



Red Kites and Red Deer Fingest, Christmas Common, Pishill, Turville

Distance 23 km (14 miles), easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Chilterns

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Map: Explorer 171 (Chiltern Hills West)

Refreshments: every village!

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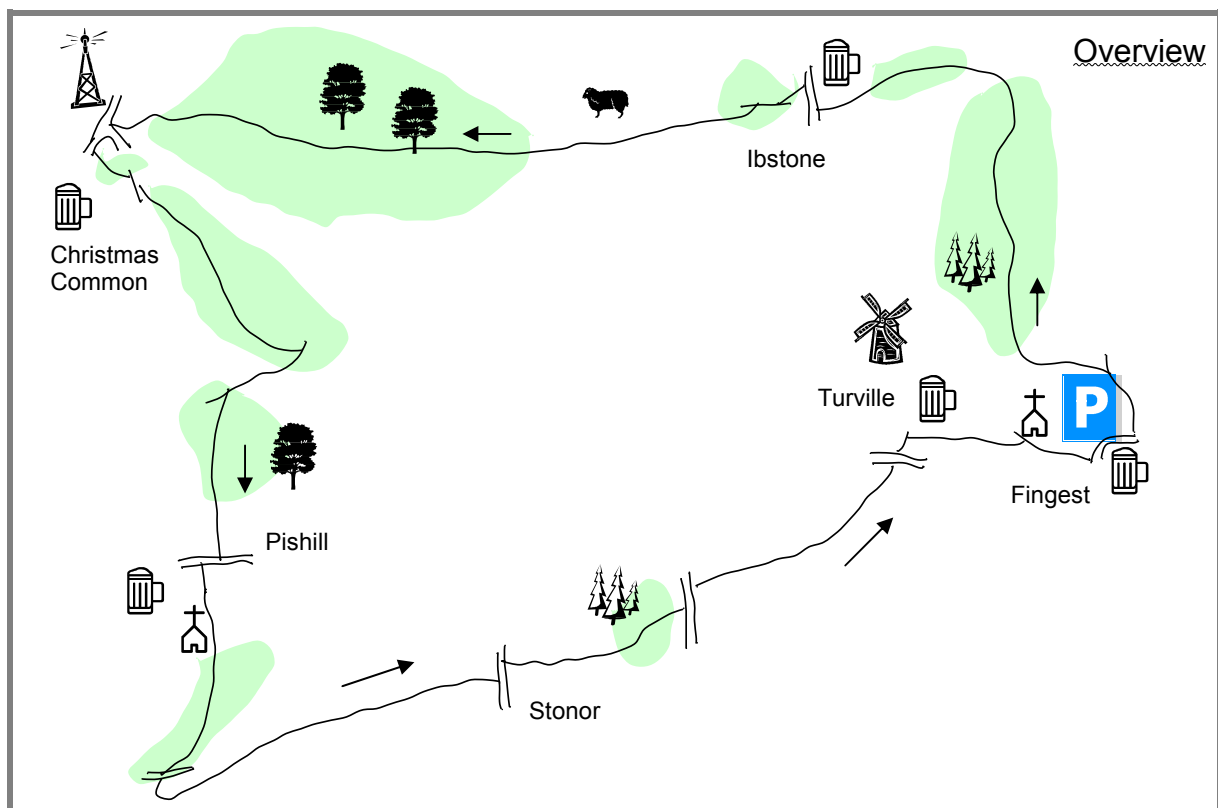
Woodland, hills, views

In Brief



This is an unforgettable walk through hilly beechwoods and villages of Buckinghamshire and South Oxfordshire, easily accessible from London. It is perfect at any time because the beech trees change at every season sometimes with spectacular colours. The walk is easy to follow thanks to the white arrows painted on the trees.

There are no nettles, except for a tiny patch just before Stonor. Dogs have a free run in the woods with just a few sheep and cattle fields.



