

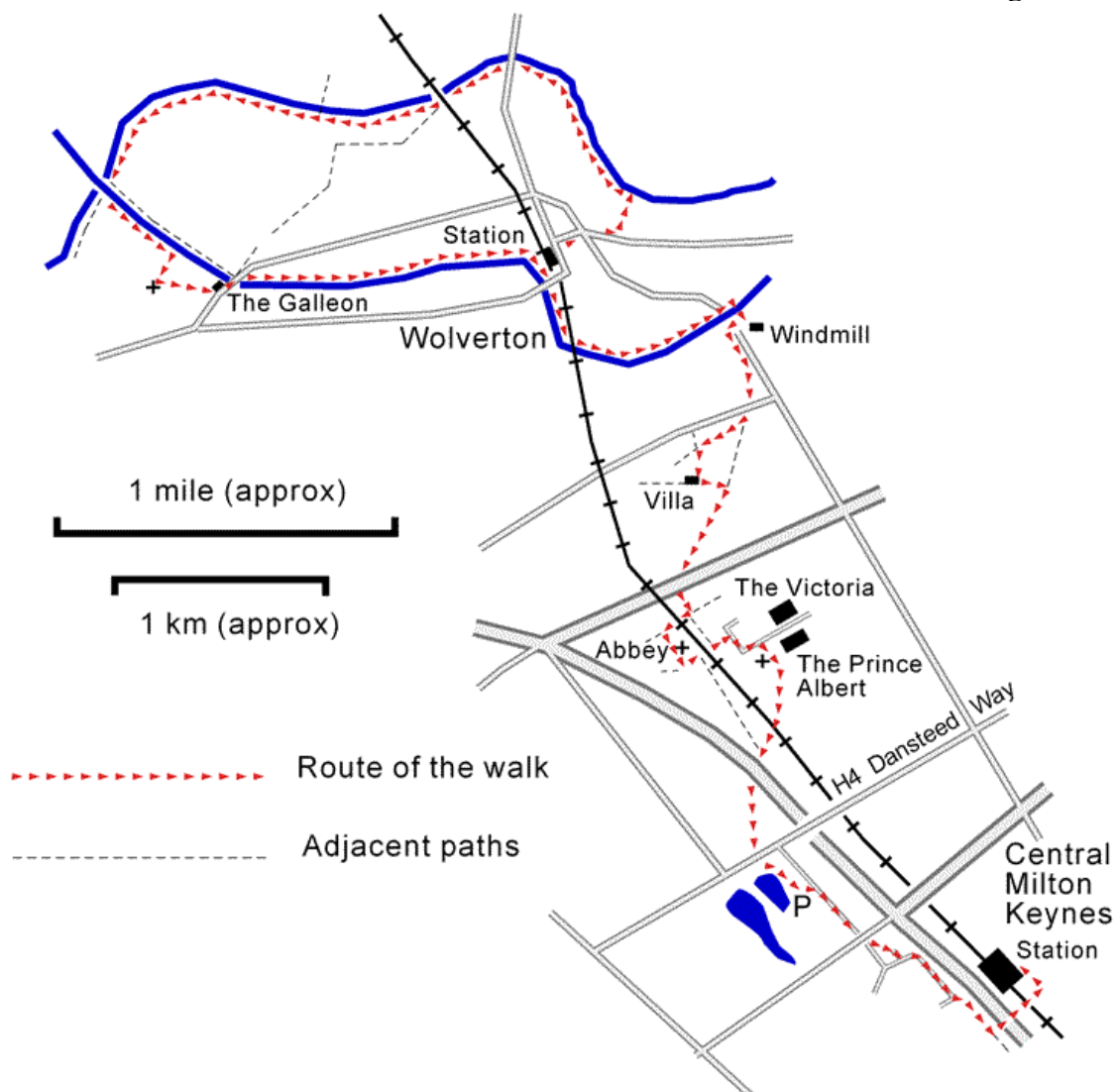
## WOLVERTON to MILTON KEYNES (via LOUGHTON VALLEY)

This walk goes through attractive parkland and carefully preserved countryside, along a river and a canal, passing two canal aqueducts, a windmill, a Roman villa, an historic abbey and the famous concrete cows. There are a couple of slightly spooky tunnels.

