



Pilgrim Paths

Chipping Norton Deanery

Wigginton to Swerford and back

5 miles

A pilgrimage is a spiritual journey to a sacred place

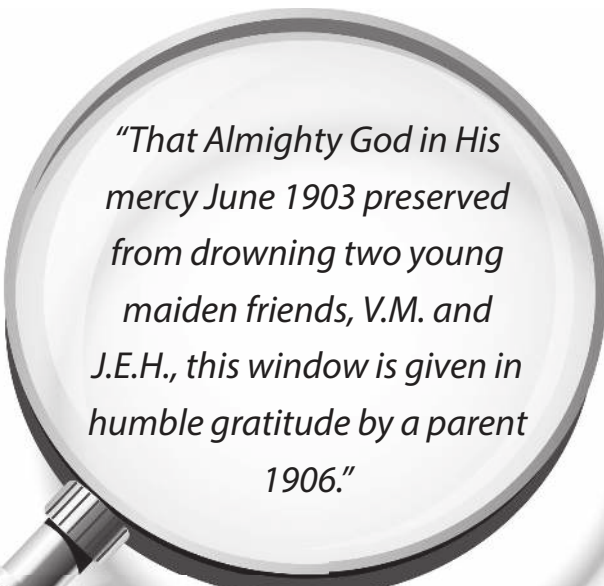
This leaflet will give you clear guidance on the route to take and provide comments on points of interest. To help focus your thoughts, there are short reflections and prayers based on psalms and other texts, as well as advice on places to pause to catch both your physical and spiritual breath!

This walk begins and ends at Wigginton Parish Church, which is normally open during daylight hours. The dedication of the church is to St Giles, who's often associated with out of the way places – this certainly seems appropriate for Wigginton today. In the past, the village, or rather an area within it, was home to a Roman citizen of some wealth, as evidenced by the remains of an extensive villa in a field not far from the church.

St. Giles Church Wigginton

Preparing : Inside the Church

Inside the church you will find a booklet detailing some of its history, and there is an interesting memorial to the right of the altar commemorating 50 years of service within the parish by **Canon Hart**. Most memorials, like that one, are only erected after someone has died, but the stained-glass window over the entrance porch commemorates a moment of life rather than death, with an inscription that reads:



"That Almighty God in His mercy June 1903 preserved from drowning two young maiden friends, V.M. and J.E.H., this window is given in humble gratitude by a parent 1906."



Pause Here



Pause here to read the psalm and *"count your blessings"* as the old hymn has it. Or to quote from Shakespeare's Henry VI, Part 2: *O Lord, that lends me life, lend me a heart replete with thankfulness!*



Psalm 36

*Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.*

*⁶ Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,
your justice like the great deep.*

You, LORD, preserve both people and animals.

*⁷ How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.*



Churchyard

As you pass through the churchyard, you'll see graves on your **right**, a reminder that the Church is made up of Christians from previous generations as well as the present one. Also on the right-hand side of the path is **Wigginton's war memorial**, commemorating the four villagers, two from the same family, who died in the First World War.

If you are doing this walk very early in the year, pause to admire the abundant snowdrops which brighten up large swathes of the churchyard soon after Christmas and usually remain in flower for many weeks.





Starting Out . .

Outside the gate, turn **right**, and within a few yards turn **right** again, along **Dash Hill Lane**. This takes you past the medieval Manor Farmhouse and some renovated outbuildings to a bend in the road where you'll see a footpath sign on your **left** "To White Swan". Follow this footpath, which, despite covering only a short distance, involves negotiating 3 stiles and 2 gates. The path runs along the top of the slope, passing between a horse training area and a tennis court to bring you out beside the **White Swan**, Wigginton's pub. This may be a good time to investigate its opening hours and food offer.



A little way downhill from the pub, and on the opposite side of the road, behind and to the **left** of the bus stop, is the entrance via a **kissing gate** to a footpath, normally well defined by dog walkers, which will take you diagonally down a steep slope to a spring which you cross by means of a small stone footbridge. Pass **through** the kissing gate on the other side and continue **diagonally** to the kissing gate and **bridge** over another reach of the same small spring.

During the drought of Autumn 2015 this spring dried up, leaving the River Swere which it feeds into very short of water and consequently more polluted than usual with nitrates and phosphates that had run off the agricultural land on either side.



