

hill (now marked by a single tree to your right) was called *lisdune* ('little hill') in a tenth-century charter. Despite its name, Little Hill provides almost panoramic views. The track you are on is part of an ancient route linking the Iron Age hill forts at Wychbury, Solcum Farm (Drakelow) and Kinver Edge. It was also an important link in the salt-way network during the Anglo-Saxon period. The hedge line at the end of the 500m path to your left marks the Pedmore-Hagley boundary and just in front of that boundary is the probable site of an Anglo-Saxon fort or fortified settlement known as *sicanbyrig* (largely ploughed out in the early twentieth century). The Old Swinford parish boundary lies in the opposite direction, at the far edge of Stourbridge Golf Course.

Burys Hill to Norton Covert. Continue westwards along the hill-top path for another 900m until you reach its junction with County Lane (10) on the right. This lane follows the line of a first-century Roman road linking Droitwich (*Salinae*) to the Greensforge marching camps. It later came to mark parts of the Pedmore and Old Swinford parish boundaries as well as the county boundary here. Continue down County Lane. The hillocks to your right are glacial sand and gravel deposits dating from about 25,000 years ago. Cross the A451 (11).

Norton Covert to Mary Stevens Park. Turn right here and follow Norton Road (A451) for 1.2km to Mary Stevens Park. This part of Norton Road traverses a gently-sloping area of former moorland, crossed by numerous small streams that eventually drained, via the (now culverted) Withybrook, into the Park's 'Heath Pool'.

The Western Boundary

Total 9.5km. Difficulty: easy; some moderate inclines

Mary Stevens Park to Norton Covert. Take the path around the pool until you reach the Park's corner exit onto Norton Road (A451). Cross the road where safe and proceed left (south) along Norton Road for 1.2km, passing Norton Covert (wooded area) and a cluster of large houses on your right, until you reach the bridle path (11).

Norton Covert to The Broadway. Take the bridle path (up the slope). Like County Lane behind you, this also follows the line of the Roman road and parish boundary. Norton Covert, the wooded area to your right, lies within a disused sand and gravel quarry and is now a *Site of Importance for Nature Conservation*. It, and the aforementioned glacial hillocks, were collectively known as *Wolfeswosne* in 1300 AD, and formed one of the boundary landmarks of the Royal Forest of Kinver. The Old English word *wrosne* meant 'contorted ground'. Continue up along the bridle path (Sandy Lane), passing Sandy Road, to The Broadway (12).

The Broadway to Westwood Avenue. Continue ahead along the unmade track, Sandy Lane (which is, from this point, also erroneously known as Roman Road). After a few metres, the Lane veers slightly to the right (east) while the real Roman road continues straight on under the fields. Follow Sandy Lane, alongside Clent View Road, for about 800m. This segment of the track is part of an eighteenth-century turnpike road linking Kidderminster to Dudley and was, in fact, originally called Dudley Road. The Roman road runs along the hedge line on the opposite

side of the fields, and the county and parish boundary lies roughly half-way to the hedge line. This straight section of boundary dates from the Parliamentary Enclosures, although a less-formalised boundary must have existed along the ridge line before that date. Continue along Sandy Lane to the top of Westwood Avenue.

Westwood Avenue to Dunsley Road. Turn down the unmade track (Swinford Lane) to your left and, after a few metres (13), turn right into Little Iverley Covert (called Whittington Covert in the nineteenth century). The path through the trees is fairly indistinct, but a depression in the ground (the remains of an old quarry) will confirm you are on the right route. You are now back on the parish boundary line, which also marked the edge of the Royal Forest of Kinver in 1300 AD. At that date, the Great Perambulation of the forest noted a *croked apeltre* ('crooked apple-tree') somewhere in the vicinity of Swinford Lane or a short distance to the north. Continue straight ahead (northwards) through the trees, to the opposite edge of Little Iverley Covert, and then along the fenced path until you emerge into the southern-most of the Three Fields. There are stunning views over the Stour valley and towards the Malvern and Clent Hills. Follow the path abutting the Lime trees (i.e. the parish boundary), or along the ridge, to Dunsley Road (14).

