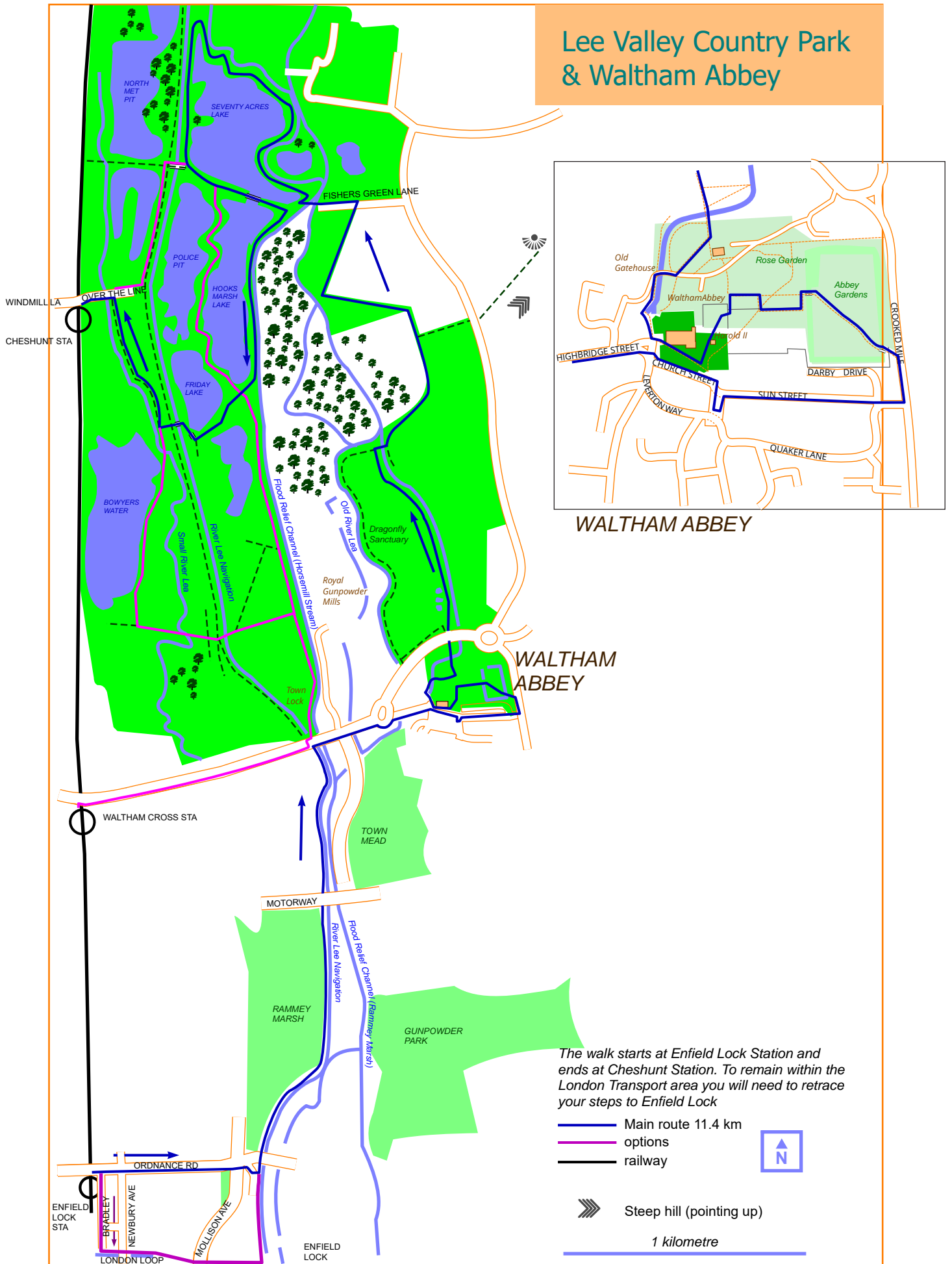


Lee Valley Country Park & Waltham Abbey



WALTHAM ABBEY

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The walk starts at Enfield Lock Station and ends at Cheshunt Station. To remain within the London Transport area you will need to retrace your steps to Enfield Lock

- Main route 11.4 km
 - options
 - railway
- ▶▶▶ Steep hill (pointing up)
- 1 kilometre

walk notes

Lea Valley Country Park & Waltham Abbey

We start the walk from Enfield Lock station because it is within the London travel zones and follow London Loop to the river before walking upstream. The river is pretty here and spoilt only by the sound from the M25 under which we pass. On the opposite bank is Enfield Island Village, former home of the Royal Small Arms Factory. (Lee-Enfield rifle?) At Highbridge we turn right and make for Walthamstow Abbey, a picturesque medieval market town where you could spend the day exploring. Alternatively you can explore the Country Park

Waltham Abbey

The first known church in Waltham was built c.610 at the bidding of the nephew of Ethelbert of Kent. It was a small wooden building, lying within the choir of the present Abbey Church. Later, under the rule of Offa of Mercia, a stone church was built around it. In the reign of Cnut Waltham was given to Tofig, who also owned manors in Somerset, and on one of them, a large stone crucifix was found buried in the top of a hill. This was brought to Waltham and hung in Offa's church, where it soon became an object of pilgrimage. One of those healed by a pilgrimage to Waltham was Harold Godwinson, then the owner of the manor of Waltham and better known as King Harold, defeated at Hastings. In 1184, Henry II raised the foundation to the status of an abbey; Waltham became the most important of all the Augustinian houses in England.