Sermon on the Mount

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust

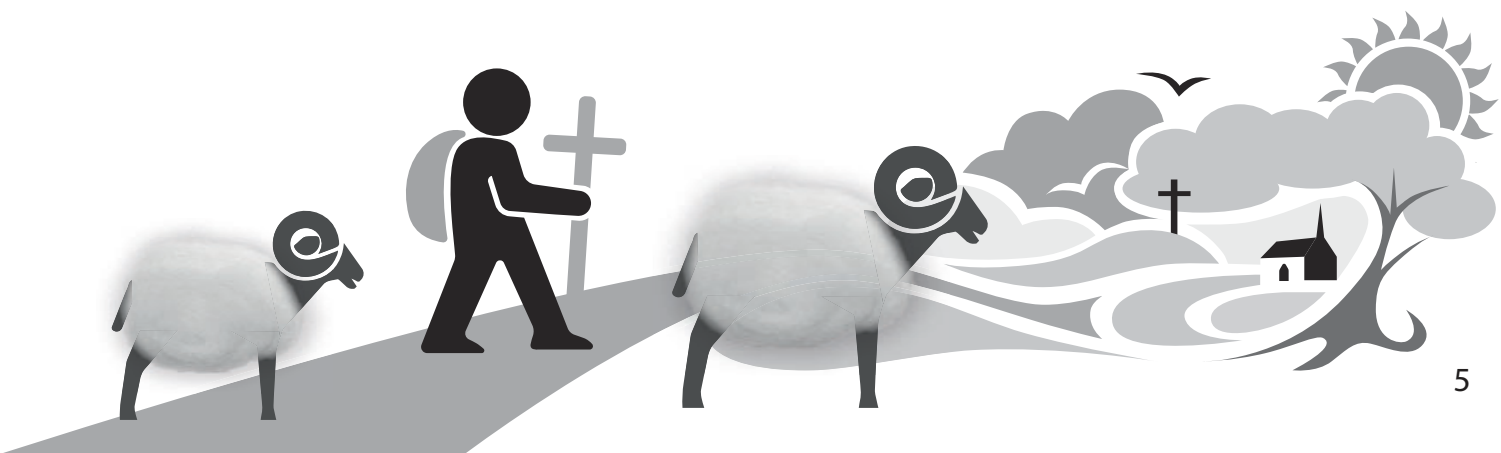
Matthew 5.



Thinking about the last verse in that extract from the Sermon on the Mount, is it 'just' for some to pollute the water so that it becomes less able to sustain the life of others, whether human or animal? What steps can we take to encourage farms and businesses to keep our waterways clean?



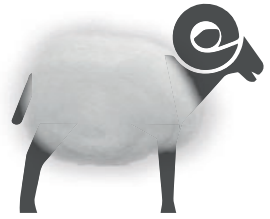
The fields on this part of the walk may well have sheep in them, or evidence that they were recently grazing here. This psalm speaks of the relationship between God and His people as being like that between a shepherd and his flock.





