

St. John's Church

Beating the Bounds Walk Around Lacey Green, Loosley Row and Speen



Beating the Bounds – Illustration by Garry Walton and with kind permission from St. Martin-in-the-Fields

Background and Important Points to Note

“Beating the Bounds” used to be an annual tradition which dates back to medieval Britain and was a way of marking the boundary lines of church parishes. At the time, most of the country was divided into parishes, with the clergy and churchwardens responsible for the running and upkeep of their areas. The boundaries determined important issues such as where parishioners could graze their livestock, or the limits between different jurisdictions.

Before maps were commonplace, beating the bounds was a way of reaffirming the territories of each parish, as well as a way to pass the knowledge on from one generation to another. Traditionally this usually took place annually on Rogation Sunday, the 6th Sunday of Easter, and involved the clergy and locals tapping boundary markers such as stones, gateposts, walls and trees with sticks as they passed. Rogation invited people to ask for blessing on the crops and the well-being of the parish, so as an important part of the ceremony, there were prayers and a sharing of hope in God's goodness.

St. John's Church was built between 1823 and 1825 as a chapel-of-ease to the Parish Church of St. Mary in Princes Risborough. It was consecrated on the 3rd July 1825 by the Rev. George Pelham, Bishop of Lincoln and some 19 infants were baptised. At www.stjohnschurchlaceygreen.org there is a brief history of the Church. As 2025 marks the 200th anniversary of the church, it was decided that this tradition would be revisited as part of the celebrations. It is not possible for the route described below to exactly follow the parish boundary as it is important that walkers stick to properly designated footpaths and roads, and these don't always correspond to the actual boundary. It is a reasonable approximation however and the circular walk of approximately 10 miles enables the unique landscape of the Chilterns to be appreciated.

When undertaking the walk, it is strongly advised that you have an OS map with you to confirm that you are utilising appropriately designated routes. When undertaking any walk, it is important to respect, protect and enjoy nature. Please therefore ensure that you follow the Countryside Code and their advice can be found at <https://www.countryside-code.org.uk>.

Parts of the walk are on roads that have no footpaths, and there will be occasional stiles, and the possibility of livestock in fields. Therefore, please take great care and note that your participation in this walk and the use of your equipment is entirely at your own risk. The author, publishers and copyright owners shall not be liable to you or responsible for;

- Any personal injury, damage of harm caused or suffered or
- Any damage or loss to your personal property, possessions or equipment

resulting from any cause whatsoever.

The Route and Points of Interest

The walk as described here, notionally starts and finishes at Gommaes Forge at the junction of Loosley Hill and Foundry Lane, as this is a well-known landmark in the village. However, as the route is a circular one you can start at any point that is convenient to you. Please note that route instructions are in **green**, the approximate distance travelled from St. John's Church is in kilometres and a **brown** font, and points of interest in black.

In order to get from St. John's Church to Gommaes Forge, walk along Main Road towards Princes Risborough.

When passing Stocken Farm, note that during WW II, some of their land was used to create an airfield which ran behind the site of St. John's School. From here, Sir Arthur (Bomber) Harris, the Air Chief Marshall who commanded Bomber Command between 1942 and 1945, took regular flights to Hertfordshire and later on to France. At www.laceygreen.com find out more about Lacey Green residents who played a pivotal role during the conflict.

Behind the Whip / Spice Raj, is England's oldest remaining "smock mill", so called due to its resemblance to a traditional farmer's smock. It ceased life as a working mill in 1915. In 1971 the Chiltern Society stepped in and volunteers, led by Christopher Wallis, began restoration work on Lacey Green Windmill. The project was completed in 1976 and in July 2013 it was given a prestigious Engineering Heritage Award. Further details at www.chilternsociety.org.uk and www.laceygreenwindmill.org.uk.

At the Whip / Spice Raj (1.06K) turn left and go down Loosley Hill. When you reach a crossroad, go straight over keeping on Loosley Hill. In ~250 metres you will see Gommaes Forge on your left (1.62K). This family business has operated since the mid 19th century. Visit www.laceygreen.com for a more detailed history. A short way up Foundry Lane on the opposite side of the road is a cottage called Grannies which has an unusual and eccentric display in the front garden.

