

## A walk along the Mary/Michael Pilgrims Way – the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire

*“It frequently happens that the preoccupation with thoughts about the aim of going, completely blots out the full consciousness of the act of going...”*

*Nyanaponika Thera*

### Introduction

This is a path across the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire, from Churn Knob in the Berkshire Downs to Pyrton at the foot of the Chilterns. The route reflects my personal experience of the area, recently shed in a new light by the Michael and Mary energy lines, as they weave across the county.

The first section of the route follows the centuries old St Birinus pilgrimage, from Churn Knob to Dorchester on Thames. This pilgrim's way follows the energy flowing through the landscape, almost exactly along the Michael line. It is a path steeped in the ceremonial devotion of our forebears, retaining an atmosphere of sacred reverence as it charts a route across the ancient terrain. There is a sense of encountering the earth through the eyes of those who have walked before you, as you are taken from one strategic landmark to another, providing a series of vistas across the surrounding country. The environment seeps into your consciousness as you pass along your way.

A major feature on this pilgrimage route is the crossing of The Sinodun Hills (Wittenham Clumps), where we find a node point of the Michael and Mary lines. This is the only such convergence in Oxfordshire, pointing, perhaps, to the status of the Clumps as Oxfordshire's favourite and most distinctive ancient site. It is a joyful, magical place to visit for all ages at any time of year, providing a panoramic view of South Oxfordshire and the Vale. Truly a place to reflect on the deep human connection with the earth and the slow movement of time.

To get to Dorchester from the Clumps, we leave the Michael line briefly to follow the Mary line, upon which the catholic church and abbey sit. Dorchester is an ideal place to visit on such a walk, with an ancient history of spiritual observance, while offering the walker all the modern amenities they could desire, including my favourite tearoom at the abbey.

From Dorchester we follow the River Thames and rejoin the Michael line at Clifton Hampden, heading onward through quiet villages to Garsington and Cuddesdon. Cuddesdon, in particular, has an important religious history, being the home of Ripon College, the largest training centre in the country for Anglican clergy. The walker has easy access to Oxford from this part of the route.

Leaving Cuddesdon, we depart from the Michael line, cutting across South Oxfordshire to rejoin the Mary line close to the Chilterns and the Icknield Way. This recommendation is made with the next stage of the route in mind – following the Michael line on from Cuddesdon, one would soon have to travel through a long sequence of large urban conurbations, through Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and beyond. Spending this day heading back to the Mary line, it enables the walker to follow a more pleasant onward route, closer to the Chiltern Hills.

## **Churn Knob to Dorchester on Thames – 17km/10.5m**

### Practical Information

Blewbury is a good starting point for the walk, a large and interesting village with all amenities for the pilgrim.

Blewbury Village Website – <http://blewbury.co.uk/> has useful information on accommodation and other amenities, as well as history of the village.

Parking – In Blewbury, at the sports ground car park or in the village. Savages Farm Shop, open seven days a week, is almost opposite the car park, a little further out of the village. This is a good place to stock up provisions before setting off.

Public transport – all the locations on this walk are covered by the Traveline South East website - <http://www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk/>

Getting to Churn Knob from Blewbury – Churn Knob is not directly accessible up the paved road from the car park at the sports ground. If using the car park, walk back in to Blewbury along the main road for 200 yards. Take the track opposite the lane called Nottingham Fee, where there is a war memorial under a lime tree, and a sign pointing downhill to the Red Lion. The track splits after 50yds – take the middle footpath through the covered hollow, to the top of Churn Hill. With the wooded copse before you, walk anti-clockwise around the hilltop to find Churn Knob, a round, bell barrow in the middle of the ploughed field in front of you.

### Churn Knob to Blewbury – 1.5km

Links to information on the St Birinus pilgrimage:

<http://www.walkingworld.com/Articles/Walk-articles/St-Birinus.aspx>

<http://walks.walkingworld.com/Walk/Birinus-Pilgrimage-Route--Churn-Knob---Dorchester.aspx>

<http://www.stbirinus.co.uk/saint-birinus-a-benedictine-monk.html>

From Churn Hill, there are expansive views over the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire, encompassing much of the route you are about to take. Blewbury immediately below; Blewburton Hill; Sinodun Hills and the River Thames, with the West Berkshire Downs behind you. It is at Churn Knob that the St Birinus pilgrimage starts.

