

Harwell Village History Trail

(About 5 km – see map at end with numbered points marked)

1. Start at Village Hall. Opened as Harwell Technical Institute in 1931. Renamed as The Village Hall in December 1960. Originally it was divided into two parts. The women of the village were taught cookery and domestic in the room by the kitchen. The men could learn field crafts and carpentry at the western end. Turn right out of the Village Hall car park down the High Street.



2. Continue down and find Rosemead on your right, one of the listed houses in the village. Can you spot the building that was the Chequers Public House on the left as the road changes to Wantage Road?

3. The Jubilee Playground that can be seen from Wantage Road was extended in 2012 and renamed to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

4. Turn right at the end of Wantage Road and cross over Reading Road carefully. A few metres down the road is a lane called Winnaway which used to be called Winnow Way (early 20th century) - winnowing means removing the chaff. It has the nickname Burma Road, probably because it lead to the Harwell aerodrome. Road names do get changed over time. Reading Road was originally Turnpike Road and there is a Turnpike Cottage further down Reading Road on the right.

5. Turn around and retrace your steps to Wantage Road. Then continue past the turning until you reach the next but one lane on the right. What do you think the old name for this road was? Hollow Way. Holloway (and Winnaway) leads to the Icknield Way (an ancient right of way - Iron Age or earlier, that stretches from Norfolk to Wiltshire) - it takes about 15 minutes to walk there. Copies of the Saxon charters made in 12th and 13th centuries mention the Icknield Way passing by Harwell. Climb even further out of the village and you cross another ancient road - The Ridgeway, that runs more or less parallel to the Icknield Way here.

6. Cross over Reading Road and walk down one of the two marked footpaths which both lead to Broadway. Walk down Broadway. The end of Broadway is the former site of the old village fire engine shed. Turn left at the end. Just before you reach Wantage Road again, you will see an old letter box on the right hand side. Can you spot the letters VR? These stand for Victoria Regina, i.e. Queen Victoria. This was the first post box in Harwell. Postage stamps were first issued in Great Britain in 1840 in the early days of Queen Victoria's reign. Read the plaque to find out when the pillar box became part of the seat.

7. Retrace your steps back past Broadway along Wellshead. Wellshead House (formerly The Poplars) was the home and surgery of Dr Rice, who either rode his horse or was driven to see

patients. After he retired it continued to be the surgery run by Dr Beisley and Dr Cruilshank. Eventually the surgery closed and moved to Mereland Road, Didcot. On the right hand side of the road is Holywell Cottage a wonderful example of a cruck house – a technique making use of curved posts.



The next road on the left hand side is called Chilbrook. Walk about 20 metres into the road and look over the fence at the pond which is the source of Chilbrook, the stream, which runs northwards through the village and eventually empties into the Thames.

8. Walk down to the end of Wellshead and turn left down The Park. Almost immediately there is a lane on the right hand side with a thatched cob wall (listed) along the far side (probably 18th century). The thatch is for protection.

9. Continue along The Park to St. Matthew's Church, built in its present form between 1190 and 1310. At first the church was dedicated to Our Lady. A chapel is mentioned in the Domesday Survey. If open visit the church to see the two tapestries which the women of the village created to celebrate the village millennium in 1985. The so-called Harewell window was restored and additional stained glass added in 1981 by the descendants of John de Harewell (1320-1386) who now live in the USA.



10. Walk past the church and look at Princes Manor on the right - one of the original 3 medieval manors which owned much of the land in the village. The manor (territory) was originally granted by William the Conqueror to Robert d'Oily.



11. Continue round along the footpath to the churchyard (taking the right fork and not the road to the Rectory). On the right hand side across a small paddock the barn has a lovely shepherd weather vane on top of the wavy roof! Continue past the paddock and go through the gate on the right and walk to the low-hedged enclosure. There are a number of commonwealth war graves here (World War 2) with the graves of men from Australia, New Zealand and Canada as well as the UK, who were based at Harwell aerodrome.

12. Retrace your steps back past the church and turn right down Church Lane. Walk along to the thatched cottage (Dell Cottage) on the left - another wonderful example of a cruck house. Note the thatched bird - a symbol to show which person thatched the roof.

13. Walk to the end of Church Lane. The corner on the right was the site of the Boot Public House. On the opposite side of the High Street is the building with steps up to the front entrance that was The Crown Public house. During the great fire in 1852 the building was saved by a Mr Walters who apparently spent several hours dousing burning embers as they alighted on the then thatched roof. The sale by auction of the cherry crops (while they were still on the trees) took place there annually.

14. On the High Street the house immediately opposite called Lime Tree House used to provide accommodation for the Bishop of Winchester or members of his household when they travelled in the area. We will see the farmhouse now called Bishop's Manor Farm later in the trail.



15. Walk right along the High Street past the Almshouses on the right. Frances Geering (nee Jennings) bequeathed in her will (1723) a sum of money for the purchase of a house or ground for the building of Almshouses for six poor widows to live in. In front of the Almshouses is the village war memorial to the men of the village killed in both the first and second world wars.



