



# Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust

*Supporting Oxfordshire's Churches since 1964*

## **Ironstone Country: Hanwell, Horley, Wroxton, and Drayton** **A short walk as described by Elizabeth Knowles**

*A circular walk of between six and seven miles using lanes and a couple of fieldpaths (if you know the area, the distance could probably be trimmed slightly by using more footpaths, but I found walking the lanes very pleasant and straightforward). I found this an excellent route by which encounter some of the notable Ironstone churches of the Deddington Deanery: the churches described below make a wonderful introduction to the treasures to be found in this part of North Oxfordshire.*

*As a walker, I got to and from my starting point by using the local bus service, but you could also make a parked car the starting and finishing point. The map to use is OS Explorer 206, Edge Hill & Fenny Compton. The going is generally easy, and the only bit where you need to be surefooted is walking up to Drayton on a narrow path beside the A422. If you preferred not to do that (and visit Drayton separately directly from Banbury) it would be quite possible after visiting Wroxton to walk back to your starting point via Hanwell. As laid out here, the walk starts and finishes in Banbury where refreshments can be had, and there are pubs along the way in the villages visited.*

### **The route**

Catch the B5 bus from Bridge Street in the centre of Banbury and get off by the North Oxfordshire Academy. Walk down past the school, and follow the leftward curve of the road round to the junction with Warwick Road. Walk north until you come to a roundabout with a Sainsbury's Local at the north-west corner. Cross carefully so that you can continue up the A4100 (Warwick Road) on the east side of the road until you come to the end of the pavement. Then bear right across the green open space which skirts the edge of the built-up area. Follow the path on to a footpath crossing a track through a belt of trees. Take a clearly marked diagonal footpath across the next field, and come out on to a farm track. Cross this, and look to your left across the next field to see the tower of St Peter's, Hanwell. Turn left and walk round two sides of the field, taking the second gate in the hedge to follow the public footpath running down one side of a private field. Cross the field, and enter the churchyard to see the south face of the church.

On leaving the church, follow Church Lane to the left out through the village, passing the Village Hall on your right. Walk down to the A4100 and cross with care. Take the single-track lane ahead signed for 'Wroxton 1½'. Walk down this lane. After an S-bend a footpath is marked to the right (it comes in from Banbury from the left). If you know the area, I think it would be possible to use this as a short cut, but if you are unfamiliar with it, you could miss the turn. I preferred to walk on down to a T-junction, and then take the (unsigned) right arm, which in fact leads to Horley within half a mile or so. When you are in the village you will see a turn to the left marked Little Lane; take it, and it will lead you to St Etheldreda's Horley, sitting at the top of the hill.

Leaving the church by the south door, walk ahead through the churchyard to a footpath leading to the far end of Little Lane and so back to the main street.



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Turn right, and walk back the way you have come to the crossroads. Continue on, taking the road to Wroxton ( $\frac{3}{4}$  miles). This brings you to a T junction with the A422. Cross with care, and turn left to walk in the direction of Banbury. At the corner, turn right into Church Street and walk down to find All Saints, Wroxton.

Leaving the manorial glories of Wroxton, walk back up Church Street, and at the corner of Stratford Road and Silver Street you will see a fieldpath to the right. Before turning on to it, look directly ahead to see the thatched roof of *St Thomas of Canterbury, Wroxton*. Walk a very short way up the broad grass verge, and enter by the west porch.

On leaving the church, return to the corner, and turn left on to the fieldpath. This will lead you virtually parallel to the A 422 to the north, until the path runs down to a stile by a tumbledown section of wall. Step out carefully on to a narrow path along the verge, and walk up the hill into Drayton. This is really the one part of the walk where care is needed; it is quite a busy road, and the path is fairly uneven underfoot.

Once you are in the village, follow the road round to the right and past the right turn into Mill Lane. Almost immediately beyond you will see a right turn down to a care home, and a lane curving round beyond it and along the ridge. Walk along this track, and looking down you will see *St Peter's, Drayton*, in the valley below.

After visiting the church, walk back up to the main road, cross, and walk on uphill in the direction of Banbury. You will need to cross again further on, but there is now an easy footway all the way into the outskirts of the town. Finally, look across the road and you will see the bus stop outside North Oxfordshire Academy, the starting point for this walk. Cross, and wait for the next B5 to take you back into the centre of Banbury.

## **About the churches**

### *St Peter's Hanwell*

Approaching from the south, you see the church sideways on: a handsome Ironstone building, with a small turret on the west tower, and a wonderful frieze of animals and grotesques by local North Oxfordshire masons adorning the chancel.