The pilgrimage is in memory of Berin (his Saxon name), a Benedictine monk sent from Rome as a missionary in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. An important figure in the history not only of this area but the whole of Britain, he converted Cynegils the king of Wessex. This paved the way for the King's strategic marriage to the daughter of Oswald, the Christian King of Northumberland. It also resulted in the legitimisation of Christian observance in the South and West of England. Tradition tells us that Berin and Cynegils first met at Churn Knob.

From the hill, ignore farm tracks to right and left and take the covered path straight down toward Blewbury. This is the same track you used on the way up if you started in Blewbury. The path is bounded by an ancient mixed hedgeway, displaying a multitude of berries and blooms depending on the time of the year you are passing through.

You may already have noticed the large red kites, with their forked tails, flying overhead. The birds

are a noticeable feature of this whole area since their highly successful reintroduction around twenty years ago.

The path eventually joins a track and, shortly after, the main road. Cross straight over, passing a war memorial under a lime tree, on to Nottingham Fee. There are some beautiful old cottages on this lane and the Red Lion pub soon appears on your left.

Bear right on to Chapel Lane then take the path on the left, alongside the thatched wall. This brings you out on to a lane. Carry straight on and the church will appear in front of you. The lane opens to a beautiful church green, which has a feeling of being suspended in time.

The St Michaels Living Churchyard Project encourages a vibrant habitat for the local flora and fauna, an initiative that was set up with the help of the much loved local conservation charity, BBOWT (Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust - <http://www.bbowt.org.uk/>). A pair of ancient yews, one hollow, rest in peaceful serenity, central to the setting. Crumbling, ivy grown headstones thicken the atmosphere. The interior of the church is brought to life through some very good labelling, explaining the variety of features present from centuries past – doorways, an oak chest, windows and more. A painting to the left of the entrance is of particular interest to the pilgrim here, illustrating as it does the Birinus memorial on Churn Nob, which was dedicated on 9th August 1942.

The Church of St Michael and All Angels in the centre of the picturesque village speaks powerfully of the faith of countless generations of Christians. There was a church on this site in Saxon times, as mentioned in the Domesday Book. It was rebuilt by the Normans towards the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and originally consisted of a Nave and Sanctuary. The Chancel, north and south aisles, tower, Lady Chapel and porches were added gradually between the late 11<sup>th</sup> century and 1600. We worship in a building that holds memories of those who have lived and worshipped here before us.

- taken from the Churn Churches website <http://www.churnchurches.co.uk/our-churches/st-michael-and-all-angels-blewbury/>

### Blewbury to South Moreton – 6km

Walk around to the far side of the church and turn right on to the lane as you leave the churchyard. Follow the gravel path to the left of the building in front of you. The path takes you alongside watery channels, part of the complex of springs that Blewbury is famous for which fed the former watercress industry. Join a track and head straight on, with the colourful Blewbury Wagon on your right. Turn left on to the next road, then after 100 yards, turn right on to Bessels Lea Road, opposite the sign for South Street. (If you get to the school, you've gone too far). Blewburton Hill rises up in front of you as you walk along this modern residential street. Cross over the main road and take the track through Winterbrook Farm yard. A footpath sign indicates Aston Upthorpe 1 mile.

Carry on to Blewburton Hill, where you will find pedestrian access into the fenced off hillside, just past a vehicle gate. Inside the enclosure, you are free to walk around the hillfort, where excavations have discovered evidence of Neolithic and Bronze Age occupation. Later, it also served as an Anglo-Saxon burial ground.

There is a gate and path easily visible on the far side of the hill when you are ready to continue.

Follow the path along the field edge to a road. Turn right and after 50 yds, take the path on your left on the other side of the road. This will take you along a lane, past a series of horse paddocks. Coming to a large hedge after a few hundred yards, keep to its right, using the grass path.

