



Historic Landscape Walk 1: South Leigh

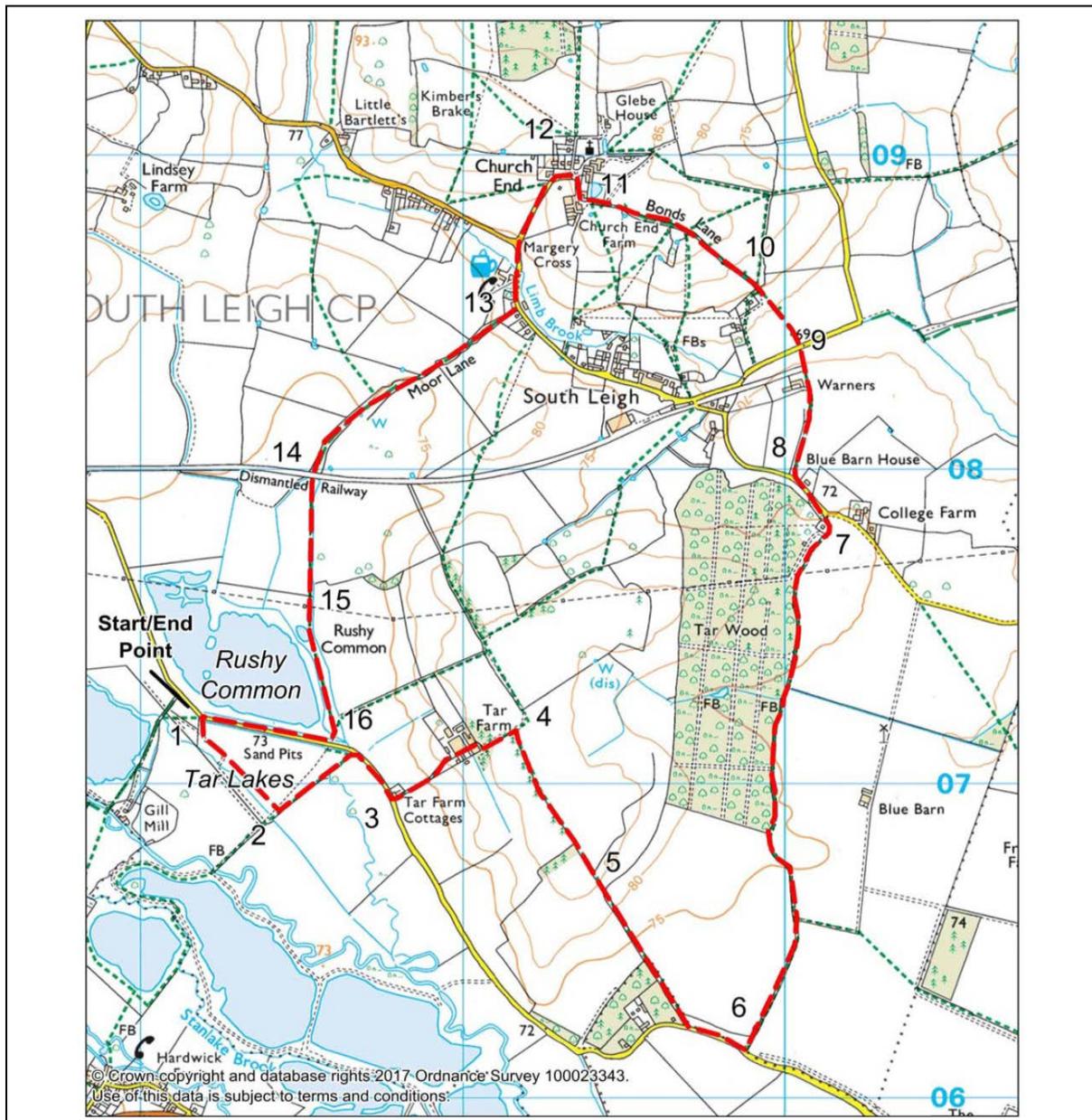
Rushy Common – Tar Wood – Church End – South Leigh – Rushy Common

Distance: 8.6 km / 5.3 miles

Start/End Point: Rushy Common Nature Reserve Car Park, Tar Road, OX29 6UJ

Public Transport: NA

Parking: Rushy Common Car Park



1. From the Rushy Common Car Park cross over Tar Road into the Tar Lakes Nature Reserve
2. Take the gravel surfaced path around Tar Lake and between the two lakes back towards Tar Road. Beyond the picnic area, turn right on to the grass path to return to the road.



This small area between Tar Road and Hardwick Brook was the southern edge of 'The Moor'. South of the brook lay an area of enclosed meadow, 'Moor Meadow'. This land was reorganised by the Act of 1793. Quarrying has quite altered this landscape and few boundaries of those rectangular, planned fields survive. The course of the brook has also been affected, being moved further west and straightened. Quarrying uncovered an extensive Roman agricultural settlement which has been the subject of archaeological excavation by Oxford Archaeology since 1988. The settlement was established in the early 2nd Century A.D. and covered at least 10 hectares. It was arranged around paved roads and divided into enclosures surrounded by ditches. Burials were found scattered around the edge of the settlement

3. Turn right on to Tar Road for a short distance. Turn left for Tar Farm and keep to the footpath as it cuts through the farm yard

Tar Farm was built in the late 19th century on the edge of a large area of regular fields created by the Act of 1793. These fields have seen extensive reorganisation in the 19th and 20th century, with many boundaries removed to create larger fields and various plantations of trees. The farm itself has also changed the fieldscape, introducing small and irregular fields, yards, and gardens around its buildings. Before enclosure this land made up Tar Field, one of South Leigh's largest areas of open field.

