



Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust

Supporting Oxfordshire's Churches since 1964

Three Churches by the Windrush: Cogges, Ducklington, and Witney

A short walk as described by Elizabeth Knowles

A walk of approximately 5 miles, which allowing (at least) 10 minutes per church can be completed comfortably within 3 hours, although a more in-depth visit could include longer spent in each church, a visit to Cogges Manor Farm, or a look round Witney.

The route

Leaving St Mary's Cogges by the lychgate, bear right and walk round the end of the barn. Passing Cogges Manor Farm (and café) on your right, walk straight ahead to cross over Cogges Hill Road and up the market footpath to its junction with the back lane to Stanton Harcourt. Walk up and over the bridge across the bypass and continue on round the curve of the lane. (At this point, there is no footway, but there is comparatively little traffic.) Just before the turn up to Springhill Farm on the left, you will see a gate to the right leading to the Northern Cross Valley Way, a footpath running down to Ducklington. There has been a lot of gravel extraction in the area, and in the fields to the left scrapes have been carved out: it's worth keeping an eye out for what birds you may see. Follow the path round a curve, across a wooden bridge (over one arm of the Windrush) and up to what is effectively a crossroads: the Windrush Path along the river runs at right-angles to the NCV Way.

When the weather is dry, you can walk to Cogges from this point along the Windrush (as shown on OS 180), but when the ground is saturated, you are likely to encounter a good deal of slippery and sticky mud. On a happier note, the field to your left and directly behind you is the wildflower meadow opened each year on 'Fritillary Sunday'—depending on the weather, usually the second or third Sunday in April. Follow the lane down and through a small gate, and you will see St Bartholomew's directly ahead.

Leaving the church by the north door, turn left along the road and simply follow its course towards Witney. As you get nearer the bypass you will see the roundabout at the end of the road; before that, you can cut down across the water meadows in accordance with a 'footpath' sign marked 'Witney ½ mile'. Go through the gate at the end, and follow the shaded path down to the footbridge across to Witney Lake. Turn left and take the path under the bypass and up through the industrial estate to the pedestrian crossing on Station Road. On the other side, walk up The Leys through the central avenue of limes, and into the churchyard of St Mary's Witney. From there, walk down the length of Church Green to the Market Square (the Buttercross, at the foot of Church Green, is a reminder of the starting point as it was one of William Blake's benefactions).

At this point, there are various options depending on your starting point. If you used the S1 to get to Cogges getting off at Church Lane, you can reconnect with the bus here. And on a practical note, there are plenty of coffee shops and eateries around the Market Square for refreshments.

Alternatively, walk down as far as the Corn Exchange, turn right down the passage, and make your way across the Waitrose car park to the pedestrian crossing on Witan Way.



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The route

From there, the path round to the right leads to the footbridges across Langdale Common and back up to St Mary's Cogges.

By Elizabeth Knowles

About the churches

The first church, and the starting point, St Mary's Cogges, stands on the north side of the Windrush between Cogges Manor Farm and Cogges Priory. The church itself is medieval, effectively completed by the fifteenth century, but the lychgate through which you enter the churchyard is much later. A commemorative tablet in red terracotta on the right marks Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of 1897, with the Queen's head surrounded by the names of countries and dominions of the British Empire. On the left, a brass plaque records the building of the lychgate. Because the stone was dressed before it was brought to the churchyard, the building was completed in the manner of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:7), 'So that there was neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard'. The Vicar of the time was Edward James Undy Payne, and the churchwardens were William Cantwell ('A friend to all, an enemy to none', as his tombstone describes him) and Harry Robbins, both of whom were wardens for over fifty years. William Cantwell was a builder who worked on the lychgate and lived in the School House (now the Church Office): his wife Sarah was the schoolmistress of what was to become the Blake School.

Entering by the south door, you see a large round pillar with a scalloped capital, marking the oldest (twelfth-century) part of the church. On the left is the tub-shaped font, and behind it, the War Memorial, carved with acorns and roses. We have a list of the Christian names of those commemorated which is read aloud each Remembrance Day, so we know that 'A. Pratley' was 'Archie'. Some of the young men named here were actually christened in the font. Albert Miles, who died at 19 in the Gallipoli campaign, was baptized here on 26 April, 1896. Hariph Bernard Young, killed just over a week before the end of the war, had been baptized on 14 October 1894. Beyond it is the large fifteenth-century west window, reglazed in 1974 in memory of the Vicar who baptized them: Edward James Undy Payne, Vicar from 1883 to his death in 1914, and his wife Eveline.