Just after the pylons, this path ends at a fence. Turn right, crossing a ditch, then immediately left along the field edge. Follow this as it turns to the right, with the church on the opposite side of the stream on your left as you continue. Cross an old pasture to reach a meeting of paths and a bridge. Turn left across the bridge towards a waterfall, then fork right over a second bridge and follow the path for 50 yds beside a wall. The path on your left will take you to the church of St John Baptist where a sign indicates the remains of a medieval motte castle in its grounds.

The church was locked when I passed by but a key is available as indicated by a sign on the door. Contact Rev'd John Clarke 01235 512987/[john@clarke1662.freeseve.co.uk](mailto:john@clarke1662.freeseve.co.uk). In the churchyard, there is an interesting split Yew that has been heavily burnt. Thrushes continue to nest in its branches.

#### South Moreton to Wittenham Clumps – 8.5km

From the church, retrace your steps, turning left when you rejoin the main path at the wall. Carry straight on, ignoring a right branch of the path. Pass a hay barn on your right, and continue alongside a low wall, before passing between houses to meet the road. Turn right at the road and cross over, passing the Baptist chapel. Go left up Crown Lane, carrying straight on as it turns into a path. Don't take the left fork, instead continue straight on. The path bears right then leads through a tunnel beneath the train track.

Turn right beyond the train track and go straight on through the gate into the next field. Take the diagonal path across the field until you reach a vehicle gate. Don't go through it, turn left and follow the fence. Ignore the first bridge on the right. Instead take the footpath gate to the left, which leads over another bridge. Go through a gate, carry on and cross yet another bridge. Turn right, following the edge of a field. Cross one more bridge, turning left along the edge of this field, where a sign indicates Mackney/N. Moreton. 50 yards short of the end of the field turn right, taking the footpath across the field. You should be able to see a vehicle track in front of you, to the left of a tree plantation. Follow this straight through a series of fields.

Turn right at the junction with a farm road and head towards modern looking barns and an old farmhouse. Turn left before you reach them, in front of a beautiful old barn. After 50 yds, take a footpath to the left, signed Brightwell cum Sotwell, ½ mile. Climb a metal stile and follow the edge of a field. Around the corner, the path cuts the corner of the field. Keep the farm on your right and head for the hole in the hedge opposite. Follow the path left, signed Brightwell cum Sotwell. Climb another metal stile, then head between fields on a narrow path. Go over the bridge and cross the pastures toward the houses. A short track takes you to the road. Turn left into Brightwell cum Sotwell.

You will soon reach a war memorial and St Agatha's church on your left, and a shop and post office on your right, behind the village hall. Stay on the road as it bears right beyond the church, signed Didcot Road and Grove Cottages. As the road then turns left, take the sign-posted byway straight on. This shaded track takes you gently upward to the main road. Cross over on to cycle path no. 5.

When the cycle path rejoins the road, turn right. After 10 yds follow the footpath on the right, signed Little Wittenham 2 miles. Climb over the stile into a field and aim towards another stile midway along the far side of the field. Cut the corner of the next field to another stile on your right. Climbing this, you will see Brightwell Barrow on the hill crest above you. Turn left, following the field edge.

There are only a few remnants of the hedge marking the boundary with the next field and the path is unclear as it turns right along this indistinct line. Keep Brightwell Barrow on your right and Wittenham Clumps on your left as you head uphill. Dorchester Abbey and the River Thames appear in front of you as you crest the rise.

Turn left away from Brightwell Barrow, directly toward the Clumps, as signed on an old section of fence. As you follow this crest, you have the Vale of White Horse to your left and the Thames Valley/South Oxfordshire to your right. Follow the next footpath sign to turn right along the hedgerow, then bear left as the path skirts the edge of the tree line. You will pass a few entrances into Little Wittenham woods on your right. Stay on the path to the top of Castle Hill and its hillfort.

Take your time to explore the Sinodun Hills, the views, the wildlife and ancient heritage. The excellent Earth Trust have positioned useful information points around the site they manage so expertly.

