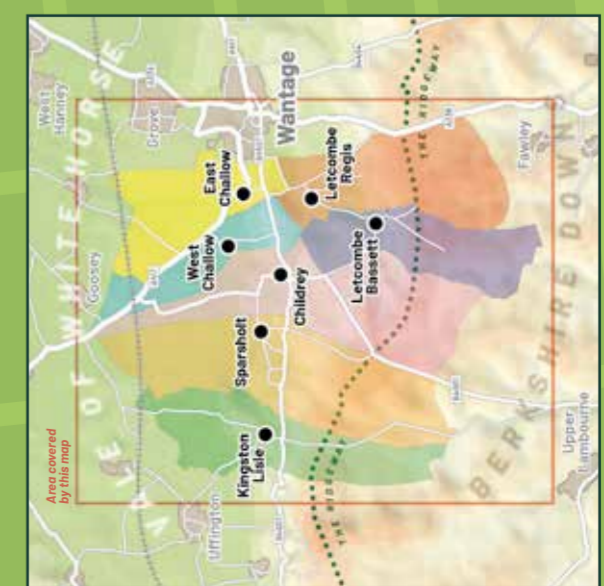


**Seven Beautiful Parishes
of Southwest Oxfordshire**

A map and guide for walkers & cyclists

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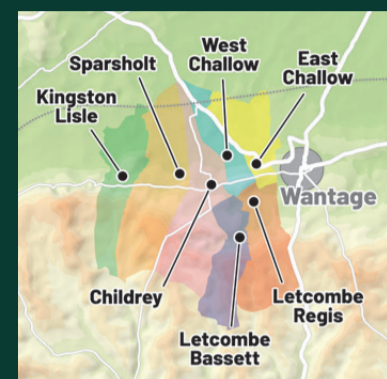


This project was funded by the UK Rural England Prosperity Fund facilitated and supported by the Vale of White Horse District Council.
Text and photographs prepared by Cllr Dr Paul Barrow.
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The seven villages immediately West of Wantage include some of the most beautiful in Oxfordshire. The parishes in which they sit stretch into the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (northwessexdowns.org.uk) and most have no street lighting thereby contributing to dark skies. The landscape consists of open fields largely bordered by old or new hedges.

Most are spring line villages situated just north of the chalk Berkshire Downs with the villages situated on green sand or clay with the springs arising from the boundary. The springs supply clear fresh water and in Letcombe Bassett and Childrey use was made of this to carve out cress beds which was important for their economy.



This is primarily an agricultural area with arable and livestock predominating with some sheep farming on the more southerly areas up to and on the downs. Horse riding, as recreational activity and with several racing stables, remains a major economic activity both on the downs and around villages such as Kingston Lisle. Small industrial estates have been set up in East Challow and Challow Station with the larger Grove Business Park sitting in East Challow Parish and containing some very high-tech companies.

The villages are connected by footpaths. Cyclists are welcome but there is little parking for cars in most villages.

Travelling East from Wantage on the A417 East Challow is situated on a main road one mile west of Wantage, and still retains some of its rural village characteristics. Suffering from its proximity to Wantage, its two public houses, *The Goodlake Arms* and *The Coach and Horses*, have closed within the last 20 years. Nearby *Grove Airfield* was very active on D-Day 6th June 1944 and some of the original buildings remain. One mile to the west is West Challow, a very small village until the 1980s with its water supplied from a bore hole sited in a field south of the village. Both villages sit on and benefited from the Wilts & Berks Canal (wbct.org.uk).

Between them is the site of a Roman Villa only partially excavated in 1972 but which has produced many bronze brooches, coins and other artefacts. West Challow parish also includes Challow Station along the A417 and which is on the main Bristol-London line but with the station closed in 1964 (Beeching!). The station was connected to West Challow, Childrey and Sparsholt by footpath and the "New Road".

Letcombe Regis and Letcombe Bassett are nestled at the foot of the Downs along Letcombe Brook (letcombebrook.org.uk) and contained many racing stables, one of which remains active and has boasted several major winners over many years (www.markbradstockracing.co.uk). Situated wholly within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and with the ancient Ridgeway track running south of both villages. Letcombe Regis was the birthplace of Lester Piggott, the late great flat jockey. Letcombe Bassett appears as *Cresscombe* in Thomas Hardy's *Jude The Obscure*. It nearly disappeared after the war when the government thought it too expensive to supply mains sewerage and was going to close the village and relocate all the residents. With a village rebellion supported by John Betjeman and Frederick Etchells (West Challow) the idea was crushed! The village had a pub, The Yew Tree, now closed.

