

## Aspley Guise geology and wildlife

The southern half of the parish lies on the Greensand Ridge, a mass of sandy sediment deposited in a shallow seaway during the Cretaceous period, about 115 million years ago. The free-draining, infertile soils of the ridge make poor farmland; once cleared for agriculture, the fields were soon abandoned to become heaths used for rough grazing, or harvesting gorse and broom for fuel. In the 19th and 20th centuries some heaths were planted with conifers to produce timber, but many are now being cleared and restored to heathland.

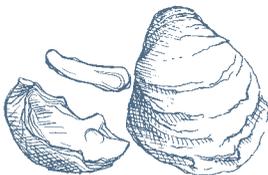
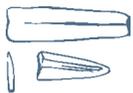
Buried in the sand, layers of volcanic ash became Fuller's Earth, used since Roman times to process wool, and with many more modern uses. It was quarried in southern Aspley Guise and nearby parishes from the early Middle Ages until 2004. The open ground around the works is a marvellous place for insects and any other wildlife that enjoys warmth. Watch for lizards, tiger beetles and butterflies basking in the sunlight.



*common lizard*

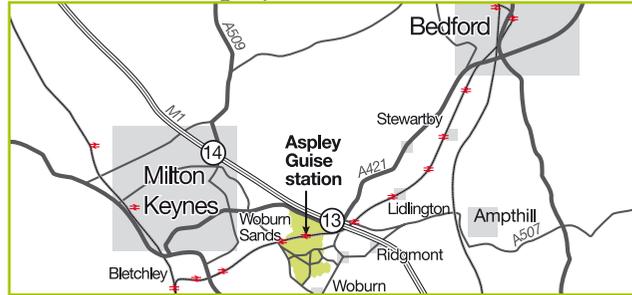
Northern Aspley Guise lies on the Oxford Clay. Once the floor of a Jurassic ocean, this is one of the clays that supported the brick industry of the Marston Vale. Bricks were made here for local use, but the clay is more valuable as farmland. Watch for fossils as you walk the paths here; belemnites (once thought to be the tips of elf-arrows, or the remains of lightning bolts) and shells of the Jurassic oyster *Gryphaea* may be found on the bottom of the Jurassic ocean.

*Fragments of the internal shell of a belemnite*



*Gryphaea shells*

## How to find Aspley Guise



**By rail:** Aspley Guise is easily accessible on the Marston Vale Line direct from Bedford and Bletchley and also from Milton Keynes and Leighton Buzzard with just one change at Bletchley. For more information about the Marston Vale Line and the work of the Community Rail Partnership please call 01234 832645 or visit [www.marstonvalecommunityrail.org.uk](http://www.marstonvalecommunityrail.org.uk)

**By road:** Aspley Guise lies southeast of Milton Keynes, near both the M1 and the A507.

Other people hope to enjoy the footpaths and wildlife of the parish. Please clean up after your dog, and in spring and early summer please keep dogs on leads to avoid disturbing ground-nesting birds in the fields and hedgerows. Please take your litter home!

If you have questions about the footpaths, or wish to report problems on the network, contact Aspley Guise Parish Council at [www.aspleyguise.bedsparishes.gov.uk](http://www.aspleyguise.bedsparishes.gov.uk)

### For more information

*Events and places in Aspley Guise:*  
[www.aspley-guise.org.uk](http://www.aspley-guise.org.uk)

*Walks and places to visit in Bedfordshire:*  
[www.letsgo.org.uk](http://www.letsgo.org.uk)

*Fuller's Earth and the geology of Bedfordshire:*  
[www.bedsrigs.org.uk](http://www.bedsrigs.org.uk)

This leaflet was published by Aspley Guise Parish Council and sponsored by Central Bedfordshire Council and the Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership.



enjoy & explore  
**ASPLEY GUISE**



## About Aspley Guise

Many people have walked these roads and paths before us. The word 'Aspley' comes from the Old English meaning *the glade or clearing in the aspen wood*, and is first documented in an Anglo-Saxon charter of AD969. The village existed before that time in some form; a minor Roman road from Dorchester-on-Thames to Alconbury passes through the parish, and in 1958 Roman pottery was found during building works on Aspley Hill. *Aspeleia* in the Domesday Book (1086) included Aspley Heath, which only became a separate civil parish in 1885. The de Gyse family acquired the Manor of Aspley by 1276; the name *Aspelegise* appears in the 14th century.



