



Historic Landscape Walk 3: Ewelme

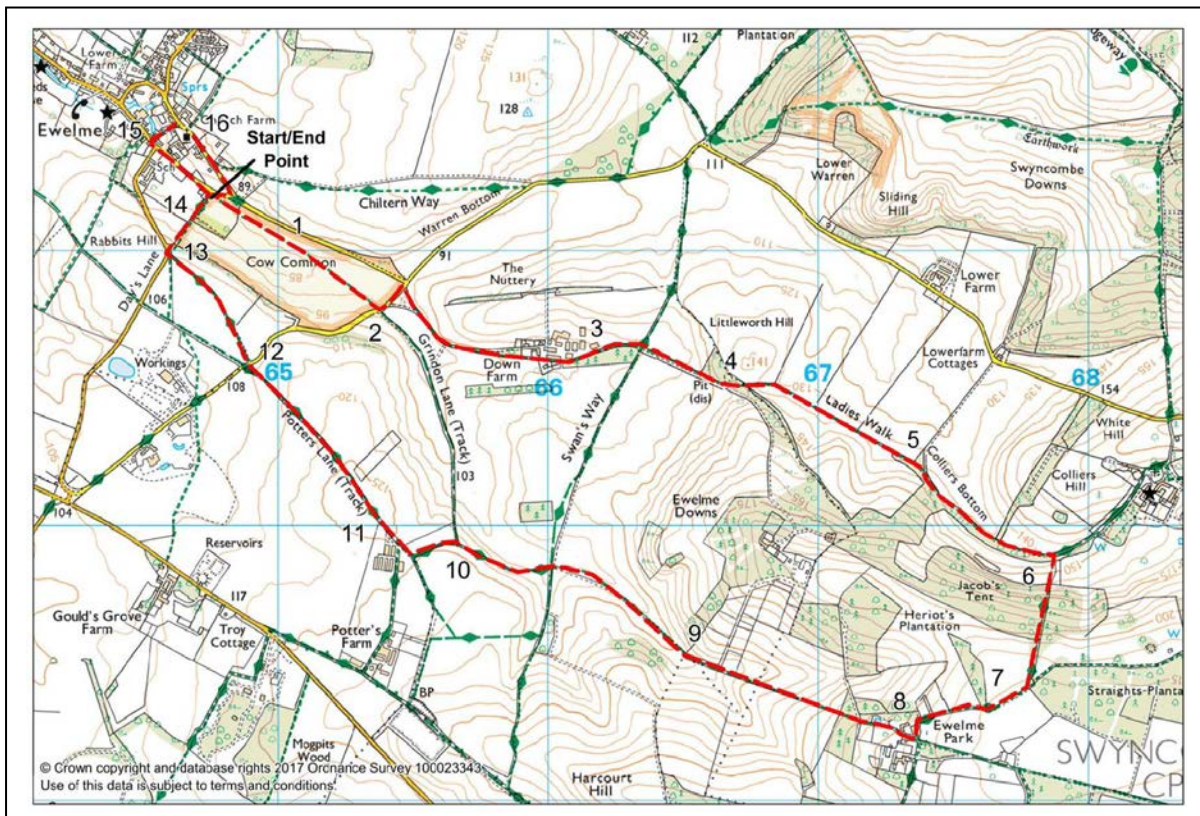
Ewelme – Ewelme Park

Distance: 9.12 km / 5.7 miles

Start/End Point: Cow Common Car Park, High Street, Ewelme, OX10 6HQ

Public Transport: X39 and X40 Buses from Oxford and Reading serve the nearby village of Benson

Parking: Cow Common Car Park



- 1. Start from the car park on the village side of Cow Common, next to the sports field. Cross the corner of the sports field to a gate leading onto the common. On the common you may walk where you please, but aim for the gate in the middle of the hedge on the opposite side.**

Cow Common was an area of common pasture and still holds common rights today. It is a rare survival in the county of a medieval and post-medieval system of farming. Briefly, between 1885 and 1912, it was used as a golf course. The bank on the northern edge of the field was filled with rabbit warrens used in the medieval and post-medieval period for hunting.

- 2. At the far end of the common, go through the gate onto Warren Bottom (lane) and turn left. Continue for 120 metres to the (second) driveway on the right for Ewelme Down Farm, signposted as a bridleway. Take this route.**

Warren Bottom, the name possibly inspired by the aforementioned warrens and others in the area, follows the route of the Icknield Way. This was a prehistoric trackway, or series of trackways, which was once believed to have linked the



Salisbury Plain to Norfolk, but whose long-distance status has recently been questioned by archaeologists.

- 3. Continue on the track past Down Farm and its various outbuildings, across the Swan's Way path, and up the bridleway towards Ewelme Down House.**

Down Farm was created in the 20th century as a 'hobby farm' by the newly built Ewelme Down House. The house and farm were built on Ewelme Downs, an area of common grazing, much of which was enclosed by the 15th century into pasture fields. The creation of the farm and the house led to the reorganisation of many of the existing fields, but the lanes and paths maintained their older routes, criss-crossing the landscape and linking the various parts of the parish.

- 4. At the entrance to Ewelme Down House, bear left on the bridleway through the woods.**

These woods seem to have grown up gradually throughout the 19th and 20th century, spreading from the hill now surmounted by Ewelme House. As you enter the woods, a large and disused post-medieval chalk pit can be seen, interrupting the course of the path.