The walk begins in the village of Fingest, Bucks, not far from Henley-on-Thames. The following is a favourite cultural route via the M4 and Marlow but it can easily be reached from Henley or via Stokenchurch (exit 5) on the M40, due south through Ibstone. For full details see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

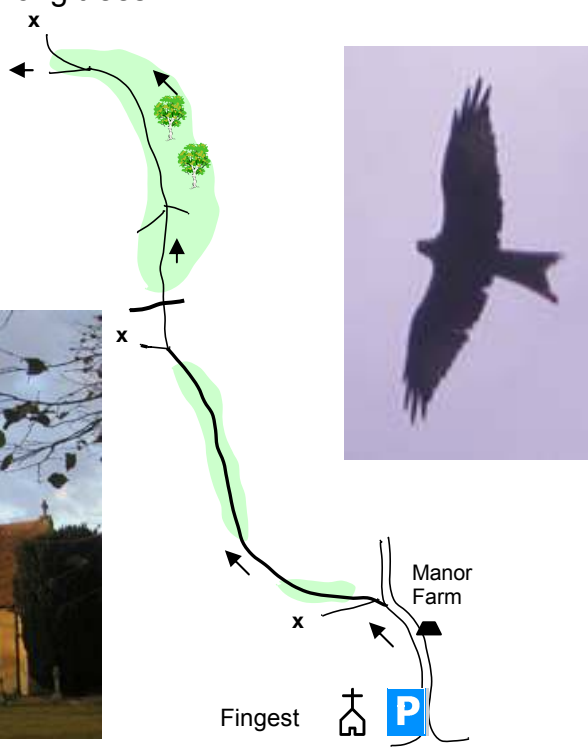



Looking at the unique church of St Bartholomew you feel transported to the South, maybe Italy, rather than England. The massive western Norman tower with twin gables is early 12th-century. Inside is some fine stained glass. Outside are the brick and flint walls, lined with ancient lime trees and of course the wonderful setting.

The name Fingest derives by gradual change from Tinghurst which tells us it is on a wooded hill, as we know, and that it was the seat of a Medieval council.

Leg 1: Fingest to Christmas Common 9 km=6 miles

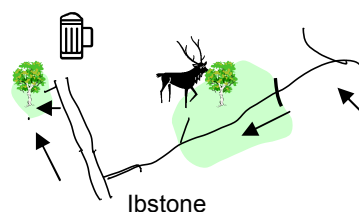
- 1 Continue along the lane with the church on the left. Soon on the right you pass the picturesque Manor Farm usually with white doves fluttering on its roofs. Just after the lane bends left, ignore a footpath right and 100m later take a signposted footpath **left**. Before a gate into a field, fork **right** on the narrow footpath and continue on this forest path as it runs between fields and again among trees.



*From this point, and for most of the walk, you will see red kites, the birds that were re-introduced so successfully and now majestically glide over the Chiltern Hills. Soon you pass a white arrow on a tree and then a junction marked with more white arrows . Keep straight ahead on path **I14C**, ignoring a path right and later avoiding a bridleway left. These white arrows are another charming feature of these Chiltern paths*

and will help to guide you during the entire day. Soon you pass through a large wooden gate or over an unneeded stile. After some distance, the bridleway curves away left. Ignore it and keep straight ahead on the footpath, marked with a yellow arrow. 50m later, the path goes by another stile to a track near a farm. Cross straight over the track to a stile opposite and a narrow path. The path enters dense woodland and after about 250m goes over a path in a small clearing with gates on each side. In another 250m, the woods become clearer with tall larches and soon open out completely. Here a crossing path comes in from the left and turns right into the woods. Ignore this junction by keeping straight ahead in the clearing on path **I14A**. About 70m further, you meet another white arrow indicating a path **S35** forking right. Again, ignore this by keeping straight ahead. In another 100m, you pass the corner of a field on the left. 200m further, the path runs under electricity wires. In less than 200m, you pass a white sign indicating a junction 20 yds ahead. Fork **left** at this junction. Take care not miss it.

