

Self-Guided Historic Pathways Walk: Coley Park, Reading

This walk starts from the junction of Castle Hill and Coley Avenue near the Berkshire Records Office. Numbered Points of Interest (POI) relate to the map which accompanies this document. However, if you prefer not to use public transport, an alternative start point might be at Waypoint 8, because there is reasonable parking at many places along St Saviours Road. This leaves Coley Park as the climax of the walk – quite a reasonable alternative

This map shows the Coley Estate in 1885; Berkeley Avenue was not started until the last decade of the 19th century. It was finished in 1908 with the building of two bridges, one spanning the River Kennet to join up with Pell Street the other over the railway into Coley Goods Yard.

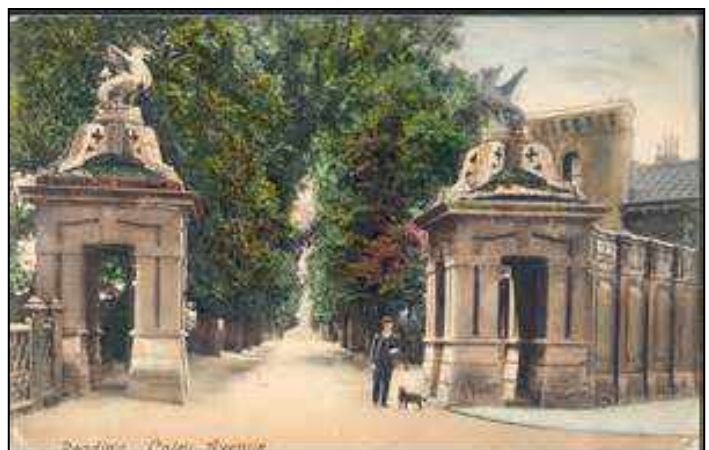


Coley Park Estate 1883

Coley Avenue was, and still is, a tree-lined avenue leading to Coley Park. The entrance had two ornate pillars surmounted by griffins. These were removed when the main road was widened at this point.

(POI 1)

Coley Avenue 1908



Griffins were part of the family crest of the Monck Family who owned Coley Park from 1810 to 1937.

Monck Coat of Arms



The walk goes south, down Coley Avenue towards Berkeley Avenue. This was named after John Berkeley Monck, who was MP for the Borough of Reading from 1820 to 1830.

The only significant buildings along Coley Avenue were smart “villas”, two of which, Westbourne Villa and Avenue Vila, can be seen at the junction of Berkeley Avenue. (POI 2)

Cross Berkeley Avenue at the traffic lights, taking time to look back at the two villas, which are on the north side of Berkeley Avenue. Continue down Coley Avenue to the two lodges that guarded the entrance to Coley Park, one of which is shown below. (POI 3)



To continue you now have a choice of 3 routes:

a) Take a diversion to the left (Red route on the map) which leads through a kissing gate to the pedestrian crossing on Wensley Road. Cross the road and turn **right**, continue past the little roundabout and along Wensley Road past the school. The new hospital block and “Manor House” can be seen on the right.

b) Enter between the lodges into the newest housing estate (Castle Walk, 2017) ahead (Green dots). Wind down the continuation of Coley Avenue to the little roundabout (see above). Cross Wensley Road and turn **right**. The new hospital block and “Manor House” can be seen on the right.

c) Take the footpath to the right (Purple dots), round the new estate. When you reach the cross paths with a park on your right, take a left and immediately another left into Swallow Croft. Wind down the lane and you exit on Wensley Road just beyond to Coley Park House. Turn left and the new hospital block and “Manor House” can be seen on the left. Then exit at the roundabout, cross the road and go **left**.

Coley Park Manor is now part of the private hospital, built in 1993. The newer building on the right is the main one; the manor on the left was renovated later and now houses the out-patients' and a few other facilities.