- 5. Emerging from the woods, keep the field boundary on the left and cross the field to another piece of woodland and the track leading to Lower Farm. Turn slightly right to take the track south-west and away from the farm.**

The track cuts across former downland on Colliers and White Hill, an area of common grazing in the medieval period. The trees cutting across these hills were planted in the early 20th century and coincided with the reorganisation of the fields on the edge of Swyncombe House Park.

- 6. As the track bends around to the left, take the footpath on the right. This is clearly signposted and is part of the Ridgeway National Trail.**

** If you have the time, continue on the track to Swyncombe House. The estate was owned by Thomas Chaucer in the 15th century, but the house was not built until the 1520s by which time the estate had been forfeited to the crown. The house burned down in 1814 and has been rebuilt twice.*

The Ridgeway is one of the largest surviving prehistoric routeways in the country, stretching 139 kilometres from Ivinghoe Beacon to the east and Overton Hill, near Avebury to the west. This ancient trackway has been used by travellers, herdsmen, and soldiers throughout the centuries and is managed as a long-distance National Trail today.

- 7. The path climbs steeply through woodland before emerging into a field. Continue around two sides of the field, keeping the boundary on your left. Exit the field on a track which runs between the field boundary on the left and a plantation on the right.**

From the entrance of this field there are wide views on the Thames Valley to the north. This landscape has been gradually enclosed since the 13th century and some very irregular field boundaries do survive. However, post-medieval alterations and modern removal of hedges, along with the planting of various wooded tracks, has dramatically changed this landscape.

- 8. Follow the track westwards to Ewelme Park. Beyond the farmyard, where the farm driveway enters from the east, turn right between the buildings.**

Ewelme Park (which lies in Swyncombe Parish) originated as a medieval deer park. It was created by Thomas Chaucer, son of Geoffrey Chaucer (poet and author of 'The Canterbury Tales') in the 15th century, possibly on the site of an earlier park. The park passed in to the hands of the de la Pole family, dukes of Suffolk, through the marriage of Thomas' daughter, Alice. In the early 16th century, the Suffolk's land was seized by the crown and the park, Swyncombe estate, and the manors and land in Ewelme was sold off. A house, probably originally a hunting lodge, was replaced in the early 17th century by a new brick house. This house reportedly contained 41



hearths, making it one of the largest in the county. This house was pulled down in the early 18th century and the current house dates to 1913. The park itself was cleared and converted to arable use by the late 17th century. Since that time boundary changes and woodland plantations have altered the appearance of the landscape significantly.

9. Keep to this track as it heads westwards, down the hill towards Ewelme.

As you emerge from the trees on the edge of Ewelme Park Farm there is a spectacular view across the Thames Valley. In the foreground you can make out Ewelme village and the track leading down the hill and Grindon Lane beyond would have linked the park, the downs, and the village in the medieval and post-medieval period. Towards the bottom of the slope lie a series of modern paddocks. These were created by subdividing the fields which had enclosed Ewelme Down, possibly as early as the 15th century. Beyond these paddocks, the fields to the left of the track once formed part of Ewelme's open fields. These strips, often preserved today as ridge and furrow, were farmed by individual families in the medieval and post-medieval period.

10. Cross back over the Swan's Way and keep following the track westwards towards farm buildings north of Potter's Farm. Do not turn right onto Grindon Lane (track)

11. Keep right to pass the farm buildings with them on your left and join a farm track, Potters Lane, heading north-westwards.

The open fields which lay on the right of Potters Lane were still in existence in the early 19th century. Unlike most Oxfordshire parishes, Ewelme was never formally enclosed. Private fields had been created since as early as the 15th century, but common areas and open fields survived into more recent times.

12. At the road, cross over and take the right-hand of two paths.

This path skirts the edge of a modern landfill site. This was created on former open fields, known as Mondays Field. This land was enclosed during the 19th century and converted into a land fill site in the later 20th century.

13. Where the path joins Day's Lane, turn right onto a footpath across Cow Common and the sports field and back to the car park.

Extension into the village

14. Beyond the sports pavilion, turn left onto High Street.

On the right lies Ewelme Church of England primary School. The school occupies the 15th century Grammar School built by the de la Poles between 1437 and 1550. Behind these lie the almshouses, set around an impressive cloister, and built at the same time.

15. Turn right up Burrows Hill to reach the church of St Mary the Virgin.

Originally All Saints, the church changed its dedication in the 15th century, possibly at the same time as the refurbishments carried out by the de la Poles. A church has stood here since at least the early 12th century. It lies within an elongated triangle of lanes which may indicate the position of a former village green. Inside the church lies the magnificent tomb of Alice de la Pole, daughter of Thomas and Maud Chaucer.

16. Turn right down Parson's Lane, passed the Rectory, and back to the car park.

A rectory existed beside the church from the early 15th century and was described as one of the largest houses in the village by the late 17th century. The current houses predominantly dates to the late 18th century.

Other notable sites:

- * Ewelme Manor lies on the southern side of High Street, close to the King's Pool (pond). This is the site of Thomas Chaucer's home, enlarged by his daughter, Alice, and her husband



William de la Pole in the mid-15th century. The manor hosted the likes of Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, and Elizabeth I.

- * Ewelme Watercress Beds Nature Reserve lies beyond the manor, on the south side of High Street, toward the Shepherd's Hut public house. The watercress beds were established in the late 19th century and continued as lucrative local business throughout the 20th century.

References:

Oxfordshire County Council Historic Landscape Characterisation Project. www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/historiclandscape
Townley, S. ed. 2016. *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 18, Benson, Ewelme, and the Chilterns (Ewelme Hundred)*.

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