There is an optional loop at the beginning. (At present this is not at its best, during construction work, but it is still pleasant and interesting walking.) Those who wish to do the shorter walk can join the canal towpath directly from Wolverton Station. (For the short walk, start at "Second start".)

In very wet weather the loop by the river may be flooded, and impassable, but apart from a short section at Old Wolverton the whole route is on gravel or tarmac "redways" and "leisure routes", part of Milton Keynes' unique cycle and pedestrian system, so can be done comfortably when other routes would be unpleasantly muddy. (However, you can usually walk on the grass if you wish.)

Minor route change 2008



## Distances

Wolverton loop	3.5 miles (5.5 km)
Wolverton to Milton Keynes Central	4 miles (6.5 km)
Total	7.5 miles (12 km)

No significant hills.

## Travel

There are generally two trains an hour from Milton Keynes Central Station to Wolverton. Wolverton and Milton Keynes are on the main railway line between Euston and Birmingham, which also serves Harrow, Watford, Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Northampton, among other places.

Milton Keynes is at the hub of a network of bus services, with good services from Aylesbury, Leighton Buzzard, Bedford, Cambridge and Northampton.

Travel information for Buckinghamshire is available on [www.buckscc.gov.uk/travelinfo](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/travelinfo) or by telephoning 0871 200 22 33.

For those who have to use a car to come to the walk, there is a small car park by Bradwell Road, off H4 Danstead Way, not far from Milton Keynes station. From there, follow the last few lines of our route description to Milton Keynes station, and take a train to Wolverton.

## Refreshments

There are a number of pubs, cafes and shops near Wolverton Station (turn right from the station and go over the bridge). Tescos, close to Wolverton Station, has a (fairly basic) café, and customer toilets. This being an urban environment, “nipping behind a bush” is not an option!

Pubs: The Galleon by the canal at Old Wolverton. The Victoria Inn and the Prince Albert, just off the route in Bradwell Village.

At Milton Keynes station there are cafes in the square (with toilets presumably for customers only), and toilets on platform 3.

The main shopping centre is a mile up Midsummer Boulevard, opposite the station, with many eating places there and between the station and the centre.

Please always be considerate about muddy boots in pubs etc; either take them off, or cover them up. Never eat or drink your own provisions on pub premises (including the garden, if there is one).

## Ordnance Survey Maps

The whole of this walk is shown on Explorer 192 *Buckingham & Milton Keynes*, or you may like to use the Official City Map at a scale of 1:10000 (approx), published by GEOprojects (UK) Ltd., on behalf of English Partnerships.

## Route

**Milton Keynes was planned as Britain’s first new city; it was intended to be, and is, much larger than any previous new town. In 1997 it became a unitary authority.**

**The site was first announced in 1966. The government “selected the name of a tiny village engulfed by the new city, because the three old towns due for absorption (Bletchley, Wolverton and Stony Stratford) all seemed touchy about local pride”. From the start it was the intention to preserve the integrity of the towns and villages within Milton Keynes, to retain something of a rural landscape between**

**the settlements, and to create “linear parks” which would follow natural features such as rivers. Loughton Valley is an example of such a park.**

**It was argued that it would be impossible to plan a city satisfactorily for 100% car use, and various revolutionary layouts and transport schemes were considered, including a monorail system. In the end, the city finished up with a basic grid pattern and conventional public transport. The redways, described as “Britain’s largest urban footway/cycling network”, were named when a secretary accidentally typed “redway” instead of “pedway” which was the name originally intended.**

From Wolverton Station cross Stratford Road, turn left on the pavement then immediate right into Newport Road. There is a roundabout ahead, and just before you reach that the footpath becomes a redway. Look for the two yellow poles at the beginning and end of each redway.

Follow the redway as it curves left under Grafton Street and at a junction in the redway turn left again to rejoin Newport Road.

Cross the road, turn right and proceed 50 yards to pass a picnic site sign.

Shortly after the sign turn left, and immediately take the first footpath to the right, and continue 200 yards to a junction in the path, with a Cycle Route No. 6 sign pointing to the left.

Follow the sign to the left, and cross a footbridge over a creek.