Pause Here to read the psalm

Psalm 100

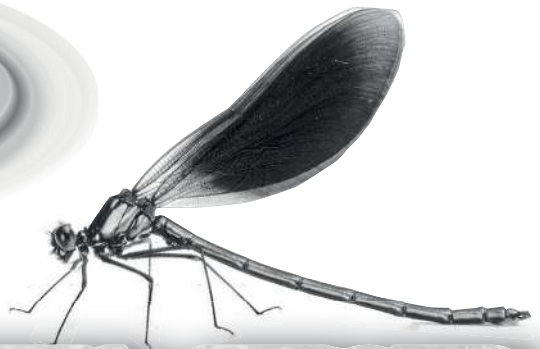


¹ *Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.*

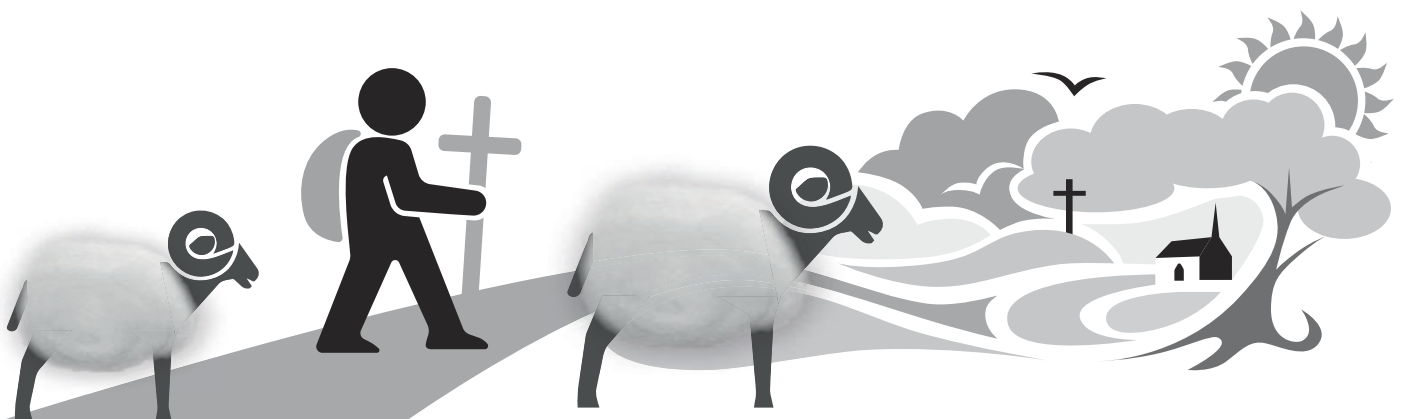
² *Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.*

³ *Know that the Lord is God.*

*It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*



In the summer you may see many different kinds of wild flowers and butterflies along this part of the walk. A particular insect to look out for along the valley of the Swere is the Beautiful Demoiselle, a kind of damsel fly with copper wings and a slender body coloured peacock blue (male) or peacock green (female).





Continue . .

The path now follows a hedge line (on your **left**) for some way, before offering the chance to turn **left** beside a large boundary ash through a **gate** into another field. Take this turn and follow the path, now with a hedge and fence line on your **right**, until you have crossed another spring. Here there is a waterfall and still pool, a place for animals to drink.

At this spot, the words of another psalm, recalling a shepherd's care come to mind. Pause and perhaps, while reading the words of this psalm, thank God for providing quiet waters to refresh our souls.



Psalm 23

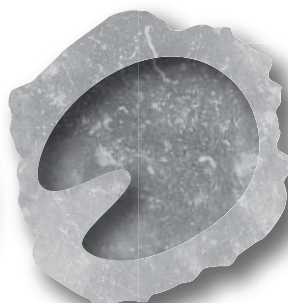
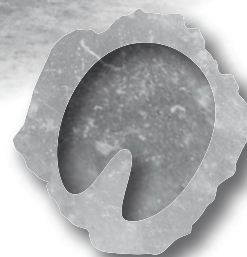
- ¹ The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing.*
- ² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,*
- ³ he refreshes my soul.*
- ⁴ He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.*
- ⁵ Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me.*



Continue . .

Now bear **right** along the valley, towards a field gate in the distance. Turn **right** just before this gate to follow the yellow footpath sign (ignoring the arrow to the path ahead to Hook Norton). Here you will pass beside a small stand of willow trees on your right.

Follow the path up the slope to your **left**, towards a barn near a large house (Cradle Farm). You are very likely to encounter horses here.