Dunsley Road to Bridgnorth Road. The boundary line crosses the road at the hill-crest. It is marked, on the far side of the road, by a set of boundary dykes extending north along the wooded ridge. The dykes are known to be *at least* one-thousand years old but may actually be much older. Although the path along the ridge is private land, it is well used by dog walkers. A public footpath starts about 200m to the west (15) and runs parallel to the ridge.

Bridgnorth Road to the River Stour. The public footpath emerges on the A458 (Bridgnorth Road) and here we must take a detour left along the road, right along Wollaston Road, and then left into Twickenham Court (16). The parish boundary line continues behind the houses to your left. The lower end of the cul-de-sac provides access to a footpath which follows the Old Swinford parish, and county, boundary for about 500m. This is the line of the now culverted Dividale Brook (so named because it used to mark the division between Worcestershire and Staffordshire). At the lower end of the footpath, the boundary continues straight ahead to the Stour. We are obliged to turn left instead, to join the river Stour some 300m west of our parish boundary (17).

From the River Stour to Mary Stevens Park. Cross the bridge and follow the canal towpath to your right for about 500m. Shortly after the aqueduct which carries the canal over the river you will encounter the Wordsley Canal Junction bridge (18). Cross it, and follow the canal towpath straight ahead for about 3km until it emerges in Canal Street (19). Turn right at the far end of the street and then take the underpass into Lower High Street. At the top of the hill, near the town clock, turn right into Market Street. Proceed straight ahead, via another underpass, and along Worcester Street (20). At the roundabout, bear left (via a zebra crossing) to the Park's main gate.

If you have enjoyed your walk through Stourbridge's Green Belt, why not keep up to date with efforts to preserve this area for future generations by visiting:

<https://www.stourbridgegreenbelt.co.uk>

Beating the Bounds

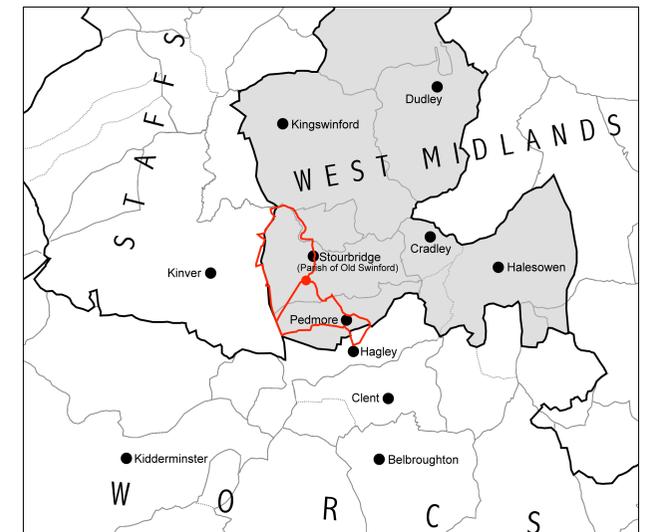
A walk around Stourbridge's Green Belt

Beating the Bounds was an ancient yearly custom whereby members of the local community would walk the boundary of the local parish. The practice has its roots in seventh-century religious 'Rogation Day' processions but, in later centuries, it became an event that served mainly to remind parishioners of the extent of parish lands.

