

Location Map



### Additional Information

All of Cherwell District Council's circular walks and rides are published on the Council website and can be downloaded free. Leaflets can be purchased from Banbury Tourist Information Centre (01295 259855). For further information about circular walks and rides, guided walks and grants available for countryside access projects, please contact:-



# PIDDINGTON CIRCULAR WALK & VILLAGE TRAIL

## Piddington Circular Walk

Approx 4.5miles / 7km

The **Piddington Circular Walk** is one of a series of guided trails to be established by Cherwell District Council. The route is an attractive country walk taking in Muswell Hill, the highest viewpoint in the southern half of the district.

### Piddington Village Trail

An easy level walk through the picturesque village of Piddington, noting points of historical interest. Most of the buildings described are private dwellings. Please respect the privacy of the occupants by viewing from a polite distance.

### Widnell Park

A small countryside pocket park outside Piddington, which can be enjoyed by everyone, free of charge. The park includes car parking, picnic area, play equipment, small pond and information board.

The walk starts and finishes at Widnell Park (alternatively you can start from the car park of The Seven Stars).

The route is described in an anti-clockwise direction, but you can walk it either way around. Trousers, strong boots or wellingtons are recommended, as parts of the route can be wet and muddy. There are several stiles along the way, so this walk is difficult for people with mobility impairments.



Much of the route is across grazing land. Please keep to the public rights of way and keep dogs on leads through stocked fields. Make sure that gates are properly closed behind you.



**3** Continue along the field edge (on your right) until you reach a gate in the corner.

**2** Walk along the field edge, cross a stile, continue and then bear right over the next stile (don't go straight ahead through Hill Farm).

**4** Pass through the gate and head up through the next field, bearing slightly to the right. Go through a metal kissing gate (just on the right of a large oak tree) then immediately through a wire gate (ensure that this is fastened with the spring handle before you continue).

**1** Bear left out of Widnell Park, cross the road and go over the stile. Notice Muswell Hill straight ahead of you.

**20** On reaching the edge of the village cross a stile and follow the narrow path between the garden hedge and wire fence to a stile in the corner. Go over another stile and turn left along Vicarage Lane.

**21** From here you can follow the instructions in the Piddington Village Trail back to the Arcott Road and Widnell Park.

**19** Bear slightly left across the field and head towards the Manor House (large house with four dormer windows in the roof) until you reach a gate and stile on your left. Cross the stile and continue towards the houses.

**18** Still keeping to the field edge, walk through the next field and cross another double stile.

**5** Turn immediately right to avoid the large scrub area (and electric fence which is sometimes in place) and then left to follow the field edge up the slope to a gate which can be seen in the distance.

**6** Cross the main Thame Road with great care and enter Piddington Wood.

**16** Pass through the gate and turn right. Stay as close to the field edge as conditions allow. The Wilderness is to your left. Go through another gate and after a while you will start to descend (note Piddington Village in the distance). Take care as this stretch can be slippery when wet. Cross stile and continue downhill.

**17** Cross another stile beside a gate and continue straight on, adjacent to a hard track. Cross the track as it bends, and continue straight on and over a double stile which brings you to the flat.

**7** Follow the main track and signs along the edge of the wood (be wary of deep ruts in the ground). The track is somewhat overgrown during certain seasons but it should be easy enough to follow. A series of paths has been cleared through the main part of the wood if you wish to explore.

**15** Cross Brill Road with care and head along tarmac drive. You are now near the summit of Muswell Hill. Take time to enjoy the view and pick out the features as described in this leaflet. Continue to a small gate on the left as the drive bends right.

**14** Pass a horse jump to the left and a dipped copse of trees to the right. The next gate is just to the right of the telegraph pole ahead.

**8** The track bears right as you reach the far end of the wood. Cross the stile, turn immediately right and then left along the field edges.

**13** Continue up the hill, staying close to the field edge if you can. However, this is a very scrubby area and it may be easier to find your way further into the field, to the left of the scrub. Remember to look back and enjoy the view. This section is quite long and steep.

**9** Continue along the field edge until you reach a thick hedge which runs to the left. Turn left and continue along what is now a bridleway and the county boundary with Buckinghamshire.

