

## 8 Black poplar

Continuing below the bank, pause and look ahead to your right where you will see a large towering slightly columnar tree. This is a black poplar. As you get closer, notice its large glossy heart shaped leaves. It grows best in boggy conditions, alongside ditches and on flood plains. According to the Forestry Commission, black poplar is the most endangered native timber tree in Britain.

## 9 Holy Brook

The grass narrows to become a mud track. Go through the kissing gate ahead of you and you reach the banks of the Holy Brook. The Holy Brook is 6 miles long and mainly man-made to serve the water mills at Calcot and the Abbey. Turn right with the brook on your left and go through another kissing gate.

## 10 Ash trees

Soon you will reach a clump of ash trees. The leaf of the ash tree actually comprises a stem with 6-12 opposite pairs of light green oval leaflets. Once the flowers have been pollinated, they develop into winged fruits. Ash is currently being seriously affected by Chalara, ash dieback disease, which is a type of fungus which kills the tree.



## 11 Alder trees

Proceed along the brook side path and, as the brook turns sharply left you will see alders and a white willow. Alder trees are commonly found near rivers, streams and wetlands. The leaves often have indented tips. The flowers are catkins with the male catkins ripening into little woody "cones".

## 12 Old plane tree

At this point on your walk you will pass trees that you have already identified. Look out for the beautiful old plane tree overhanging the path, and on the small island in the brook, a tall black poplar branching out from a cut-off trunk.

## 13 Pussy willow

As the island comes to an end you will see pussy willow, so called because before the male catkins of these species come into full flower they are covered in a fine grayish fur leading to a fancied likeness to little cats. You will soon come across another kissing gate by the concrete bridge. Go through the gate and over the bridge. Pass left through another kissing gate and walk back the way you came. You will soon be back to the start of your walk.

## Useful information

### How to get there:

**By car:** Take the A4 westwards about a mile out of Reading and then the third road left (Coley Avenue) after going over the A33 roundabout. Turn right into Wensley Road and use street parking.

**By bus:** Take the 11 bronze bus from Reading town centre at Friar Street or Market Square, direction Coley Park. Go right to the terminus and you are in Wensley Road.

### Further information on trees:

You can find out more about these tree species online or in Paul Sterry's (2007) *Collins complete Guide to British Trees*, Harper Collins. Look out for Adrian Lawson and Geoff Sawers' book *The Shady Side of Town: Reading's Trees* (2017), Two Rivers Press.

All information in this leaflet correct at time of publication.

### Reading Tree Wardens:

You can find out more about us and forthcoming events by visiting our website at <http://www.readingtreewardens.org.uk> or our Facebook page (Reading Tree Wardens)

### Walking time:

Approximately 1 hour.

This is one of five urban tree walk leaflets developed by Reading Tree Wardens. The others are at the Town Centre, Caversham, Redlands and Tilehurst. You can download them from the Reading Tree Warden website.

### Important advisory notice:

The Coley Meadows are farmland. Please respect all farm notices and if there are any cows in the meadow, please do not disturb them.