Childrey also sits on a spring, and also benefited from the proximity of the Wilts and Berks Canal (this part of Oxfordshire was in Berkshire until 1974). The Great Western Railway came to this part of the world in 1840 requiring the construction of New Road to reach the line at Challow Station from Childrey.

The springs arising in Sparsholt and Kingston Lisle collect in lakes on large estates. Both parishes maintain large and important racing stables up on the Downs. Kingston Lisle, in particular, is rich in equine history and boasts a number of racing stables in the village and immediate surrounding countryside. Westcot and Fawler are hamlets within the parishes of Sparsholt and Kingston Lisle respectively.

This map shows Public Rights of Way and is intended for exploration by foot or cycle. The notice board in each village will show a QR code which will take you to an online version of this map and guide you to some of the many historical and natural assets in these parishes. The local pubs and cafés are also indicated on the map.

Please respect privacy during your village visits. Many of these assets are private dwellings and not accessible to the public.

Enjoy!

East Challow

1 The Church of St. Nicholas is a 12th century Norman building (parts of the nave and the original font). The South Chapel is 14th century and the communion table is 17th



century which was restored in the 19th century including the addition of the low tower. The Rood Screen is dated 1905. The Church contains some religious relics including two bells, probably 18th century, the smaller made in Aldbourne, Wiltshire.

OS Grid Ref: SU380882

2 The Old School. Opened in 1856 funded by the Government and private subscription. Children were charged 3d per week for children of mechanics and 1½d for children of labourers. Originally built for 40 children expanding to 120 by the turn of the 20th century. The



children not infrequently put on a variety of Shakespeare's plays. It closed in 1964 and is now a private dwelling.

OS Grid Ref: SU380881

3 Milestone. On the A417, the main road from Wantage to Faringdon.

OS Grid Ref: SU382879

4 Interesting Older Houses. Most of these are situated around The Village Green, Main St., the old centre of East Challow. They include a row of 19th and 18th century houses, Challow House Farm built in 1790 and the early 18th century Manor House Farmhouse with an adjacent 18th century threshing barn badly maintained and in poor condition. The green also contains a 19th century water pump and trough which supplied the village before mains water was provided.

OS Grid Ref: SU380882



5 Nalder Building. The original site of Nalder and Nalder Ltd., an agricultural manufacturer, established in 1866, producing steam threshing machines

and brewery equipment, later coffee machines and roasters for export and more latterly vehicle fascia. It succumbed to the economic crisis in 2007/9 and is now residential.

OS Grid Ref: SU380883

6 The Mission. A former non-denominational place of worship. Wooden building built in 1904 as part of a private donation of land in response and objection to the Oxford Movement. Place of worship until 2015. The village is hopeful for its retention as a community centre but its future remains uncertain.

OS Grid Ref: SU380881

7 Ridge and Furrow Fields. Until WW2 the village was surrounded by these features created by a ploughing system and providing land drainage. Most were destroyed by post-war arable farming, the few left are used for grazing.

OS Grid Ref: SU377881

West Challow

8 Church of St. Lawrence. Late 12th century with 13th century chancel and restored in the 19th century with a 15th century gabled porch, 17th century pulpit and 13th century font. The tie-beam roof is 18th century. There are two bells made in 1629 and 1283, the latter made in London by Paul Potter with an inscription in Lombardic: Povel:Le Poter:Me:Fist.

OS Grid Ref: SU366883



9 Manor Farm. A Queen Anne Grade II* listed house, formerly a dairy farm. Former owners include Robert Lloyd-Lindsay, 1st Baron Wantage. The wall at the side of the Manor is also listed.

OS Grid Ref: SU388885

10 Converted Barns. A small number of agricultural barns have been converted into dwellings with very little modification. Vokins Barn is shown.

OS Grid Ref: SU367883

11 Wilts & Berks Canal. Part of this canal runs through West and East Challow with the walkable towpath running through to Stockham in Wantage. It was opened in 1810 and eventually connected the Kennet & Avon Canal with The Thames at Abingdon but it was abandoned in 1914 hastened by the advent of the railway and an aqueduct failure.

OS Grid Ref: SU371883

12 A Number of Buildings in the village are listed and a few 17-18th century houses are thatched and of interest. Frederick Etchells (1886-1973), founder of British cubism and friend of Picasso and Modigliani, lived in The Thatched Cottage.

OS Grid Ref: SU366884

Letcombe Regis

13 The construction of the Church of St. Andrew began in the 12th century with the nave added in the 15th century and all restored in the 19th century. It contains several plank doors, and a battlemented tower with gargoyles. There are the remains of the churchyard cross in the graveyard. An obelisk in the churchyard is a memorial to Maori chief George King Hipango who came to train as a missionary but died of tuberculosis.