At Gommaes Forge and with the workshop on your left, go down Foundry Lane. In ~570 metres (2.19K) you get to a sharp left hand bend next to a house called The Warren. On this corner, there is a footpath you need to take that heads down towards the A4010 – the road from Princes Risborough to High Wycombe. When you get to the long driveway, cross over and remain on the footpath with the field on the right and trees on the left. When you get to the road, cross over the A4010 (2.45K), and the footpath carries straight on through the field that is on the other side. Once you have crossed this first field, don't carry straight on - instead turn right onto that path (2.84K).

In ~750 metres you get to a road (Upper Icknield Way) (3.58K) and you need to turn right and walk along it. When you get to the crossroad with Shootacre Lane, go straight over and carry on Upper Icknield Way. The Icknield Way trail is unique because it can claim to be "the oldest road in Britain." Extending from the Dorset coast to Norfolk, the ancient route consists of prehistoric pathways, old even when the Romans came. It survives as splendid tracks and green lanes along the chalk spine of England - www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk.

At the T junction with the A4010 (Wycombe Road) (4.07K), you need to cross over and head towards Princes Risborough. Princes Risborough has been described as a "Pleasing country town, with a prosperous high street, traditional market house and a working heritage railway" - www.chilterns.org.uk. The history of Princes Risborough stretches back to the time of The Domesday Book. The origins of the name Risborough relate to the "brushwood covered hills" whilst the addition of "Princes" derives from the time when the Manor was taken by the 14th century Black Prince, son of Edward III.

In ~500 metres, shortly after The Repair Barn, there is a footpath that you need to take that cuts diagonally across the field that is on your right (4.59K). The Repair Barn offers an easy-to-use service to have furniture, electronics, clothes or whatever, repaired and restored. They also provide tools, training and the hire of workbenches for DIYers. www.facebook.com/people/Repair-Barn/100069786069939.

Upon exiting the field (4.78K) turn right up the track that is once again Upper Icknield Way and also the Ridgeway national trail. The Ridgeway trail runs from Avebury in Wiltshire to Ivinghoe Beacon in Bucks. It follows the high ground used since prehistoric times, by travellers, herdsman and soldiers - www.nationaltrail.co.uk.

In roughly 270 metres, leave the track and take the footpath that is on your right. When you get to the bottom of the slope, there is a seasonal stream on the right called Pyrtle Spring (5.40K). At this point turn left onto the path that cuts across the field. Pyrtle Spring is a seasonal spring that is dependent on the water table. It is an important historical spring which once fuelled a number of water mills in the area. (Risborough Area Heritage Society Facebook contains some photographs and memories from local people.)

Go through the gate at the end of the field, and turn left onto the lane (5.89K). Go up the lane until you get to Brimmers Road (6.08K). Turn right, taking care as you walk along this road. Nearby is Kop Hill. In 1910 motorcyclists were looking for a challenging route to ride and the sinuous and steep Kop Hill proved to be ideal. Within a year, cars joined the motorcycles to see who could be quickest and the event quickly became the annual Kop Hill Climb. Nowadays, it's no longer a competition, but a celebration of the history of the car and the motorcycle - www.kophillclimb.org.uk.

Once you have just gone past Brimmers Farm (6.48K), there is a footpath that leads off on the left hand side of the road, and you carry on up there. Keep going straight on towards the tree line, navigating the occasional stile. At the end of the field (7.06K), go over the stile and the footpath begins to go up the hill. At the top of the hill, there is a crossroad of paths - turn right here (7.37K). Carry on along this path until you go through a wooden gate, after which turn left onto a driveway and you will arrive at Pink Road where you turn right. In about 50 metres, just before the Pink and Lily pub, turn left onto Lily Bottom Lane (7.64K).

The Pink and Lily Pub was a favourite of the poet Rupert Brooke during his walks through the Chiltern Hills before WWI. Legend has it that the Pink & Lily came into being in 1800 when Mr Pink, a butler, and Miss Lillie, a chambermaid, both from the nearby Hampden House, fell in love and turned a private house into the Pink and Lily hostelry - www.chilternsociety.org.uk.

