

## The Round Oxford Walk - Section I

**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.

Start at the Public Car Park at the north west corner of Port Meadow. (Just next to Wolvercote village, on the road leading from Wolvercote to The Trout Inn and Wytham). There is a plaque across the road here commemorating two Royal Flying Corps airmen who were killed here in a plane crash in 1912.

Head off east across the top (northern end) of **Port Meadow**, or if the dew is bad go through Wolvercote village.

**Port Meadow:** *The meadow is an ancient area of grazing land, still used for horses and cattle, and has never been ploughed. In return for helping to defend the kingdom against the marauding Danes, the Freemen of Oxford were given the 120ha of pasture next to the Thames by King Alfred who founded the City in the 10th Century. The Freemen's collective right to graze their animals free of charge was recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 and has been exercised ever since. In the 17th and 18th centuries the meadow was used for horse racing, and low stone bridges laid over washes and ditches for this purpose still survive.*

*During the First World War part of Port Meadow was used as a military airfield and the Royal Artillery had a base there. In 1940, during Second World War, a camp was set up on the meadow for military personnel evacuated from Dunkirk. [from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port\\_Meadow,\\_Oxford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_Meadow,_Oxford)].*

[www.portmeadowbirding.com](http://www.portmeadowbirding.com) Adam Hartley's great website blogging his almost daily visits to Port Meadow and sightings of birds seen there and in particular on the flood-water.

Then head East out of Wolvercote on the Godstow Road over the railway and canal bridge and along the pavement to the round-about at the Woodstock Road / A 40 junction. Take care of the traffic here, even if you are starting off very early and the junction is quiet. Go up Five Mile Drive, passing the Wolvercote Cemetery on your left, all the way to the Banbury Road.

**Wolvercote Cemetery,** *Unusually, this single cemetery is divided into areas to accommodate graves of the Jewish and Muslim communities, as well as all categories of Christians. Many Russians, Poles and other East Europeans who did not belong to Oxford parishes are buried here. There are more than 15,000 people buried there including Isaiah Berlin and JR Tolkein. It was opened in 1889. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolvercote\\_Cemetery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolvercote_Cemetery)*

At the Banbury Road turn left, and cross over the road where safe. Walk on towards Kidlington past the North Oxford Golf Club and then right down the bridleway / driveway opposite the golf course. Just before you get to Water Eaton Manor the track does a sharp left but your footpath goes straight on over the River Cherwell via Sparsey Bridge.

At **Sparsey Bridge** have a look at the charming Water Eaton Manor tucked away to your left. [ *Pevsner's Oxfordshire gives a full description, saying it is 16th/17th centuries, probably started 1586, and that there would have been wings left and right of the present house. The chapel, built in 1610 is visible on the right.*

*1909: The Thames Story, J E Vincent -*

*Thus far we must penetrate, in spite of difficulties of navigation over the ford close to the house, [not nowadays] for whoso has not seen Water Eaton from the Cherwell has not seen one of the neatest and most complete Jacobean manor houses in England. Thirty years ago [i.e. 1879] one might inspect the whole, courtyard, chapel and the rest, for it was occupied as a farm, and the farm folk were kindly. Since then it has been the home of a famous architect,*

now dead, and it is possibly somebody else's home now, into which one would not like to intrude. But from the Cherwell it is perfect, and worth three and four times the little trouble needed to reach it. Water Eaton is quite far enough up the stream to go; Islip hardly repays the trouble of winning to it, though the navigation is through scenes of real beauty. Taken from the very good guide to the Cherwell / Thames at <http://thames.me.uk/s02430.htm> ]



After Sparsey Bridge follow the footpath through the field and over a little ditch bridge at the end, then go left and after 20 yards after the hedge go right following the hedge, and thence on to **Woodeaton**. After passing Woodeaton Manor School on your left the path hits a T junction at the main road in the village.

**Woodeaton Manor School** : *Woodeaton Manor was built in 1775 in a commanding position west of the villiage of Woodeaton, with extensive views south across Oxford city and the Thames Valley beyond. In the early 1790s the house was extended and refurbished to the designs of John Soane. This was shortly after his appointment as architect to the Bank of England, and it demonstrates some of the developing style of one of Britain's greatest architectural talents. The house contains elegant Soane cornices, chimney pieces and decorations most of which are still in fine condition. The importance of Woodeaton Manor is reflected in its Grade II\* ('particularly important buildings of more than special interest'; in top 6% of all listed buildings). The remainder of the site – the stable block, water tower, workshops, cottages, boundary walls, walled garden and folly – is all Grade II listed. Since 1950 the House and the grounds have served as Woodeaton Manor School, providing education for children with moderate learning difficulties, and since 2004 for for pupils with Emotional and Social difficulties.*

**Woodeaton Church** – built in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, then with a Tower added in the C14<sup>th</sup>.

Turn left and follow the road out of the village and along to a junction with the main road. Please take care on this half mile stretch of road. Go straight over the main road at the T junction and down a footpath known as Prattle Lane. In the late Spring there are fine bluebells and wood anemones.

Prattle Lane reaches **Noke** village [*Anglo-Saxon place-name meaning 'place of the Oak', v good 12<sup>th</sup> century church*]. Turn right at the road, and then very soon after turn right again onto what is a section of the Oxfordshire Way. It has probably taken you 90-120 minutes to get here from Port Meadow, and makes a nice spot for a break. Here you are on the edge of Otmoor and about to start heading up toward Noke Wood.