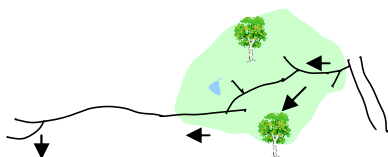
- 2 The path runs along the left hand side of a large field and at the end crosses a track into a large ancient coppice where the path gradually ascends for some distance. Sometimes deer are seen or heard here. At the top, continue on the left hand side of a field and go ahead on a farm track. Exit via a gate to the road at Ibstone and turn **right**.



The road passes a few houses, such as Yew Cottage, and in 50m reaches the corner of a wood on the left. *A little further on is the Fox Country Inn which, despite its upmarket exterior, welcomes walkers and sometimes has a Walkers Special Offer for a sandwich and chips lunch. However, this would be early in the walk.*

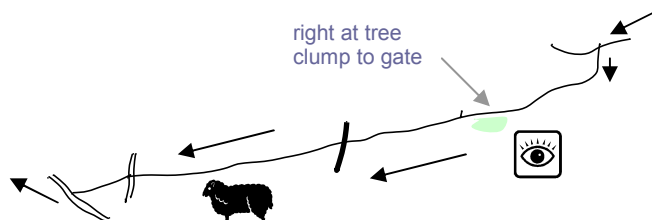
In his wonderful book of Adventurous Walks, Raymond Hugh points out that this prosperity that you see everywhere in the Chilterns is recent. Historically, the hills were always mired in poverty. Wealth was found down by the River Thames where goods and water were easy to obtain.

- 3 Turn **left** into the wood just after the corner onto a narrow signposted footpath. In 20m fork **right**, ignoring the left hand path that runs close to the field. In 30m ignore a path right and keep to the left curve in the direction of the white arrow. The path passes a footpath on the right and then a pond and curves left. At a T-junction, turn **right**, soon passing a sign for the Wormsley Estate. The path comes out of the trees and descends. After some distance on this sunken path, look out for white signs on the tree. Leave path **S7a** by turning **left** here following **S21** (also marked as **CW** for the Chiltern Way) on a narrow path downhill. Take care not to miss this turning.

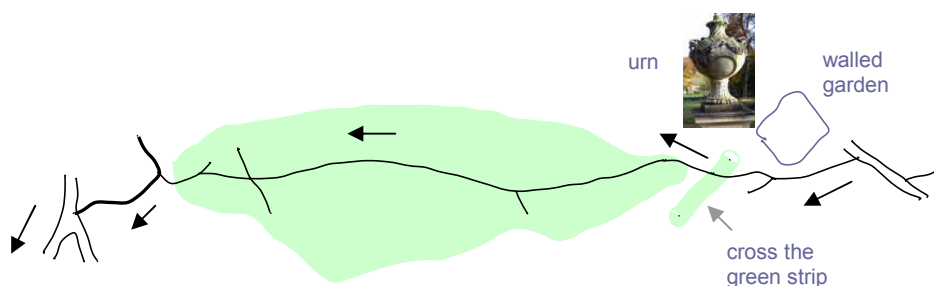


The Chiltern Way is a vast circular route covering the Chilterns from north to south, 192 miles (309 km) in total if you do all the extensions.

- 4 The path leads steeply down and curves right along the right hand side of a large meadow with the first terrific views of the walk. At a clump of trees, stay close to the fence and go through a small wooden gate. Leave the meadow via another wooden gate, cross a track and enter a large sheep meadow via a stile. On reaching the far end, go over a tarmac drive via two stiles. Continue half **left** across the meadow, then through a metal gate, or over stile, to join a tarmac drive where you turn **right**.