With the river on your right you will follow this path for 3/4 mile (1.2 km), passing under a road bridge and a railway viaduct.

**The river is the Great Ouse, which rises near Silverstone in Northamptonshire and flows into the Wash.**

**As you pass under the railway viaduct, look up and note that it was built in two stages, further lines being added when traffic increased.**

**Just after the railway viaduct there is a panel giving information about the Manor Park Floodplain Forest project, which is taking place here. The site looks raw at present, but the intention is to provide a much improved environment while supplying vital construction materials for Milton Keynes.**

Just after the viaduct, turn right over a footbridge over another creek and resume the riverside walk. After 400 yards ignore the cycle route crossing the river to the right. A mile after the railway viaduct you come to the canal, far above you, as it crosses the river on an aqueduct. As you approach you will see an information board.

**You will probably want to go up on to the canal towpath and walk on to the aqueduct, after which you should come back down again.**

Go through the cattle creep under the canal (see the information board) and turn left along the track parallel with the canal bank.

**The lock gates set into the ground mark the original course of the canal, descending into the valley by a series of locks, before the construction of the first aqueduct in 1805, replaced after its collapse by the present Iron Trunk in 1811.**

Ignore the track forking up to the builder’s yard on the canal bank, go through the gate on the right and continue ahead, to the right of the fence, to gates.

Bear right, towards the church, looking for bumps in the ground where the village of Wolverton used to be.

**What is now called Old Wolverton was plain Wolverton until the London and Birmingham Railway took over the parish name when it build the works and adjoining workers' houses on nearby fields in the 1830s and 1840s. Old Wolverton had been an ordinary midland village until the sixteenth century, when enclosure of its open fields led to the abandonment of most of the village. Today just the church (much renovated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), rectory and Wolverton House remain, but you can see traces of the mediaeval roadways and grassy building platforms of the deserted village near to the church.**

To your left is the much-altered motte of a small castle, to your right is a seat with a fine view of the Ouse Valley and of more bumps in the ground in the field below.

From the seat, follow the tarmac path behind you to join Old Wolverton Road, passing an information board near the exit from the field.

Turn left along Old Wolverton Road for a few yards, past The Galleon pub, cross the canal, then turn left, go down to the canal towpath and turn left again, to walk along the towpath with the canal on your right.

Shortly you pass under a traditional arched canal bridge, number 69.

On the right is the old Wolverton Railway Works, largely screened by trees, and on the left is more modern industrial development.

**The Wolverton Works were opened in 1838. The greenfield site was selected by the London & Birmingham Railway Company because it was close to the half way point on their new trunk line. Here, at the Grand Central Station (which was *not* at the site of the present Wolverton station), engines were changed and passengers were given a short break for refreshments and toilet facilities, neither of which were available on trains at that time. It thus made sense to establish a works for the building and maintenance of the railway's locomotives beside the station. During the 1850s the building and repair of carriages was moved to Wolverton and in the 1870s locomotive work was moved to Crewe, leaving Wolverton to concentrate on carriages (and some wagons).**

**Part of the works was apparently still operational until very recently, so this was the oldest continuously functioning railway factory in Britain, possibly in the world. It is now largely derelict (though well screened from the canal by trees) and parts of it are being redeveloped.**

After nearly three quarters of a mile (1 km) there are two flat bridges, taking sidings from the main line into the railway works, a new footbridge, and then a high road bridge.

(For food or toilets in Wolverton, go up the steps and turn right. Wolverton Station is to the left; otherwise continue along the canal.)

## **Second start.**

Those who wish to skip the first loop via the river and canal should turn right out of the station, up Stratford Road and over the railway, to a gap in the brick wall, then down the steps to the towpath, and turn left.

A little further on, look across the canal to your right, and note the mural on the brick wall, commemorating Wolverton's railway heritage.

As the canal emerges above the surrounding countryside, look for the sails of Bradwell Windmill above trees ahead. Just before you get to the windmill the canal passes over a dual carriageway.

**This aqueduct was built in 1991, surely the most recent in Britain.**

Cross the canal on the footbridge.

If you wish to look more closely at the windmill (which is not open to the public), from the bridge go straight ahead to a minor road, which cross, and turn right, ignore a crossing redway/bridleway, then after 50 yards turn left on to a path to the windmill.

