



BBC Oxford Oxford Inspires

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Blenheim is a World Heritage Site

Tread the path of warriors and kings by Simon Pipe (October 9th 2007)

BBC Oxford's walking trail between Chipping Norton and Woodstock is a path through the past. It follows a valley known to princes, soldiers, a poet laureate and England's greatest gardener. The Glyme Valley Way follows a river that ripples through history.

The river flows past deserted villages, ancient roads, an Iron Age earthwork, a playground of kings, and the birthplaces of Winston Churchill and The Black Prince. And it leads walkers through two landscapes created by the great Lancelot "Capability" Brown - one of them now a World Heritage Site.

The trail has been created by BBC Oxford and the Oxfordshire Countryside Service as part of Oxfordshire 2007, celebrating a thousand years of the county's history.

Chipping Norton

The trail starts by the museum in Oxfordshire's highest town, where grand buildings recall Chipping Norton's glory days at the height of the wool trade. Wealth from wool paid for ornate additions to the 15th Century church, which stands on the slope between the medieval Guildhall and the old castle mound. The reverend Henry Joyce was hanged from the church tower in the 16th Century, for refusing to lead prayers in English, rather than Latin.



Chipping Norton town hall

The Glyme Valley Way leaves the museum and Town Hall via the Charlbury Road, then turns into countryside by the allotments and school, reaching the infant river just beyond Glyme Farm. Soon it crosses a lane known to locals as Swing Swang - but to historians as one of the ancient salt ways that carried salt from Droitwich to the tables of the rich.

Old Chalford

A mile further on, walkers reach a private cluster of houses around a lake with a grotto. In the Domesday Book, Old Chalford was called Celford and listed as having a mill. It still had one in 1856, for grinding bones.

Just beyond, the ghost village of Nether Chalford lies a few yards below the footpath. No one knows why it was deserted, but it has not quite disappeared: the bones of the cottages and chapel in "The Towns" are still clearly visible in the meadow, where cows graze in the old main street. The village is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument, just like its twin deserted village of Upper Chalford, across the valley.

Lidstone

Tiny Lidstone is one of the "towns" embraced by the parish of Enstone of the Seven Towns. There used to be a pub here, and a working mill - and also, long ago, the giant stone of Leodwine, which gave the hamlet its name.

Now it is a string of stone cottages leading steeply down to the river, where the Glyme Valley Way turns downstream, then climbs slowly to cross the A44 - once a turnpike road, on which travellers paid tolls to pay for upkeep.



Cottages on Church Enstone's green

Enstone

The Harrow Inn on the edge of Enstone is close to the site of a fabulous grotto and fountains, visited by King Charles I and Queen Henrietta in 1636. On the day of the royal visit, two jets of rose-coloured water each raised up a golden ball and held it suspended in the air. The King plucked one from the water and found a portrait of the queen inside it, painted on ivory. The gardens and their ballroom fell into decline after the civil war. The Enstone shepherd Mont Abbott told how, in his young days, "Queen Henrietta's waterworks" became the privy at the back of the pub.

Enstone is said to be named after Enna's Stone, a chambered long barrow whose weird remains stand by the road the Charlbury. The Glyme Valley Way heads the other way, crossing the entrance to Heythrop Park and dropping down to a mill that stopped working in the 1960s - the last of six in the parish.



An ancient rock at Cleveley is a mystery

Cleveley

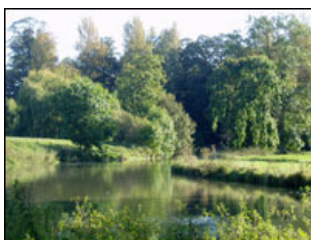
A mile beyond the green at Church Enstone, the path drops into Upper Cleveley, opposite one of the hamlet's two old mills. This was once a busy working settlement, three or four times its present size. The lake was created in 1972. The winding lane through Lower Cleveley was the original route of the Oxford to Worcester turnpike.

Kiddington

Great trees mark the fringe of parkland that gives views down to Kiddington Hall and its lakes, the first of several landscapes created in Oxfordshire by the great Lancelot "Capability" Brown. He was famed for a uniquely English style of "naturalistic" landscaping with artificial lakes and careful scatterings of exotic trees, but had his critics. One said he hoped to die before Brown so that he could see Heaven before Brown "improved" it.

Brown exploited the "capability" of 170 gardens in England, including Nuneham Courtney, Adderbury and Blenheim. It was partly for his work at Blenheim - and the lake he created by damming the Glyme - that it was made a World Heritage Site. The 24-year-old Brown said of Kiddington Hall and its garden: "I will make it so agreeable that no one will wish to look beyond it". The Glyme Valley Way passes through the heart of the estate.

Thomas Warton, Poet Laureate from 1785, was parson of Kiddington for 20 years, soon after the gardens were established. He was also a fellow of Trinity College at Oxford, fond of drinking, hunting and prize fighting. He discouraged students from attending his lectures. His pen was more poetic than his voice, likened by his friend Doctor Johnson to a turkey's gobble.



Kiddington's 'Capability' Brown lake

He described the Glyme as "a deep but narrow stream, winding through willowed meadows and abounding in trout and wild fowl." In his April Ode, he pictured the coming of spring at Kiddington, with swallows skimming the village green and rooks swarming in the oak trees round the manor house:

Within some whispering osier isle,
Where Glyme's low banks neglected smile,
And each trim meadow still retains
The wintry torrent's oozy stains...

