

## Day 5: Abingdon to Wallingford



*Today's walk begins by the ruins of Abingdon Abbey in Abbey Close car park. The Abbey was probably founded in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, but was refounded by Athelstan's successors in around 950.*

*After visiting Abingdon's St Helen's Church, built on the site of a 7<sup>th</sup> century nunnery, we follow the Thames footpath via Culham to Clifton Hampden, where the picturesque church looking down on the river was restored by George Gilbert Scott, the architect of the Albert Memorial and the St Pancras Hotel, in the mid-nineteenth century. From Day's Lock, we take a detour to visit Dorchester Abbey, founded originally as a Saxon cathedral in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, before returning to the Thames and ending the day's walk at Wallingford.*

**Distance:** 17 miles

**Duration:** 6½ hours, not including breaks

**Level of difficulty:** Easy but long

**Maps:** Ordnance Survey Explorer 170

**Car parking:** Abbey Close car park in Abingdon and other council car parks, Cattlemarket car park and other car parks in Wallingford

**Public transport:** see [bustimes.org](http://bustimes.org), No. 33 bus between Abingdon and Wallingford

**Refreshments:** the Barley Mow pub at Clifton Hampden, pubs and cafes in Dorchester and Wallingford

**Toilets:** public toilets at Abingdon Abbey Meadows, Dorchester Abbey and pubs along the route

### Short Walk Option:

Abingdon to St Michael and All Angels Church, Clifton Hampden. 6½ miles.  
Directions 1 to 6.

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### Directions:

1. From the Abbey Close car park, walk towards the town centre and under the Abbey Arch. Cross the road and follow the street to the left of County Hall (East St Helen's Street) to reach **St Helen's Church**. The present 12<sup>th</sup> century building replaced an earlier Saxon church dedicated to St Helen. The Lady Chapel has a wonderful 14<sup>th</sup> century painted ceiling.
2. Retrace your steps back to County Hall, cross the road towards the Abbey Arch and turn right over the river bridge. At the Nag's Head pub, cross to the pavement on the other side, continue over the bridge and turn right at the public footpath sign to join the river bank.

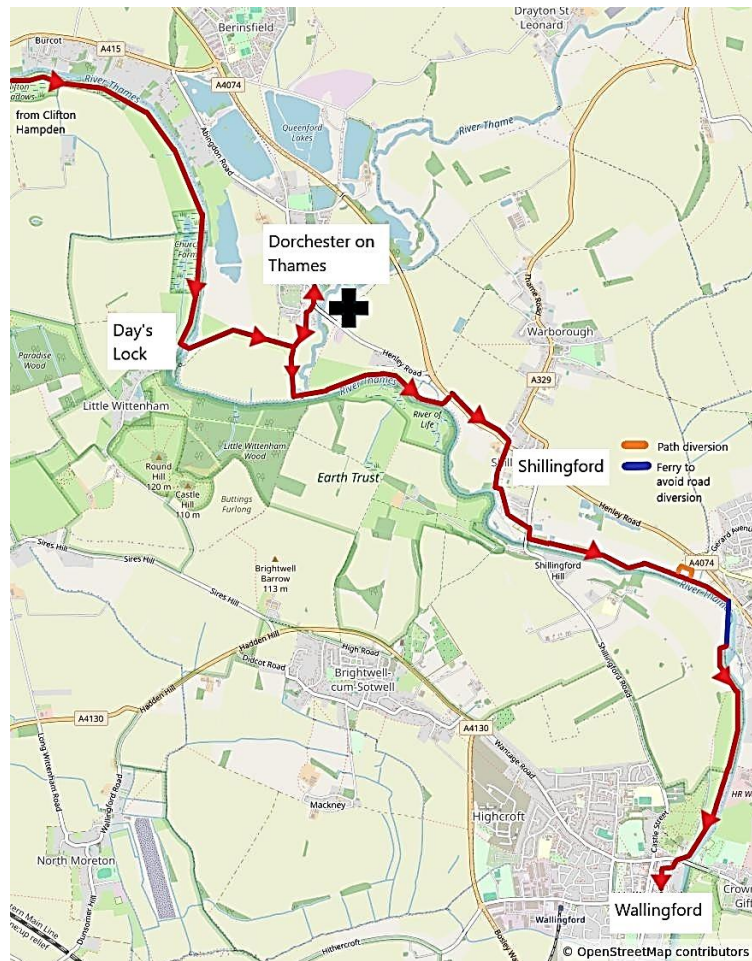
### Abingdon

An ancient site of human settlement, occupied since the early Iron Age. The Council website claims the town to be the oldest in England. The remains of an Iron Age 'oppidum' (a defensive enclosure) are located below the town centre. A Roman villa and a Saxon farmstead were excavated at the nearby Barton Court Farm. The name 'Abingdon' is believed to mean 'Hill of a man named Aebba' (or alternatively, a woman named Aebbe), although this view is contested. The Benedictine Abingdon Abbey (St Mary's) was founded in Saxon times, possibly as early as 676, by Cissa (or possibly by Hean, his nephew), viceroy of Centwine, king of the West Saxons. The Saxon abbey was destroyed by the Danes in the 950s, and rescued from decay by Aethelwold, appointed Abbot by King Eadred in 954. He was subsequently Bishop of Winchester. The Abbey became an internationally-renowned centre of learning and culture. The importance of the Abbey is demonstrated by the fact that William the Conqueror celebrated Christmas there in 1084. The Abbey was dissolved in 1538, resulting in the town falling into decay. It was revived in 1556 by the grant of a charter by Queen Mary I, incorporating the town as a borough. The site of the Abbey is marked out in Abbey Gardens.

