

Walk 6

Leckhampton's Transport & Trackways

(approx. 1 hour)

The start of this walk is a little way from the bottom of Leckhampton Road and the Norwood Arms. Make your way uphill and stop by a brick wall between the junctions of Leckhampton Road with Old Station Drive and Leckhampton Place.

1. This brick wall is the parapet of an old railway bridge. From here you can look down to where the station buildings once stood. The Banbury to Cheltenham railway line opened here in June 1881 and linked Leckhampton and South Cheltenham to the much wider national network. The line was taken over by Great Western Railway in 1897 after which platforms were extended and a second track put in for express trains. Over 10,000 people a year used this station in its heyday: day trippers, holiday makers, everyday passengers and during WWII, evacuees, injured personnel and prisoners of war. It also saw considerable

freight movements: 'banana specials' from Southampton Docks, 'pigeon specials', coal from South Wales, cattle, machinery and all manner of goods and raw materials. Over the years, the station name changed from 'Leckhampton' to 'Cheltenham South & Leckhampton' in 1906, and finally 'Cheltenham Leckhampton' in 1952. The network was nationalised into British Railways in 1948 and this station and section of line was closed to passengers in October 1962. The site has been completely redeveloped.

Walk up Leckhampton Road to the pedestrian crossing near the junction of Moorend Road, and cross over. Stop at the junction of Moorend Road, Leckhampton Road and Hall Road.

2. Even well into the 19th century, Leckhampton was a largely agricultural settlement with a patchwork of fields, each named on old maps. Many new roads in the late 19th century followed much older field boundaries. Here we can see some of those old boundaries in Moorend Road which ran around Moorend Farm fields. Notice how straight Leckhampton Road is in comparison. Why do you think that might be? Walk on to find out!

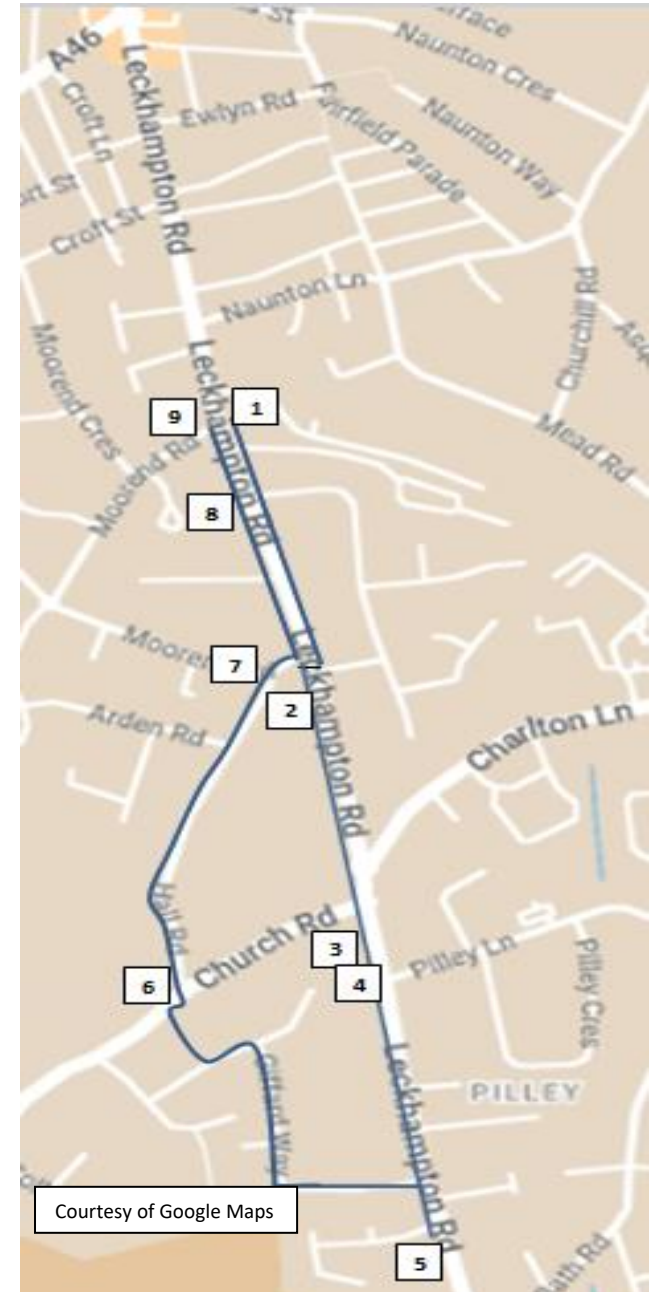


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Carry on up Leckhampton Road to the corner of Church Road, and stop by the pillar box.

3. There has been varied transport activity here over time. In the latter part of the 19th century, there was a weighbridge here as well as an 'all-in-one' drinking fountain, trough and bowl to quench the thirst of passing people, horses and dogs. The route to Charlton Kings is an old trackway but the passage of carts and animals heavily eroded unsealed surfaces and to maintain them, tolls were collected. Housing the gatekeeper, a turnpike house once stood on the corner diagonally opposite, near the Charlton Lane junction. To its right was the Malvern Inn (now private), a stop for the first form of public transport in Leckhampton. From 1890 horse-drawn buses ran past here hourly from

Cheltenham. Despite their popularity, they were replaced by electric trams in 1905. Running on rails to their terminus further up the hill at the junction with Old Bath Road, the trams continued until 1930, by which time motor



Courtesy of Google Maps

buses were also servicing the same routes, but more quickly and flexibly. Buses still operate in Leckhampton, the route having changed little over the years.