Kiddington has another poetic connection: the hall was owned by Sir George Browne, who was the real-life "Sir Plume of amber snuff box justly vain" in Alexander Pope's poem, *The Rape of the Lock*.

Glympton

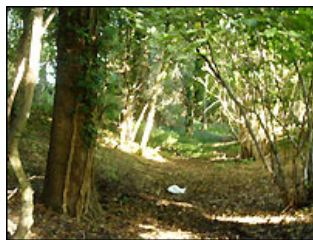
The Glyme is dammed again to create another serpentine lake at Glympton Park - not visible from the public footpath. This lake was not the work of Brown, though he may have given advice. The original "Glim Tune" - meaning Place By The Shining Stream - was in the spot where the small 12th Century church still stands, a few yards off the Glyme Valley Way. A chest in the church vestry was said to have held the wages of Oliver Cromwell's soldiers.

The village was moved in 1636 to make way for the creation of Glympton Park. The manor and village at Glympton were bought in the 1990s by Prince Bandar bin Sultan, a member of the Saudi royal family and former ambassador in Washington. He spent many millions of pounds restoring the 2,500-acre estate - which includes the old village stocks, re-erected on the green below the post office.

Wychwood Forest

Our trail has to leave the valley below Glympton, venturing into the old Forest of Wychwood. Here, English kings maintained hunting rights for hundreds of years, and special Forest Law prevailed. It was already well established as a royal hunting forest - not all of it woodlands - by the time of the Domesday Book of 1086.

The boundary of the forest has moved several times. Henry the Second extended its area but it was reduced again after 1219. In 1609 the boundary ran along the current route of the A44. Journeys called perambulations were occasionally made to establish exactly what land lay inside the forest. Where the Glyme Valley Way turns east to head back to the main road, it follows the course of a perambulation conducted in 1300.



Grim's Ditch lies in Wychwood Forest

Grim's Ditch

Before reaching the road again, the trail crosses Grim's Ditch, a shallow depression heading north from the path, with trees growing up through it. This vast Iron Age work enclosed 22 square miles between Woodstock and Charlbury. No one knows why Grim's Ditch was built, but it has been suggested it was a defence against chariot warfare. This area was a frontier between three Iron Age tribes.

Wootton

Soon the path looks down on the Glyme once more, over a series of ponds to the ancient Cotswold stone village of Wootton. The bridge was built in 1840: before that, there was only a ford. Like Woodstock, the village had a thriving glove-making industry, sometimes using deer skins from the royal hunting grounds. Wootton was once royal property itself, before being granted to the first Duke of Marlborough. Land east of the village has only recently been sold by the estate to a village trust and opened to walkers, 300 years on.

A mile further on, the trail crosses Akeman Street, a Roman road serving the important military stronghold at Alchester, near present-day Bicester. The site of an early Roman town was found close to the Glyme, just north of Akeman Street, in the late 20th Century.



The Black Prince was born at Woodstock

Old Woodstock

The Glyme Valley Way rejoins the river by Woodstock's ancient water meadows. On the north bank is Old Woodstock and the Black Prince pub - named after the illustrious son of Edward the Third. The prince was known during his lifetime as Edward of Woodstock, because he was born here. He led a succession of campaigns that won French territory for England, but sometimes caused terrible suffering. He died of melancholy in 1376, a year before he would have become king. The Crown passed to his only surviving son, who became King Richard the Second - and invented the handkerchief.

Today, the Black Prince pub is the home of the Old Woodstock Mock Mayor ceremony, which continues a good-hearted tradition of mocking the official town mayor and councillors in the "new" town of Woodstock, across the valley. The custom was first recorded in 1786. It involves electing a mock mayor who is then thrown in the river. Nowadays the hustings take place on the first Saturday in August.

Old Woodstock is said to have been founded by Saxons who had been driven out of the royal hunting forest.

Blenheim Palace

Across the main road from the Black Prince pub, a spur in the Glyme Valley Way enters the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site. It passes close to the site of Woodstock Manor, a royal palace that was begun as a hunting lodge for King Henry the First, and housed a succession of English monarchs.



John Vanbrugh's bridge at Blenheim

Blenheim Palace was built across the valley to commemorate the first Duke of Marlborough's audacious victory in The Battle of Blenheim in 1704. The Duke died without a male heir but a unique Act of Parliament allowed the title to pass to his wife... who ordered the destruction of the old ruins as soon as her new home was completed.

Sir Winston Churchill, Britain's wartime leader and grandson of the seventh Duke, was born in Blenheim Palace in 1874. He is buried in the churchyard at Bladon, close to the spot where the Glyme joins the River Evenlode.

The Blenheim Loop of our trail leads walkers beside the lake and past the great Column of Victory, recording the first Duke's military honours, but the main route leads up the hill into town. It may be possible to enter the park and turn left up a path above Capability Brown's great lake, emerging into the High Street through the Triumphal Arch - but a fee is charged in summer.

Woodstock

The town of Woodstock grew up in the shadow of its palaces, but its fine buildings testify to a rich history of its own. It was given its royal charter as borough in 1543. Tradition says Oliver Cromwell lodged at 28 High Street during the siege of Woodstock Manor in 1646. The grand town hall was commissioned by the fourth Duke of Marlborough in 1766.



Trail's end: the stocks at Woodstock

The Glyme Valley Way ends outside the county museum in the High Street. Here, walkers can put their feet up, and wonder why the old town stocks have holes for five legs...

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