Horses



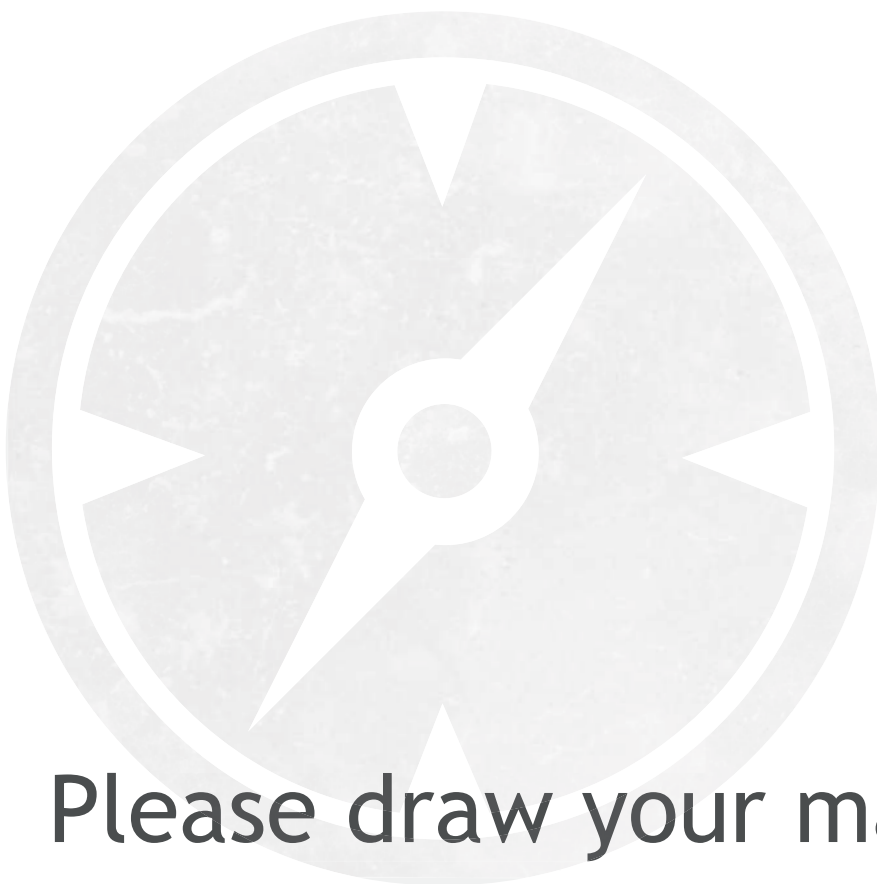
In the Bible, horses are usually associated with the exercise of military power. After the Israelites were delivered from the pursuing Egyptian army through the parting of the Red Sea, Moses' sister Miriam sang a song of triumph, describing how God had "thrown the horse and his rider into the sea." This event is remembered every year by observant Jews at the time of Passover. Today armies no longer use horses to wage war against their enemies, but the focus on dressage as a major discipline in eventing reminds us of the training that horses needed to undergo in the past before being taken into battle.



Go through the **gate** and continue for a few yards to the driveway, turn **left** and walk down the full length of the drive to a very minor road/track. Turn **right** onto this track and continue until it joins an unnumbered minor (but busy) road, which links Hook Norton and Swerford.



Map . .



Please draw your map here . .

Pilgrim Paths

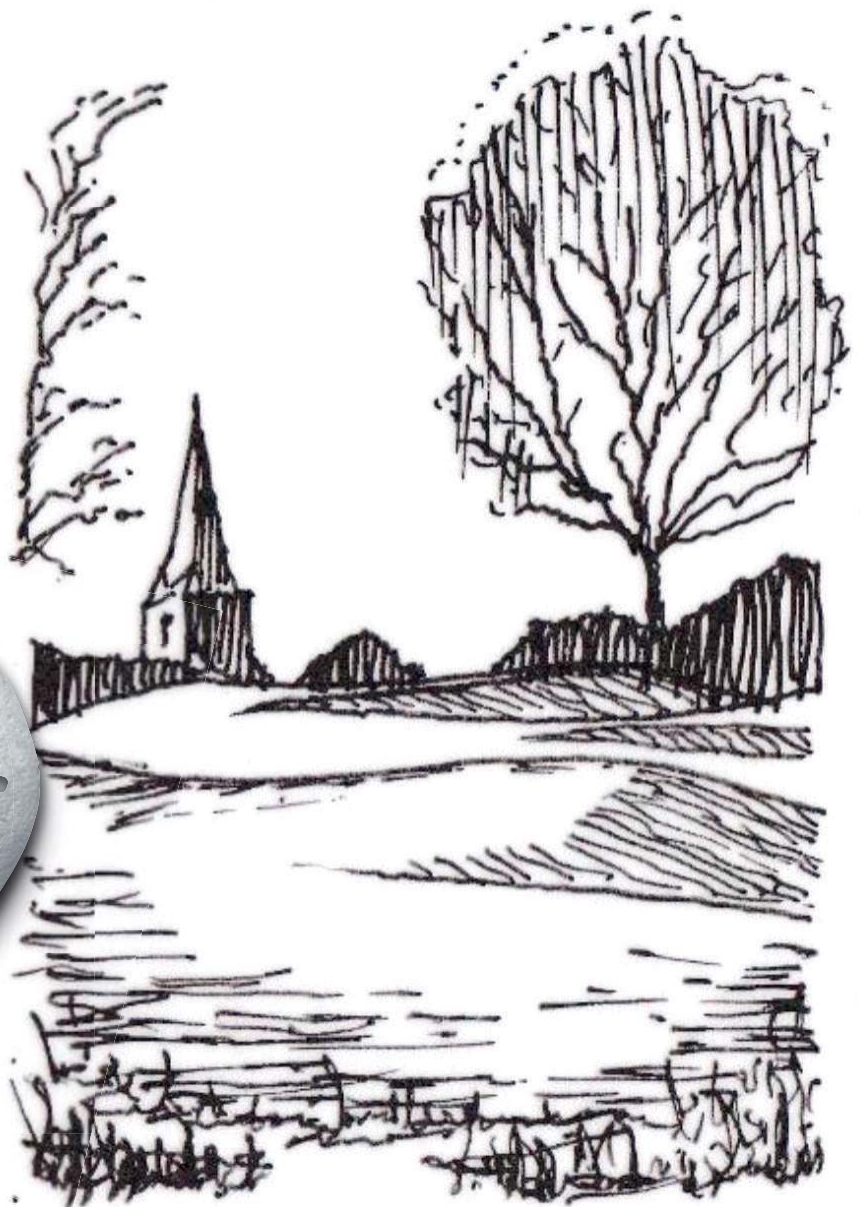
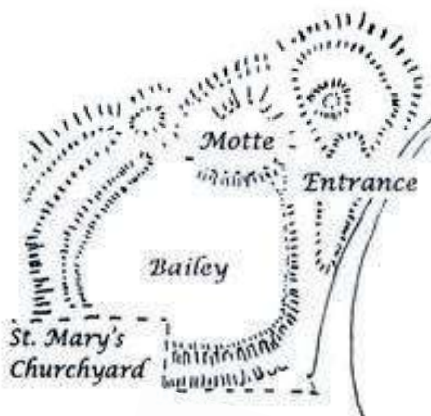