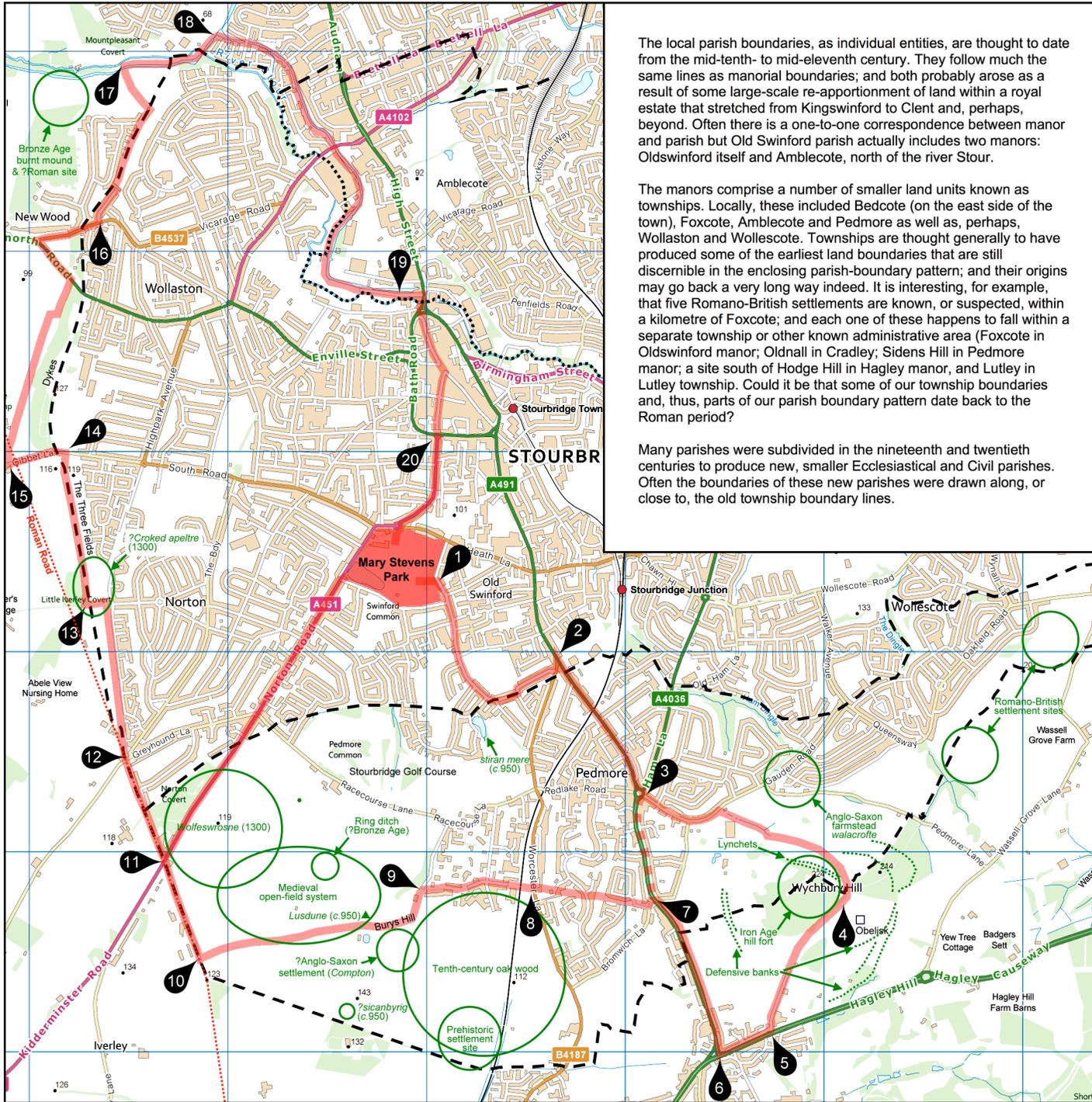
Land was a valuable asset and, before maps became widely available, such perambulations were the most efficient way to record the position of parish boundaries in collective memory. To help them remember, the village's boys were made to beat the parish-boundary markers with sticks; and they were sometimes beaten themselves as they reached each marker.

Stourbridge resides within the ancient parish of Old Swinford*, an area which has strong historic links with Kingswinford to the north and the parish of Pedmore to the south (see the map below). Large parts of the Old Swinford and Pedmore parish boundaries still lie within a rural landscape.

This leaflet describes two circular walks, covering parts of the parishes' southern, and the whole of the western, boundary. Each begins and ends at Mary Stevens Park (red dot) but, as they intersect at **Norton Covert**, the walks can be combined into one large circular route. Our trek through Stourbridge's historic landscape takes in scenic views and fascinating ancient sites. Stout footwear is recommended for both walks.



* Traditionally spelled as two words in ecclesiastical contexts



The local parish boundaries, as individual entities, are thought to date from the mid-tenth- to mid-eleventh century. They follow much the same lines as manorial boundaries; and both probably arose as a result of some large-scale re-apportionment of land within a royal estate that stretched from Kingswinford to Clent and, perhaps, beyond. Often there is a one-to-one correspondence between manor and parish but Old Swinford parish actually includes two manors: Oldswinford itself and Amblecote, north of the river Stour.

