

Leckhampstead/Peasemore: a short walk north of Newbury

c.4 miles/6 km with one stile and some walking on country lanes. Park at Leckhampstead village hall Grid Ref: SU439 763. OS Explorer Map: 158 may be useful.

1. Records of the village of **Leckhampstead** date back to c.1200, the name meaning 'the farmstead where leeks grow'. The church to the south replaced Leckhampstead Old Church or Chapel. This was dedicated in about 1050 and stood near Chapel Farm at Hillgreen. The chapel was demolished in 1859 when the new church of St James was built.

From the village hall, turn right along Shop Lane towards the green.



2. The War Memorial on the green is unusual. It is made up of an obelisk with two clock faces, facing north and south. The chains surrounding the monument came from a warship that took part in the Battle of Jutland, and they are supported on spent shell cases. The clock on the memorial has hands made from First World War bayonets, hours made of .303 cartridges and minutes made from .303 bullets.

Turn right at the end of the green to follow the lane downhill, crossing the major road carefully at the bottom to join the track opposite.

3. Egypt, the group of houses at this junction, may have been so named because it lies at

some distance from the village centre, or because it was a place that Romani travellers (once known as 'Gyptians') regularly stopped to camp.

4. The track is part of the circular **Downland Villages Riding Route** – 21 miles of tracks and lanes through West Berkshire and South Oxfordshire. Look for the horseshoe waymark. The path rises through thick hedgerows and spinneys where spring flowers may be seen, following an ancient trackway.

5. At **Hillgreen** the path emerges into the open area of the village common surrounded by interesting old houses, such as the Grade II-listed Hill Green House (early 19th century) and Malt Cottage, dating from the 18th century, where in 1851 the census showed that malting was still being carried out. The volunteers help to maintain the area.

Keep left at the green seat, then cross the road at the junction and follow the lane to find a footpath leaving to the left. This heads diagonally across fields and a lane towards Peasemore Church.

6. Peasemore (the place where pea plants grow beside a mere or pond) is referenced in documents dating back to 1086. Notable residents have included former prime minister David Cameron and the author Dora Saint of 'Miss Read' fame. The manor house was built by Thomas Chaucer, son of the poet. **Peasemore Church** is



a fine example of Victorian architecture but replaces a demolished Norman church of c.1090, the rubble from which was used to make up the village street.

Cross the lane beyond the churchyard to follow the path to the west of the village, crossing a stile and emerging opposite The Fox public house. Take the lane to the left of the pub passing the cricket pitch on your left.

7. The metalled lane passes **Eastley Copse** the site of ancient woodland. Take the footpath that leaves to the left as the lane bends to the right, revealing fine open views. Follow field margins along the parish boundary, full of summer flowers and butterflies, downhill to the road.

8. Brightwalton Holt was an important stopping place between Newbury and Wantage, with a pub, farm and cottages. In the 19th century there was a grocery shop, bakery, garage and petrol station. In 1887 a dozen skeletons were found here, believed to be soldiers killed in a skirmish during the English Civil War.

Turn right onto the main road, crossing with great care, then almost immediately left onto the well-made track.

9. Govepit Common is all that remains of a once extensive area, stretching either side of the road to Brightwalton, providing grazing for villagers' animals. It is maintained by the Volunteers. The verges and glades contain bright spring and early-summer flowers. Coppiced hazel and a variety of trees add to the wildlife diversity of the wooded track.

On reaching the road, cross over to the green to return to the village hall.

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