4. Beyond the farm take the footpath on the right

Walking across the large field south of Tar Farm, a very irregular 'stepped' field boundary lies ahead. This is the former boundary of a detached portion of Stanton Harcourt which once encompassed this area and included Tar Wood. This boundary lay around a series of small and irregular fields which were probably created by assarting or cutting down parts of the wood. These fields remain quite distinct from South Leigh's Planned Enclosures which lie immediately to the west.

5. Keep straight as the footpath joins a track

This track follows the edge of what was still part of Tar Wood in the late 18th century. The large field on the left of the track was once Ancient Woodland which was cleared for farming during the 19th century. The perimeter boundary preserves the earlier extent of the wood as it was in the 18th century.

6. At the road, turn left and then take the first path on the left.

This path runs between the assarted woodland on the left and former open fields on the right. It also represents the old boundary between the detached portion of Stanton Harcourt and South Leigh and was, by the 18th century, a public road. Further along this path is Tar Wood. To the right of the wood lies a series of rectilinear fields, these were created by the Act of Parliament in 1793 and enclosed Lies Field open fields.

7. Turn left on to Stanton Harcourt Road where the path passes Tar Wood Lodge.

On the right of the road lies the modern paddocks associated with the late 19th century College Farm (so called due to its ownership by Brasenose College). This farm and its fields were created within and reorganised a series of older enclosures which existed by the late 18th century. It is likely that these earlier fields related to Field Farm (now Warners) a large farming estate by the end of the 18th century.

8. Turn right on to the footpath which leads up the drive to Warners Farm.

Just beyond Warners Farm buildings the path crosses over the dismantled railway which has almost entirely been removed along this section.

9. At the road, cross over and continue on the footpath.

This field and those to the north are further Planned Enclosures created by the 1793 Act. These fields, however, did not enclose open fields, they enclosed the former



green. The field boundaries have certainly altered the character of this area, but the perimeter, followed by roads and path on most sides, still preserve the shape of the old green.

10. Continue straight on as the path turns in to Bonds Lane (track).

Bonds Lane, which links the green to Church End, crosses an area of pre-18th century small and irregular fields, criss-crossed by a number of footpaths. These paths and the lack of ridge and furrow in this area may indicate that this land was former common grazing before it was enclosed. In the 18th and 19th century, Sibthorp Arms, named after the 18th century estate owners, lay halfway along the southern side of the lane. The site of the public house is now planted with trees, but the property boundaries can still be seen.

11. At the end of Bonds Lane, turn right through Church End Farm yard to join the road (Church End).

Church End Farm, the main buildings of which are on your left as you leave Bonds Lane, was formerly the Manor House and was built in the later 16th century. Church End, being the location of the Manor House and the Church, was likely to have been the main core of the community before activity shifted south to South Leigh.

12. Keep left to stay on Church End road. The Masons Arms will be on your right.

13. From the Masons Arms, continue along Station Road and turn right onto Moor Lane (track)

Moor Lane existed by the 15th century and ran west from Station Road to Rushy Common, also known as Lies Moor or South Leigh Moor, an area of common grazing. The lane cut across open fields, dividing them into Upper and Lower Home Field. These open fields were enclosed by a Parliamentary Act of 1793. These regular fields have seen some adaption since the 18th century, with boundaries removed and others added. However, the regular character has been retained.

14. Cross the Dismantled Railway and continue across the field with the field drain on your left

The dismantled railway was once part of the Witney Line which opened in 1861. The line linked Oxford to Witney before continuing west to Fairford, Gloucestershire. Passenger services were withdrawn in 1962 and the line had been dismantled by 1971.

15. Continue on between the eastern end of Rushy Common Nature Reserve (a flooded quarry pit) and a plantation

This area has been a focus of extensive sand and gravel quarrying. Works here at Rushy Common were completed in 2005 and across the road at Tar Lakes in 2008. The Lower Windrush Valley Project was set up in 2001 and coordinates various projects to improve the landscape and biodiversity. With their help, these sites have been turned into a species rich nature reserve. In the post medieval period, Rushy Common, or 'The Moor' was an area of common pasture, the name of which suggests it was a wet environment. The Moor was enclosed by the 1793 Act, but the fields were never particularly regular. The post medieval drains still survive in places, running north-south and now into the lake. On the left, the small plantation of trees was created in the 1990s, planted on the edge of further planned enclosures, but these regular fields were created by enclosing open fields and not common ground.

16. Take the grass and stone path between the lake and road, passed the bird hide and back to the car park.

For a shorter walk, the Lower Windrush Valley Project has produced a leaflet which guides visitors around the Rushy common and Tar Lakes Nature Reserve. This can be downloaded from Oxfordshire County Council's website: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/rushy-common-nature-reserve-and-tar-lakes>



References:

Oxfordshire County Council Historic Landscape Characterisation Project. www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/historiclandscape
Crossley, A. & Elrington, C. eds. 1990. *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 12, Wootton Hundred (South) Including Woodstock.*

When out walking, it is always wise to let someone know where you are going or, if possible, have someone with you. Take your mobile phone with you and make sure that it is fully charged. If you use your car to access the route, please park with care – do not block farm gateways or village facilities, and do not leave valuables in view.

Please follow the Countryside Code:

- Be safe – plan ahead and follow signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals
- Take your littler home with you
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people