



Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust

Supporting Oxfordshire's Churches since 1964

Four Cotswold Churches: Fulbrook, Swinbrook, Widford, Burford **A short walk as described by Elizabeth Knowles**

A walk of around 6 miles, which allowing (at least) 10 minutes per church could be completed within about 4 hours, although the interest of the different churches, and of Burford itself, would repay a more in-depth visit. The walking is reasonably undemanding, with only a few stiles to negotiate on the path between Widford and Burford, and although there is a fair component of road walking the main stretch (Fulbrook to Swinbrook) is along a single-track lane with comparatively little traffic.

The route

The walk begins and ends in Burford (there are plenty of eateries of all kinds), and you can either drive and use the main carpark, or catch one of the regular 233/234 buses from Witney. The Ordnance Survey OL45 'Cotswolds' map in the 'Explorer' series covers the whole route. Walk down Burford High Street to the bridge over the Windrush. Cross carefully with the lights, keeping to the footway painted on the right-hand side, and take the right-hand fork, following the A361 Banbury road uphill. There is, happily, a proper pavement. At the top of the hill, where the road begins to curve left and drop, there is a sign welcoming you to Fulbrook. At this point, looking back across the valley, you get a splendid view of the spire and tower of Burford Church. Follow the footpath down to the village, and take a left-hand turn into Church Lane, with St James the Great, Fulbrook at the top.

When you leave St James's, return to the main road, turn left, and walk for a short distance until you see the single-track road to Swinbrook (2 miles) on the right. Cross carefully (the A361 is a busy road), and follow the lane uphill. When it rises and levels out, you get a good view across the valley. After about a mile you pass a belt of trees on the right, and the road drops. At the foot of the incline, you have the option first of a bridle path, and then a stile and footpath, both marked for Widford. I have taken the bridleway in the past, and it probably would cut the distance slightly, but this route is planned as a circular walk. Still, the option is there, and could be taken using the map.

The lane rises and levels out again, and you get a good view across the valley to the A40 in the distance. Finally it drops quite steeply to a T junction. Turn right, and follow the road up to Swinbrook. St Mary's, Swinbrook is on the right, sitting on the top of a rise.

Leave Swinbrook via a gate in the south-west corner of the churchyard, helpfully marked 'St Oswald's, Widford'. Follow a path between stone walls for a short way, and exit through a second gate on to the green slope of grassy land running down to the water meadows. The footpath is well-trodden: you can see it's a good deal used. Straight ahead, in the distance, you can see the little church of St Oswald's, Widford, with a low wall running round it. At this point, you are about 3 miles from Burford.

When you have visited St Oswald's, rejoin the track. It runs down to a cattle grid (negotiate carefully), and at this point you turn left and walk down to cross a bridge and reach the road to Burford.



Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust

Supporting Oxfordshire's Churches since 1964

Four Cotswold Churches: Fulbrook, Swinbrook, Widford, Burford

The route

Turn right and walk a short way until you see a sign for a footpath to your right. Follow the narrow (occasionally muddy) path through nettles and undergrowth for a short distance until you come to a stile leading out into open ground. At this point the track is parallel to the river (quite close on your right.) Looking up to the left, you can see traffic on the A40 running along the ridge. . Another stile, and then the path bears left, cutting off a corner. Cross a field, negotiate a footbridge, and the path runs diagonally up to a stile into the lane at the corner of the field. Turn right, and the rest of the walk is straight into Burford. The footway is somewhat notional, and there are more cars than on the previous lane, but it is quite walkable (and clearly, regularly used by walkers).

When you reach Burford, pass the old Baptist Chapel on your left, and shortly after that take a right turn into 'Guildenford'. Follow the road down, bear left, and you will arrive at St John the Baptist, Burford. (There is a café and facilities in the nearby Warwick Hall.) When you have seen the church, there is a path from the churchyard taking you back into the High Street.

By Elizabeth Knowles

About the churches

St James the Great, Fulbrook, is an attractive village church that may date from as early as the eleventh century (Buildings of England points out the herringbone masonry on the south wall of the nave). It has a fine Norman door sheltered by a slightly later porch.

Inside there is a good deal to see. The north arcade has rounded pillars with striking scalloped capitals, but what catches my attention when I visit there are the memorials. Fulbrook has the feeling of a cherished church today, and it has clearly always been valued by those who worship there. Local stonemasons were responsible for some fine monuments in the chancel, and there is a good bale tomb on the south side of the church (as it happens, near to the herringbone stonework).

