

# Rickmansworth Waterways Trust

## Strolls from the Lock Number 14 – To Chandlers Cross via Cassiobury Park

Time approximately 3 hr 20 min

Distance 8 miles

From the Lock Centre, go up the ramp to Batchworth Lock on the Grand Union Canal, crossing over a small canal that used to lead to the railway station, the gas works and a gravel quarry. Continue along the towpath for about 3 miles, passing 3 further locks. After these, you will reach Ironbridge Lock at Cassiobury Park (1hr). Items of interest on this stretch of canal are the old distance markers on the left of the tow path, showing the distance to Braunston, one of the main hubs on the canal, and the old lock cottages, which used to house canal workers in the days when the canal was the main industrial conduit of the country. The canal linked the Midlands with the River Thames at Brentford, but more locally, was important for the paper making industry founded on the banks of the Rivers Colne, Chess and Gade. The importance of the canals was overtaken by the development of the railways and declined into oblivion between 1945 and the 1960s. Note the grooves in the iron posts on the corners of the bridges, where the tow ropes from horse drawn boats have cut into them. Horses were replaced by engines in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Initially steam engines were tried, but required too much space for coal at the expense of cargo, and were unreliable. However, the power generated did allow the use of ‘butties’, - towed boats without engines. Steam was replaced by diesel, and by the mid 1920s most narrow boats were using engines. The last working commercial horse-drawn narrow boats stopped in the 1960s.

Leave the towpath at Ironbridge Lock Bridge to follow a wide track (FP #30) which runs between the canal on the right and a golf course on the left. It crosses a small road and then the golf fairway (twice). The track enters Whippendell Wood, a SSSI designated site which has been wooded for at least 400years and thus is termed ‘ancient’. As part of Cassiobury Estate, this wood was owned by the Earls of Essex (until 1909) and managed for timber, firewood and game. Management is continued now by the local Council. The wood is noted especially for bluebells, which bloom in spring. Recent events include the first record in the UK of a rare fungus (1995) and filming of scenes in ‘Star Wars’. The Lime trees lining the track are reputed to have been planted in 1672, hence its name ‘Lime Walk’. After about ¾ mile from the lock, there is a signpost - turn off FP#30 and follow the route indicated to Chandlers Cross, until a small road is reached, and turn right. This is Rousebarn Lane - a sunken lane bounded by banks supporting many shade and damp-loving plants, designated a Countryside Heritage Site.

**Short cut:** it is possible to cross directly over the road here to enter Harrocks Wood. This will cut about a mile from the length of the walk. The path rejoins the route at the point where it exits the wood through a gate on the left.

**Main route:** In about ¼ mile Rousebarn Lane reaches a T junction at the settlement of Chandlers Cross. Turn left and left again (just before a road on the right) onto a footpath signposted to Croxley Green. However, just a few yards further on from here is a ‘Tin Tabernacle’. These prefabricated churches were made from corrugated iron sheets and erected mainly towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Once common, they are becoming increasingly unusual. The footpath leads into Harrocks Wood, maintained by the Woodland Trust. The wood contains several deep pits as a result of gravel and flint excavation. Coral root bittercress, a nationally rare plant, is found here. Go through the gate on the other side of the wood, where the path runs along the edge of a field and alpacas can be seen through the hedge. A gate leads to a small road which passes a wooden statue and ‘Oak Farm’, an old brick building. Later on, you pass a driveway on the R leading to the various buildings comprising York House School, of which the main building (with the clock turret) dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Turn left into Little Green Lane just before you reach the main road, then right just after Waterdell House. The gardens here are opened each year for charity. At the green of Croxley Green, cut diagonally across to where a footpath sign can be seen on the far side (FP#7). Follow this (it briefly becomes FP#5 later on) for about 10mins and at the bottom of the hill, turn right onto FP#2. Turn left in about 150yds (FP#1) and follow this to a bridge over the River Chess. Turn left to walk along the river bank and just before a sports field, follow the footpath (FP#29) to the right. This runs next to the fence around the grounds of The Royal Masonic School. In about 10mins you will get to a main road.