Continue . . .

Turn **left** down this road as far as the house called **Osney Mill** with its highly decorative wrought iron gates and waterfall. Just below you will find **Griffin House**, an old pub that is now a private residence. The footpath here runs through the drive of Griffin House, **over** a stone stile, and up the hill towards **Swerford church**. Just before you get to the church, you will see the remains of **Swerford Castle** (a motte and bailey), founded by Robert D'Oily in Norman times. On your **left** is a line of artisans' cottages known as **Blue Row**.

The Motte and Bailey . . .





Pause Here

Think about your own personal form of shelter – is it more like the castle as it would have been in its heyday, or more like one of the cottages – or is it perhaps very different from either? Is it, in any case, a place to be thankful for? Jesus, famously, had nowhere to lay his head – instead he relied on the hospitality of others. Many pilgrims speak of the kindness they have received from strangers – perhaps you have experienced kindness yourself on some occasion when you needed help, and have been happy to offer a helping hand to others in return.



Exit

Exit the field via the wooden **gate** and just before you reach the road through the village, you'll see a gravel path leading up through the churchyard and past the **east** end of the church to the entrance. **Swerford church** is normally open during daylight hours, so if time allows, take a few minutes to look around.





Inside St Marys Church

This is another very old church building which records the changes that have occurred within its community over the years. A memorial slab has recently been added to the north wall in honour of **John King**, a shoemaker from Swerford who felt the call to go and live as the first English missionary to settle in New Zealand. His was a pilgrimage that involved many weeks at sea and the near-certainty of no return to the mother country, even if he survived the many dangers of the voyage and the hazards of life in what was still a largely unknown territory when he arrived there in 1814.



Like missionaries in the past, refugees today may find themselves having to adjust to a totally unfamiliar way of life – in their case, because of war or tyranny in the place where they were born. In this they are following in the footsteps of Mary (to whom the church here is dedicated), Joseph and the baby Jesus, who were forced to flee to Egypt to escape the jealousy of King Herod. The Holy Family eventually returned to Palestine when it was safe to do so, and this must be the hope of many refugees today.





Did you notice?

As soon as you entered the building, did you notice the very loud and persistent tick of the church clock? This can be quite distracting during a sermon, but it's a useful reminder of the passing of time.

C.S. Lewis wrote

"The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of sixty minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is."

You may like to think about the words, taken from a prayer in Common Worship:

Prayer

Almighty God, by your command time runs its course;
grant us to have a good hope because of your word;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

As you leave the churchyard, turn **left** towards Blue Row but this time continue past the cottages along the road until you reach a **T-junction**.