To resume the walk return to where the redway crosses the minor road, and re-cross the dual carriageway on a bridge parallel with the viaduct.

**This part of the redway is known as the Old Railway Walk, and it follows the line of the former Wolverton to Newport Pagnell branch line.**

At the far end of the bridge turn right and follow the path as it curves to the right, under the bridge you have just crossed (you may find it quieter to use the horsetrail, to the right of the fence, not the asphalt path). You now have the dual carriageway on your left as you go slightly uphill.

Where the asphalt path crosses the horsetrail follow the asphalt path to the right, as it meanders round some boggy ground with Loughton Brook on your right, and passes under a road.

Walk alongside the stream 100 yards until you come to the first bridge on your right.

Cross the bridge and follow the footpath gradually up hill to a path crossing.

Bear left to the site of the Roman Villa, marked by a low hedge.

**None of the stonework you see is Roman. All of the building materials were "robbed out" in the post Roman period and recycled into other buildings. The site was identified by the marks of foundation trenches in the ground, and these stones have been laid to show where walls were. There are some information boards, though when we last checked they had been somewhat defaced.**

On leaving the Villa turn left on the redway, cross a long bridge and turn right to resume the walk along the side of Loughton Brook. After 500 yards, note the famous concrete cows on the right, just before you pass under a road.

Continue 100 yards, then turn right to go under the railway for 100 yards, then left at the sign to the Abbey.

There is an information board at the side of the path, describing Bradwell Abbey

**Bradwell Abbey was a Benedictine priory, founded in 1154.**

**It fell into disrepair even before the dissolution of the monasteries.**

**It was eventually replaced by a farm, which utilised some of the building material, just as the Abbey had probably used building material from the Villa.**

**The only significant part to survive is the small 14th century Chapel of Our Lady of Bradwell, which contains some important wall paintings of the period.**

**Also on the site is the City Discovery Centre, established to promote a wider understanding and appreciation of the history and development of Milton Keynes. It includes an interpretation centre, library, lecture theatre, and shop.**

Ramblers' Association: Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area

*The centre is mainly open for organised educational visits. The Gatehouse tea room may be open to the public on Sunday afternoons, but don't count on it. The chapel is only open for guided tours, but the centre plans to allow inspection of the wall paintings by remote TV camera.*

Go past the chapel (which is some distance to the left) to the courtyard in front of the Discovery Centre.

**If in the courtyard you turn left and go between two buildings you will see an information board on a door on your right.**

To resume, from the courtyard, with a pond on your right, walk up the drive, turn sharp left past a red brick house and go along the path with the car park on your right, to a bridleway and parallel redway either side of a hedge.

Turn left and pass under the railway line.

With a playing field on your left go ahead to Abbey Road.

**We are now in Old Bradwell – one of the villages absorbed by the new city, but still retaining much of a village atmosphere.**

Turn right, and then left into Vicarage Road.

After 100 yards look for the turning on the right signposted to the church, with the Youth Hostel on the corner. (For the Victoria Inn and Prince Albert pub continue ahead here for 100 yards, otherwise turn right.).

Continue through the churchyard.

**The church of St Lawrence is the parish church for Bradwell. It has been much restored, but has two of the oldest bells in Buckinghamshire. It is normally locked.**

Turn right in front of houses and follow the footpath to cross a bridge over the railway.

**Note remnants of old ridge-and-furrow cultivation after you cross the railway.**

Cross a footbridge over the brook and at a T-junction of paths, turn left, following signs to Lodge Lake, to pass under the A5 underpass.

From here with the brook on your left, walk south over a red footbridge, and under another road bridge to bring you to Lodge Lake.

Follow the path round to the left, past the car park and continue ahead along Bradwell Road, passing the National Badminton Centre.

Immediately after passing under a road, take the path to the left, to go up Bignell Croft to a T-junction.

Turn left and follow the road as it bears right, to a T-junction with Redland Drive.

Turn left along the path, which you follow as it curves to the right, to a junction with a redway.

Turn left and cross the bridges over the A5, and the railway.

Turn left to Milton Keynes Station.

Original route by Grace Miles, adapted by Donald MacCallum