- 5 In under 100m, before gates on either side of the drive, fork **left** on a path marked as **SH4** and **CW**. *The private drive on the right leads to the great walled garden for which there is a sign on the gate, suggesting that it is open some time, but exactly when is a tantalising mystery.* After passing the walled garden on the right, ignore a marked footpath left, indicated by a sign on the tree, and continue to a large ornamental urn which once obviously formed part of the vista in a line with the garden. There is also a haha to the right, apparently to keep deer from entering the estate. Keep straight on past the urn, in the same direction, going across a grassy strip and joining a narrow path on the other side. (There is no sign immediately on a tree but you can see one from here in the distance several metres further on.) This is the path that will take you gently and pleasantly up to Christmas Common. The path curves immediately left. After some distance another path (**SH6**) joins from the left. The long lovely clear path now rises up into beechwood. At the top it reaches a bank on the left where another path (**SH5**) joins. Here the path curves slightly right (see the white arrow on the tree), goes past a pit on the left (possibly an old sawpit) and comes to a junction. Keep straight ahead on **PY3**, avoiding **SH4** that branches off right. Follow the path heading towards hollies and a field where the path curves right with the field on the left. Finally it comes out between posts to a track. Turn **left** here towards a house and keep to the right past the house on a grassy path. The path curves right and then left and reaches a road at Christmas Common by a Y-junction. Turn **left** on the road and take the **right** fork, signposted *Nettlebed, Henley*.



Christmas Common is a hamlet in the parish of Watlington Oxfordshire, 240m above sea level on an escarpment of the Chilterns. The two radio masts are local landmarks. The origin of the hamlet's name is uncertain. It is often ascribed to an episode of the Civil War when Royalists who held the heights and Cromwell's men who pitched down below in Watlington met on Christmas Day and called a truce on the site of the Fox and Hounds pub. But the local holly tree coppices, and the Christmas family, which lived nearby, also provide a convincing explanation.



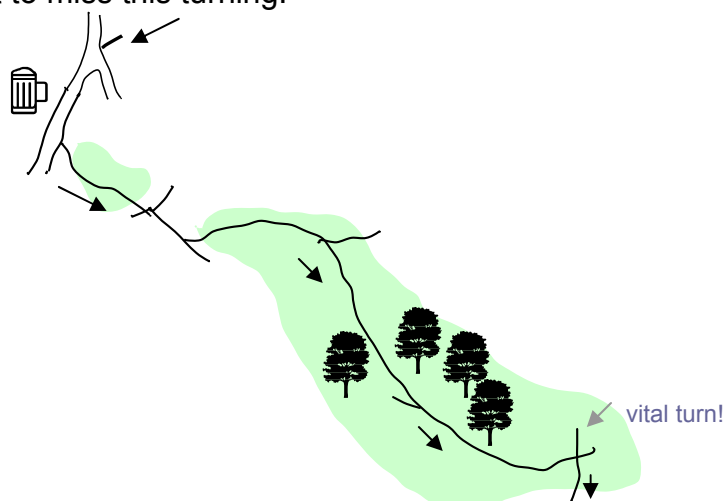
Leg 2: Christmas Common to Stonor 8 km=4½ miles

- 1 The road passes a pub on the right.



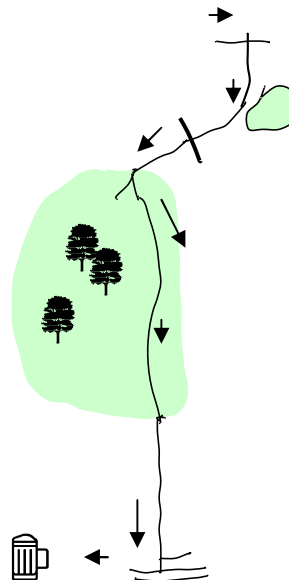
The Fox and Hounds (Brakspear) or 'the top fox' as it is known locally was once a rustic ale house, with a pond in front of the house, but now this Brakspear pub is has an enviable position with a cosy atmosphere, food and live music nights. It offers seasonal dishes such as 'Game On' made from game sourced from the neighbouring Turville Valley, roasted and cooked in its own juices and served on toast.