**12** Cross road with great care and pass through gate over to the right, adjacent to the 'Buckinghamshire' sign and marked by a bridleway sign. Begin to climb the hill and pass through another gate.

**10** When this hedge ends, continue straight ahead along the field edge (on your right) and pass through three gates. Look up as you walk along this section to see Muswell Hill and the Civil War gun platforms.

**11** After the third gate, stay close to the field edge and cross a bridge over the ditch. Then bear left towards a gate on the Thame Road.

**KEY**

- Route ●●●●●
- Village Trail ●●●●●
- Other Footpaths ●●●●●
- Steep ▲▲▲▲▲
- Information i
- Views ☀
- Points of Interest B

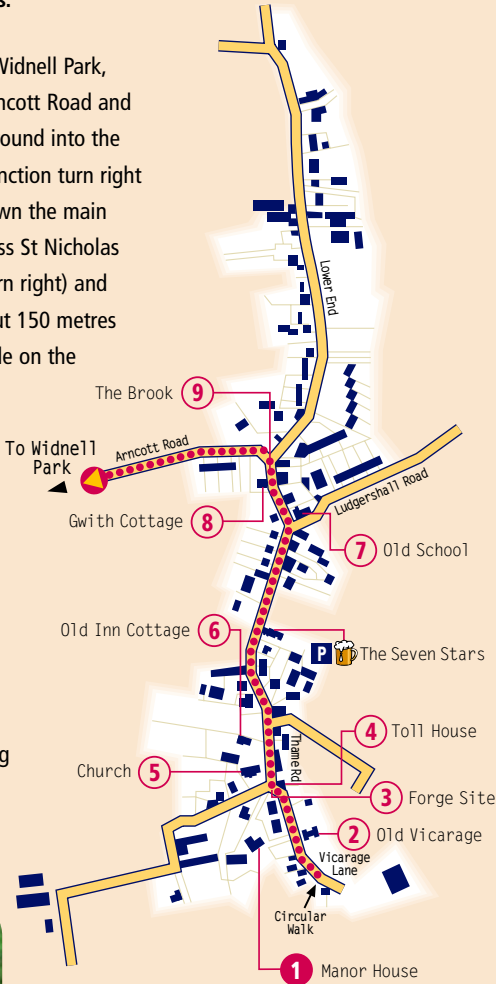
For those who would like to venture further afield we recommend the OS Explorer sheets 180 and 191.



# Piddington Village Trail

The picturesque village of Piddington can be enjoyed as part of the overall route as well as by those who only want a short stroll. You can park at Widnell Park or The Seven Stars.

If starting from Widnell Park, turn left onto Arccott Road and follow the road round into the village. At the junction turn right and continue down the main village street. Pass St Nicholas Church (don't turn right) and carry on for about 150 metres to a gate and stile on the right. This is the point at which the circular walk enters the village. Turn right around and you will be ready to stroll back through Piddington noting its historical features.



**1 Manor House** The Manor can only be seen as you approach the village along the circular walk. So for those interested and able, cross the last two stiles of the circular route and a view of the Manor will be revealed if you look back. The side you can see is the oldest part of the building, dating from the seventeenth century.

**8 Gwith Cottage** On the left before the junction with Arccott Road. Used to be the wheelwrights. The census of 1851 showed 13 craftsmen and tradesmen in the village, including a baker, blacksmith, shoemakers, bricklayers and carriers.



**9 The Brook** Before turning left along Arccott Road note the brook running along the right hand side of the street. It was the primary source of drinking water for the village prior to 1886.

**6 Old Inn Cottage** Next to the church is the Old Inn cottage, a small thatched house, which is said to have been the inn for the masons who built the church.

**7 The Old School** On the right at the junction with the Ludgershall Road. Now a private house, Built in the 1860's, it was attended by up to 44 children from the village and surrounding farms.

**5 The Church of St Nicholas** The church with its sturdy squat tower has parts dating back to 1300 and is worth a look around. A fact sheet can be found on the wall to the left of the door as you enter. Under a tree opposite the church porch is the grave of John Drinkwater, the poet, who spent his youthful summers here with relatives at Manor Farm.



