

# Rickmansworth Waterways Trust

## Strolls from the Lock Number 3 – To Croxley Common Moor

**Time approximately 80minutes (40 mins via the shortened version)**

**Distance 3 miles (1.5 miles for shortened version)**

From the lock centre, turn left and follow the signpost directions to the Ebury Way. The lock to your right is the entrance to Salter's Cut, a canalised part of the River Chess. Samuel Salter built this in 1805 to connect his brewery (approximately where the gasometer is today) with the Grand Junction Canal, to take his beer to his other premises at Uxbridge. Later, coal was carried to the gas works (built 1851) at Town Wharf. When gravel and sand were extracted from the Colne valley between here and Croxley early in the last century, this arm of the canal was again used.

The wooden bridge spans the River Chess, and the weir here incorporates a fish ladder on the other side. The path skirts builder's merchants, from where a large tree containing a huge mistletoe can be seen on the far side. The manual lifting bridge at the entrance to the Chess Basin is a wide beam bascule bridge, a rarity on the Grand Union Canal. There used to be a lock on the far side of this, built in 1903, the entrance to a wharf where gravel and sand were loaded. This, and some of the other gravel pits are now filled in, but one, Sabeys Pool, still exists and is used for fishing. On the other side of the bridge is the Chess Basin, which was widened when the railway was built, now containing houseboats. Don't cross the bridge, but turn left and then right past a small car park, to join a footpath, which is separated from the Chess Basin by a wooden fence. Keep this to your right, and follow the Ebury Way signs.

On the land to your left was the original Rickmansworth station. This line from Watford, built by the London and North Western Railway, opened in 1862, but the original intention to extend the track and connect the LNWR at Watford with the GWR at Uxbridge never occurred. From 1871, coal arriving from the Midlands by train was transferred to the canal and so on to London. Watercress produced locally was taken to Watford market, thus the name 'watercress trains'. However, it was not a success, and the line closed to passengers in 1952 and to freight in 1967. Subsequently, the track bed was dedicated by the local council as a walk and cycleway and now forms part of the Sustrans National cycle route between Rickmansworth and Watford. You join the original track bed on the bridge passing over the canal. A little further on are many lakes on either side of the track, some of which were originally gravel pits and all now used for fishing.

You should be able to see a large medieval Tithe Barn amongst farm buildings to the left, although it is somewhat obscured. At least much of the roof, and a small part of the clapboard walls are visible. This barn is said to be one of the largest in the country, measuring 101ft by nearly 40ft, and 35ft high. Built at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century by St Albans Abbey, it was given later on to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, by John Caius and eventually passed to Hertfordshire County Council. It was renovated in the mid 1970's, but is now in need of repair. There is no access unless by prior arrangement.

The track now passes over the canal where a large access ramp descends to the canal towpath. **If you wish to return to the canal centre to shorten the walk, turn R onto the towpath here.** Otherwise, continue on the Ebury Way. The track goes under the Metropolitan railway and past an industrial estate to the right. To the left is the SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) of Croxley Common Moor. Go through the second gate onto this and follow the main path directly ahead where the footpath sign #17 directs to Common Moor/Canal/Croxley Green.

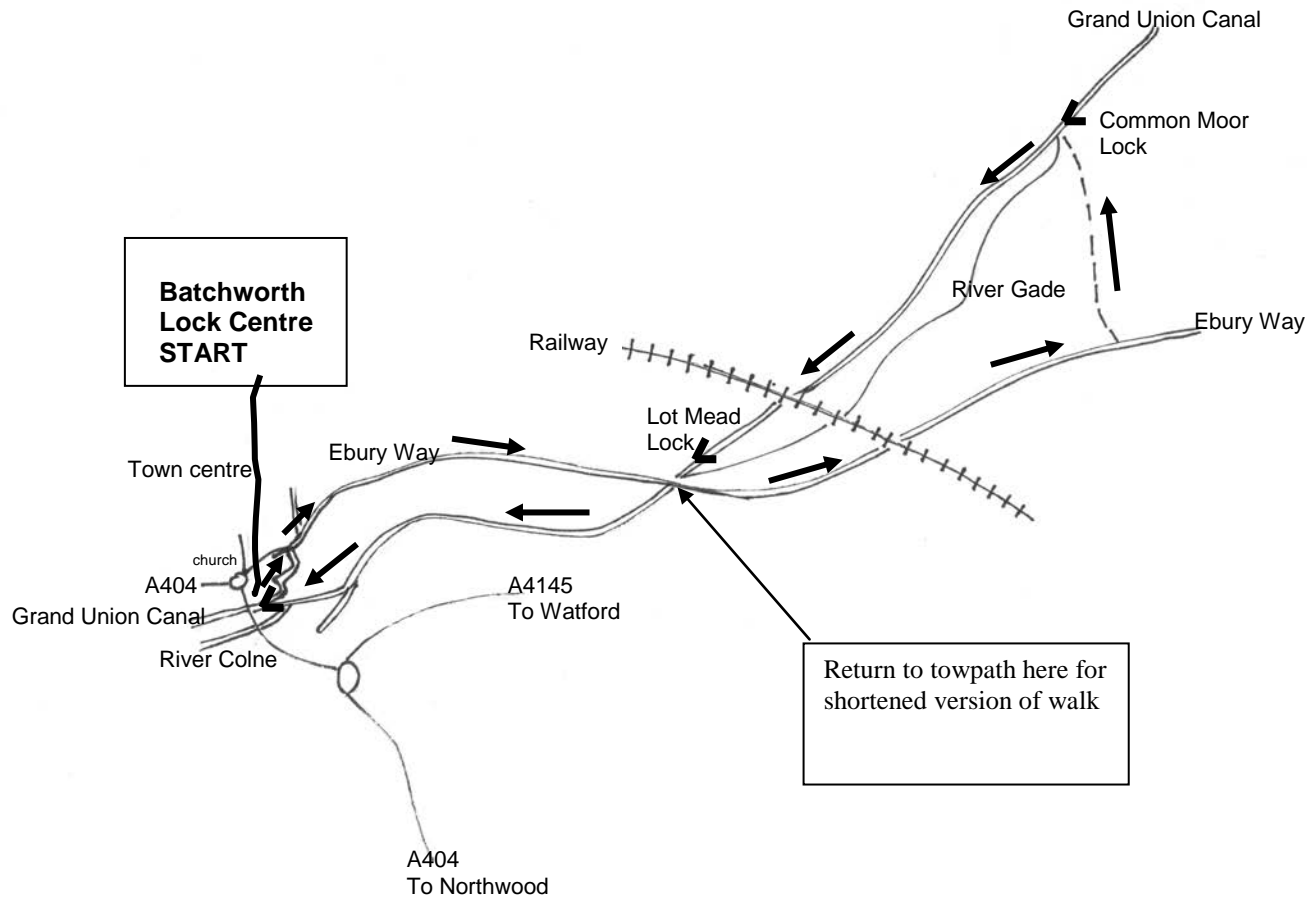
The moor is part of the flood plain of the River Gade, comprising around 100 acres of unimproved pastureland. It is rich in plant species and attracts a large variety of insects and thus birds. A bridge over the River Gade is reached, with the canal and lock (Common Moor #79) next to it. The houses on your right here, with another industrial estate, are built on the site of Croxley Paper Mill, opened by John Dickinson in 1829, and closed in 1980. Goods were delivered and taken away by canal boat from here up until the 1950's.

Go over the canal, and turn L onto the towpath. This passes under the railway, and then on to Lot Mead Lock. A further  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile along the towpath takes you back to the lock centre.

**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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