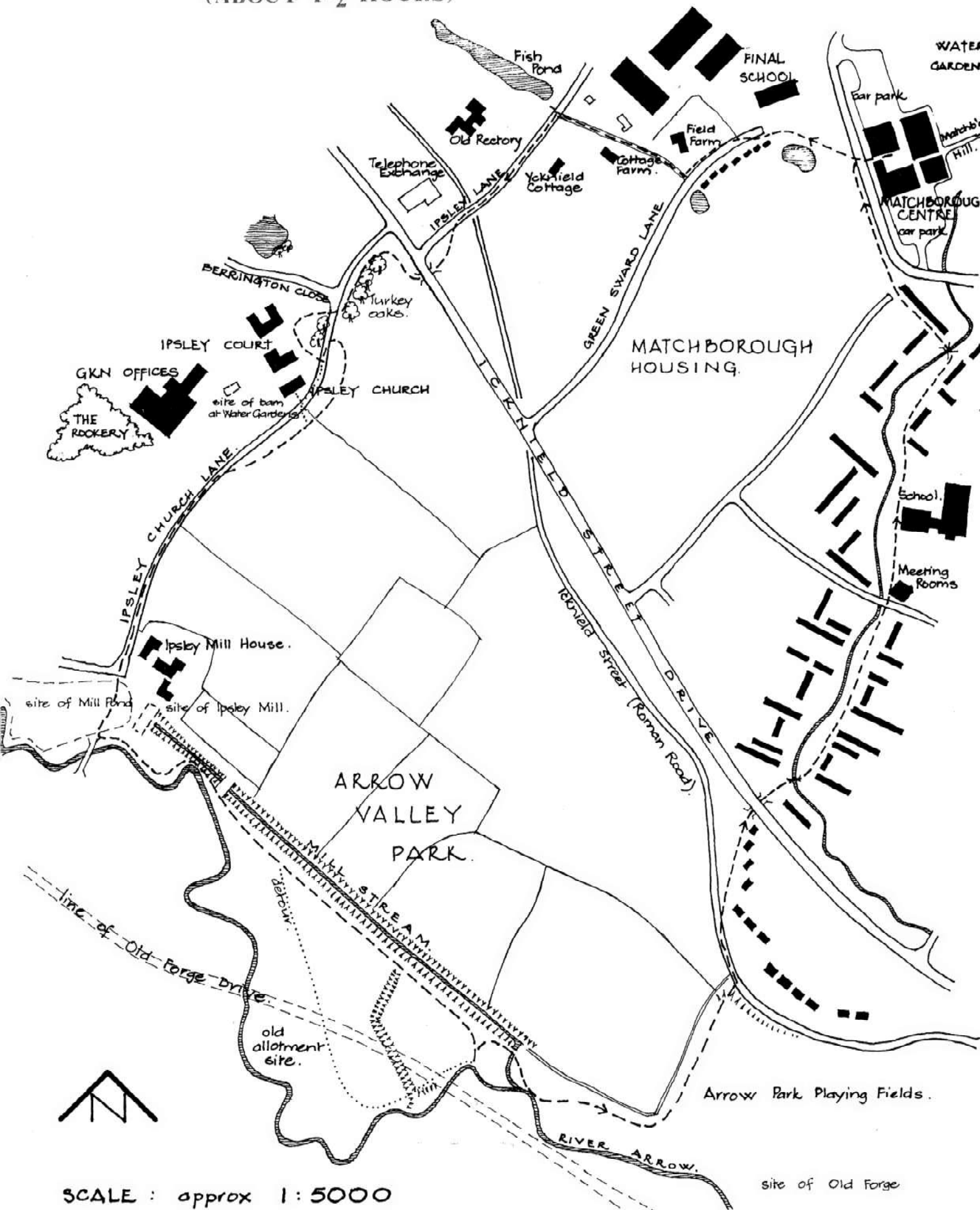


REDDITCH NEW TOWN WALKS No.3

IPSLEY AND MATCHBOROUGH

(ABOUT 1½ HOURS)



This is the third in an occasional series of walks in and around the New Town. 'The Meadow of the White Poplars' a leaflet by John Rollins published by Redditch Development Corporation gives additional background material. It is suggested that a reasonably stout pair of shoes should be worn as the middle section of the walk may be a little rough. The starting and finishing point of the walk is Matchborough Centre where you may catch a 'bus or leave your car. The walk takes about 1½ hours and is approximately 2 miles long.

Walk across the Public Transport Route from Matchborough Centre, bear right and proceed along the footpath with the marlpool on the left and the Final School, now under construction, on the right. Despite the proximity of housing the marlpool attracts many birds; several can be seen in a few minutes. Proceed towards Field Farm, an original 16th or 17th century timber-framed farmhouse which was reconstructed on the same site recently.

Turn right directly after Field Farm and walk along the path originally the drive to Field Farm, lined by hawthorns, and pass the picturesque white painted Cottage Farm. With Icknield Cottage and the Old Rectory these houses formed a group of buildings which were the hamlet of Ipsley. Two of the buildings are obviously old farmhouses, one of the last connections with the agriculture of the area.

