on the eastern seaboard of America, his poem 'After Apple Picking Time' may well have been more than inspired by his short period in this small corner of rural Britain:

*My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree  
Toward Heaven still,  
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill  
Beside it, and there may be two or three  
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.  
But I am done with apple picking now.  
Essence of winter sleep is upon the night,  
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off*

Ledbury continues as a focus for cider making. At Much Marcle is the well known firm of H Weston & Sons whilst just a short walk along the Bromyard Road from Ledbury Station is Wilce's Cider at the Old Kennels Farm Wilce's Cider at the Old Kennels Farm. Further afield, other producers are Lyne Down Cider, Oliver's Cider and Frome Valley Cider.



# A Flash of Colour

Cheryl Davies: Botanist & Artist

## The Making of a Trackside Home

It is hard to imagine our countryside without railways, harder still to imagine what a change was wrought on the landscape by the coming of the railways. We accept the viaducts, bridges, cuttings, embankments and railway architecture as naturally as any medieval building or ancient castle but we forget that the railway network imposed a completely new feature on the landscape and only within the last two centuries. However the countryside was not passive in this process, for the railways also provided a network of relatively undisturbed land along which wildlife, as well as people, could travel. The trackside has become, as Richard Mabey (of 'Food for Free' fame) so aptly terms this and similar land - 'the unofficial countryside'!



*Tufted Vetch (Vicia cracca): Colwall.*

Take a look out of the window of the next high-speed train or local sprinter on which you travel and marvel at the flashes of colour and the diversity and abundance of flowers and shrubs on the narrow strip of land either side of the track. These fertile embankments and cuttings form an interlocking network of green lanes along which plants can spread, trains themselves often acting as unauthorized carriers of their seeds. Embankments, especially south facing ones are well lit, well drained and safer than any nature reserve. In at least one place in

Herefordshire, adjacent to Colwall station, there is a well-established nature reserve right next to a flower-rich embankment, providing ample testimony to the diversity of plant life in their common home.

## Plant Adventurers

When land is first laid bare it is the fast-moving hardy opportunist plants that move in initially and, amongst plants, occupation is nine-tenths of the law. Those that arrive first tend to remain first and predominant. But pure chance also plays an enormous role as is amply illustrated by one set of railway wanderers: seaside plants such as sand sedge (*Carex arenaria*), Danish scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia danica*), strapwort (*Corrigiola litoralis*) and sea mouse-ear (*Cerastium diffusum*). Their usual habitat is stony, sandy places near the sea but they are often found on railway land miles inland. The botanist Oliver Gilbert has proposed that they probably travelled inland either at a time when ship's ballast was used in the construction work of railways or in the days of steam when sand was carried on locomotives and scattered on the track to aid traction of the wheels.



*Oxford Ragwort*  
(*Senecio squalidus*).

However the classic story of a plant spread by the railways is that of Oxford ragwort (*Senecio squalidus*). This plant, now a familiar sight in industrial landscapes, was only introduced into this country in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century when the great Swedish scientist Linnaeus planted it in the Botanic Garden in Oxford. From there it escaped to a nearby college wall and thence to Oxford Station. It found the stony foundations of the permanent

way much to its liking being very similar to the rocky scree of Mount Etna in southern Italy, its native home. Thus, initially care of the Great Western Railway Company, it rapidly colonized the whole of industrial Britain, the downy seeds often travelling actually in the trains. The eminent Victoria botanist George Claridge Druce described a journey that he once took with the seeds of Oxford ragwort - they boarded the train at Oxford Station and alighted at Tilehurst in Berkshire 20 miles down the line!

Yet Oxford ragwort remains an urban plant continuing its spread but keeping close to railways, roads and building sites and rarely invading grassland. The famous Herefordshire Woolhope Club recorded that on the Abergavenny to Hereford railway line the ragworts growing on waste ground within one-quarter of a mile either side of the track were of the Oxford ragwort species. Further afield they were common ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), a much more insidious poisonous weed.



*Rosebay willowherb*  
(*Epilobium angustifolium*).

A story which comes a close second to that of Oxford ragwort has to be that of rosebay willowherb (*Epilobium angustifolium*). Until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century this plant was relatively scarce in Britain. Its spread latterly has been put down to the increase in waste places created by the Industrial Revolution and to the railways. Every plant produces on average a spectacular 80,000 seeds each equipped with a featherlike plume of hairs, enabling it to drift long distances on the breeze or in the slipstream of trains.



The seeds will also tolerate soil that has been subjected to heat and would have found land fired by steam trains ideal for germination. Many's the bombsite too that was enlivened by rosebay willowherb after World War II. Indeed there is nothing quite to compare with the great swaths of purple flowers when they appear on the trackside in the summer.