Henry VIII particularly valued Waltham as a place to escape the cares of state and enjoy hunting and discussion with the Abbot, a very learned man. Probably for this reason it was the last abbey to be dissolved, and very nearly became a cathedral.

The abbey gardens, reputed to be the burial place of King Harold, contains some remains of the Augustinian Abbey founded by Henry II in 1177 — cloister entry, gateway, chapter house walls, bridge — one of the largest in the country

until dissolution in 1540.

Waltham Town

The Town grew around the Abbey and during Richard I's reign it was granted a Charter to hold markets and fairs. The Charter Market continues to this day on Tuesdays.

Throughout the Middle Ages the town and the Abbey prospered beside each other and many distinguished people passed through the town en route as a guest of the Abbot. Monarchs came to Waltham to hunt in the Royal Forest of Waltham.

This all stopped on dissolution. Waltham was leased to Sir Antony Denny and the monastic buildings demolished. However the demolition stopped at the low wall dividing the monastic choir from the nave and the parish church was saved for the townsfolk. The great central tower was demolished and rather than let the bells be lost, the parishioners bought them and put them in storage until a new tower was built. Unfortunately the tower cost so much to build the bells had to be sold to raise the needed funds. A ring of twelve bells was built up later and these are the 'wild bells' referred to in Tennyson's well-known poem "In Memoriam".

Despite the changes that came with the loss of its abbey, Waltham continued to flourish as a town even if its life became less colourful and less affected by visits of dignitaries and monarchs. Industries were set up, one of the earliest being the manufacture of explosives at the Powder Mills.

Gunpowder Mills

The Royal Gunpowder mills started in 1665 and closed 1991. The story of gunpowder produced at Waltham Abbey starts with a fulling mill for cloth production originally set up by the monks of the Abbey on the Millhead Stream, an engineered water course tapping the waters of the Lea. In the second Dutch War (1665) gunpowder supply shortages were encountered and the mill was converted to gunpowder production. It was acquired by Ralph Hudson using saltpetre made in Bedfordshire and

Hertfordshire.

The Hudson family sold out to William Walton at the end of the 17th century, starting a family connection lasting almost a hundred years. The enterprise was successful under the Walton's tenure and the Mills expanded up the Millhead Stream as fresh production facilities were added, the material progressing from one building to another as it passed through the various processes.

In 1735 Waltham Abbey Mills were described by Thomas Fuller, a local historian, as "the largest and compleatest works in Great Britain" and in the 1860s by Colonel George Rains as the "best existing steam powered mills in any country".

In the 1780s there was fresh concern over security, quality and economy of supply and the then Deputy Comptroller of the Royal Laboratory at Woolwich, Major, later Lt. General, Sir William Congreve advocated that the Waltham Abbey Mills should be purchased by the Crown to ensure secure supplies and to establish what would now be called a centre of excellence for development of manufacturing processes and to establish quality and cost standards by which private contractors could be judged.

In October 1787 the Crown purchased the Mills from John Walton for £10,000, starting a 204 year ownership. Congreve was a man of great drive and vision, a pioneer of careful management, quality control and scientific method and under his regime manufacture moved from what had been a black art to, in the context of its day, an advanced technology. Under the leadership of Sir Frederick Abel, first, Guncotton was developed at Waltham Abbey, patented in 1865, then, the propellant Cordite, patented in 1889. During the first world war The Mills increased staff numbers by around 3000 to a total of 6230. <http://www.wargm.co.uk>
<https://www.royalgunpowdermills.com>

River LeeCountry Park

The 1000 acre River Lee Country Park [part of the 10,000 acre Lee Valley Regional Park] is on land reclaimed from

the sand and gravel industry and is now a haven for wildlife. Much of it is now a SSI and there are hides for observing the wildfowl. It is particularly attractive when the blackthorn is in blossom. Overhead power lines detract a little. There is an excellent map available from the Lee Valley Park Information Centre showing all the paths in detail.

<http://www.visitleevalley.org.uk>

Fishers Green

With large expanses of reedbeds across Seventy Acres Lake you might be lucky enough to spot the wintering birds such as Bittern or Smew, a secretive Water Rail amongst the reedbeds or Shoveler feeding on the open water.

The Bittern Information Point which has fantastic views over the lake and reedbeds and also the chance to see close-ups of the wildlife on the live camera streams from over the lake.

The mosaic of wetlands including lakes, wet meadows and scrapes around the park are perfect for wildlife watching throughout the year, look out for a wide range of ducks including Gadwall, Shoveler and waders such as Lapwing and Snipe.

With plenty of woodland around Fishers Green you might be lucky enough to hear the melodic song of the Nightingale.

Cornmill Meadows Dragonfly Sanctuary

One of the best examples of semi-natural floodplain grassland remaining in Lee Valley Regional Park. Its mosaic of rivers, ditches and pools makes it a fantastic place to see a variety of wildlife throughout the year. This is one of the best places in the region to see a range of dragonflies including White-legged Damselfly, Hairy Dragonfly and Migrant Hawker Dragonfly

Look out for Kingfishers too as you stroll along the rivers and streams.

The muddy margins provide excellent feeding ground for waders passing through on migration in spring and autumn.

Look out for: Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Redshank.

The wet meadows and open water are home to winter visitors such as Teal and Wigeon.