St Mary's, Swinbrook is also a medieval church (with the exception of the tall tower, which apparently dates from 1822), and one which is peopled with monuments recalling its earlier worshippers. Again, this is a church which is clearly valued and used today, with an active life, but also one in which you can hear the voices of those who worshipped here in the past, and through whose efforts the building has been passed down.

The great family of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries were the Fettiplaces (they built their mansion, demolished in the nineteenth century, in the 1490s), and the chancel walls are filled with their monuments. I spent some time admiring the effigies of six Fettiplace gentleman, stacked in threes and lying on one side.

However, taking as they are, this time my attention was caught by other memorials. Joan Goddard is



Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust

Supporting Oxfordshire's Churches since 1964

Four Cotswold Churches: Fulbrook, Swinbrook, Widford, Burford

commemorated (in the nave) by a hatchmented monument on a pillar, something I haven't seen before. There were also a couple of twentieth-century memorials that I liked very much, both relating to the Second World War.

The east window of the south aisle records bomb damage from 1940, after which fragments of medieval glass from the chancel were gathered up by the then Vicar and have been inserted in this window 'in thankfulness to God for our merciful deliverance'.

And on the north wall of the north aisle there is a simple (and beautifully-lettered) memorial tablet to a naval officer who was lost with his submarine off the coast of Newfoundland in 1941. The inscription concluded with a quotation I had to look up: 'The deck it was their field of fame And Ocean was their grave'. It's from Thomas Campbell's nineteenth-century ballad 'Ye Mariners of England' (1801)—not perhaps so familiar today. And not, I admit regretfully, now in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (8/e, 2014), although perhaps that should be reconsidered!

St Oswald's, Widford, sitting by itself on a grassy slope, has had a chequered history since its inception in the twelfth century. The medieval village of Widford has long since disappeared, and in 1859 the church was closed and then used as a farm building. It was rescued and restored at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

In the course of the work they discovered the remains of a mosaic pavement, indicating that the church had been built on the site of a Roman villa. Now *St Oswald's* is part of Burford benefice. Unlike the other churches visited, there are no rich memorials: it is a simple two-celled building with box pews and a seventeenth-century communion rail with flat balusters. There are faint traces of wall paintings. It is a very peaceful place.

St John the Baptist, Burford, is a complete contrast to the other churches on the route. This is a town rather than a village church, and one that benefited hugely from the medieval wool trade, and wealthy donors included the Guild of Merchants who in the mid thirteenth century built what is now the Lady Chapel (originally the Chapel of *St Mary* and *St Anne*). It has had its tribulations: the top of the spire collapsed in 1722, and G. E. Street's restoration of the 1870s according to *BoE* 'provoked William Morris to found the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings'. *BoE* records in a nice footnote that according to May Morris her father had remonstrated with the then vicar, W. A. Cass, only to receive the response 'The church sir is mine, and if I choose to, I shall stand on my head in it.' One wonders what Mr Cass would have made of the subsequent rescue of Widford.

It would not be difficult to spend a half-day going round the church, but I find it more rewarding to focus on one or two things for a visit. This time, the first one was a wall monument in the north aisle to Edmund Harman (d. 1577), who held what sounds like a challenging post, being barber-surgeon to Henry VIII. This has the remarkable feature of including what Buildings of England describes as



Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust

Supporting Oxfordshire's Churches since 1964

Four Cotswold Churches: Fulbrook, Swinbrook, Widford, Burford

'American-looking Indians' (although it concedes that they 'may derive from Etruscan sources'). If they genuinely represent 'First Nation' peoples, it would surely be a remarkably early representation.

The other memorial I wanted to spend some time looking at, in the north chapel of the chancel, was the remarkable Tanfield monument. This features the impressive effigy of Sir Lawrence Tanfield (c.1551-1625), in judicial robes, with his wife. Their daughter, kneeling at their heads and looking outward, Elizabeth Tanfield Cary, is of great interest in her own right both as a writer and as a determined Catholic convert and recusant—something inimical to both her father and her son (Lord Falkland, the Royalist) who kneels at his grandfather's feet. There is an extraordinary amount of the social and cultural history of the seventeenth century embodied in the figures shown.

With an eye to the time, I left reluctantly, but paused to read a modern inscription outside on the south wall recalling the execution and burial in the churchyard of three Levellers in 1649: another reminder of the human cost of that turbulent century.

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.