<http://www.earthtrust.org.uk/>

#### Wittenham Clumps to the Abbey – 3km

Head down from the Hills toward the Thames and Little Wittenham church. Turn right on to the lane, crossing Day's lock and the river. (There is a useful campsite at Day's Lock, managed by the Waterways. It must be booked ahead by calling 01865 407768). A diagonal path crosses the meadow away from the river to a gate, where there is a map and information about Dorchester. Take the narrow path between fields, bearing right. When you reach a crossroads of paths, carry straight on, keeping the unusual Dyke Hills on your right. Access into these ancient earthworks is further along the path on your right. It is well worth a brief deviation to walk around this complex.

Our route follows the path left away from the Dykes toward the houses. Look out for home grown produce for sale as the path turns into a track. The track becomes a gravelled lane, and when you join a tarmac road, the Catholic church of St Birinus will appear in front and to your right. This marks the end of the St. Birinus Pilgrimage.

St Birinus. Grade II\* listed. One of the first churches to be built after the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. The Daveys of Overy Manor were a recusant\* Catholic family who, from 1570 and, over several generations, adhered to their Catholic faith in times of great persecution. In 1849, after the Catholic Emancipation Act, John Davey gave the land and paid for the building

of the present church. He commissioned William Wilkinson Wardell, an eminent architect and colleague of Augustus Pugin, to be the architect. Wardell eventually emigrated to Australia and became the architect of the Cathedral churches in Sydney and Melbourne, as well as many other Australian churches. (\*Recusant: An English Roman Catholic of the time from about 1570 to 1791 who refused to attend services of the Church of England and thereby committed a statutory offence.)

The design of the church is in the style of a 14th Century Gothic chapel. It is built of Littlemore stone with Caen stone embellishments and statuary. Under a canopy on the west wall is a carved statue of St. Birinus and in the gable end of the porch is a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Divine Child. The interior is a simple rectangular nave and chancel, with a canopied sedile and piscina, under a painted and gilded ceiling. The wooden traceried rood screen is part of the original furnishings provided by John Davey. The stained glass windows in the sanctuary were made by Ward and Nixon in 1849 for the opening of the church by Archbishop Ullathorne OSB. The church was restored extensively from 2004-2009. The interior restoration was carried out according to the principles of Sir Ninian Comper.

- taken from the website of Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust <http://ohct.org.uk/>

Carry on past the Catholic Church to the Abbey and town with shops, accommodation and amenities. If you are lucky enough to fit in with its opening times, do not miss the wonderful Abbey Tea Rooms.

Abbey Church of St Peter and St Paul. One of the earliest Christian sites in Britain – has been a centre of Christianity since A.D. 634, when St Birinus began a mission to Wessex. The imposing church is all that remains of an Augustinian abbey, founded in 1140. It was enlarged in the 13th and 14th centuries and restored in the 19th. It has good medieval stained glass, a remarkable Jesse window, and a rare lead font.

The church of Dorchester Abbey, as it stands today, was built entirely by the Augustinian Canons, although there are traces on the north side of Saxon masonry, probably part of the ancient cathedral. The whole length of the church is 230 feet (70 m), its width 70 feet (21 m) and its height 55 feet (17 m). The north transept and its doorway are Norman.

The north side of the nave and chancel arch are Early English Gothic. The choir, south side of nave, south aisle are Decorated Gothic. The south porch is late Perpendicular Gothic. The very rich sanctuary, with its highly decorated windows (including the famous east window one known as the Jesse Tree

window) and ornately carved sedilia and piscina, dates from 1330.

Other fittings include one of the few surviving lead fonts in England, frescoes of 1340 and several monuments, especially the well-known "swaggering knight" effigy formerly believed to be Sir John Holcombe who died in 1270 but it is more likely that it is William de Valence the Younger (died 1282 at the Battle of Llandeilo Fawr), son of William de Valence, 1st Earl of Pembroke.

- taken from the website of Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust <http://ohct.org.uk/>

<http://www.dorchester-abbey.org.uk/>

### **Dorchester on Thames to Garsington - 17km/10.5m**

Dorchester village website – <http://www.dorchester-on-thames.co.uk/>. Has useful information on accommodation and other amenities, as well as history of the village.

