

Round Oxford Walk Section III - Shotover to Sandford Lock

We start section III by the car park at the top of Shotover Hill, in what is the Shotover Country Park, managed by the City Council.

From the Oxford.gov.uk website – “On the eastern fringes of Oxford, Shotover Country Park is a whole hillside of hidden valleys, sudden views and varied habitats which are freely accessible all the year round. This beautiful and historic country park covers most of the 100ha of land between Shotover Plain and the Eastern Bypass and falls into two main parts, the southern slopes of Shotover Hill and the flat predominantly wooded land near the bypass.

In 1908 the Rev A. H. Johnson raised enough money to buy Part of Shotover for the University a condition of the gift being that it be opened to the public forever. This land was later leased to the City Council who were also given much of the rest of Shotover on condition that it be kept as public open space.”

From the Car Park our walk heads east along the ridge; after about half a mile the path splits, narrowing to a lane ahead, and forking off to the right into the woods of the Country Park. Follow the fork to the right into the woods (also signed here as the Oxford Green Belt Way). Go down through the woods, but keep an eye out after 400m for a footpath branching off to the left (again signed as Public footpath and Oxford Green Belt Way). **Take care – it is easy to miss the turn to the left here** out of the wood.

As you break out of the wood a fantastic view opens up for you of the South East corner of the City and the land beyond, right across to the Chilterns. In the foreground are the Cowley works. It is a spectacular view. Follow the path

Follow the footpath down the field to meet the edge of the village of Horspath. The footpath then heads left (signed at a little gate on the edge of the village) and becomes a little hedged-in track going behind the farm and some houses, and onto a village road. Turn right, it takes you down through Horspath, past the Post Office and shop, and The Chequers pub. Bear left and after the pub go under the railway bridge. 50m after the bridge take the footpath off to the right through the horse paddocks.

To quote the very good Horspath village website “Horspath may not be a pretty village, but it has character”!

Horspath lies in a geological area known as the "Oxford Heights". The area occupies the northerly part of a belt of low limestone hills that surround Oxford and separates the low-lying clay vales which lie to the north and south. This is an area of prominent relief and complex geology and soils, which contrasts markedly with the adjoining clay vales.

The hills are composed of Upper Jurassic Corallian limestones and sands which outcrop in a broad belt from Wheatley north-westwards to Beckley and have historically been the source of superior building stone. Elsewhere these rocks are overlain by Kimmeridge Clay and a capping of Lower Greensand which forms the higher ground at Shotover Hill, Forest Hill and above Garsington. In the north, the hills descend sharply into the low-lying Cherwell Valley and Otmoor lowlands which are overlain by extensive deposits of Oxford Clay, while to the east and south the hills descend into the alluvial floodplain of the River Thame and its tributary, Baldon Brook.

In Romano-British times there were pottery kilns producing Oxfordshire red/brown-slipped wares at Horspath Open Brasenose. Production of red-slipped wares commenced by about AD 240 and continued until end of 4th century.

Production at the Horspath kiln was from the mid 3rd century until the 4th century. A wide range of red-slipped table wares, often decorated with rouletting, stamps or white slip, was produced in the Oxfordshire potteries and widely distributed across Britain during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. A Romano-British pottery mould has been found at Horspath and Roman pottery has been found on the allotments and on the common to the north of the village.

The area was once part of the medieval **Royal Forest of Shotover**, with dense woodland cover extending from Islip to Cuddesdon until 'disafforestation' in 1660. A number of important remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland remain, particularly on the steeper hillsides near Stanton St John and at Shotover Hill, where important remnants of calcareous grass-heath also occur. Over much of the area, the free draining and easily cultivated soils have historically been suited to growing arable crops while permanent pasture and wet woodland are more common on the heavy clay soils of the floodplains.