### Footwear:

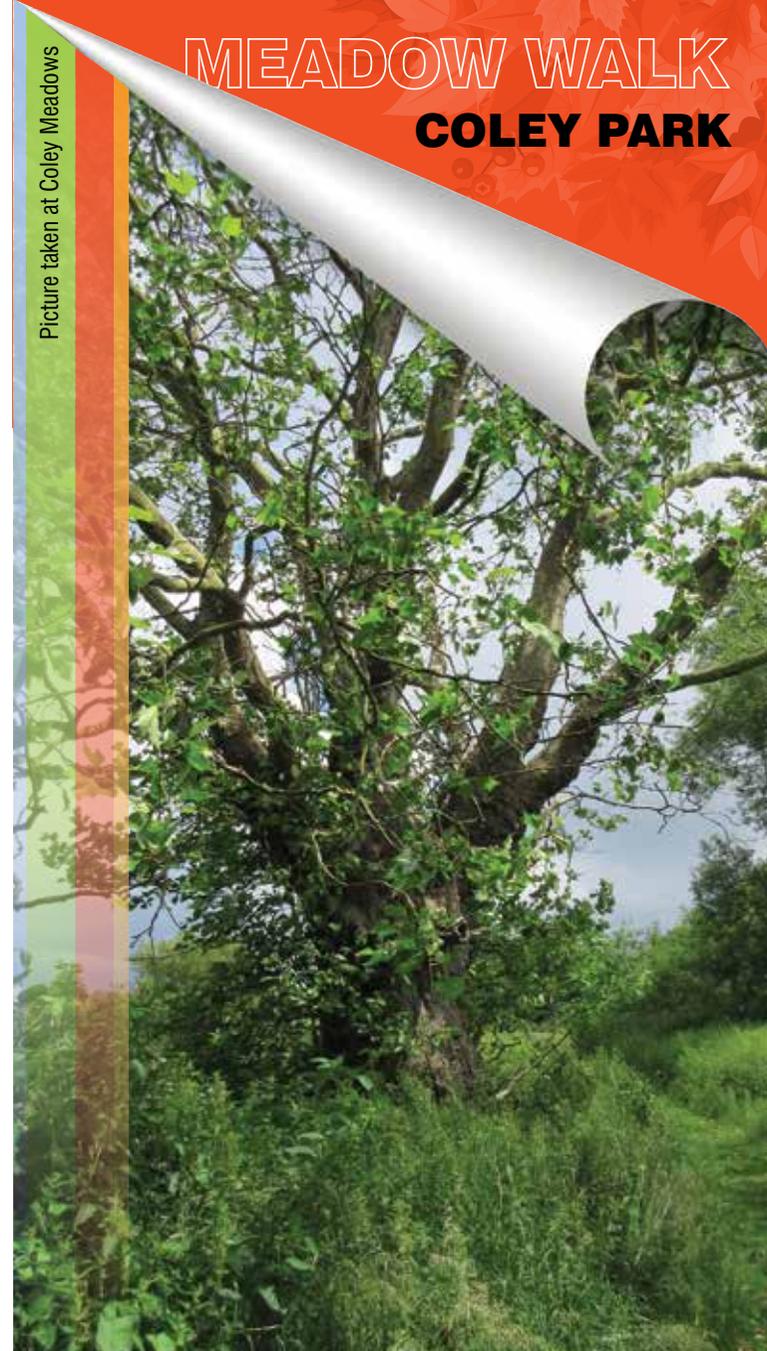
The terrain is clumpy and often wet and muddy. We strongly advise that you wear suitably supportive and waterproof footwear.

### Publisher:

Image Box Design. [www.imagebox.co.uk](http://www.imagebox.co.uk)

Picture taken at Coley Meadows

# MEADOW WALK COLEY PARK



# Introduction

Coley Park Estate lies to the south west of Reading in the parish of St Mary. It has been in existence since at least the 13th century with the Vachell family purchasing land from Thomas Syward of Reading in 1309. The Vachell family built a stately manor on the banks of the Holy Brook stream and had a nearby working farm. The house was eventually demolished in the 1800s when a new house was built on higher ground.

The new Coley House (or Mansion) is the large grey stone house, now Berkshire Independent Hospital, that stands on Swallows Croft (near Wensley Road).