Parking - on the lane called Bridge End or in the town.

Dorchester to Clifton Hampden – 6km

Follow Bridge End away from town, passing St Birinus on the left. Just after the church bear right, then take an immediate left on to Wittenham Lane. Follow the gravel track until it ends, carry straight on along the path in the field toward the Dyke Hills. Follow the path as it bears right, with the Dykes on your left. Carry straight on at the path crossroads. (If you have done the previous day's walk, you can simply follow the way you came back to the river).

At the river meadow, cross the bridge over the weir to the other side of the river. Turn right, following the Thames Path. Enjoy the riverside walk for about a mile as it bends gently to the left. Eventually the path brings you to a road. Turn right and cross the bridge in to Clifton Hampden, rejoining the Michael line. There is camping available on the riverside here. St Michael and All Angels Church is on the right as you enter the village, situated on a hill overlooking the river.

St Michael and All Angels. The Church of England parish church of St. Michael and All Angels was a chapel of Dorchester parish until the 19th century. The oldest parts of the church include the arcade of the south aisle, which was built in about 1180. Elsewhere in the church are three 13th century Early English lancet windows. The south aisle ends in a Decorated Gothic chapel that was added in the 14th century. The Perpendicular Gothic arcade of the north aisle is later. In 1843–44 the church was rebuilt to the designs of George Gilbert Scott, who ornamented the chancel as a memorial to the benefactor who funded the restoration. - taken from the website of Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust <http://ohct.org.uk/>

In 1889 the novelist Jerome K. Jerome featured the village and its pub, the Barley Mow, in his book *Three Men in a Boat*.

*Round Clifton Hampden, itself a wonderfully pretty village, old-fashioned, peaceful, and dainty with flowers, the river scenery is rich and beautiful. If you stay the night on land at Clifton, you cannot do better than put up at the "Barley Mow."*

Clifton Hampden to Marsh Baldon green – 6km

Down from the church, there is a well-stocked shop and post office on the right. If you are walking on, this is the last shop on the route until Garsington, about 11km away.

Carry on past the shop to the crossroads. Go straight over, between a doctor's surgery on the right and pub on left. This lane ends with a large red brick house on your left. Take the path straight on between Well House and Jamaica Cottage. Cross a minor road, following the footpath sign straight across. Turn right on the gravel lane leading to the main road. Turn left and after 30 yards, turn left again onto a footpath signed to Nuneham Courtenay, 2 2/3 miles. Walk along the edge of the first field, then as you enter the next field turn immediately right, following the hedgeline. Ignore the path crossing right/left after 100 yards, carry straight on and soon you will come to a wood. Go straight over a track and then a bridge – look out for messages of encouragement from the Brahma Kumaris, a spiritual community whose residence you will soon come across.

Head straight up the right hand edge of the next field and follow the path across a green clearing with an oak in the middle, to the right of a house. Turn left onto a farm track between fields, arriving, after a few hundred yards, at a lone house with a remote feel. Turn right here.

This track leads passed abandoned farm machinery to arrive at the Global Retreat Centre, after around ½ mile. This is the home of the aforementioned Brahma Kumaris. You are welcome to go inside and speak to the reception, who should allow you to walk around the estate. There are formal gardens and to the rear, the parkland drops down to the Thames with views to Oxford.

<http://www.globalretreatcentre.org/about/history-of-nuneham-house>

<http://www.globalretreatcentre.org/about/history-of-nuneham-grounds>

From the front gate of the house, take the road directly opposite. Follow it as it meanders for 1/2 mile through peaceful fields and meadows, until you reach a signed footpath on the right. This path is fenced in, with a meadow to the left and woods to the right, and a row of houses in front. An abandoned church can be seen to the left. Follow this path to the right of the houses until it reaches the main road. If you have the time, the entrance to Harcourt Arboretum is 200 yds to your right up the main road. It is well worth a visit at any time of year. Otherwise, cross almost straight over, up Baldon Lane toward Marsh Baldon. Follow this quiet, wooded lane for 1 mile, coming to Baldon House and St Peters Church on your right, just before you enter the village through an old livestock gate. The Seven Stars pub is on your right as you reach the green.