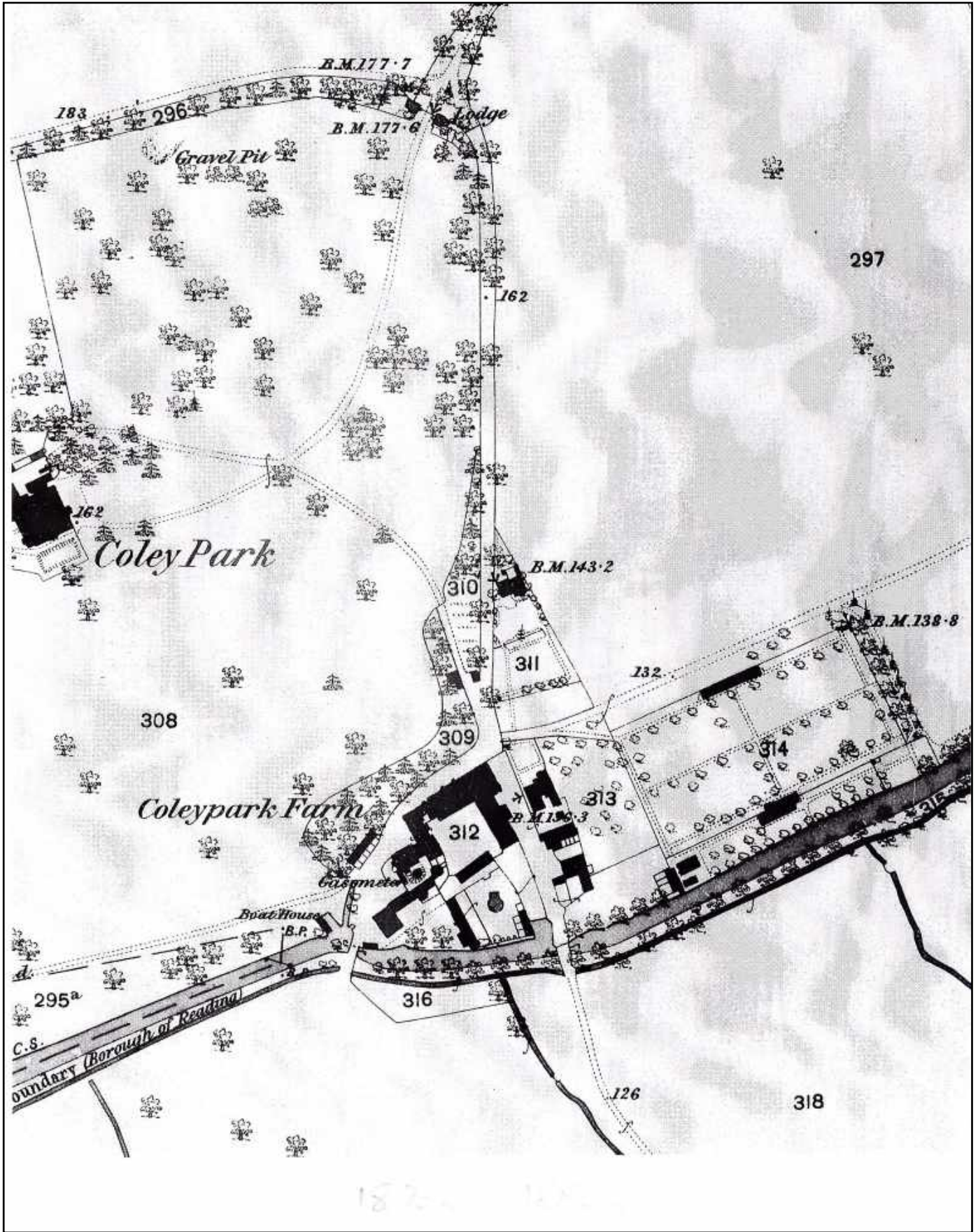
Coley House ca. 1823



Coley House 2013

Before we visit Coley Farm, we can see where Reading Corporation started building at the end of the 1950s, firstly around the hospital area, then the maisonettes and the 16 storey tower blocks (POI 5) further west, and finally to the east, towards the town centre. The reason for the development was the plan to redevelop the centre of Reading, so more housing was needed, and this was reasonably accessible open land. Retrace your steps to the roundabout and onwards – to the junction on the right opposite the shops. The “Top Shops” were built in 1961 and the adjacent Roundhead pub was built in 1965 (but closed and changed into flats in 2012). In the 1960s a new school (where Kate Winslet went) and a church were built.

Now turn right down The Old Lane towards Coley Farm. Although the farm complex has been redeveloped for housing many of the buildings are listed and can be seen. (See the very detailed web site of “Coley Park and Beyond” by Kevin Rosier for more details, <http://coleypark.com>).



Coley Park Farm 1885

Turn right at the bottom of Old Lane along Brookmill lane, past the farm barn to see farm buildings which are described on the web site. Further on are the coach house and the old dovecote. (POI 6)



Coach House



Dovecote

Continue to the bridge over the Holy Brook which allowed access for the cows to graze in the water meadows. Do not cross the bridge, turn left (east) along the footpath past the housing before turning left again past a small car park to see the farmyard and the other side of the dovecote.



Farmyard of Coley Park Farm

The farm buildings have been converted into modern accommodation. Continue up the lane past Rose Cottage to rejoin Old Lane.