Walk a little further up Leckhampton Road, and pause opposite the junction of Pilley Lane.

4. On the opposite corner there had been a car showroom for about a century. In 1937 a stylish Art Deco building was erected here for the Leckhampton Motor Company, run by Victor Nicholls. Reflecting his love of cars, he named one of his children Austin. From 1990 John Wilkins Cars traded here in a red-brick car showroom; that building was demolished in 2024. The boom in private car ownership in the 20th century was reflected in the establishment of several car mechanics' workshops and petrol stations in Leckhampton, which have now gone.

Continue walking uphill and stop at the entrance of Leckhampton Views.

5. In 1810 The Gloucester & Cheltenham Railway Company opened a line through Cheltenham up to this point; it was extended the following year from Cheltenham to Gloucester. It was a tram-road of horse-drawn wagons on rails, with rails flanged rather than wheels so any wagon owner could use the rail system for a fee. The section to Leckhampton was primarily conceived for use by the hilltop stone quarries, but was also used to transport other goods to hilltop communities. A track was created alongside the rails, which later became Leckhampton Road; that's why the road is straight. Behind the metal railing here the footpath that runs parallel to Leckhampton Road was the path of another section of the quarry tram-road, albeit an 'incline' system using gravity to move full and empty wagons over rails, transporting stone from the quarries to this spot where a stone-yard, workshops, stables, and even lime kilns were built. The quarry ceased trading in 1926 and the Cheltenham Caravan Company bought the site in 1938. A highly innovative company, it designed and built its own caravans. During WWII it made aircraft parts, but

the caravan business boomed again post-war and the company attended rallies all over Europe. In the 1970s a combination of factors led to its decline, and the Cheltenham Caravan Company ceased trading.

Walk back down Leckhampton Road, turning almost immediately left along Liddington Road, through to the top of Collum End Rise. Turn right down Giffard Way, left onto Thompson Drive, right onto the footpath and down to Church Road. Cross the road and stop by the War Memorial.

6. Here you are on intersection of two ancient routes: you've just walked down a footpath, part of an historic trackway off the hill (known locally as 'The Piece'), and also crossed Church Road, documented as far back as the 15th century. Charlton Lane is part of the same route as that trackway. In the 16th & 17th centuries Church Road was known to villagers as 'Colum Strete' and was the route to the 'Collum' fields; common land between Leckhampton Road and Old Bath Road. This name is still reflected in 'Collum End Rise' which you have just walked down. Further down Church Road is the heart of older Leckhampton with its thatched cottages, church and former manor house. For centuries this historic thoroughfare has been used by travellers and locals, on foot or horseback, with carts or livestock. Let's follow Hall Road now; it's in line with the ancient path from the hill. En route there's a reminder of Leckhampton's market gardening past: allotments, just past the school.

Follow Hall Road back to Leckhampton Road and stop here.

7. Notice the Leckhampton stone wall on your right just by the road junctions. It's just one example of local stone; you would find many more much further down Leckhampton Road in some of the older buildings. Pause here to imagine seeing your first ever aeroplane flying over! In 1912, a touring aeroplane landed in a field off Old Bath Road. The local press reported that 'many Cheltonians had not yet seen an aeroplane' and the town was 'all a-gog with excitement'. Over 2,000 people gathered in the field to see

it and after a couple of hours, it took off towards Cirencester. The following year there were three more aviation events in that same field which became known as "The Aviation Ground" or "The Aeroplane Field".

Don't cross at the pedestrian crossing on Leckhampton Road, but walk downhill to the old railway bridge where you started.

8. You may have noticed that the footpath on this side is lower than the road itself. This is because it was the path of the horse-drawn tram-road from the stone-yard further uphill; as mentioned at point 5, the tram-road preceded this part of Leckhampton Road and drew its course. It also opened up a new route into rapidly expanding Cheltenham and was a catalyst for the expansion of the Bath Road area, attracting trades, workshops, businesses and new residents. Long after the tram-road has gone, its legacy remains in how the area developed.

Stop at the railway bridge on Leckhampton Road, on the opposite side of the road to where you started.

9. Painted on the bridge here is "BCL 106-12", referencing the Banbury Cheltenham Line that once ran underneath. The house on the corner of Moorend Road behind the bridge wall was built after the railway closed; an older one was demolished in the 1870s to make way for the railway. Opposite is the entrance of Leckhampton Place. Due to excavations for local potteries, a lake was formed where houses are now, just out of sight from here. 'Liddington Lake' opened to the public in 1893 and was a very popular leisure destination. On one day in 1897, over 2,300 people passed through its gate to enjoy a day out, hiring a rowing boat or canoe or even riding on a mini steam-ship. After passing into private ownership, the lake was gradually, but completely, filled in.

You are now back at the start of the route, having learnt a little about the trackways, trains, buses, tram wagons, passenger trams, cars, caravans, and even boats and 'planes of Leckhampton!