When you get to the sign for Iron Beech Cottage, there is a crossroad of paths (8.21K). The Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire Grim's Ditch (or Grimsdyke) runs right to left at this point. Overall it includes a series of three prehistoric earthworks aligned along the face of the Chiltern Hills between Bradenham and Berkhamsted. It spans some 18km, and is thought to have served as a territorial boundary, separating, and perhaps enclosing, organised groups of land and settlement. Excavations to date have indicated that it was in existence in the Iron Age, but may have a considerably earlier origin.

You turn left here. In about 60 metres, turn right off the bridleway onto a footpath. Keep on this path, keeping the paddocks and fields that are through the trees and hedgerow on your right. When you get to the next footpath crossroad, just keep going straight on (9.30K). When you get to Hampden Road (9.98K), just cross over and carry on down Coleheath Bottom. In ~ 450 metres there is a footpath sign to the right and you should turn up there (10.42K).

This is an unusual path as it appears on occasions as if you are walking through people's gardens. Just keep to the right, going through all the little gates. When you get to the road, cross over (10.59K), and walk up what looks like a driveway on the left hand side. You will be skirting past Speen Church. This was built over 200 years ago by local people. Regular church activities are held in the hall, as well as seasonal and one-off events - www.speenchurch.org.



Lacey Green Windmill



Pyrtle Spring

After about 20 metres there is a footpath on the right hand side that you should follow. When you get to a footpath crossroads (10.87K), you jink left and then immediately right, so you effectively go straight on. At the bottom of the field there is a little woodland and you carry straight on. At a footpath crossroad, there are a couple of gates (11.35K). Again carry straight on, up the slope, and through a couple of fields. At the top of the slope you go through a gate. There is what looks like a farm track straight on, but you want the footpath slightly to the left of that (11.70K). At the end of the field turn right just before the trees (12.07K). The military houses are on your left behind the trees.

RAF High Wycombe is a major administrative support station. It hosts HQ Air Command, the European Air Group, and several organisational groups. RAF High Wycombe is also the HQ for UK Space Command, delivering and coordinating outputs that help make space safe and secure - www.raf.mod.uk. It is also worth noting that a 1,200 yard section of the Buckinghamshire Grim's Ditch runs from RAF High Wycombe to Grymsdyke Farm, the latter being on the left if travelling down New Road and before you get to St. John's Church.

When you get to the small road, turn left. You will get to the main road (12.50K), where you will turn right heading towards Lacey Green. Just after the 40 mph sign (13.12K) turn left onto the path that takes you into the woods. Nearby is the Horse Trust on Slad Lane, the oldest equine charity in the world. Inspired by the story of Black Beauty, the Home of Rest for Horses came into being in 1886, initially for London's over-worked cab horses. Go to www.horsetrust.org.uk to find out more about their long history of providing retirement and respite for working horses and ponies, and details of their public opening times.

Once in the woods, after ~25 metres, the path you want goes to the right. Keep following this, ignoring a path that goes off to the left. When you get to the bottom of a dip, there is a large footpath (13.62K). Turn right onto it and, keep going on this main path, ignoring the one that would take you off to the left. After a while you get to a Y junction (14.04K). Take the left hand fork in the direction that the arrow on the tree is pointing.

Follow the yellow public footpath signs, ignoring the National Trust footpath signs. Keep going straight on, also ignoring the various paths to the left and right. You will emerge into a small car park (14.81K). At this point turn left onto Smalldean Lane. The Smalldean Lane and Parkwood area is owned and managed by the National Trust. There are regular guided walks by welcoming trained volunteers and this is an enjoyable way to explore the area. For further details - walkwithus@nationaltrust.org.uk. For self-guided walks, search National Trust Chilterns Countryside.

Once you have gone past Smalldean Farm, in ~120 metres, you will come to a path on the right that you should follow (15.17K). Keep on this path that takes you up the hill, all the while keeping the tree line on your right, ignoring any other footpaths to the left or right, and going through gates as they appear. At the end of the final field (16.81K), go over the metal stile. This stile displays the names of two local pubs, and was cast and installed by Gommès Forge. They also made some ornate local bus shelters in Lacey Green.

After the stile, cross the road and go down Foundry Lane which is ahead of you. Keep going until you are back at Gommès Forge. Well done – you have just completed Beating the Bounds! (17.00K)

The Lacey Green and Loosley Row history society has an interesting website which has a wealth of information curated over recent years by an enthusiastic group of local people - www.laceygreen.com.



Smalldean Farm



Gommès Forge