Plants have a wonderful way of adapting to changing



circumstances like this. The red campion (*Silene dioica*) normally a native woodland plant regularly crosses with white campion (*Silene latifolia*) which inhabits waysides and hedgerows, especially where the land has been disturbed. In this way it has extended its range considerably to much more open habitats (including the trackside). Another plant that has been able to make use of railway embankments and other open places is buddleia

*Red Campion (Silene dioica)*  
*below Ledbury viaduct.*

(*Buddleia davidii*). It was introduced into the country from China in the 1890's and has since spread across

almost the whole of rural and especially urban Britain. It may even have been the saving grace for many an urban butterfly population. It certainly has a tenacious zest for life clinging as it does to any foothold. It can even be seen growing out of the Victorian brickwork on the railway cuttings approaching New Street Station in the heart of Birmingham.

## **Plant Settlers**

These are just a few instances of the way in which railways

have influenced the spread of some of our most colourful plants. Numerous others could be listed, from the horsetail



*Hedge Bindweed*  
*(Calystegia sepium)*

(*Equisetum fluviatile*); an ancient survivor of a family of plants common in the carboniferous period, 300 million years ago, through to plants like the scarlet pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis*); a lowland plant of arable fields and the hedge bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*), a plant of scrub and waste places which would have found the wire netting fence at Colwall station an open invitation to climb. In fact, the station as much as the trackside embankment provides shelter for many plants perhaps more so because of the number of different habitats to be found

there.

Our list would also include many a garden escape; the stationmasters lupins (*Lupinus polyphyllus*) were often to be found miles from the stationmaster's garden! Some colonisers may even be as a result of deliberate planting. The ox-eye or (more romantically) the moon daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) is normally found in old meadows and coastal grasslands but in recent years it has become common on road verges and embankments. These plants probably derived from commercial wild flower seed planted on newly landscaped motorway verges.

There is a sting in the tail of this story however, the bane of Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) and similar invasive, destructive weeds may have been started in part by disenchanting Victorian gardeners throwing them in disgust over their garden walls onto ... railway embankments!

The heyday of the colonization of railway embankments must have been a fascinating one for the many ardent Victorian botanists to watch, but the end product is also one that we can



appreciate today and not only from our railway carriages. With, and since the Beeching era, as we all know there have been many railway lines taken out of service. These disused lines make another network of green ways separate from the permanent way and they are often converted into fine walks and bridleways. The Ledbury Town Trail, known locally as the Line Bank Path, provides a good example. This follows what was originally the old Ledbury-Gloucester Canal. The

*Purple Toadflax (Linaria purpurea): Ledbury.*

land was later bought by the Great Western Railway and the resulting railway line eventually closed in the

1950's. The area has been partially landscaped but many examples of typical embankment flowers still survive.

The coming of the railways certainly changed the face of our landscape. What must not be forgotten, however, is that railway land also provides sanctuary for our natural flora, fast disappearing elsewhere, as well as aiding the spread of some of our most attractive newcomers. The Tufted Vetch shown in the picture on page 54 was abundant at Colwall railway station and the adjacent nature reserve but is rarely seen in its native meadow today. Perhaps, despite and because of man, nature comes full circle and rises victorious in the end colouring our lives as we speed on our way!

# **A Bit about Ledbury**

**Gareth Calan Davies**

Ledbury is an old market town steeped in history and located at the crossing point of two ancient trackways. Its origins date to around AD690 and in the Domesday Book it is recorded as Liedeberge. It may have taken its name from the river Leadon which runs close by to which has been added the Old English burg meaning a defended site. The crossroads is marked by the Lower Cross where the Bye Street/Church Lane intersects the High Street/Homend. Near this crossroads, towards the end of the seventh century, the Bishop of Hereford established a small religious community for administering to the dispersed population. This is marked by the location of St Katherine's Hall (Hospital), the Alms Houses and the recently restored Master's House. The car park was once the site of the home farm that provided for this community.

From this crossroads the town slowly expanded along the main highways. In 1138 the town was granted a market charter by King Stephen and in 1584 Queen Elizabeth I granted a new charter. By the seventeenth century Ledbury had become a town of considerable importance and in 1617 a group of local citizens elected to build a proper Market House. This was completed in 1655 and perhaps is Ledbury's best-known landmark. Markets are still held there.

At this time Ledbury had become established as a wool town where wool fleeces from the Welsh borderlands, known as the Marches, were sold. It is thought that the late fifteenth century old grammar school (now the Heritage Centre) at the top of Church Lane was originally a guildhall for wool merchants.

