

Day 2: Cricklade to Lechlade



Today's walk begins at St Sampson's Church, Cricklade, the massive 16th century tower of which dominates the local skyline. Sampson was a 6th century Celtic saint from Wales, who is counted as one of the seven founder saints of Brittany. Athelstan is reputed to have brought Sampson's relics from Brittany and presented them to the church, which resulted in the dedication.

From Cricklade, the route follows the Thames Path all of the way to Lechlade, with good stopping points at Castle Eaton and at the church of St John the Baptist in Inglesham. This church was saved from Victorian 'restoration' by William Morris, one of the founders of the Arts and Crafts movement, who lived in nearby Kelmscott, and it has retained its medieval identity and fine wall paintings.

Distance: 11 miles

Duration: 4½ hours, not including breaks

Level of difficulty: Easy

Maps: Ordnance Survey Explorer 169, 170

Car parking: several free car parks in Cricklade

(crickladetowncouncil.gov.uk/services/car-park), pay and display car parks in Lechlade (lechladeonthames.co.uk/visiting-lechlade/car-parking)

Public transport: see bustimes.org

Refreshments: cafés and pubs in Cricklade and Lechlade; The Red Lion pub, Castle Eaton

Toilets: public toilets in Cricklade and Lechlade, Castle Eaton Village Hall (when open), The Red Lion pub, Castle Eaton

Short Walk Option:

1. Cricklade to Castle Eaton. 4.5 miles. Directions 1 to 5.

Day 2: Cricklade to Lechlade

Directions:

1. With your back to the porch of **St Sampson's Church**, turn right and head out of the churchyard to the High Street.
2. Turn left along the High Street, past the mini-roundabout and continue to the 13th century St Mary's Church on the left-hand side, opposite the Red Lion Inn. This is

Cricklade

Founded in the 9th century by the Anglo-Saxons at the point where the Roman Ermin Way (from London to Gloucester via Silchester) crossed the Thames. Another of Alfred's 'burghs' (thirty of these are recorded in the Anglo-Saxon 'Burghal Hidage'), it was critical to the Wessex defensive line as it was close to Cirencester, where a Viking army was established. The fortifications have been extensively excavated. The Cricklade Council website claims that Cricklade is 'the most intact example of a late Saxon town in Britain'. The town was an authorised royal mint from 979 until 1100.

now Cricklade's Roman Catholic Church and it has a medieval preaching cross in the churchyard.

3. Cross the road, turn back up the High Street for a very short distance and then turn left into Abingdon Court Lane. You are now on the Thames Path.
4. When the lane bends right, turn left instead down a drive. At a meeting of paths, cross over a stile on the right over a large stone slab.
5. Follow the signed Thames Path through the meadows, under the A419 bridge and alongside the river. The path crosses the river twice and then leaves the river to arrive at the village of Castle Eaton. (Incidentally, the river here forms a county boundary, with the north bank being in Gloucestershire and the south bank in Wiltshire.)
6. At the road, turn left and walk through the village, past the road bridge over the Thames. The Red Lion pub is on the left, overlooking the river, and **St Mary's Church** is just after this on the left-hand side. It is well worth visiting, with a medieval Standing Cross and a wall painting of The Virgin and Child.

Castle Eaton

The Domesday Book entry records twenty-seven households in the settlement, which was divided between two lords, Herman of Dreux and Earl Roger of Shrewsbury. The Norman castle is believed to have been built on the site of a late Saxon village. The church has two Norman doorways. The chancel was built in the 13th century.

7. Continue past the church, through some bends and turn left along a farm lane at the Thames Path sign.

Day 2: Cricklade to Lechlade

8. Continue along the signed Thames Path for around five miles to the church of **St John the Baptist at Inglesham**. This redundant church is in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust and, as noted in the introduction, it has retained its medieval furnishings and wall paintings.

Inglesham

St John the Baptist Church, dating back to the 13th century and restored in the 19th century under the supervision of William Morris (see Kelmscott, below), is now redundant and in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. There is an unusual Saxon stone carving of the Madonna and Child set in the south wall. The 15th century screens and the 17th – 18th century pulpit and box pews are all original to the church, and the furniture layout is very much as it would have been in Oliver Cromwell's time.

9. From the church, follow the signed Thames Path alongside the river and through the water meadows. This section to Lechlade has the first boats, as distinct from canoes, that we see on the river. The roundhouse on the opposite bank has the Thames's head of navigation (the point at which the river becomes navigable for boats) as well as one end of the ill-fated Thames & Severn Canal. The circular building was the accommodation for the lock-keeper, who controlled the traffic between the two waterways. The path leads to Ha'penny Bridge at Lechlade, the end point of this walk.

Lechlade

There is archaeological evidence of habitation in the locality from the Iron Age, and of a Saxon burial ground (500 - 700) within the town. Cropmarks identified by aerial photography have indicated a nearby Neolithic 'cursus' (a long monumental enclosure). The Manor of Lechlade was given to Henry de Ferrers by William the Conqueror and is mentioned in the Domesday Book. Lechlade Priory, an Augustinian house, was founded in the early 13th century, initially as a nunnery, and lasted until its dissolution in 1472. St John's Bridge was built in 1229 by the founders of the Priory on the site of an old ford across the Thames. The present bridge was built in 1886.

Timings for Tuesday 19 August (approximate):

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| 09:15 - 10:00 | Registration at St Sampson's Church , SN6 6AT, look around the church, briefing, send off from Cricklade. |
| 10:00 | Set off from St Sampson's Church |
| 12:00 - 13:00 | Castle Eaton (4½ miles) – visit St Mary's Church and lunch provided by church congregation in Village Hall |
| 15:30 - 16:00 | St John the Baptist Church, Inglesham (10 miles) |
| 16:30 | Arrive at Ha'penny Bridge, Lechlade (11 miles) |
| | Contact: David Pope, 07413 713 515 |

With thanks to John Dewhurst, Churchwarden of All Saints, Kingston, for the information in the panels