100m after the pub, take a footpath **left** marked as part of the Oxfordshire Way (OW). The Oxfordshire Way is a 110km (68 mile) walk from Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire to Henley-on-Thames. It also passes through the Cotswold Hills. This walk will follow the OW for the next few miles. Go immediately over a track and continue through the woods, always following the white arrows. At the end of the wood, turn **left** on a track and immediately **right** on a tarmac lane past houses, ignoring the marked footpath straight ahead. At the end of the lane, opposite Queen Wood Farm, turn **left** on a path marked with **PS3** and **OW**. The path goes down through lovely beechwood. Soon, the path reaches a major fork. Keep to the right fork (**w18 OW**), the wider one, slightly downhill. In roughly 600m, the path meets a forestry track coming from the right and passes, on the left, an area presumably used for turning forestry vehicles. In roughly another 500m, you reach a crossing path indicated by arrows on a tree and a post with various coloured arrows. Turn **right** here on **PS4 (OW)**, a path that goes past a white arrow and steeply up the bank out of the woods. Take care not to miss this turning.



- 2 The path goes past an unneeded stile into a field. Go straight across the field, slightly right, heading for the centre of a broad line of woodland. On the other side, the path continues with trees and a large sunken pond on the left. At the edge of the field, go over a track and a stile and continue along the left hand side of the meadow. At the end of the meadow, go over a stile into woods. In 20m you reach a fork, indicated by arrows on a tree. Take the **left** fork (**OW PS5** not **CW PS8**). This high path takes you through magnificent beech woods with views right into the wooded valley. Keep looking out for the white arrows that mark the route. Eventually the path descends to a gate into a large meadow with a sign for the Stonor Estate. There is still some way to go before you reach Stonor village however. Follow the long path between fields. Just before you reach the first house of Pishill, ignore a footpath left and continue to the road where you turn **right**.

Pishill (pronounced to rhyme with "official") is named after the many pea farms that once existed in the area. The parish includes nearby Stonor, Russell's Water and Maidensgrove. The history of Pishill, especially of its various manors, is described in a fascinating account in the British History Online website (www.british-history.ac.uk).



- 3 In 30m there is a lane on the left. If you suspend this left turn and continue a little further, you will shortly reach, on the right, the *Crown Inn*.



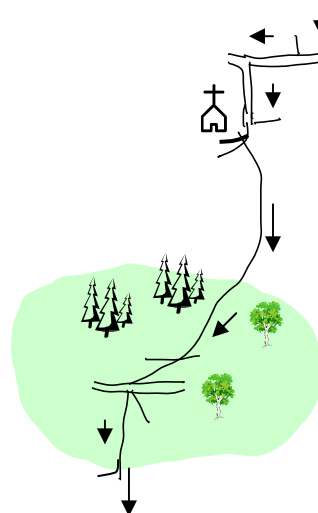
The Crown Inn is a 15th-century brick and flint coaching inn with origins that may go back to the 11th century. It was winner of the South Oxfordshire CAMRA Summer Pub of the Year in 2008. Accommodation is available in the 200-year-old stable block which was recently converted to a pretty self-contained cottage overlooking the valley, with a four-poster bed.

Turn **left** on the lane, past Pishilbury Cottage, and onwards to the church.

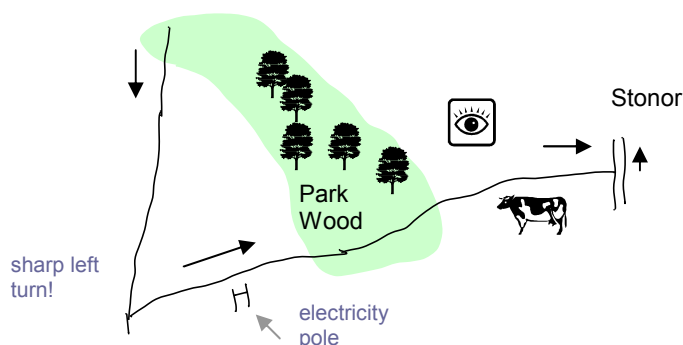


Pishill Church was built around 1100. The rectory was passed from Dorchester Abbey to more secular manor seats after the Reformation and then to the Stonor family, an anomaly since they were catholic.

