



Sibfords

Historic village trail



Village trail:
Distance 2 miles/3.4km
Time 1.5 hours



Cherwell
DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Sibfords historic village trail

The **Sibfords Historic Village Trail** is a two mile walk around and between the villages of Sibford Gower, Sibford Ferris and the hamlet of Burdrop. A shorter, easy level walk can be enjoyed along the village streets between Sibford Gower and Burdrop for those who want to avoid the steep paths to and from Sibford Ferris.

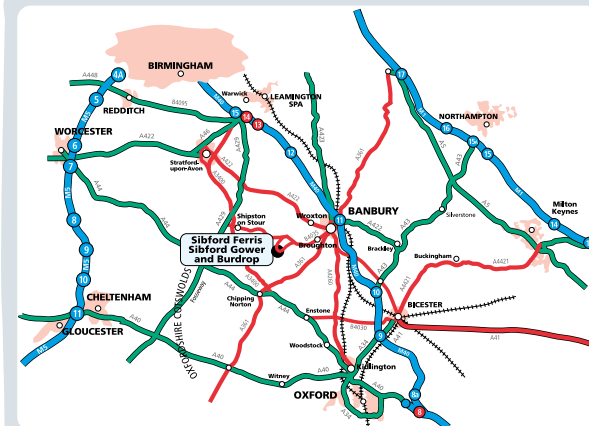
The circular walk is clearly waymarked but it helps to follow the information in this leaflet as you go. **Before setting out on your walk, please check the council's website for updates in the leaflet text and along the route: www.cherwell.go.uk/circularwalks**

Theodore the Hermit

For many years between the wars and until he died in 1950, Theodore Lamb lived the life of a recluse in a shack on Sibford Heath.

A skilled watch and clock repairer, Theodore plied his trade around the local villages. He also played various instruments and posed for photographs for which he charged a fee of half a crown.

He travelled around, sometimes on a bicycle without tyres, sometimes on foot, and usually with some form of truck loaded with junk and, in the winter, his fire in a bucket as well. He always paid for his small needs, although when his clothing, which was often made from sacks, became less than decent he was banned from Banbury and had to wait at the door of the village shop to be served. He was always totally honest and completely harmless despite his appearance. He was an immensely strong man and once pulled a chicken hut for many miles back to Sibford taking several days over the journey.



Getting there

The Sibfords Historic Village Trail starts at the Wykham Arms Public House in Sibford Gower. Grid reference SP352377. Post code OX15 5RX

By Train: The nearest station is Banbury which links to Oxford to the south and Birmingham to the north.

By Bus: Johnsons Excelbus service No 3A stops at Sibford Ferris School and links to Banbury and Stratford-on-Avon but this is an irregular service so a taxi may be required. Call 01564 797070 for further information.

By Car: The Sibfords are eight miles west of Banbury via the B4035.

Acknowledgements

This leaflet was originally researched and written by the Sibfords Society. Watercolour illustrations by Nigel Fletcher. Designed by Cherwell District Council's Design Service. Thanks are due to the landowners whose co-operation has helped to make the walk possible.

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Introduction to the Sibfords

Standing high on their hilltops, Sibford Ferris, Sibford Gower and the hamlet of Burdrop have survived relatively unscathed and remain an oasis away from the hustle and bustle of 21st century life; but like many Oxfordshire villages, great changes have taken place in the past few decades. Today's thriving community supports a shop, village hall, a pub, two schools, three churches and can draw on the rich legacy of the past through the largely unspoilt beauty of its buildings and wonderful rolling countryside.



Sibford Gower Post Office c1924

Intriguing finds of flint arrow heads and the remains of two Iron Age barrows are clear links with the Ancient Britons who first settled here.

When William the Conqueror's great survey was made in 1086, it noted Henry de Ferrieres as the chief landowner at 'Sibforde'; and a Charter of 1216 mentions Thomas Goher as a landowner. It seems likely that these settlements were chosen for their position and proximity to the nearby ford and may have taken their names from these early landowners.

The village school in Sibford Gower, endowed by the Town Estate Charity, has provided a rich and free education to local children for almost 400 years. Many ancient grammar schools were endowed in this manner but an endowed primary school of such antiquity is rare. The Town Estate Charity is still in existence, providing one third of its annual profit for the benefit of the school – it is our most venerable village institution.

