

The Round Oxford Walk - Section II

Maps – I suggest the Ordnance Survey Explore Map 180, 1:25000 on Oxford. The 164 1:50,000 map is OK for a general view, but for when you are doing it you will benefit from having the greater detail on the 180.

From Noke village you follow the footpath along the edge of Otmoor, (you get great views off to your left), and up into Noke wood – bought by John Buchan with the profits from “The 39 Steps” and still owned by the family. Follow the path up through the middle of Noke Wood, and then up the bank towards **Beckley** village. Again super views over Otmoor as you come up the bank.

Follow the path into the village, and then when you reach the main road in the village, follow it around to the left, and go on past the Abingdon Arms pub, and then swing round to the right following the road through the upper part of the village and along the ridge; houses and TV mast on your right, magnificent views out over Otmoor to your left.

The Beckley Mast - *The transmitter was constructed in 1968 by the BBC, having been chosen as a suitable site for high power colour UHF transmissions. The transmitter entered service on 17 February 1968 carrying BBC Two, with ITV and BBC One following later in June 1970. Originally the site was host to a low power BBC monochrome 405-line VHF television relay, which was mounted on a much smaller tower. The latter is still on the site and is presently used for microwave dishes. In 1997, the transmitter began analogue transmissions of Ch Five at high power. In 1998, the transmitter began digital transmissions of all six ONdigital multiplexes. In 1999, the transmitter began analogue transmissions of Oxford's RSL local channel, Six TV on low-power. Coverage area: It serves the south midlands, including Oxfordshire, most of Buckinghamshire, and parts of north Berkshire, north east Wiltshire, south east Gloucestershire and south west Northamptonshire. It is sometimes called the Beckley mast, a reference to an adjacent village, or the Ot Moor mast, this referring to the area on which it is located.]*

When you get to the T Junction turn right, and then after 50m turn left following the footpath through the elegant set-up that is **Woodperry**.

When you reach the farm at the far side of their main drive watch that you keep on the right path (it is pretty much straight on). Then on through the fields and finally allotments (fork right into the allotments) before reaching **Stanton St John**.

Lovely views from here on off to your left over toward the town of Thame, Aylesbury and the Chilterns with Stanton Great Wood on your immediate left.

Pass through the building site that is Breach Farm, and just out of the farm the track heads uphill to the right. You head left, and on up toward **Forest Hill**. Turn right into the village and go past The White Horse pub on your left.

Go across the road opposite The White Horse and follow the lane toward Manor Farm. After approximately 100m, look out for the footpath sign heading off to your right. Follow this path back toward the outskirts of Oxford, the noisy A40 on your left. After a while the path leads along behind a row of houses in Sandhills. Turn left into the first street and go up the street to the A40. Don't cross the road – use the underpass! Once out of the underpass immediately on your left is a footpath going up next to AC Nielson's offices and then by some playing fields, follow this up to the ridge on Shotover Hill. Could be great bluebells in the woods on the way up.

See Alan Simpson's notes on Shotover at his website
<http://home.clara.net/shotover/shotover.htm>

Or here ...

“Shotover Hill and the Old Road

Shotover Hill, 3 miles (5km) to the east of Oxford, rises steeply to a height of 557 feet (171m) above sea level. Indeed one theory of the origin of the name Shotover is from the Old English Scoet Ofer, meaning a steep slope.

Shotover was a Royal Forest from the time of the Domesday book until 1660, by which time the woodland was in such poor condition that it was disafforested or made no longer subject to forest laws.

Throughout its time as a Royal Forest the road from Oxford to London ran over the top of Shotover Hill. Up to the middle of the sixteenth century the main users of the road would have been pedestrians, riders and pack horses. The Highways Act of 1555 made parishes responsible for the upkeep of roads within their boundaries. In the Oxford area, increased traffic placed a heavy strain on the roads leading into the town and this resulted in the Mileways Act of 1576. This bound inhabitants living within 5 miles of Oxford to supply labour proportional to their holdings, to maintain the roads within one mile of the city center or "mileways". However the road over Shotover was outside this one mile limit and so did not benefit from the mileways act. Its maintenance remained the responsibility of the parish.

By the seventeenth century wheeled carts and waggons were starting to replace packhorses, and carriages were coming into use for people making longer journeys. In 1669 the diarist Anthony Wood reported that on Monday April 26th, the first "Flying Coach" was able to complete the journey from Oxford to London within a single day. It set out at 6 am from All Souls college and set its passengers down at their inn in London by 7 pm.

This increase in wheeled traffic took its toll on the roads and by 1647 parishioners with the misfortune to have a "main road" passing through their parish were arguing that taxes should be levied on road users to fund the upkeep of the roads. The result of this was the first of the Turnpike Acts, passed by Parliament in 1663. This permitted local justices in Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire to levy tolls on traffic using the important road Ermine Street, where it passed through those counties, in order to cover the costs of keeping the road in good repair.

The idea of making road users, rather than parishioners, pay for road maintenance caught on slowly over the next 30 years. The early "Justice Trusts" were replaced by Independent Trustees, who were granted powers to borrow money, appoint officers, manage the roads and levy tolls to pay for their repair. The trustees themselves were unpaid and specifically forbidden from making a profit from the activities of the trust. However most were local business men who benefitted indirectly from the increased trade brought to a town with good road links. The turnpike system grew steadily over the next 150 years until by 1838 when the turnpikes were at their peak, it has been estimated that there were more than 1000 turnpike trusts, responsible for around 22,000 miles (35,000 km) of highway. This represented around one fifth of all the public highways in the country.

The road over Shotover was made into a Turnpike by the Stokenchurch Turnpike act of 1719, the introduction to the act stating that the road had "become so ruinous and Bad, that in the winter season the said Road is Dangerous to Travellers".

Presumably the act resulted in an improvement to the road, but the tolls charged were a source of much complaint. In 1740 the tolls were one shilling for wagons and carriages drawn by four or more horses, and sixpence for those with less than four horses; a lot of money at that time.

The Turnpike Act could do nothing to reduce the slope of the hill and the western escarpment in particular was so steep that travellers were forced to dismount from their coaches and walk up the hill. The resultant slow progress made Shotover a favourite haunt of Highwaymen. In 1737 for example, John Wesley was a victim.

In 1773 the trustees applied to parliament for powers to divert the road to a new route entirely avoiding Shotover. In 1775 a cutting was made up the steep face of Headington Hill making possible the opening of a "New Turnpike" to the north of the old road, passing through Headington and along the line of the present A40 road. However progress on the new road appears to have been slow, with disputes over the exact route and a shortage of funds to build it. In 1788 the trustees went back to parliament with a request to enlarge the term and powers of the previous act in order to allow them to complete the new road. It was not until 1789 that the old route over Shotover was finally abandoned.

The new turnpike continued in use for another 90 years. The 1830's were the heyday of the turnpikes when the volume of traffic was at its maximum. During the 1840's income started to fall as the railways began to take over the long distance traffic and the Stokenchurch road was finally disturnpiked in 1878.

After 1789, the the road over Shotover fell into disuse. Little maintenance has been carried out since then and the description of 1719 is probably once more true! (Though nowadays travellers who venture over the hill are more likely to damage sumps and exhausts than to be attacked by highwaymen!)

The Country Park

Over the top of Shotover Hill, the old road is known as Shotover Plain. To the north of the Plain, the land is farmed but the Plain itself and the land to the south comprise Shotover Country Park. This land is open to the public and managed by the Oxford City Council."

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