

Circular Walks Around Brightwalton

Brightwalton – Leckhampstead – Oak Ash – Spray Wood

Approx 9 kilometres - 3 stiles

Familiar paths and perhaps one or two slightly less familiar ones around Leckhampstead, a picnic spot or two and wonderful views to the south towards Inkpen on a reasonably clear day make this a favourite. Beautiful early spring carpets of snowdrops, and later daffodils at Oak Ash, are followed by stunning bluebells at Spray Wood to look forward to in April and May. Enjoy!

(You may wish to carry hand sanitiser with you to minimise infection risk when using stiles. For simplicity the walk begins and ends at Brightwalton Village Hall. The sketch map is not to scale.)

① From Brightwalton Village Hall, walk a few steps to the south and turn left at the War Memorial, pass the church and on to the T junction. Then either take the road down the hill to the right, or the footpath across the field almost opposite you.

The War Memorial cross was originally part of the ancient Peasemore church.

The church, consecrated in 1863 and built by Street, replaced the Saxon building. A few remains and gravestones can be seen in the old churchyard near Manor Farm. A slip-up was made in that the consecration of 1863 omitted the formalities necessary to legalise marriages in the new church. The Marriages Legalisation Act of 1903 had to be passed to validate the marriages which had taken place in the new church until then! There is a picture of the old church inside.

② Turn left at the bottom, onto Sparrowbill. Take the next right, Pudding Lane, and continue to the junction at the end of the lane.

I have always understood that lanes which are below the level of the adjoining fields are particularly ancient, as at Pudding Lane, possibly as a result of water erosion over the centuries, as well as the gradual rising of the soil level. But that could well be wrong! The author Monica Dickens lived here in her later years.

③ Now turn left, heading towards the B4494 along Holt Lane but look out for the footpath which takes you across the field to your right quite near to the main road. Please keep to the path to avoid damage to crops – it is usually marked by tractor tracks but head for the stile straight ahead. *NB It is advisable to keep dogs on a lead for the next section as there are often horses in the field.* Continue straight on towards the kissing gate at the end.

④ As you leave the tiny thicket turn right, then, with Cotswold farmhouse behind you, follow the wide track due south (ignoring the footpath to your right). Take the right-hand fork at the top, you are now about to enter Grovepit Green.

Take a moment to read the information board here as it is now a nature reserve and there is much to look out for. The path has been improved which makes it suitable for wheelchair users, and there is a bench a little further on which is ideal for a picnic in non-Covid times. The hawthorn blossom is lovely in spring.

⑤ Continue until you reach the road at the end and turn left onto it. Almost immediately you come to the Leckhampstead War Memorial. Follow the road south through the village (sadly the pub has

now closed) until you reach the church on your left which is worth a look from the outside even if locked.

The architecture is unusual, and the interior is very reminiscent of Keble College. You can see the interesting roof line from the churchyard behind. The derivation of Leckhampstead is "Place where leeks grow"!

⑥ Leaving the church, backtrack a few steps and take the lane on your left, from where there are fabulous views on a reasonably clear day. There is a well-positioned seat, which in normal times makes an excellent spot to relish the view.

⑦ Ignore the road bending round to your right and take the footpath a little further on, through the fields, then the right turn at a junction with another path, bringing you to Leckhampstead Thicket.

⑧ Turn left onto the road.



After a short distance turn right along the footpath next to The Malting House, which takes a dog-leg, then meets another track at the T junction at the top. (or simply follow the road further on and turn right at the junction). The footpath is more fun! Turn left at the top, where your path meets the other path at a T junction, and you will come out onto the road at a bend.

⑨ Walk straight ahead as you leave the footpath to the private drive (which is a public right of way) where the spring flowers are beautiful, to Oak Ash. Beware sleeping policemen! Where the drive bends to the left there is a footpath leading straight on, along a little bridge over the duckpond with a stile at the end. (Walkers with large dogs will be able to bear left along the drive and enter the field on your right through the gate.)



Walk to the right across the field (where there are often sheep) towards the stile. Continue straight along the grassy track to the road.



Should you decide to divert to Chaddleworth it is very pleasant to walk from Oak Ash straight across the field to the gate at the end, keep straight on along the lane, turn right at the T junction, down the hill, and left into the village at the bus stop. This delightful village may be included in other walks to follow.

⑩ Turn right at the road, and at the first sharp bend to the right take the footpath straight ahead into the field ⑪ which follows the edge of Spray Wood. At the north east corner of the wood the path crosses the arable field back to Brightwalton. Re-join the road at the junction and head north for the few yards to the Village Hall.