### Marsh Baldon green to Toot Church – 1.5km

Walk on to the green and head for the middle of the tree line that cuts across it, where you will find a bridge over the stream. Turn diagonally to your right after crossing, toward another old livestock gate where you rejoin the road. Go through the gate and follow the road as it forks left up Pebble Hill, between the buildings of Parsonage Farm.

Just over the crest of the hill, take the footpath on the right next to a house. There are open views in front of you toward the Chiltern Hills. Enter the field and turn left, aiming diagonally toward the gate to the right of the houses. Follow the path between a hedge and the houses and carry straight on as it turns into a track. Cross the next lane, going straight on through a gate onto the mown grass path, up to St Lawrence's Church. Lovely views are to be enjoyed from the churchyard.

### Toot Church to Garsington Church – 3.5km

Follow the track left up to Toot Baldon. Take a right onto the road, then turn left opposite the Mole Inn on to the lane. Follow the track downhill, with views of Oxford appearing to your left. Go under the pylons and look out for Garsington to the right on top of a hill. Farm tracks meet after the second hedgerow on the right. Carry on straight through a field, turning right on its far side toward a copse of trees. Take the signed path into the copse, keeping right and going along a covered path until it opens to a field. Cross straight through the field, then over a brook into the next field, which you follow along its right hand edge. A stile brings you to the main road.

Cross straight over and up a farm track. After 100 yards, climb the stile into a field. Keep left close to the hedgerow. Cross into the next field, again keeping to the left hand side, then follow the tree line bearing right across the field toward the houses. Where the footpaths dissect in the middle of the field, carry straight on, taking the next path on the right. This leads out of the field and across a small pasture, emerging onto the left edge of another field. Continue until you reach some houses and a track which brings you to the road. Cross straight over, taking the path signed "To The Church", between a wall and a thatched cottage. Look to your right as you arrive at St. Mary's Church, back across South Oxfordshire and the Sinodun Hills to the West Berkshire Downs and Churn Hill. The Chilterns are to the left and Oxford to the right.

St Mary's. Grade II\* listed. C13 origins but restored C19. Building materials consist of limestone rubble with ashlar dressings. There are Westmorland slate roofs.

Central features include a four-bay aisled nave with a chancel, west tower and south porch. The Chancel of C14 has three two-light windows each side with Y-tracery

The Transitional tower of C13 has at the lower stage, clasping buttresses and a round-headed west window with a pointed outer arch and detached shafts. There are plain lancets to the second stage, and pairs of lancets to each face of the top stage with outer roll-moulded arches on detached shafts.

Interior: There are C14 nave arcades of two chamfered orders under hood-

moulds - round piers to north and later octagonal piers to the south. There is also a chancel arch. Woodwork dates from C19 except for barley twist communion rail in south aisle and C15 screen re-set in tower arch. - taken from the website of Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust <http://ohct.org.uk/>

Garsington has fairly limited services, with only a newsagent and a single pub. For the shop, follow Oxford Road downhill and look out for Elm Drive on your right. The shop is at the bottom of this residential street. The pub is on The Green in the centre of the village, near the church and our route through the village.

### **Garsington to Watlington - 22.2km/13.8m**

Garsington Church to Ripon College – 2.5km

Directly opposite the church door, go through the gate into the adjoining meadow. Take the left hand path toward Garsington manor . Keep to the left of the pond and pass on through another gate to the road. Turn right, passing in front of the manor. Take the first signed footpath on the left, next to Greystone House.

Cuddesdon appears on the hill in front of you. A good path cuts straight across the fields. Ignore the one on the left which leads toward a large house, instead go straight on and then toward the far left corner of the next field. Climb two stiles before joining the road. Turn right, then at the junction, climb the stile straight opposite into the horse pasture. Another stile on the far side of the pasture brings you to a bridge. Cross over the stream to the village green and continue straight on to the road. Follow the road uphill to Cuddesdon. Entering the village, pass The Bat and Ball Inn on your right and when the road forks, turn left uphill to Ripon College.