Walking around the villages, it is still easy to see the ridges in the surrounding fields, marking the old-time



Primary School c1900

strip cultivation. For centuries the land would have looked very different from today. No hedges marked boundaries, animals roamed in open common furze land and large areas of it were covered by woods. Enclosure (Gower 1773 and Ferris 1789) meant the loss of much common land, but the Enclosure Act thoughtfully added 10 acres of former furze land to the Town Estate to be farmed and the profit to be used to buy fuel for 'such of the poor people as do now and shall hereafter reside within the township'.



Sibford Ferris Manor c1904

Many Sibfordians still recall days when the busy community boasted several shops, two post offices, blacksmiths, and numerous craftsmen and tradesmen, meeting local needs. Days when able-bodied men queued at dawn light for a day's farm work are not so far gone. Still just within living memory, the only commercial transport to far off Banbury was the twice weekly carrier's cart – a boneshaking four hour journey away.

Sibford is still a true beauty spot and a desirable place in which to live. We hope your walk will help you to appreciate this special corner of Oxfordshire through the living history around us today.

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Points of interest

A The Wykham Arms

Believed to have been named after William of Wykham who built part of Swalcliffe Church in the 14th century and Swalcliffe Barn in the early 15th Century. The age of the building is unknown but during alterations in the 1950's, a penny dated 1537 was found there.

B The Manor House

Formed around the time of the Great War by linking and extending several old cottages and a barn. The tower was added later to give the impression of antiquity. It was the creation of Frank Lascelles, a flamboyant local character who made his name directing spectacular pageants for state occasions. Famous artistic friends often visited him in Sibford, including Robert Graves, Ivor Novello and Noël Coward.

C The Old Post Office

This was owned and run as a post office by the Inns family, starting in 1884. In the early 20th century there were three bands in the village. The string band rehearsed here, whilst one brass band practised at the Bishop Blaize (former pub in Burdrop) and the other at the Quaker Mission Room, next to the Meeting House.

D The Village Pond

Fed by local springs for centuries. It overflowed across the village track until 1900 when the pond was kerbed and the ford piped.



The horse chestnut tree beside the pond was raised from a conker picked up beside the body of Joseph John Lamb, who fell and died while knocking down conkers for his seven year old son Theodore (see Theodore the Hermit).

E The Old Vicarage

Home to the vicars of Sibford until the 1970's. Note the false window painted on the first floor level, a result of the old window tax. The stone structure outside is a wellhead covering "Town Well". It is fed by a separate spring from the pond, and is still occasionally used to top the pond up.

F Bond's End Lane

Several cottages along this narrow lane sold bread, sweets, seeds and groceries until the early 1960's when the last shop closed. Other cottages, with springs bubbling up in the corners of their kitchens, were homes to outworkers who wove the renowned Shutford Plush.

G Friends Meeting House

The Sibfords have a long tradition of religious nonconformity. There has been a Quaker Meeting House on this site since 1678 (burial ground added later) and, until the Methodist Chapel was completed in 1827, it was Sibford's only place of worship. (A Templar's Chapel existed in 1153, site unknown). The current building replaced the original in 1865.



H The Sib

The stream rises east of the village and joins the Stour at Temple Mill. These streams are unique in Oxfordshire, as they run west into the Avon/Severn and then Atlantic, and not east towards the North Sea.

I Oddie's Field

Named after Robert Oddie, farmer and former headmaster of Sibford School. The undulating nature of this field is the result of clay digging to form bricks and tiles for building West Town House in about 1790. The large hole in the western half is the kiln position.

J Mulberry Cottage

Believed to have been built at the end of the 18th century, it was originally three cottages of unusual design; being three-storey with one room on each floor. Two fossils unearthed here in 1986 have been identified as bivalves from the Jurassic period, approximately 180 million years ago.

K The Old House

Probably 16th century of yeoman design, it was lived in by generations of the Lamb family until recently. It remains virtually unaltered, with the exception of the outbuildings on the right-hand side, now joined to the house.



L The Old Bake House

Probably older than The Old House, it was the first Post Office (first telegraph to Sibford 1896). There is a stream running through the cellar.

M Home Close

Was built in 1911 by a Gloucestershire builder called Bourne who built it for his own family use. It was built on the site of an old barn known as Austin's Barn.