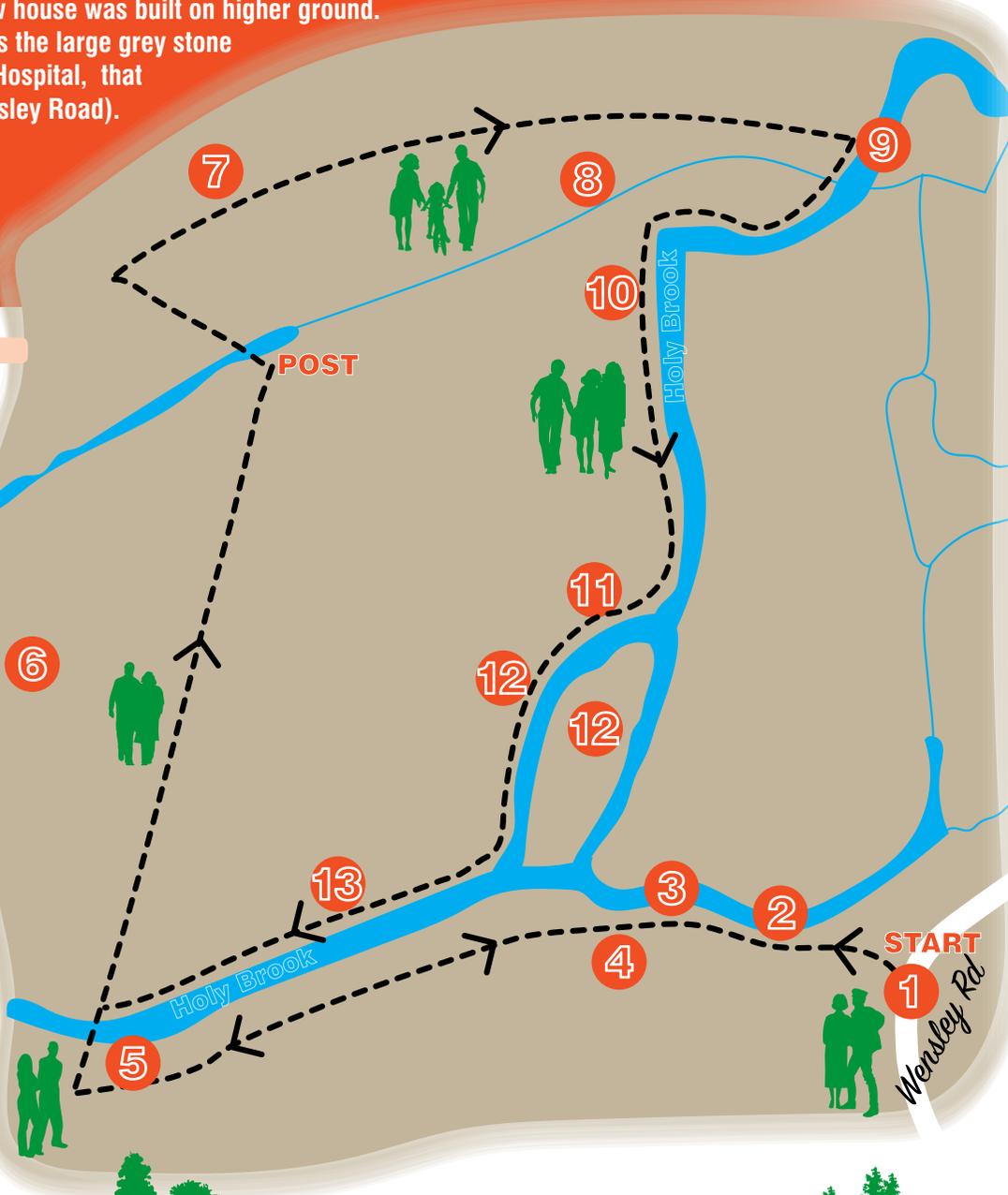
The walk that you are undertaking is particularly interesting in that it features trees and plants that thrive in a wet land environment.

## 1 Wensley Road

The walk starts at the magnificent oak on Wensley Road by house number 352. Oaks have spirally arranged leaves with wavy edges in many species. In spring, a single oak produces both male flowers as catkins and small female flowers. The fruit is a nut called an acorn. Oaks are immensely important to native wildlife, even down to microscopically small creatures, for food and shelter.

## 2 Crack-willow

Continue forward and you will see on your left between houses 344 and 346 a tarmac path with metal fencing on both sides. Turn in to the path and continue as it becomes a grass track. On your right you will see abundant slightly grayish crack-willow. This is usually found growing beside rivers and in water meadow channels. Its flowers are produced in catkins in early spring and then in late spring fruit capsules release numerous cotton-tufted seeds. The crack-willow is named for the sound made when the twigs break off. These are carried further downstream and often take root. Look out for more crack-willow as you go round the walk.



## 3 Weeping willows

Also on your right you will see the first of a number of weeping willows on this walk. It has golden yellow branches that weep to the ground. The leaves are long, tapering and narrow, yellowish green. Due to its ability to absorb large quantities of water, willow is often planted in flood-prone areas. The strong deep wide root also prevents erosion of the soil.

## 4 London Plane

Note a London Plane on your left. It has typical maple leaves that look like an open hand. The fruit are 3cm balls of hairy seeds on a hanging stem, breaking up in winter. London Planes are planted as street trees for their ability to adapt to urban conditions and resist pollution. You will see more mature London planes as you continue.

## 5 Lime tree

At the fork, go right until you almost reach a gate. On your right is a lime tree. This tree has heart shaped leaves, many asymmetrical. The tiny fruit, the size of small peas hang attached to a ribbon-like greenish-yellow bract. The medicinal herb, lime blossom, is used to make a soothing tea.

## 6 White poplar

Go through the gate, and the next gate, and cross a concrete bridge. At the five bar gate, noting the warning about walking on farmland, go through the small kissing gate and ahead into the meadows. In front of you is more crack-willow. Keep it to your left so that you are moving slightly right all the time. Looking to your left you will see white poplar. The leaves are dark green-gray and white-ish on the underside. It requires abundant light and thrives near water, standing up well to flood water.



## 7 Coley Branch Line

As you move forward, you will see a post with a right of way sign leaning at an angle. Cross over the simple concrete bridge and walk slightly to the left towards a metal kissing gate. Just before you reach the gate, turn right and walk along by the bank. Above you are the remains of the Coley Branch Line built in 1903-1908 to take goods to Central Reading Depot. The line was closed in 1983.