Continue along the lane to the Old Vicarage which has some fine topiary in its garden. Stonor Park, your next destination, is visible to the left. Just past the lawn of the vicarage, by an entry drive for Chapel Wells, turn left on **PS17** discarding the right turn (**PS22**). The path goes down the left hand side of a large meadow and up the other side. On reaching the trees, go over a track and up following a blue arrow. After a taxing ascent, the path runs near a meadow on the right. Soon a footpath (**PS9**) joins from the left. Soon after, ignore a right turn (**PS19**) and stay on **OW PS17**. The path goes down to a lane close to the hamlet of Maidensgrove. Cross the lane and take the **right** hand of two paths opposite, the higher path with a white arrow. The path leads gently up. Just before a field ahead, ignore a path right (**PS18**) and enter the field.



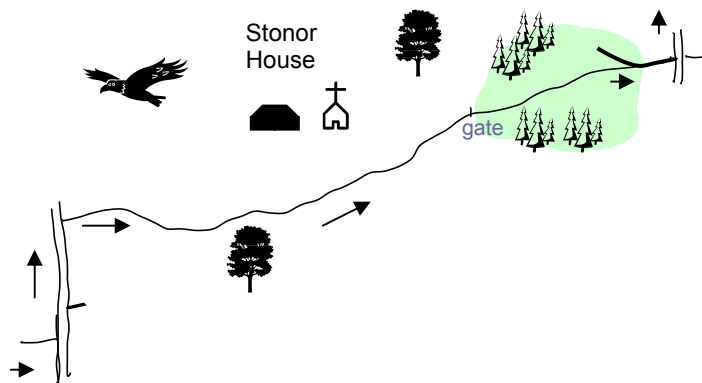
- 4 The route from here is along the **right** hand side of the field all the way to the far right hand corner. You then need to turn **sharp left** back across the field to a stile into the woods. There must be a short cut through the woods on your left and of course you could keep to the *left* hand side of the field – both illegal. This official route has one advantage though: a great view ahead over the Thames valley in the distance. When you reach the far corner and make that sharp left turn, aim roughly 20m to the left of a double electricity pole because the path is sometimes not clear at first. (*Some other day, if you continued ahead without turning sharp left, you would reach the magical Warburg Nature Reserve.*) On reaching the trees, go past an unneeded stile and down a lovely wide path through more fine beechwoods. The path goes through a gate into a fine high meadow with the ground sloping away on both sides. From here there is one of the best views in the walk: the village of Stonor in a delicate line along the valley with the parkland beyond, often enhanced by the late afternoon sun. Go through a swing gate into another meadow and down through another swing gate and an enclosed path to the road at Stonor. Turn **left** on the road.



Leg 3: Stonor to Fingest 6 km=3½ miles

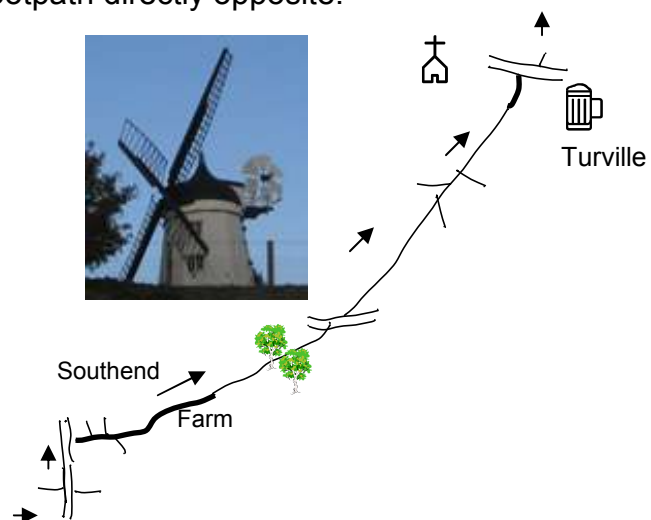
- 1 Shortly, ignore a bridleway on the right and in just under 200m you reach a metal fence of the deerpark on the right. Turn **right** through a kissing gate into the park. Keep to the main path that climbs up the slope with Stonor House spread below on the left.