16. The next road on the right is called Hengest Gate. This was mentioned in the Saxon Charter of 985 describing the Anglo-Saxon bounds of Harwell: 'Starting from Harundun Way, it goes to the people of Middleham, to Sutton lake; from Sutton lake to the people of Leofsige, to the twisted ditch; from the twisted ditch to the bramble-thorn; from the bramble-thorn to Hengest Gate in the old down, to the people of Brihtwold; from the people of Brihtwold then to Harandun.' The modern boundaries of Harwell are very similar.

17. Continue along the High Street to School Lane on the right. This does not lead to the Primary School in the village now, but instead to the old school built in 1894 as the Parish/Council School (closed in 1962). The current school is located in The Styles reached from Gaveston Road opposite School Lane. Gaveston Road was named after Piers Gaveston, a favourite of Edward II, who was awarded the manors in Harwell. Walk down School Lane to the old school on the left at the end before the road narrows into a footpath. The old School House (17th century) is on the opposite side of the road. Look at the plaque.

18. Continue down the footpath and round to the left to the junction of The Cleave (used to be The Clive) and Jennings Lane. Walk down Jennings Lane back to the High Street. On the opposite side of the road is the Bargain Stone. It was formerly located at Junction of The High Street and Kings Lane. Cross the road (using the pedestrian crossing) and try to shake hands through the hole in the stone to seal a bargain! A horse-fair is traditionally supposed to have been held in Harwell in medieval times. The bargain stone is said to have been used at these horse-fairs for paying the money. The bargain stone is a sarsen stone.



19. Continue along the High Street and before Grove Road look left to see Middle Farm (renamed King's Manor and now Bailols Manor) which was occupied from about 1200 to 1350 by the Bayllols family and by the Brounzs from about 1350 to 1437. In the 13th century the Bayllols were the most important residents in Harwell.



20. Walk down Grove Road (careful as there is no footpath here) to see another thatched cob wall (also listed) running along the left hand side. Continue past The Croft on the right hand side and then take the footpath on the right. These fields all contained cherry orchards that Harwell was

famous for. They were replaced by apple trees when disease struck. The apple trees were then removed after entering an EU agreement - farmers were paid to remove them. John Masefield wrote a poem called The Cherries which describes cherry production in Harwell. Two short excerpts:

*Below, where the springs burst and the brooks trill,
Long centuries since, man found that cherries thrive
For Harwell Man's perpetual treasure-trove.*

*When every bird is as a little boy,
A winged imp, to threaten and annoy,
To peck the ripening cherries, and to thieve
The sweet-fleshed fruit from dewy dawn to eve.*

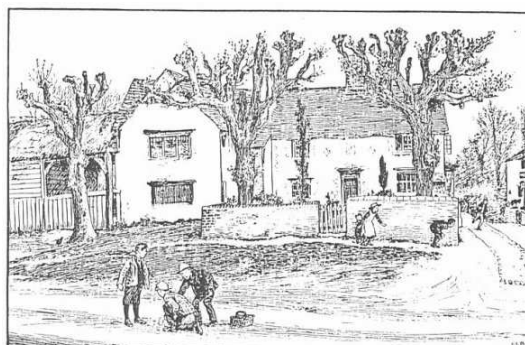
21. The footpath bends through 90 degrees 3 times (right and left alternating) and eventually emerges onto Barrow Road. Turn left and take the footpath on the right after the next turning. This footpath brings you out onto Barrow Lane. Turn left and walk down to Townsend. A cherry orchard still thrives on the opposite side of Townsend.

22. Turn right along Townsend and walk down past Pomander House, another cruck house from 16th century, on the right hand side. Notice the unusual brick work. Townsend was the old road to Sutton Courtney.



23. Walk to the corner of the High Street and Burr Street. On the left hand side you pass Bishop's Manor (Farm) - the present house has a 17th century front. It was the Grange of the Bishop of Winchester's manor of about a thousand acres. From 13th to 15th century the manor was known as Lower Manor or Bishop's Harwell.

24. Pollards the house standing on the corner of Townsend and Burr Street tells is listed and was the old Post Office.



25. The Hart of Harwell on the opposite corner used to be called The White Hart, another of the six public houses that used to exist in the village. It has an Aunt Sally pitch around the back. Aunt Sally is a traditional game still played throughout Oxfordshire. The 'dolly' is placed on a metal spike about 1 m high and short sticks are thrown to knock it off. The White Hart was originally a bakery but has served as a public house for about 380 years, in former days as a coaching inn. It has an unusual chamber over the entrance door.



26. Walk down Burr Street. The Crispin public house was on the right and further down on the left by the Chilbrook was The Queens Arms later called The Kicking Donkey after a donkey was taken into the bar and caused some damage.

27. Walk back up Burr Street, cross over Townsend and start to walk back along the High Street. Then cross the High Street when opposite Bob's Butchers and the newsagents. The house immediately after the newsagents is Adnam's Farm where the great fire began in 1852. Next door is The Old Bakery.

28. Walk back towards the Village Hall. Before the garage on the left after Church Lane is a (listed) milestone - before we had signposts this was how people knew how far it was to the next village or town (probably mid 19th century - listed). This one shows that it is 6 miles to Wantage and 8 miles to Wallingford!

29. Cross the road again to return to the Village Hall.