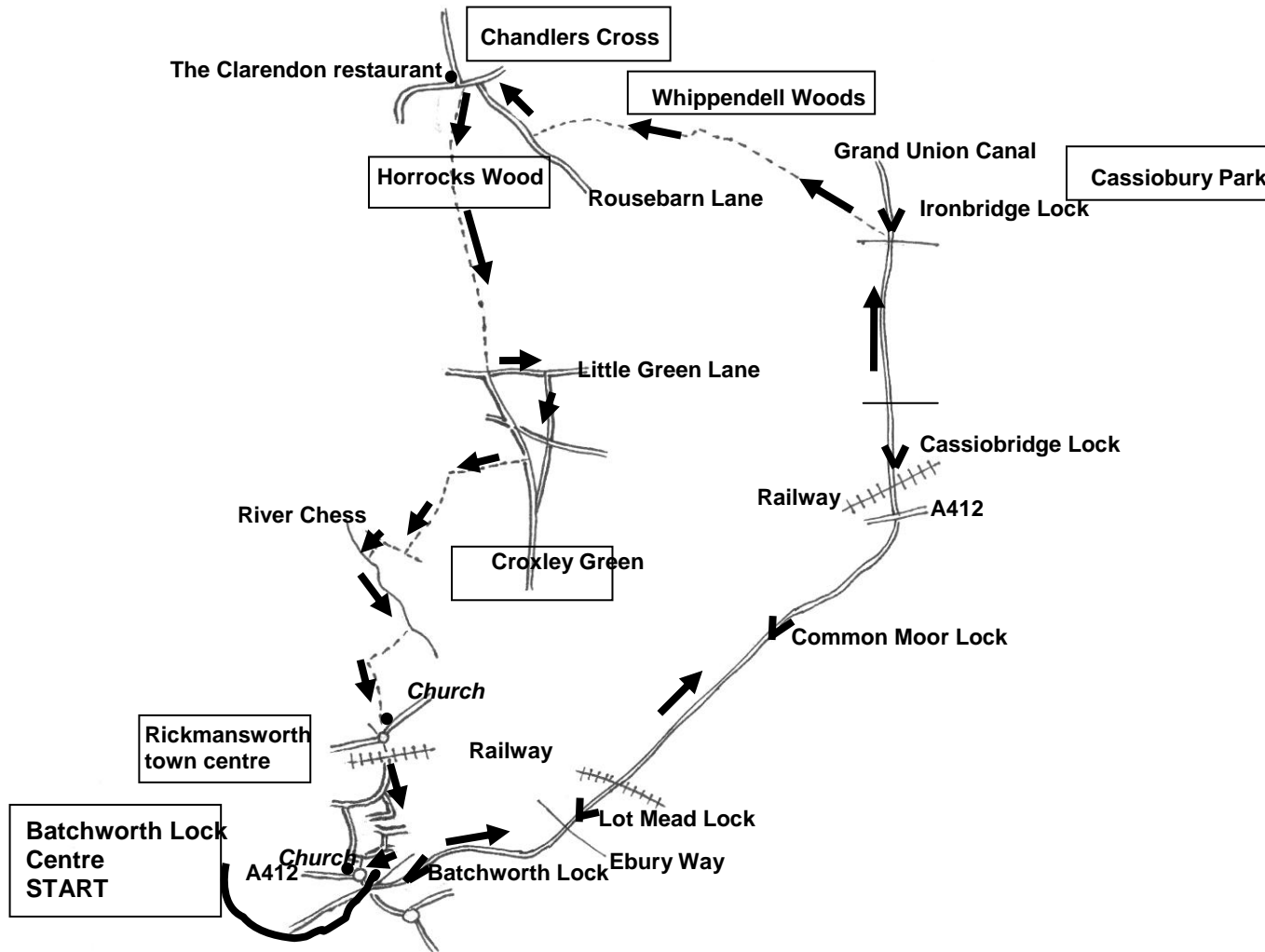
Cross this and go under the railway bridge. After about ¼mile, turn left into Talbot Road. Just after a sharp right hand bend, turn left, to pass a small row of houses to a ginnel between two houses and reach Norfolk Road. Turn right, then almost immediately left (Waters Drive), right (Skidmore Way) and left (Church Street) opposite the war memorial. Continue past the roundabout and over the River Chess. The next bridge crosses the canal, where you can see the Lock Centre on the left.

**These walks are written by Jillian Christensen and are provided free by The Rickmansworth Waterways Trust but a minimum donation of 20p is suggested to help support our education programme. Thank you!**

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Walk #14



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