The College reception is to your left as you enter the complex, with information regarding the site. The Bishop Edward King Chapel is in front of you, famed for its award winning modern architecture. It is kept locked, so be sure to contact the College in advance if you would like to see inside. There are events held at the College throughout the year with which you may be able to time your visit. Please check the website for information.

<http://www.rcc.ac.uk/>

<http://www.rcc.ac.uk/downloads/edward-king-chapel-description.pdf>

[01865 877400/enquiries@rcc.ac.uk](mailto:01865_877400/enquiries@rcc.ac.uk)

There has been a theological college at Cuddesdon for over 160 years. Cuddesdon College was established in 1854 by Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, whose vision was for a college independent of any specific Church faction, and with a focus on the discipline of daily prayer and spiritual formation. A merger with Ripon Hall in the 1970s, forming Ripon College Cuddesdon, brought in new resources and fresh thinking, and helped develop a new and open approach to theological study. - taken from the Ripon College website.

## Ripon College to Great Milton Church – 4km

Turn left out of the college along the road. Carry on past the car park on the left and take the first signed footpath on the right. Pass a row of houses on your left and head into a field, bearing right. As you pass a large house on the right, the path turns left across the field, directly opposite a gate exiting the back garden of the large house. Cross straight over the farm track after 100 yards, over a field and through a gap in the hedgeline. Carry on straight over the next field, bearing to the right hand edge of the copse in front. Turn left on to the road, crossing a double bridge over the River Thames, passing Cuddesdon Mill. Follow the lane uphill and at the junction, turn right. After 50yds, take the signed footpath on your left, to Great Milton, ½ mile.

Follow the hedgerow before taking the gate on the right, across small fields toward some houses. Turn right on to the road and follow into the village. A shop and post office is on your left before you reach the village green. Take the road to the right of the pub on the far side of the green, downhill to St Mary's church.

St Mary's Church. Grade I listed. C11/12 origins with C13 and mainly early C14 additions. Building materials consist of coursed limestone rubble and ashlar dressings. Roofs are of metal sheet.

Central features include a three-bay aisled nave with a chancel, west tower and south porch. The chancel retains a tiny round-headed window on each side and a C13 lancet to south, but has two-light side windows and a four-light east window of Decorated style.

The south aisle is entirely elaborate Decorated work with a high moulded plinth, gabled buttresses with ogee-canopied niches, and three-light side windows, a four-light east window and a two -light west window, each of a different tracery pattern.

The two-storey south porch has a ribbed quadripartite vault with a richly-carved boss, and the parapet continuing around the aisle has fantastic gargoyles. The north aisle is plainer with three-light windows of reticulated tracery, but incorporates a C13 doorway with deeply-moulded arch and five shafts, both detached and attached, with stiff-leaf capitals.

- taken from the website of Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust <http://ohct.org.uk/>

## Great Milton Church to Great Haseley Church – 2.5km

Carry on the road past St Mary's to the junction with the main road. Turn left, walking along the verge for 100 yards. Turn right on to the road toward Great Haseley. Go past an industrial estate, then along an open stretch of several hundred yards. After some houses on the left, look for a footpath sign up a lane called Backway. Follow Backway, bearing right behind the village, until it rejoins the tarmac road after about half a mile. Turn right for the pub or turn left to continue the route. At the next junction, turn right toward Little Haseley. After 150 yards, take the signed footpath on the left through a grand, manor gateway to St Peter's church.

## Great Haseley Church to Stoke Talmage Church – 4.7km

Take the path to the right of the church through the churchyard to an old gate. A very rural section now lies ahead. Look for the footpath sign in front of you and go straight on across a series of fields. Follow the path to a lane and turn left. After ½ mile look for a footpath sign on the right, signed Stoke Talmage, 2.

Follow the path diagonally left across the field and under the pylons. There is a well marked path through the next field to a bridge over Haseley brook. Beyond this take the path along the right hand edge of the next field. Eventually, cross a bridge on the right which takes you onto a lane. Cross straight over the lane and another bridge onto a covered, woody path. The path leaves the wood to the left after 100 yards, emerging into a field. Go diagonally across the field to a wide gap visible in the hedgerow. Look out for a slightly hidden sign as you get to the hedgerow, pointing straight across the next field. The path is signed again over a stile into the next field. Follow the left hand fence uphill.