The manors comprise a number of smaller land units known as townships. Locally, these included Bedcote (on the east side of the town), Foxcote, Amblecote and Pedmore as well as, perhaps, Wollaston and Wollescote. Townships are thought generally to have produced some of the earliest land boundaries that are still discernible in the enclosing parish-boundary pattern; and their origins may go back a very long way indeed. It is interesting, for example, that five Romano-British settlements are known, or suspected, within a kilometre of Foxcote; and each one of these happens to fall within a separate township or other known administrative area (Foxcote in Oldswinford manor; Oldnall in Cradley; Sidens Hill in Pedmore manor; a site south of Hodge Hill in Hagley manor, and Lutley in Lutley township. Could it be that some of our township boundaries and, thus, parts of our parish boundary pattern date back to the Roman period?

Many parishes were subdivided in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to produce new, smaller Ecclesiastical and Civil parishes. Often the boundaries of these new parishes were drawn along, or close to, the old township boundary lines.

The Southern Boundary

Total 10km. Difficulty: average; one moderate and one steep hill

Mary Stevens Park to Wychbury. Climb the grassy slope behind the play area, up to the Park's Love Lane exit (1) and turn right. The hill was referred to in a charter of c.950 as the *dune* ('flat-topped hill surmounted by settlement'); the settlement being the forerunner of Oldswinford and its open fields (large area to your left) which seem then to have belonged to Pedmore. Walk to the far end of Love Lane, but note that, as it bends to the left, the road enters a dip. This is part of an old stream valley that fed a pool in which fresh-water sturgeon were bred during the Anglo-Saxon period. The pool survives at the lower end of Peartree Drive (on your right). At the T-junction, turn left along Oakleigh Road. The Oldswinford-Pedmore parish boundary runs behind the houses on your right. At the junction, carefully cross Worcester Lane and veer left for a few metres before turning right onto the A491, Hagley Road (2). This follows the course of an ancient salt-way (a major road for the distribution of Droitwich salt — an important resource). Follow it for about 800m to the roundabout and take the second exit onto Pedmore Lane (3). After about 600m bear right onto the footpath to Wychbury Hill fort.

To omit steep, muddy climb up Wychbury Hill (and about 2km) take the third, rather than the second, exit at the roundabout, reaching Bromwich Lane on your right after about 700m.

Wychbury Hill Fort to Bromwich Lane. The fort dates from the Iron Age and lies in, or close to, a border zone which separated the Cornovii and Dobunni tribes. While the fort's exact purpose is unknown, it was probably built as a toll-collection point or staging post for the aforementioned salt-way. The Pedmore-Hagley parish boundary runs through the centre of the fort, and this may reflect a division of royal land some time in the late Anglo-Saxon period. From here the boundary runs westwards from the fort but we must, instead, continue in a south-westerly direction (keeping the obelisk on our left) along the path (4) to Monument Lane. Descend to the A456 (5). Turn right to the traffic lights and right again (6) along the A491 (the aforementioned salt-way). After about 700m turn left into Bromwich Lane (7).

Bromwich Lane to Ounty John Lane. After walking a few metres along Bromwich Lane, take the public footpath on your right (which starts to the left of Ferndale Park) emerging, after about 800m, on Worcester Lane (8). In the tenth century, a large oak wood occupied much of the land to your left. The path you are on seems to have marked its northern edge. The Pedmore-Hagley parish boundary, 800m to your left, marked its southern edge. An important prehistoric settlement site abuts this boundary, on the other side of the railway line, although much of its archaeology has now been destroyed by development. Continue westwards along the path, via the rail bridge. Once in the residential Quarry Park Road, take its western branch (straight ahead), a short cul-de-sac which gives way to a public footpath leading to the top end of Ounty John Lane (9).

Ounty John Lane to Burys Hill. 'Ount' is an old word for a mole; the lane is named after an itinerant mole catcher who regularly camped there. Follow the sandy track up the hill and, at the junction, bear right up the slope of Burys Hill. The summit of the