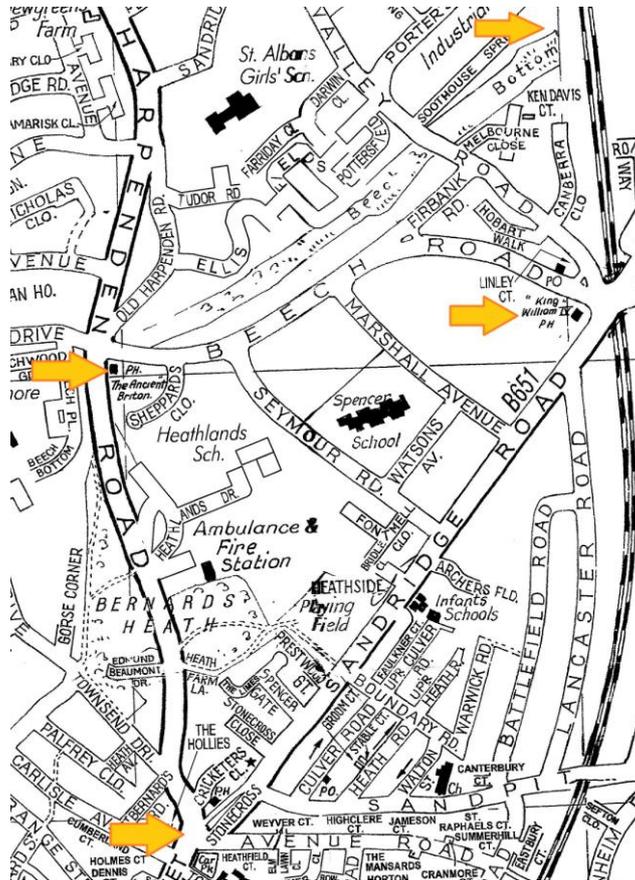


## **A GUIDED WALK ROUND BERNARDS HEATH**



**This brief guide is suitable to carry with you on your walk. You will find the walk even more interesting if you have read the full guide, which can be found on (and/or downloaded from) the website of the Friends of Bernards Heath at [www.bernardsheath.org](http://www.bernardsheath.org)**

This is a circular walk and can therefore be started at any point and completed in a clockwise or anti-clockwise direction. This guide follows a clockwise direction, starting from the Ancient Briton public house at the junction of Harpenden Road and Beech Road.

1. Start by crossing Beech Road to Beech Bottom Dyke. This is an Iron Age earthwork that later formed a crucial part of the Yorkist defences at the Second Battle of St Albans in 1461. It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Follow the footpath on the right hand side of the Dyke as far as Valley Road, noting on the way the bank across the bottom of the Dyke which was constructed as a rifle range in the 1860s.
2. Cross Valley Road and follow the Dyke to where it is blocked by the railway embankment, which was completed in 1868.
3. Turn right and walk up the slope across the grass to the road junction at the King William IV. The main Yorkist defences in the Second Battle were positioned here. Most of the fighting took place in this area and further south on Sandridge Road.

4. Cross Beech Road and walk south down Sandridge Road, noting the wastes on each side which are a lasting benefit from the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. The first phase of the fighting in the Second Battle of St Albans (1461) took place in this area, including the first firing of a handheld firearm in a battle in Britain. Note also the cherry trees (red for Lancaster and white for York) which were, reportedly, planted to commemorate George V's silver jubilee in 1935.
5. The open space on your right past the last house, which is part of Bernards Heath itself, is common land owned by the Spencer estate. The terrace of houses opposite the open space were built in the 1880s as part of what was then known, together with the grid of roads built over the next twenty years around Boundary Road, as Sandridge New Town. This was known as a 'rough area' in the early part of the twentieth century.
6. The land on the west side of Sandridge Road and south of the open space, now occupied by Prestwood Gate, was the site of the town gallows in the seventeenth century.
7. The next block of land to the south, now occupied by Spencer Gate and The Limes, was the site of three windmills in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then a farm until the 1930s. The most famous tenant farmer was Jacob Reynolds in the late nineteenth century. He owned a large brickworks on the Heath which provided bricks for many local buildings including St Saviour's Church in Sandpit Lane.
8. Further south, Sandridge Road becomes Stonecross, named for a roadside shrine that stood here in the Middle Ages. The buildings on the west side of Stonecross include the old Pump House for the waterworks that have been in this location, in various forms, since the early nineteenth century.
9. Turn west (i.e. to your right) and pass in front of Devdas restaurant into Harpenden Road. This is the start of the route of the old Luton Lane, which followed what is now Townsend Avenue to the point where a rough track turns north onto the Heath and continues along the edge of the Heath to rejoin Harpenden Road near the Ancient Briton. Luton Lane was rerouted straight across the Heath as a turnpike road from the 1830s and renamed as Harpenden Road later in the nineteenth century. 'Heath House', on the corner of Harpenden Road and Townsend Avenue, was the toll house.
10. The woods and the open grassland on each side of this stretch of Harpenden Road form a major part of the Heath. They are common land owned by the Spencer Estate and boast a range of flora and fauna, though most of the trees date only from about 1915.
11. This is a good time to note the origin of the name 'Bernards Heath'. After the Romans left in about the fifth century, Saxon settlers burned off the scrub and woodland. 'Bernard' is a local dialect term for 'burned'.
12. The next turning on your right, Heathlands Drive, leads to a complex of buildings including the old fire station, the ambulance station, and various youth services buildings. From 1890 until after the Second World War, this was the site of the Ariston Works, a huge industrial concern making tallow, lard and suet from animal carcasses. The stench was of course appalling and local people were much relieved when the works closed down. The land was bought by the County Council in 1960.
13. If you explore in the woods north of this site, you will find the foundations of Sparrowswick House, the home of the owner of the Ariston Works, and other traces of the works.
14. Now return to Harpenden Road and cross over, with care. Walk across the grass to Spinney Cottage, which is on the route of the old Luton Lane (see paragraph 9 above. This was originally four terraced cottages, or rather hovels.
15. Continue north along the track, now a cycle way, and find yourself in an area of deep pits. These are what is left of the clay pits that provided the raw material for the brickmaking industry that flourished right across the Heath for more than 500 years, with its heyday in the nineteenth century. For a history of brickmaking on the Heath, and of the Heath as a whole, go to the website of the Friends of Bernards Heath at [www.bernardsheath.org](http://www.bernardsheath.org), click on 'History of BH' and follow the links.
16. Follow the cycle track north until you are back on Harpenden Road and within a hundred yards of the Ancient Briton.