Turn **right** and continue along this road – watching out for traffic – as far as the red telephone kiosk. Turn **left** in front of the kiosk and continue straight on down a narrow passage way between two houses. (It's only after you've found this that you'll see the footpath sign saying "Wigginton 2".)



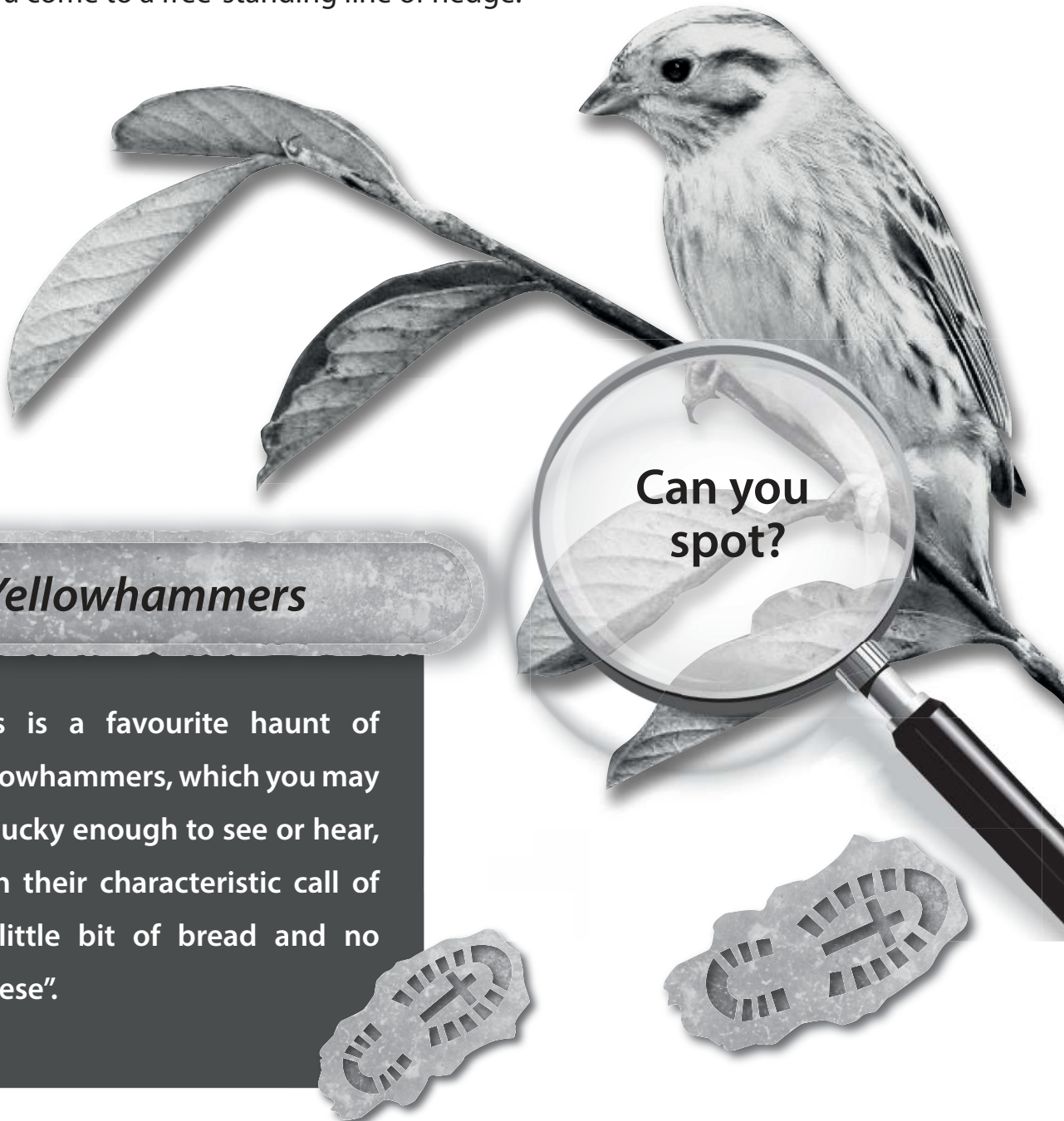
Continue . .