N Sibford Ferris Manor House

The Manor or Great House was built in 1666 by Thomas Walford during the reign of King Charles II and re-fronted in the 18th century. It was bought, in 1797, by Joseph Harris, a Quaker, who sold it to the Society of Friends in 1842 for 'the purposes of a school.' The Manor was sold in 2001 and redeveloped into apartments. The Walford Road development was built on the site of many buildings used previously by Sibford School.

O Sibford School

Now occupies a site to the south of Main Street. Quakers who had 'married out' were excommunicated and Sibford School provided a Quaker-based education for the children of these families. Unusually, it was co-educational providing a rounded education for both boys and girls. The girls helped with domestic duties and the boys worked part-time on the farm which helped to keep the fees low. In many cases the children travelled great distances to school and only returned home once a year. In its first year the School had 48 pupils – this has now increased 10 fold.

P Maria's House

Named after Maria Payne, servant of shopkeeper Susanna Farden, who kept a post office, then a wool shop. Formerly, two cottages stood on the grass area outside this house. The end part was Jeremiah Lamb's smithy in the 17th century.

Q Pettifer's Piece

Formerly a barn and stable and once home to the 'parish' bull. Cows were brought from various farms to be served by the bull.

R Medieval Fish Ponds

Used to supply trout and carp to the ancient Manor House and is prone to flooding today.

S Bishops End

Formerly Bishop Blaize Inn. Dating back to 1640, it was originally known as the 'Old Inn'. The first record of the name 'Bishop Blaize' is from 1816. There was a wool market in Burdrop in the 18th century, so we assume the name change was a reflection of this (Bishop Blaize is the patron saint of wool combers).

T Shepherd's Knoll

This was part of a large barn used for storing fleeces before they were sent to market. The barn was converted into three cottages in 1815.

U Coffin Walk

Also known as Dead Man's Walk, it was the route taken by coffin bearers to burials at Swalcliffe Church, there being no C of E Church in Sibford until 1841. This direct walk avoided Hawkes Lane, which was often flooded.

V Water Point

There is a 312 gallon tank behind this water point fed by a hydraulic ram from Ellywell (Holy Well) below the churchyard. Installed in 1847, at a cost of £50 by public subscription, to supply water for the residents of Burdrop.

W Carrier's Cottage

Carriers played a vital part in village life. Prior to the introduction of motorised bus services in the early 1920s, they were the only means of commercial transport. This cottage was also previously a bakery

X Holy Trinity Church

Prior to the consecration of this new church in 1841, the Sibfords were part of the ecclesiastical parish of Swalcliffe. The land was given by Rev William Gilkes and the design was by H J Underwood of Oxford. Built in local Hornton stone in the Early English style, it consists of a nave, transepts and shallow chancel. The porch was added in 1879.

Y The Primary School

This endowed school dates back to 1623, although the present building only dates from 1866. The endowment comes from the Town Estate Charity, given to the community in 1560, allowing Sibford Gower and Burdrop children to be educated free (Sibford Ferris children had to pay until 1891). The 'New School' was built across the road in 1968 producing an unusual split-site arrangement.

Z The Tite

A spring feeds the pool and has supplied fresh water for centuries. Used by villagers until mains water came in 1935/36.

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April 2020 edition*

step
by step

1 Start Turn right out of the Wykham Arms (A) and opposite is the Manor House (B). Continue past the Methodist Chapel (1827) and at the cross roads turn left along Main Street.

2 The first house past the telephone kiosk was The Old Post Office (C). Carry on to the village pond (D) - then retrace your steps to Bond's End Lane, passing the Old Vicarage (E) on the corner.

3 Go down Bond's End Lane (F) and at the end turn sharp left and take the furthest left of the three footpaths facing you. Continue along the narrow path, passing a wicket gate on your left through which the Friends Meeting House (G) can be seen.

4 On reaching the road turn right, downhill. Pass the entrance to Sycamore Close then take the footpath on the left. Go through a kissing gate and between houses to reach a kissing gate at the top of a field. The short descent to this gate is steep and difficult as a result of tree roots.

5 Cross the field diagonally left and go through a wooden gate and then a metal kissing gate in the next hedge. Continue in the same direction to the Sib (H) at the bottom of the hill. Go through a kissing gate, over the footbridge (which is the parish boundary) and through another kissing gate.