Rose Cottage



Garden Walls

Go up to the top of Old Lane and turn right into St Saviours Road. At the bottom of the road can be seen the listed wall of the old walled garden. Also, at the end of the next road, Tyberton Place, some arches in the wall can be seen. (POI 7)

Turn left along St Saviours Road and continue until you get to the recreation ground. Turn left up the footpath through the park. At the top of the rise look right over the grassed area where Reading Football Club had their first ground from 1882. The area where clay was dug out for the nearby brickworks forms a natural grandstand. Coley Kilns (Brick, Tile and Pottery Works) was originally located where the Coley Recreation Ground is today. It closed in 1880 and the area was levelled to make way for the new recreation ground. (POI 8)



Coley Park potteries and brick works

Looking east from the top of the rise you can visualise the landing strips for the two WW1 RFC (Royal Flying Corps) airfields (source of inspiration for the Biggles stories), which were in the fields beyond the houses on the east side of the recreation ground.

Go down the footpath to Holybrook Road, turning right (east). At the bottom behind the houses in St Saviours Road was the open-air swimming baths (men only). Turn left towards Berkeley Avenue, cross at the pedestrian-controlled traffic lights then go right, up to the bridge over the A33/IDR. This was originally the bridge over a railway serving Coley Goods Yard. Amongst other things there was a siding to the CWS Factory [not visible from here!] (POI 9), built on the site of what is now a number of car showrooms. The factory was built in 1914 and first used to house Royal Flying Corps staff for the airfields.

Turn left down Temple Place to the bridge over the Kennet & Avon Canal. Go along the canal footpath, under the IDR bridge, and on to the site of Simmonds Brewery complex (POI 10). After the bridge take the second footpath into Fobney Street and turn right past the flats. In the road are the rails of the siding from the Coley Goods Yard to the malt house on the left, now converted into flats.

Walk along Fobney Street past the old building on the right, which until recently was a Loch Fyne restaurant and before that was a store house for goods for the brewery shipped on barges on the canal. Take the second road on the left into Swan Place; and walk up past Rose Walk under the building ahead into Castle Street.

First turn left to see the Vachel Almshouses (POI 11). These were originally built in St Mary's Butts in 1634 and then moved to this site in 1864. There are 32 houses in total.

Then cross the road and head right to The Sun coaching inn which had stables for the coach horses underneath (POI 12).

The next building, St Mary's Church, was built on the site of the medieval Reading Jail. After a disagreement between the Bishop and the congregation of St Giles' Church in nearby Southampton Street they moved here. It was built in 1798 and enhanced in 1890. It is open to the public on Thursdays (10:00 till 14:00) and has services on Sundays!. (POI 13).

This is the end of the walk. There are numerous pubs around St Mary's Butts and plenty of eating places along the banks of the canal in The Oracle.

Research by Dennis Johnson

Reading U3A

June 2014 (*updated March 2020 – Chris French*)

Historic Pathways Project - Thames Valley U3A Network

References:

1. "Coley Park and Beyond", <http://coleypark.com> compiled and written by Kevin Rosier.
2. OS Maps 1883, courtesy Berkshire Records Office and Reading Library web site.
3. The Museum of Berkshire Aviation at Woodley has more information about the RFC in Reading in WWI.
4. Modern photographs, Dennis Johnson.

Appendix 1

Major Landholders of Coley Park Estate – ownership dates

Thomas Syward	1280-1309	
Vachell Family	1309-1727	(See below)
Colonel Richard Thompson	1727-1792	
William Chamberlayne	1792-1802	
Thomas Bradford	1802	
John McConnell	1802-1810	Built the second (current) house
Monck Family	1810-1937	Added a third floor and additional staircase
John Bucknell	1937-1955	Let the house to the Min. of Ag. (now DEFRA) from 1947-1980.
Reading Corporation (RBC)	1956 ...	Derelict 1980 – 1993 1993 restored as hospital building

Vachel family

John Vachell (1287-1340)		Bought estate in 1309
John Vachell (born c1330)	Son	No children
Nicholas Vachell (born c1332)	Brother	
William Vachell (born c1380-1481)	Son	
Thomas Vachell (born c1430)	Son	
Thomas Vachell (c1480-December 9,1553)	Son	
Thomas Vachell (1537-May 3,1610)	Son	Built first Vachell House - 1555
Thomas Vachell (1560-1638)	Nephew	
Tanfield Vachell (1602-1658)	Nephew	Restored the house after the Civil War
Thomas Vachell (1642 -1719)	Cousin	
William Vachell	Brother	Sold estate to Richard Thompson