The Oxford Heights have been a favoured area for settlement since prehistoric times and villages such as Wheatley, Horspath, Garsington, Cuddesdon, Holton and, particularly, Headington (a 'royal village') were some of the primary settlements in Oxfordshire during the Saxon period. The original settlements took advantage of the higher ground and the water supply provided by springs which emerge at the junction of the limestone and clay or, in the case of Beckley, from the freshwater marshes of Otmoor to the north. Some settlements, such as Wheatley and Horspath, later 'migrated' into nearby valleys but the distinctive pattern of villages perched on hilltops and ridges is still evident with only isolated farms occupying the surrounding lowlands. (From Wikipedia)

Follow the public footpath along after the paddocks, and at the bottom of the field (at 576040 on the map) where the bank starts up the hill, follow the path that goes off to the right along the bottom hedge and then straight on at the end of the field. Keep on this path / track until you hit the Oxford / Garsington road at the edge of Blenheim. Turn left and then after 100m turn right down Kiln Lane.

Go through Kiln Farm and on down Kiln Lane. At the main road (B480) opposite Great Leys Farm turn right and after 30 yards cross the road [be **very careful** here the cars can whizz around the corner] and follow the signed footpath across the field to the houses at the back of Blackbird Leys. Follow the footpath along by the road with Blackbird Leys on your right and the electricity sub station on your left.

From Wikipedia: **Blackbird Leys** is a [ward](#) located on the south-eastern outskirts of [Oxford, England](#), and is one of the largest [council estates](#) in Europe. According to the 2001 census, the ward had a population of 5,803.^[1] Unusually, the area constitutes a [civil parish](#), created in 1990; the 2001 parish headcount was 12,196. Archaeology has revealed this site as one of Oxford's earliest settlements, dating it from between the [Bronze Age](#) and the [Iron Age](#). Evidence suggesting pits and [roundhouses](#), with remains of pottery and a cylindrical [loom weight](#) of a kind previously known only from [East Anglia](#). Modern-day Blackbird Leys was built mainly in the 1950s and 60s to meet the then pressing need for accommodation. It was part of a plan to re-house people from the dilapidated inner city. This included large-scale clearance of a site near to where the [Oxford Ice Rink](#) is currently located ([The Oxpens](#)). Many of the families that moved onto the estate originally came from this area. It was also a convenient site for factory workers at the [Morris Motor Company](#) plant in nearby [Cowley](#).

Follow on until the footpath turns away from the houses and heads to the back of the sewage works. Follow the path along the back of the rather impressive Oxford Sewage Treatment Works, go sharp right at the end, then left past the entrance to the Oxford Mobile Home park, on to the end of the lane, and then down to join the road outside the Oxford Science Park. Then cross the road at the roundabout and follow the footpath through the tunnel under the busy A4074. Once under the bridge turn right at the T junction in the village of **Sandford-on-Thames** and then after 100m fork left. Follow the road on down and let weariness, hunger and thirst draw you on to reach the Kings Arms on the Thames at **Sandford Lock**.

Sandford Lock : This lock is one of only three with the greatest fall on the Thames, sharing a fall of 2.68 metres (8ft 10in) with the three Teddington locks, those nearest the estuary.

'The pool under Sandford lasher, just behind the lock, is a very good place to drown yourself in'. So wrote Jerome K Jerome in his book Three Men in a Boat. There is a stone obelisk between the weirs, marking the location where two men were drowned in a bathing accident in 1845. The treacherous undercurrents of the Sandford Lasher claimed two young lives in 1921, when two students drowned together in the pool. One was Michael Llewellyn-Davies, adopted son of J M Barrie who wrote Peter Pan. These two names were added to the obelisk.

Sandford was one of the first three locks ever built on the Thames (the others were at Iffley and the long gone Swift Ditch near Abingdon) in 1630. Over the years the lock has undergone many modifications and rebuilds, so not much of the original remains, except for three large lumps of granite on the lockside. The current lock - a 1972/3 rebuild - used much of the structure from the early lock. Two versions of the locality's history are well known. One, that monks worked a mill on the river here to make bread around the year 1170. Two, the Knights Templar built the first mill here in the 1200s. Either way, the building was converted to a paper mill in 1826 but this was closed down in the 1970s. These days, private flats grace the site.

Kingfishers, buzzards, red kites and many other birds are frequent visitors to the lock. Moorhens, greylag and Egyptian geese are common here. {again all thanks to Wikipedia}