During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries a number

of substantial merchants' houses were built, notable examples being Ledbury Park at the Top Cross, the Feathers Hotel in the High Street and the Steppes in New Street. The High Street and Homend were well established as the main retail areas of the town and in the middle of the wide part of High Street stood a row of timbered building, open fronted on both sides and mostly occupied by butchers.

The Georgian period of the eighteenth century saw the trend for covering the old Elizabethan timbered buildings with fashionable Georgian symmetrical brick frontages. Even the Feathers and Talbot Inns were once covered with such rendering. Good examples of Georgian facades are to be seen in the High Street, some in juxtaposition with buildings where the Georgian frontage has been removed to expose the timber frame. Roads were beginning to be improved under the Turnpike Acts and the era of the stagecoach had begun. Ledbury established itself on some of these routes and a number of coaching inns appeared as places for a change of horses, providing refreshments and accommodation for passengers. The Feathers Hotel became such an establishment, having been converted from a Merchants House. In the Southend, the main route to Gloucester, the George Inn was purpose built as a Georgian coaching inn.

In 1791 a canal from Gloucester was constructed to Hazle Wharf at the lower end of New Street. It was completed through the town and onwards to Hereford in the 1840's. The railway arrived in 1861 when the Worcester & Hereford Railway Company completed its line through the Hills and onwards via Ledbury to Hereford. The railway at the north end of the town is prominent for its magnificent Victorian viaduct spanning the Leadon Valley. With the stagecoach era at an end the Feathers and the Royal Oak, both coaching inns, became agents for the

railway companies. The Feathers even ran a horse-drawn omnibus service connecting the station with the hotel. In 1885 a branch railway to Gloucester was built on the line of the canal. The route is now the Town Trail.

There is much of heritage to see in Ledbury. Apart from the imposing Elizabethan buildings in the main street, a walk-up Church Lane will reward you with many more heritage buildings such as the Town Council Offices, the Butcher Row Museum in one of the buildings that once occupied the centre of the High Street, the Heritage Centre in the old grammar school leading to the imposing church of St Michael's & All Saints. Often described as a mini cathedral this church, with its separate tower is well worth a visit. Its cool and imposing interior remains a place of worship and contemplation.

A walk down New Street from the Top Cross with its overhanging timber frame buildings jettied out over the pavement and then the picturesque Talbot Inn with the Steppes house opposite is equally rewarding. Do not forget to have a peer down the numerous alleyways off the main streets, often marked with a named plaque. These are a legacy of the burgage plots that were granted to people during the medieval period.

Wherever you move in Ledbury, there is something of interest to see. To help the traveller arriving by train, a glazed display cabinet at the station contains the work of local artists giving directions to the town and the illustrated history of Ledbury's heritage buildings together with an account of the coming of the railway. The display was positioned in 2021, funded by West Midlands Railway with the displays commissioned by the Beyond the Hills Community Station Partnership.



# HERITAGE BUILDINGS



• The Market House



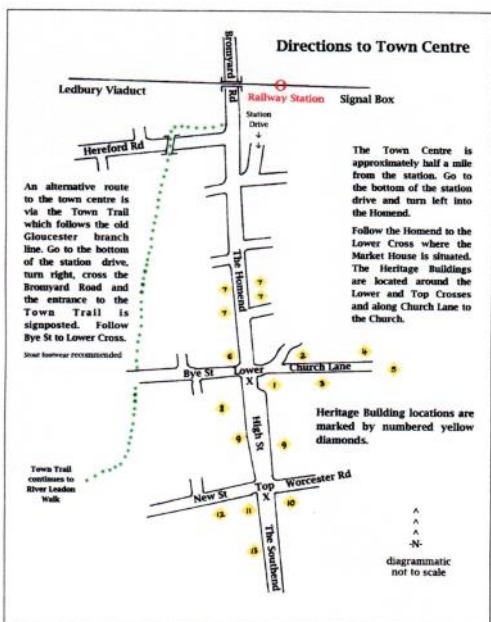
• Ledbury Viaduct



• The SM Grammar School



• The Old Tree Restaurant



• The Puffin-Bone Museum



• The Parvelli Brewery Homend



• The Town Council Office



• The Homend



• The Homend



• The Homend and Church



• The Old High House



• Ledbury Park



• Abbey House



• St. Michael's & All Angels Church



• The George Hotel



• The Peacock Hotel



• The Mayor's House



• The Jubilee Hotel

## Hereford: Gateway to the Marches

Today the City of Hereford is the terminus for Great Western Railway services from London and West Midlands Railway services from Birmingham. The impressive Barrs Court Railway Station is a grade II listed structure.