3. Continue along the river bank and, at a junction of paths after crossing a footbridge, turn right, following the Thames Path sign.
4. Continue to Culham Lock, which has benches.
5. At Sutton Bridge, cross over the road with care and continue along the river bank to Clifton Lock, which has an attractive floral display in summer.
6. Continue along the Thames Path. At Clifton Hampden bridge, it is worth taking the right-hand path to walk under the bridge, through the field and up the steep steps to **St Michael and All Angels Church**, which has some fine stained glass and carvings and a good view over the river. There are also benches in the churchyard.
7. Retrace your steps under the bridge and turn right to reach the road. Take care here, as the path leads straight onto the road. Turn right and walk over the bridge. The Thames Path continues on the left along the river bank, but you might first wish to visit the Barley Mow pub, which features in Jerome K Jerome's book, 'Three Men in a Boat'.
8. Follow the path along the river bank for around 3 miles to reach Day's Lock and cross the footbridges over the river and the weir.

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9. Go through the gate and take the path straight ahead to Dorchester, signed to the café and farm shop. Follow this path to a T-junction and take the path on the left. This leads via Wittenham Lane to **Dorchester Abbey**. The original church on this site dates back to 635 AD. The George Hotel is opposite the west entrance to the churchyard and there is also a Coop food shop. There are toilets at the abbey.
10. From the abbey, retrace your steps to the T-junction on the path from Day's Lock, take the path straight ahead to reach the river and turn left to walk along the bank.
11. After around half a mile, at a junction of paths and a footpath sign, take the path left (signed Thames Path) to reach the road. (The path straight ahead is a dead-end.)



### Dorchester

An important place in Anglo-Saxon Britain. The present Abbey replaced two Anglo-Saxon cathedrals which were built on land given by King Cyneigils (of Wessex) and King Oswald (of Northumbria). The first bishop was Birinus, known as the Apostle to the West Saxons and commemorated by the Church of England as St Birinus on 4<sup>th</sup> September. His huge diocese extended from the south coast northwards to Towcester and Bedford. When Mercian invasion threatened in about 680, the bishop's seat was moved to Winchester. Mercia took control of the northern half of the diocese, transferring the bishopric to Lindsey and Leicester. The Danish raids of the 870s caused these centres to be abandoned, with the bishopric being returned to Dorchester under Bishop Wulfwig (died in office 1067), after whom the preferment passed into Norman hands.

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12. Cross this fast road with care to the pavement on the far side, turn right and walk along the road into Shillingford village. Turn right along Wharf Road, signposted Thames Path.
13. Where Wharf Road reaches the river, there is an excellent viewpoint and a bench. However, the Thames Path turns left just before this. (On the corner of the house here, a panel shows the height that the flooded river has reached in the past.)
14. Follow this narrow footpath (signed Thames Path) around until you reach a track, where you turn left. At the road, cross over with care and turn right. Follow the path on the left just before the bridge (signposted Thames Path) to reach the river bank.
15. Follow the path to Benson, where there is a diversion until the end of 2025 for the repair of the weir. There is a short diversion around the construction site, but the path then reaches the small marina at Benson. There is a long diversion along the main road, but a pedestrian ferry operates, run by volunteers, and this will take you across the river for a small charge. (NB The ferry operates until 5.30pm.)
16. Cross over the lock bridge, turn left and follow the path to Wallingford, 1½ miles further on.

### Benson

Mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as being taken from Wessex by the Mercian King Offa following the battle of Bensington (779). This represented a significant territorial gain for Mercia along its southern boundary, and the village became a royal manor. The Domesday Book credited Benson as being the richest royal manor in Oxfordshire.

17. At Wallingford Bridge, turn right on to the High Street, left into Thames Street, right into St Peter's Street and then left into Wood Street, to reach the Cattlemarket car park on the left.

### Wallingford

An important river-crossing point, settled by the Anglo-Saxons and fortified by Alfred the Great in the 9<sup>th</sup> century as part of his defensive line protecting Wessex against the Viking invaders. The fortifications are still evident as a group of four roughly square areas around the centre of the town. Alfred granted the borough the right to mint coins. During the Norman invasion of 1066, Wigod, the Saxon thegn (lord) of Wallingford, allowed William the Conqueror safe passage across the Thames following his earlier repulse earlier at London.



## Day 5: Abingdon to Wallingford

### Timings for Friday 22 August (approximate):

09:00 - 09:15	Registration, briefing. Abbey Close car park. OX14 3JE
09:15	Start walk
09:30 - 09:45	St Helen's Church, Abingdon (¼ mile)
10:35 - 10:45	Culham Lock (3 miles)
12:00 - 12:45	St Michael and All Angels Church, Clifton Hampden (6½ miles)
14:30 - 15:15	Dorchester Abbey (10¾ miles): toilets, George Hotel, Coop food shop
17:15 - 17:30	Benson Ferry (15¾ miles) to opposite bank - Benson Weir bridge closed until end of 2025
18:00	Arrive at Wallingford (17 miles)
Contact: David Pope, 07413 713 515	

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