Cross Ipsley Lane and walk up the bank under the yew trees and have a look at the fish pond, and a glimpse of the Old Rectory, an C18th building with a very early C19th plastered front. There is a rather nice cupola which can be seen further up Ipsley Lane. The architect, F. W. B. Charles, considers the heavy slates on the roof of the Rectory are one of the earliest examples of this material imported into the region.

Walk up Ipsley Lane, pass the entries to The Old Rectory and Icknield Cottage, another C17th timber-framed house, glimpse Ipsley Church tower through the trees before crossing the line of Icknield Street. More of this road will be seen later. Bear left to the subway under Icknield Street Drive, then right towards Woodrow and Town Centre and follow the footpath under the enormous Turkey oaks. Look right to Berrington Close to a group of trees around the marlpool, one of them being the rare and interesting Wild Service Tree, *Sorbus torminalis*. This is only one of four recorded trees in the Designated Area outside woodland.

Proceed towards the large building on the hill. Ipsley Court was built for the Huband family in Queen Elizabeth I's reign, although only a small part remains. The two wings are late 17th century but the central building was demolished. The wing on the right was recently used as a barn, the other as a farmhouse. An owner, Walter Savage Landor, wrote about Ipsley Court in 1830 - "Never was any habitation more thoroughly odious - red soil, mince pie woods and black and greasy needle-workers". The tree adjacent to the fence is a walnut. It is said that you can see Edgehill from Ipsley Hill on a clear day if you look in the right direction!



VIEW FROM IPSLEY HILL.

Walk back to Ipsley Lane through a gap in the old ornamental planting of the Court. If you are interested, the church may be seen at service times. St. Peter's Church, which is 14th century, used to be considerably larger as it originally had two aisles but both were demolished in 1785. The interior has an interesting 14th century font and Elizabethan pulpit brought from Herefordshire. There are two incised alabaster slabs of the Huband family close to the altar dating from about 1560. The rather nice perpendicular tower can be seen from many positions along the walk.

Re-join the footpath on the south side of the hedge, where an extensive view of part of Arrow Valley Park gives a good idea of how the Redditch agricultural landscape once looked. Redditch is situated in a 'bowl' and this can also be seen from this viewpoint. Walk into Ipsley Church Lane which is peaceful and delightful, enclosed by a mixture of trees. At the bottom of the lane on the left is Ipsley Mill House, with a Victorian letter-box in the garden wall. Climb over the stile on to the area which was once part of Ipsley Mill Pond. Ipsley Mill once stood to the left before it was demolished in the early 1960's. The whole of this area was water which worked the Mill and fed the Mill Stream - to be seen a little later. Some of the weirs and sluices can be seen - 100 yards to the right - across the tipped area.

After the stile turn left before the footbridge towards Old Forge and Washford. The footpath becomes rather rougher over the next few yards but is well worth the effort. Walk adjacent to a brick wall which retains the mill stream, with the River Arrow on your right. When you are adjacent to a large oak look back to the left and see Ipsley Church on the hill, a scene which has not changed for many years. The spire of St. Stephen's Church in Church Green can be seen to the right.

Walk adjacent to the hawthorn on the left which denotes the Mill Stream, through the old allotment site, though if you wish to make the walk slightly longer follow the telegraph poles and turn left (as shown on map). The proposed line of Old Forge Drive will cross the old allotment site in this area. Whichever way you go, if the time of year and the weather are right, the fantastic smell of wild garlic growing on the river banks will waft in on the breeze. If time is on your side sit down by the bank and absorb the tranquility and peace of the scene and you may be lucky to see a kingfisher flash by. Also note how the river bank is eroding and the stabilizing by natural regeneration of the native Alder and the introduced Snowberry.

Cross the small footbridge, turn right and walk along the river bank through the Dogs Mercury and Wild Garlic. You should take care when walking on some of the banks as they are crumbling away. Enter into the field and again follow the hedgeline on the left. You can see the Sewage Works and also the Woodrow Estate to the right.

Cross the ditch and enter Arrow Valley Park playing fields, turn left towards the housing, go down the bank and left again. This is the route of the Old Roman Road of Icknield Street. The hedges are very old and delightful, particularly in flower. Turn right to the subway past the last house. We now leave the rural environment and walk through Matchborough housing which continues the pleasant walk.

Emerge from the subway and cross the stream via the footbridge. This stream is more or less on its existing line and has been incorporated into the housing layout although some of the poorer vegetation has been cleared. Along the length of the stream pollarded willows may be seen; these were used for making baskets and hurdles and were grown on trunks to prevent cattle grazing the rods. Walk across the roads, pass Matchborough West Meeting Rooms and the school to the right. The path leads between the housing and open space back across the stream, following the signs to Matchborough Centre.

If you have enough energy and time it is well worth walking up to the top of Matchborough Hill through the Winter Gardens, behind the centre and have an aerial view of the route you have walked.