Hereford is an ancient city dating from the first century AD. Located at a point where the shallows of the River Wye could be forded, it grew to become the capital of the Saxon kingdom of West Mercia. During the thirteenth century the town walls were rebuilt in stone. Remains of the wall can still be traced today.

The traditional date for the founding of Hereford Cathedral is 696. It was destroyed by the Welsh in 1055 and rebuilt in a Norman or Romanesque style between 1107 and 1148. The cathedral houses two outstanding pieces of history. The Mappa Mundi of circa 1300 is the only complete world map of its kind to have survived. In 1611 a chained library was created. It is the world's largest surviving example of its kind.

Hereford retains its character as a border city and today Welsh accents and the Welsh language can still be heard in its streets. The centre of the city is Hightown, a wide and open pedestrianised area. From here its old streets lead down to the Cathedral and the River Wye beyond, crossed by the Grade I listed medieval bridge of 1490.

As well as the cathedral, the city contains the Museum of Cider celebrating the county's famous drink, the Old House Museum in High Town and the Museum and Art Gallery in Broad Street. There is an eclectic range of independent shops and various eateries, especially in Church Lane where you are encouraged to take your time and indulge in a bit of slow shopping.



Beyond the city, local bus services link with the market towns of Leominster, Ross-on-Wye, Ledbury, Kington and Bromyard passing through a landscape of orchards, hopyards and black and white timber frame buildings.



*The Old House, Hightown.*

*Church Street leading to Hereford Cathedral.*



*Hop Kilns near Ledbury.*



*Castle Pool, Hereford.*

# Sir Edward Elgar

compiled by Gareth Calan Davies

No book about the Malvern Hills and Herefordshire would be complete without a reference to England's most well known composer. Edward Elgar was born in the small village of Lower Broadheath, Worcestershire, west of the River Severn in 1857.

Upon leaving school he went to a local solicitors office as a clerk but did not find such a career congenial and for fulfillment he turned to music. For a young musician and budding composer life was hard. He wrote to a friend in April 1884, *My prospects are about as hopeless as ever ... I am not wanting in energy I think, so sometimes I conclude that 'tis want of ability. ... I have no money - not a cent.*

Although he had moved to London to seek recognition he was obliged to leave in 1891 for lack of other work. He retired with his wife and child to Worcestershire, where he could earn a living conducting local musical ensembles and teaching. They settled in Malvern his wife's former home town.

The breakthrough came at the age of forty two when Elgar composed the Enigma Variations which were premiered in London. Elgar is probably best known for the first of the five *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*, which were composed between 1901 and 1930.

Elgar was knighted at Buckingham Palace on 5 July 1904. The following month, he and his family moved to Plâs Gwyn, a large house on the outskirts of Hereford, overlooking the River Wye, where they lived until 1911. During this time he was closely associated with the cathedral and its music.

The sculpture of Elgar looking at Hereford cathedral is a

superb depiction of Elgar's love of cycling around the Herefordshire and Worcestershire countryside of the land he so much loved and which gave him such inspiration.



*Sir Edward Elgar and his trusted bicycle look across the green to Hereford Cathedral.*

## **Some Useful Contacts**

### **Community Rail**

Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership:  
email: [enquiries@wcrp.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wcrp.org.uk)      [www.crp.org.uk](http://www.crp.org.uk)

Beyond the Hills Community Station Partnership:  
email: [ghal@btinternet.com](mailto:ghal@btinternet.com)      [www.bthcsp.org.uk](http://www.bthcsp.org.uk)

### **Train Companies**

[www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk/travel-information/timetables](http://www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk/travel-information/timetables)

[www.gwr.com/travel-information/train-times](http://www.gwr.com/travel-information/train-times)

### **About the Area**

Malvern Hills Geocentre    [www.geocentre.co.uk](http://www.geocentre.co.uk)

Malvern Hills Trust    [www.malvern hills.org.uk](http://www.malvern hills.org.uk)

Malvern Hills AONB    [www.malvern hills saonb.org.uk](http://www.malvern hills saonb.org.uk)

Visit the Malverns    [www.visit themalverns.org](http://www.visit themalverns.org)

Malvern Radar and Technology History Society  
[www.mraths.org.uk](http://www.mraths.org.uk)

Visit Herefordshire    [www.visit herefordshire.co.uk](http://www.visit herefordshire.co.uk)

Ledbury Town Council and Tourist Information  
[www.ledburytowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.ledburytowncouncil.gov.uk)

Hereford Cider Museum    [www.cidermuseum.co.uk](http://www.cidermuseum.co.uk)

Westons Cider Mill    [www.westons-cider.co.uk/visit](http://www.westons-cider.co.uk/visit)

Ledbury Poetry Festival    [www.ledbury poetry.org.uk](http://www.ledbury poetry.org.uk)

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