Links with Cogges Manor Farm have always been strong. The room below the tower—now the vestry—is separated from the main body of the church by a wooden screen. This was given in the mid-1930s by members of the Mawle family, of Manor Farm, in memory of their parents Joseph and Elizabeth. The screen is decorated with ears of corn, and carved with figures showing the seasonal activities of ploughing, sowing, and reaping. A rook sits in the furrow on the left-hand side, and there is an alert dog with crossed paws further round to the right. The screen reminds us that well into the twentieth century, Cogges was essentially an agricultural community, with fields where there are houses today. A rook sits in the furrow on the left-hand side, and there is an alert dog with crossed paws further round to the right. The screen reminds us that well into the twentieth century, Cogges



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Shallow steps from the North Aisle lead up into the fourteenth-century Blake Chapel, the last part of the church to be added, probably by the de Grey family who held the manor. The chapel, like the North Aisle, has a lively frieze of alternating human faces (two medieval hoodies look down from the south-east corner) with animals playing musical instruments. There are two windows in the north wall of the chapel, and would originally have been three—but the third one is now blocked by a later monument, to a family for whom this part of the church is now named. By the second half of the seventeenth century, the Manor had passed into the hands of the Blake family. Busts of three of them, William and Sara and their son Francis, look down from the Blake Memorial—blocking out an original third window in the north wall. Their impressively wigged busts look out impassively from beneath the livelier medieval carving. (Higher on the wall and to the left, a carved monkey with a harp could be seen as looking slightly quizzical.)

The masons who worked at Cogges it is thought also worked at St Bartholomew's, Ducklington, where the north aisle was remodelled as a chantry chapel, with richly-carved canopies over the founders' tombs.

One of the joys of visiting any church is 'meeting' some of the people who have played a significant role in its life. This time I was very pleased to make the acquaintance, via a memorial window in the north wall of the chancel, of a former Rector of Ducklington. This was William Dunn Macray, b. 1826, who at the age of 14 was appointed to the Bodleian post of 'supernumary under assistant' (those were the days, but his father had been the Taylorian's first Librarian). After taking his degree, he joined the staff as a general assistant, and worked in the manuscript collections until he retired in 1905. He was installed at Ducklington as Rector in 1870 (presented by his college, Magdalen), and according to ODNB 'served there, an exemplary parish priest, for forty two years'. He died in 1916. I thought this was a splendid example of the kind of scholar/incumbent who flourished in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Various members of the family are also commemorated, including his daughter Adela: she has a window showing Dorcas and St Cecilia by the Arts and Crafts artist Caroline Townsend.

The final church, St Mary the Virgin, Witney, is a fine spacious town church with a central tower and spire, which was remodelled in the thirteenth century. Witney grew wealthy from the wool trade, and its church reflects the prosperity of the town. Like the other two churches on this walk, we would primarily think of them as fine examples of medieval church architecture, but I always enjoy seeing what later centuries (and congregations) have contributed. St Mary's has a particularly nice recent addition to its furnishings: a new nave altar with a design that links closely to Witney's past of the wool trade and especially the weaving industry. It is made of cedar, from a cedar of Lebanon tree in the churchyard that had had to be felled. The new altar, fashioned from this, has a central support in



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the churchyard that had had to be felled. The new altar, fashioned from this, has a central support in the shape of a bobbin. Along the front edge, carved images evoke a shuttle, and the warp and weft of a loom. The new altar at once represents a twenty-first-century contribution to the fittings of the church, and reminds us of the source of the wealth that was needed to build the church in the thirteenth century, and make lavish later additions.

By Elizabeth Knowles

About the author

Elizabeth Knowles is a renowned library researcher and historical lexicographer who devoted three decades of her career to Oxford University Press. Her time at OUP began with contributions to the OED Supplement and the New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. Subsequently, she spearheaded the Quotations publishing program, solidifying her reputation as a leading expert in quotations and lexicography.

In 1999, Knowles assumed the prestigious role of Editor of the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, a position she held continuously until her retirement from OUP in 2007. Under her editorial guidance, the eighth edition was published in 2014, marking a significant milestone in the dictionary's history.

Knowles is a prolific writer and lecturer on the history of quotations and dictionaries. She has shared her extensive knowledge with both academic and general audiences, significantly enhancing our understanding of the role of quotations in language.

Beyond her work on the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, Knowles is also the editor of "What They Didn't Say: A Book of Misquotations" (2006) and "How To Read a Word" (2010). Her work continues to inspire and inform scholars, writers, and readers fascinated by the English language.