When you have taken time to look at them, walk round the west end to enter the church by the north door (the village side).

Inside it is a spacious building with aisles marked by three bays of arcades. The capitals are distinctive, showing men and women with linked arms (a design found in other churches in this region).



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The figures on the north side are slightly larger, and *Buildings of England* suggests that they are earlier. On the south side, there are minstrels carved standing above the capitals. The effect is astonishing when you first step in, and if anything becomes more impressive as you take in the details.

All this speaks to Hanwell's rich medieval heritage, but before you leave go up into the chancel to admire the tomb of Sir Anthony Cope of Hanwell Hall (d. 1614) and his wife. You feel that no expense was spared.

### *St Etheldreda's, Horley*

A fine early building; *BoE* says that the chancel and central tower are Late Norman 'although much remodelled'. The nave was rebuilt in the thirteenth century and has north and south arcades of tall slender piers that are alternately round and octagonal. The fixtures and furnishings include a Norman aumbry and piscina in the chancel, a Gothic Revival pulpit of 1836 painted with scenes from the life of St Etheldreda, and an impressive mid-twentieth-century rood screen designed by T. Lawrence Dale, for many years Oxford Diocesan Surveyor, and architect of St Michael and All Angels, New Marston as well as other Oxfordshire churches.

However, the most striking feature of St Etheldreda's is the marvellous fifteenth-century wall painting of St Christopher by the north door. It shows the saint fording a stream against a flowery background, with anglers on either side dangling hopeful lines for clearly delineated fish.

### *All Saints, Wroxton*

This is another fine Ironstone church (on a sunny day, the stone glows red-gold against a blue sky). It is mainly from the early fourteenth century, with a fifteenth-century clerestory, other than the west tower. This was rebuilt in 1748; the architect, Sanderson Miller, is described by *BoE* as 'gentleman architect, Gothic Revival pioneer, and squire of the nearby Radway Grange in Warwickshire'. Apparently it was originally surmounted by an octagon, which fell down in the first winter and was not replaced.

Inside there is plenty to see, including a notable fourteenth-century font with figures of saints (recut 1845-6); perhaps the most memorable features, though, are the memorials. All Saints stands opposite to the grounds of Wroxton Abbey, originally an Augustinian priory, but later the home of the Pope and then the North families. They are commemorated with appropriately grand effigies and memorials. William Pope, first Earl of Downe, d. 1631, and his wife lie on their tomb chest in the north-east corner of the sanctuary, with two respectful sons praying at their head, and their daughter at their feet.



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From a later period (1783), the three wives of Francis North, first Earl of Guilford, Lucy, Catherine, and Elizabeth have each a labelled urn on their wall monumbent of grey and white marble. It was the first Lady Guilford, Lucy, who was the mother of Frederick, eventually second Earl of Guilford but better known to history as 'Lord North', Prime Minister at the time of the American War of Independence. Despite what must have been seen as a lack of military and political success he is commemorated assertively by a figure of Britannia, spear in hand and lion at her side.

### *St Thomas of Canterbury, Wroxton*

St Thomas of Canterbury, Wroxton is a small roughcast building with a thatched roof, bellcote, and porch at the west end. It is distinctive in being the only thatched church in Oxfordshire; it also represents a significant moment in English ecclesiastical history. In 1868 William North, the future eleventh Baron in succession to his mother, converted to Catholicism. He inherited the title and Wroxton Abbey in 1884, and three years later Wroxton's first Roman Catholic church was erected on this site. It was a small building of corrugated iron which was largely replaced by a rebuild of 1947-8, when panels and motifs of nineteenth-century stained glass from West Midlands churches damaged or destroyed in the War were imported. As they represent salvage they cover disparate themes. There are windows from two separate Transfiguration sequences, and moments from other cycles, such as Peter repenting after his denial of Christ, and a feasting scene with a harper who may well be King David.

Stepping into what from the outside is a modest building, the effect of light and colour when you stand at the west end of the nave is remarkable. There are also windows in the small vestries at the west end of the church which are distinctively different, and particularly appropriate to a rural church as they show farming scenes.

### *St Peter's, Drayton*

Nestled in a valley, this small church is almost entirely fourteenth century, although the very low west tower apparently dates from 1808. It was also restored in 1877 by Edwin Dolby. From the description, it would be well worth seeing inside, and apparently it is another North Oxfordshire church with the motif of interlocking arms at the head of a capital seen so impressively at Hanwell. There is also an alabaster slab with incised figures commemorating Lewis Granville (d. 1438) and his wife Margaret.



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## 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.*