A church has stood on the site of St Botolphs since before 1188. From the outside the building appears to be Victorian, but this is due to enthusiastic restoration in the 19th century; the nave, north chapel and some other features date from the 15th century. The rust-red ironstone is a local building material quarried from layers in the Greensand.

Aspley seems to have remained a quiet agricultural village for several centuries. Traces of the ridge and furrow created by medieval ploughs survive in fields north of the village. Wheat, barley and oats grown here would have been ground at local mills to be eaten by the people of Aspley Guise. A watermill was recorded

here in 1066; in 1684 there were three watermills, probably at the same site just off Mill Way, where dams were visible in 1979. The last mention of a miller at Aspley Mills was in 1834. There were two windmills here in the 18th century.

Although the Manor of Aspley existed before 1066, the original manor house fell into disrepair and was probably demolished in the 18th century. The building known as The Manor today was the manor farmhouse, built c. 1700. It stands near the site

of earlier manor houses; some features of these, such as the manorial fish ponds, still exist nearby. In the Middle Ages rabbits were valued for their meat and fur, and were kept in special warrens; a Warren was recorded here in 1560 (probably the area still shown as 'The Warren' on old OS maps).

Aspley Wood is mentioned in Domesday Book, and would have remained an important source of timber and wood for centuries. Fragments of fossilised wood from the underlying Greensand found in Aspley Wood led to stories of a 'petrifying spring' that turned wood to stone. Some conifers have been planted into the ancient wood; in the late 18th century Francis Moore (for whom Moore Place was built c. 1786) bought part of what was then Wavendon Heath and planted 51,376 Scotch Fir to create the pinewood known today as Aspley Heath. In 1792 the 500 acre wood was sold to the Duke of Bedford. Two of the woodland paths run past Mermaid's Pond, which was listed under that name in a Bedford Estate management book in 1791.

In 1857 Dr James Williams recommended Aspley Guise as having a climate equivalent to many health resorts. The relatively small difference between summer and winter temperatures was considered beneficial, as were the altitude, and the pinewoods Moore had planted on the Heath nearly a century earlier. In the late 19th and early 20th century Daneswood, Edgbury, Homewood and The Mount (in what is now Aspley Heath) were sanatoriums in which invalids and convalescent patients could enjoy the healthful atmosphere.



*From the 16th to the 19th centuries lace-making was an important industry in rural Bedfordshire.*

Aspley was also famous for its Classical Academy, a public school founded c. 1715 'to prepare the sons of gentlemen for careers in the services, church and commerce'. Considered the equal of Eton and Harrow in its heyday, the school closed and its buildings were sold in 1874. The main school, Guise House, is now a private residence. The masters' accommodation and dormitories were purchased by John Kemp & Co, a London-based printer which by 1898 was known as the Powage Press (*the Powage* was a piece of land owned by the Classical Academy). The original buildings were lost to fire in 1911, but the replacements were built in a similar style.

The Bedford-Bletchley railway line was opened in 1846, the first line in Bedfordshire, but Aspley Guise station was not built until 1905. As a quiet village with good transport links to Bletchley Park, Aspley Guise played its part in WWII. Moore Place (then The Holt) on The Square was a hostel for the Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park and from 1946–8 housed 40 'land girls' of the Bedfordshire Land Army who worked on local farms. The Rookery and The Shrubbery were part of the Political Warfare Executive, where Sefton Delmer produced radio broadcasts of news and music to undermine the German war effort.

Today Aspley Guise remains a peaceful and attractive village set in the distinctive landscape of the Greensand Ridge.

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### ADVERTISEMENTS.