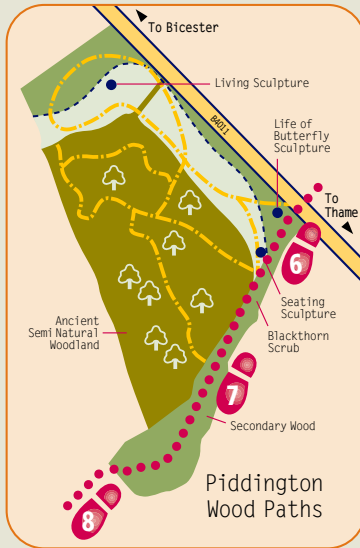
**3 The Old Forge** The parking area at the junction of Thame Road is the site of the village smithy, which closed in the early 1900's.

**4 Toll House** The small brick cottage just over to the right from the church gates used to be the toll house at the Piddington Pitches crossroads until it was removed and rebuilt here.

**2 The Old Vicarage** Along Vicarage Lane pass what used to be the vicarage on your right. In 1823 after the previous one had become too dilapidated to repair, this was the new vicarage, formed by knocking two cottages together. Before 1923 vicars of Piddington were appointed by election, with all adult inhabitants entitled to vote. To ensure that such occasions ran smoothly, refreshments would be provided for the electors. After the 1821 election the church received a bill for 14 gallons of ale!

## Points of Interest

**A** **PIDDINGTON WOOD** is an isolated block of ancient woodland which is a remnant of the Bernwood hunting forest. In medieval times it covered 200 square miles and 50 parishes, including Arccott and Piddington. 9.7 hectares was purchased by the Woodland Trust in 1989 with the help of a grant from Cherwell District Council. Prior to this there was no public access due to the impenetrable nature of the wood and private ownership. The system of 'rides' or paths which once existed through the wood has been recreated, allowing walkers to leave the main circular walk for a while and enjoy the wood even more. The woodland was expanded in 2002 (again with the help of the District Council), onto 5.9 hectares of neighbouring farmland. A number of sculptures produced by Sue Benenson were added in 2003 expressing several stages in the lifecycle of the Black Hairstreak butterfly, and its relationship to the woodland habitat. Take time to explore the wood if you can, particularly in the Spring when the display of flowers is a sight not to be missed. You can find out more about the Woodland Trust by looking at [www.woodland-trust.org.uk](http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk) or telephoning (01476) 581111.



**B** Although not visible from the circular route, **BOARSTALL** was important in the Civil War as a royalist stronghold. What can be seen are the gun platforms which the Parliamentary army cut into the side of Muswell Hill. The guns were trained on Boarstall's fortified manor house. All that remain today are the tower, moat, church

and landscaped gardens. Boarstall Tower and surrounds are now owned by the National Trust, and the gardens are open to visitors.

**C** On a clear day you can see for miles from the summit of **MUSWELL HILL**, sometimes as far as the Cotswolds. See if you can trace the route you have just walked. Along this stretch you can also see Bullingdon Prison; the crossroads known as the Piddington Pitches, where the Parliamentary army pitched during the civil war, and the Ordnance Depot's huge sheds surrounding Graven Hill and Arccott Wood Hill (The depot was originally built in 1942 to back up D Day, the sheds being arranged around the two hills to avoid both high and low level bombing. The depot supplies general stores and clothing to the British Army worldwide). In 1152 a chapel was built on Muswell Hill by Ralph the hermit, the parishioners of Piddington used to hold a procession to it on the feast days of the Holy Cross. In 1488 the lord of Muswell granted them a right of way across his land to the chapel for six shillings and eightpence. The last ruins disappeared in about 1800.



**D** The **WILDERNESS**, a strange dark area of uneven ground adjacent to point 16, is said to have been a Roman signal station for Alchester (as Bicester was known then). In the dark ages the area was left to become overgrown, as the Anglo-Saxons believed all Roman sites to be haunted. So beware.

### The Seven Stars

(01844) 237678

A friendly local pub with a beer garden at the front so you can admire the rural scene. Large car park at the back. Open every evening plus Sunday 12 noon - 3pm and Saturday all day.