As you crest the hill, a hidden valley appears. But for the drone of the nearby M40, you could be looking out on a scene from decades past. The hamlet of Clare is on the ridge in front of you. Look right for views back to the Sinodun Hills.

Carry on straight downhill. At the lane, turn left over a cattle grid and carry on into Stoke Talmage. You will come to the church of St Mary Magdalen on your right. This is kept locked but has a beautiful setting, the bench next to door providing an idyllic spot to pause and rest.

St Mary Magdalene. Grade II listed. C13 origins although rebuilt C18. Building materials consist of limestone rubble with ashlar dressings. The roof is gabled and of tile. It is built in Gothic Revival style. Features include a C19 vestry, south porch and north aisle. There is also a chancel and single-aisled nave with a west tower. Windows are Perpendicular style and contain lots of examples of 'Y' tracery. The west tower contains C13 reset lancet windows. The south porch is gabled with a double chamfered doorway.

Interior: Decorated-style piscine with a mid C19 chancel arch. The foliate capitals are C13.

- taken from the website of Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust <http://ohct.org.uk/>

## Stoke Talmage to Pyrton – 4km

Go back to the front gate of the church and turn right on to the lane, uphill to the road. Turn right on to road and follow it uphill for a few hundred yards. The Chilterns appear to your left, with South Oxfordshire to your right.

Look for a signed footpath on the left and follow it straight across the field toward a huge oak, keeping to its right as you pass by. Follow the hedge down to a stile. Cross over and walk straight, bearing slightly right, away from the hedgerow, to meet the left edge of a small copse. Climb a basic stile and cross a plank bridge. Turn to your left immediately and climb another basic stile into a field. Bear right, following the right hand edge of the field toward a red brick house. Cross

straight over the lane into the next field. Look diagonally right for the next stile, 100 yards away. Keep to the right hand fence in the next field, until when the fence turns right, you hold your line straight on across the field.

You will meet the fence to your left and a stream. Look straight on to see a stile into the next field, crossing a stream. Aim diagonally right, to find the gate onto a lane. Turn left and follow the lane into Pyrton, a settlement the Mary line cuts through directly.

St Mary's Church. The church is built of flint with stone dressings on the nave and chancel and the roofs are covered with copper. It probably dates to C14. This copper was used in replacement of the former lead roof which twice in the space of a year was stripped by thieves. The original roof was thatched and the ridge marks of this roof can still be seen on the east side of the tower. The Tower is square with buttresses to give added stability. The belfry windows are really 'sound holes' filled with louvres which allow the sound of the bells to radiate.

Lacking stone for a spire, a thin leaded spirelet was built from within the parapet of the tower. This style of building became so popular in the County, that such spirelets are known as 'Hertfordshire Spikes', although they are to be found elsewhere. The tower and the nave have embattled parapets.

- taken from the website of Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust <http://ohct.org.uk/>

Pyrton to Watlington – 1.5km

Pyrton is very small and quiet, with no amenities. For accommodation and services, it is recommended to carry on to the nearby town of Watlington.

Carry on through Pyrton and take the first road on the right. After 500 yards there is footpath on the left signed Watlington, ½ mile. Take this and look out for the right branch away from the field, which takes you to a lane between the school and allotments.

Turn right onto the road toward the Chequers pub in front of you. Then turn left opposite the pub onto Paul's Way. Turn right on to Saunders Close and follow the alley straight on, turning left and left again to join the High Street, taking you to the town centre. You will find all amenities here, including a library, shops and accommodation. For a good campsite nearby, carry straight on at the town hall crossroads, up a one way road called Hill Road. Pass the Carriers pub 100 yards on the left and carry straight on for a 1/4 mile, to the Ridgeway and the White Mark campsite on the right.

<http://www.watlington.org>

<http://www.whitemarkfarm.co.uk/>