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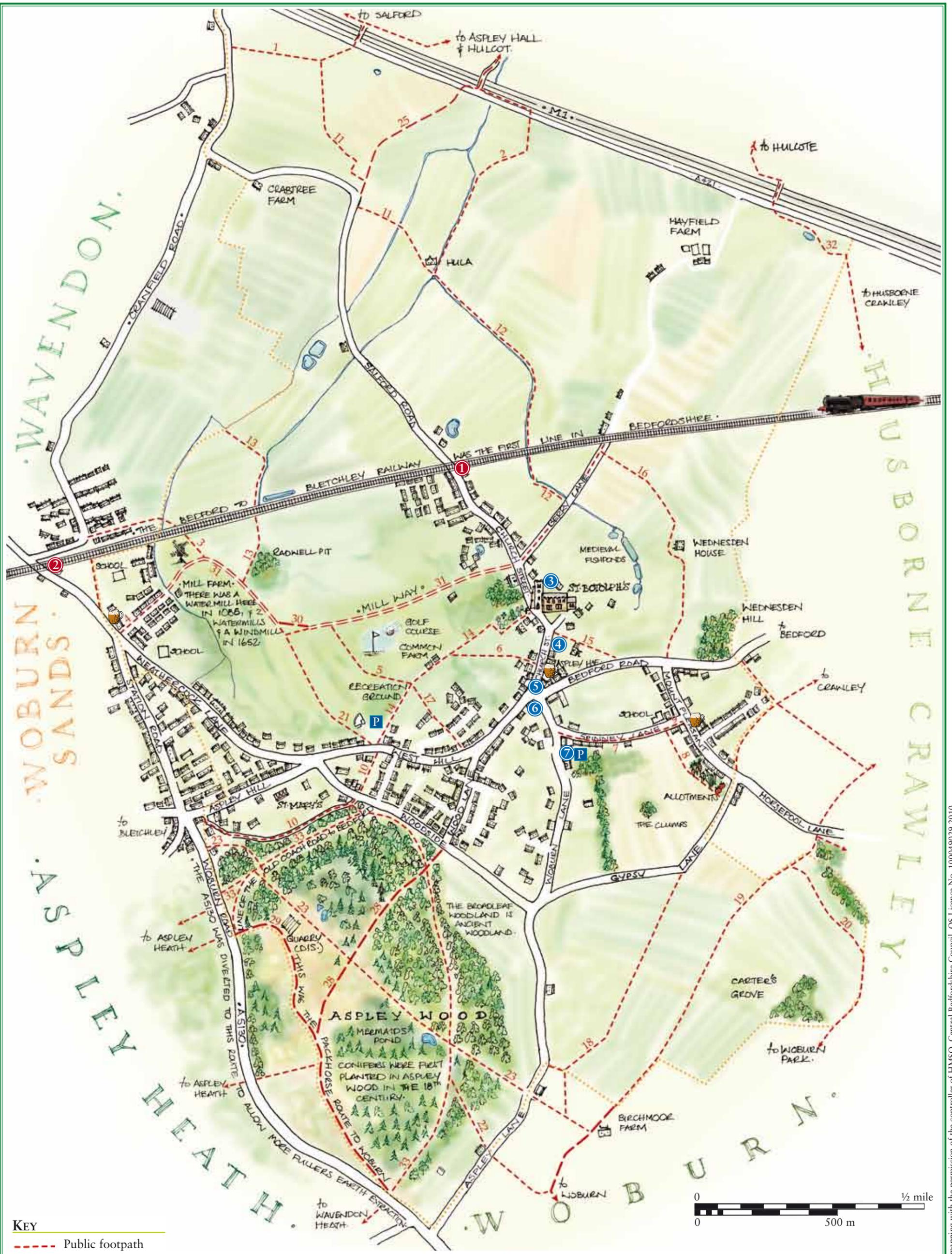
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#### Observations on the Topography and

CLIMATE OF ASPLEY GUISE, in reference to their superior Influence upon Health and Disease, as compared with celebrated English and Foreign Localities. By JAMES WILLIAMS, M.D., etc.

"Dr. Williams has here given a very pleasantly written and interesting book. He makes out a good case for Aspley Guise as a residence for invalids, and shows that England has in herself the advantages which sick tourists seek abroad."—*Journal of Public Health*.

London: THOMAS RICHARDS, 37, Great Queen Street.



- KEY**
- Public footpath
  - - - Public bridleway
  - = = = Public byway
  - ..... Parish boundary
  - Public house
  - P Parking

- ① Aspley Guise Station
- ② Woburn Sands Station
- ③ The Manor House
- ④ Guise House

- ⑤ The Square
- ⑥ Moore Place
- ⑦ Aspley Guise Village Hall