Stonor is one of England's oldest manor houses, owned by the same Catholic family for 850 years. The house contains some beautiful stained glass, paintings and drawings, bronzes and ceramics. The house, garden, tea room and gift shop are open from April until the end of September on Sunday afternoons and, during July and August, also on Wednesday afternoons.



Soon there is a fence on the right. Keep straight on at all times on the main path, occasionally following white arrows. Eventually, after a long walk through the park, you reach another kissing gate. Go through the gate and continue on a path through interesting woodland of tall pines. At the end, join a track, go through a gate and continue to the road. Turn **left** on the road, ignoring a footpath directly opposite.

- 2 In 100m, just before a sign for Southend, turn **right** on a concrete drive. Continue on a lane to Southend Farm, ignoring paths off. At the end of the lane, go over a stile on a wide grassy path between fences. The path later goes over another stile and down a wide path with woods on either side. You soon have a fine view of the Hamble valley. Fingest, the starting point, is visible on the right. Ahead, above the village of Turville, is Cobstone Windmill.



Cobstone Windmill was built in 1816 but an older mill stood there before. It milled cereals until 1873. In 1967 it was saved and renovated for the filming of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. It was then bought by Hayley Mills and her husband Roy Boulting and has been privately owned ever since, appearing in numerous films and TV shows.

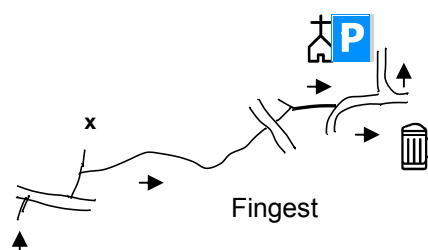
At the bottom, cross a lane and continue on the left hand side of a field. This is part of the organically managed Bosmore Park Estate. At the end of the field, go through a gate, along a path between bushes, a short residential road and a narrow lane into Turville. The last property is called *Sleepy Cottage* which seems so appropriate. *Some cottages here can be hired for a few days (try www.chilterncountrycottages.com).* The route is right on the road for a few metres but you will want to look around first. The church and the Old Vicarage are on the left and the pub on the right.



The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of 796 identifies Turville as Thyrefeld (“dry field”). With its lovely brick and flint cottages, it is inevitably a perfect site for film and TV. The Vicar of Dibley was filmed there. The parish church of St. Mary the Virgin dates from the 12th century. Again, the website www.british-history.ac.uk has a full account. The Bull and Butcher pub has excellent home-cooked food served in the garden alongside and, it being a Brakspear establishment, good beer.



- 3 Turn **right** for a few metres and then **left** on a marked footpath heading towards the windmill. Go through a wooden gate and then immediately turn **right** across a field. On the other side, go over a stile and then follow an easy path. Eventually the path comes to a road. Cross the road and go through a wooden gate. At a junction, keep right on an enclosed path down to a road. Turn **left** on the road and back to St Bartholomew’s church and the starting point.



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Getting there

Take the 8/9 exit from the M4 signposted **Henley** and then take the A404 motorway but do not turn off for Henley (although this is a good alternative route): stay on the A404, straight on all the way, until you eventually turn **left** for **Marlow**. If you have time, a short visit to Marlow is a perfect start to the day: turn left down to the riverside near the suspension bridge, the church and the fine georgian buildings. However, the route is straight on, signposted to Henley. A few miles later, you pass close to **Medmenham** where you keep straight on. Again, if you have some time to spare, a short walk down to the river past the church and the charming cottages is a delight. Soon after, you pass the sign for Mill End. (This is at one end of **Hambleden Weir**, one of the most interesting ways of crossing the Thames, from where there is a walk to Henley-on-Thames.) Turn **right** just after the sign on a road signposted *Hambleden, Skirmett, Fingest*. Soon you pass close to **Hambleden** and it is definitely worth stopping by to look at the brick and flint cottages and the 14th-century church. The road now takes you through Skirmett and on to Fingest. Park in the small road (Chequers Lane) alongside the church.