6 Walk up the very steep slope of Oddie's field (I) and then through a kissing gate onto Woodway Road. Turn left.

7 Pass West Town Cottage on the left, and the junction of Hook Norton road on the right. Pass several terraced cottages on the right, the last of which is Mulberry Cottage (J).

8 Continue along the road, passing the Old House (K), the Old Bakehouse (L) and Home Close (M) on your right. To the left is the arched gateway through the former Sibford Ferris Manor (N). Behind the Manor is the Walford Road development.

9 At the T-junction opposite the entrance to Sibford School, turn left down the hill towards Sibford Gower and Burdrop, passing Maria's House (P) and Pettifer's Piece (Q) on the right.

11 Turn left almost immediately (the very first left takes you back to the road) at the small Burdrop Green, passing a terrace of cottages on your right including Shepherd's Knoll (T).

13 Continue along the lane and on your right, after the right hand bend, is an old Water Point (V). Opposite on the lower roadway is Carrier's Cottage (W). Carry on down the hill and turn left at the main road.

14 Near the bottom of the dip (after the speed limit signs) go through the kissing gate in the hedge on the right. Head diagonally right across the field (do not go down the dip), over the footbridge crossing Ellywell Spring (V), and through a kissing gate.

16 Turn left along the road. At this point a kissing gate is submerged in vegetation to the left of the field gate. However, this is not a problem if the field gate is open. Continue along the road to the far corner of the Endowed Primary School (Y). Turn left onto the public footpath beside the school and follow it down steeply through a wooded area (you can take a short detour just before the bottom to see the school pond fed by the Tite (Z)).

10 A bit further down the hill, cross the road onto the path and look over the hedge; depressions in the field near the Sib show the position of medieval fish ponds (R). Follow the road uphill into Burdrop and take the right fork. Notice what used to be the Bishop Blaize Inn on your right (S).

12 On reaching the main road, bear right towards Banbury. After about 50 metres turn right along a gravelled public footpath (The Jitty) and at the end turn right again. Pass the village surgery and 50 metres further on, note the public footpath to the left known as Coffin Walk (U).

15 Continue up a short slope which can be very muddy and then across the next field and through a kissing gate to the right of some buildings (Wheatthills Farm), pause and look at the view behind you. Turn right and walk up the farm track (pause and look at the view behind you) to the road (A short detour to visit the Church of Holy Trinity (X) is worthwhile at this point).

17 Emerge into a young woodland area. Bear right and follow the path through the trees. When the path bears left, bear right and go through the kissing gate just ahead. On reaching the road (Temple Mill Road), turn right and walk uphill back to the Wykham Arms.

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Distance **2 miles / 3.4 km**

Approximate walk time **1.5 hours**

1 Start Turn right out of the Wykham Arms (A) and opposite is the Manor House (B). Continue past the Methodist Chapel (1827) and at the cross roads turn left along Main Street.

See step by step guide on page 4 for detailed route description

Preparation

Wear appropriate clothing and strong, comfortable footwear. The cross field stretches of the route are very steep and can be wet and muddy, especially in winter. Take a phone with you and let someone know where you are.

Things to remember

- Some of the route is across cultivated and grazing land. If you bring your dog with you, keep it under close control and on a lead if animals are in the fields. However, current advice recommends you should not walk between a cow and her calf and, if you are threatened by cattle, you should let the dog off the lead.
- You may come across temporary fencing not mentioned in the leaflet as farmers will use this in different places to manage their livestock throughout the year. Provision for walkers to get through this fencing safely should always be made – please let us know if this is not the case.
- Ground nesting birds can be disturbed by dogs, particularly in the Spring, so please keep them under close control.
- Respect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- Remember that the countryside is a working place - leave crops, buildings, machinery and livestock well alone. Leave gates and property as you find them and please keep to the line of the path.
- Take great care when crossing or walking along the roads.
- Park your car responsibly. Do not obstruct gateways, narrow lanes and village facilities. Consider leaving valuables at home.

Key

- Route
- Other paths
- Points of interest
- Buildings



The walk in this leaflet is based on village streets and official public rights of way (footpaths or bridleways). The publishers accept no responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by anyone using this leaflet.