While you're still on the higher ground you'll come to a path marked by a yellow footpath sign that sets off at a **right-angle** on your **right-hand** side. Here you can choose whether to carry on **straight ahead** down the slope to the Swere, **cross it** by means of a little stone bridge, **go up** the far bank and turn **right** along a very minor road; this will take you by a shorter route back to Wigginton.

If instead you take the **right-angled** path you will be returning to Wigginton by a longer route which lies mainly through fields. **Continue** along the well-defined path between a wall and hedge on one side and a fence on the other, passing straight through an **iron gate**, until you come to a free-standing line of hedge.

Yellowhammers

This is a favourite haunt of yellowhammers, which you may be lucky enough to see or hear, with their characteristic call of "A little bit of bread and no cheese".



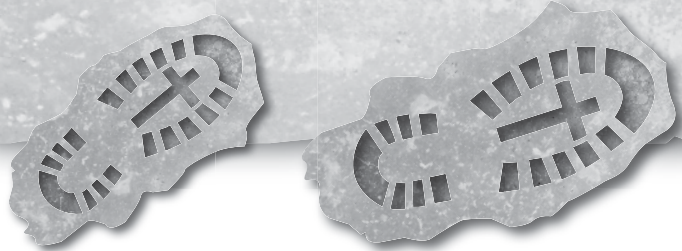
Keep Left

Keep to the **left** of the hedge and follow the path – which may be somewhat overgrown – until you come to a hedge crossing the path at **right angles**. Here you will see a mature boundary oak, and you need to look for a gate about **5 yards** to the **left** of the oak tree. Continue through the gate and then straight across the hay meadow in front of you towards a gap in the next hedge where you will find a wooden **gate** leading to a ditch crossed by a footbridge. Keep going **straight** ahead through the next two fields, divided by a hedge and linked by another **footbridge** over a ditch. You will then come out a little way to the **left** (north) of a pair of barns beside the lane running down from the **A361** into Wigginton. Here again you can choose whether to follow this lane – another unnumbered but sometimes very busy minor road - down into the village, or continue along the public footpath by climbing over the **stile** on the opposite side of the road.

Walks often take us through narrow gaps and then out into open spaces.

Notice the different feelings you have, depending on where you walk.

You may like to use this prayer.



Prayer

*God, make the door of my house
wide enough to receive all who
need human love and fellowship;
narrow enough to shut out all envy,
pride and strife.*





Continue . . .

The path now takes you along a wide grassy ride down the middle of the field through newly planted trees on either side.

Climb over the clearly marked box stile and **continue** along the mown path, with buttercups and butterflies on either side in the summer.



Continue along the public footpath, now with a hedge on your **left** and a fence on your **right**, as far as a tall clump of poplars. The path winds through the poplars, and takes you past stone buildings on the **left** and some old stables and a wooden barn on the **right**. Curve to the **left** past the last stone building, leaving the gravel track behind and taking the grassy path up the slope to the **left**, passing the farmhouse and garaging of **Paradise Farm**. *Paradise? A large claim for a North Oxfordshire farm!*

Here's a Persian definition of paradise, from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, translated by Edward Fitzgerald:

*A book of verse beneath the bough,
A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness –
Ah, wilderness were paradise enow!*





Pause Here

What would constitute paradise for you? Would it involve people and poetry, bread and wine, as it did for Omar Khayyam?



At the top of the slope you will see a stand of mature **beech trees** and **Spanish chestnuts** on your **left**. Now **follow** the slope down between two hedges, a new one on your **left** and a much older one on your **right**. At the bottom of the field, pass **through** the gap in the hedge facing you and turn **right** along the grass path, now with an old hedge on your **right**.

When you come to a **fork** in the path, take the **left fork** down to the **River Swere** which you then cross by means of a pair of **footbridges**.

A **kissing gate** brings you onto the minor road linking Wigginton to the **west** and South Newington to the **east**. Turn **left** (west) along this road and follow it as it bends past the **Old Watermill**; carry straight on up the hill, until finally you're back at the church where you began.

Finishing Well.....

A good way to end your walk might be to go inside again, pick up a prayer book from the shelf by the entrance and choose a psalm to read aloud or silently to yourself: Psalm 84, for example, which begins

"O how amiable are thy dwellings, thou Lord of hosts!"



As you exit . .

As you exit through the church porch, look up at the wall above the arch to see the nest where over the years the swallow has indeed found a place :

'where she may lay her young'

verse 3



Copyright © Chipping Norton Deanery 2017