OS Grid Ref: SU380864

14 Segsbury Camp is an Iron Age camp immediately north of The Ridgeway involving extensive ditch and ramparts and which was excavated first in 1871 yielding a cist grave. Further excavations in 1996/7 suggested that it was a centre for communal activities including trade and sheep farming. It is covered in Cowslips in the spring.

OS Grid Ref: SU384844

15 The Old Mill. There has been a mill on this site since Domesday. The current building is 20th century and with a granary, now residential. There was also a fulling mill close by also on Letcombe Brook.

OS Grid Ref: SU381869

16 The Old Manor Farmhouse. This is a 17th century Manor with a 19th century porch. The garden contains an 18th century dovecote and 16th century granary (not visible from the road). The late 19th and 20th century stable block is now residential but still contains original features.

OS Grid Ref: SU380885

17 Old Houses. In the immediate vicinity of the Church, South Street and Bakery Lane are several 17th-19th century houses some of which are thatched and one of which was a 19th century Reading Room built in the days of philanthropy, self-help and temperance. Opposite the reading room is the old village water pump.

OS Grid Ref: SU380864

18 Letcombe Valley Community Nature Reserve. This reserve stretches between the two Letcombes with woodland and chalk grassland around the Letcombe Brook chalk stream. Trout, lampreys, water mint, kingfishers,

little egrets, water voles and even otters have been recorded. Entrances in Letcombe Regis at OS Grid Ref: SU378862, and in Letcombe Bassett at OS Grid Ref: SU374851

19 The Greyhound. A popular pub and restaurant offering high quality food and rooms in an 18th century old farmhouse. It is said that the Riot Act was read for the last time in England on the pub steps.

OS Grid Ref: SU381865

20 The Village Shop and Café. This was a gate house to a large plant research establishment and now offers lunches, sandwiches, snacks, provisions and drinks.

OS Grid Ref: SU380864

21 Court Hill Centre. A converted stable and barn yard, this centre offers snacks and cooked food and accommodation for families, groups and individuals with some limited camping space. Teepees are available (April - end Aug). Cycles can also be hired.

OS Grid Ref: SU393849

Letcombe Bassett

22 Church of St. Michael and All Angels. This is a 12th century church remodelled in the late 19th century with a 13th century tower and, in the churchyard, 17th century Bale and chest tombs. There is a Norman chancel arch with some beautiful carving and doorway and another doorway set in the wall. The font is 13th century. The churchyard is full of snowdrops and primroses in the spring.

OS Grid Ref: SU373849

23 Historic Cress Beds. The Letcombe Brook springs from the ground in the garden of a house, Delamere, and settles into large ponds where cress was grown, sending cress to Covent Garden in the 19th century, until the 1970s with the drought finishing the business off. They are best seen from the road to Letcombe Regis and which is a former ford.

OS Grid Ref: SU374852

24 Devil's Punch Bowl. This lies partly in Childrey and Letcombe Bassett parishes and is a series of dry chalk valleys which host the subterranean tributaries of Letcombe Brook. It is an SSSI noted for its flora and 11 species of butterflies. It is managed by the owner, a local farmer, on behalf of Natural England. A car park is situated at OS Grid Ref: 347850 but it can be reached from Letcombe Bassett village on a path at OS Grid Ref: SU370850

25 Arabella's Cottage and other old houses. Ababella's Cottage, not clearly visible from the road, is also mentioned by Thomas Hardy. OS reference: 371851.

Several other houses on Gramp's Hill are thatched and date back to the 17th century. White's Farmhouse may date back to the 16th century modified in the 17th century.

OS Grid Ref: SU375852

26 The Old Rectory and Barn. The house is 17th century and hosted Jonathan Swift in 1714 who wrote "Free thoughts on the present state of affairs" under the Mulberry Tree and was visited by Alexander Pope. The thatched threshing barn is 14th and 17th century. (Several other old barns can be seen in the village in various stages of conversion into houses).

OS Grid Ref: SU374849

Childrey

27 Church of St. Mary the Virgin. This was a 12th century with the south door and font the only remaining features. There are a number of brasses including a 14th century knight and a one handed clock! The 8 bells were cast in Reading and Whitechapel at various times between the 17th and 20th century.

OS Grid Ref: SU360877

28 Cantorist Farm. A café/restaurant situated in a 18th century thatched barn belonging to the 17th century Cantorist House. Excellent high quality home-made food, bread, snacks and coffee. Frequenting by cyclists.

OS Grid Ref: SU360877

29 Childrey Stores. Café and micro-restaurant in the High Street. Also sells provisions, gifts and newspapers. Frequenting by cyclists.

OS Grid Ref: SU361874

30 Village Centre and Pond Area. The Village Centre has a pond (originally a wheel wash), war memorial, village hall (originally a working men's reading room) and several thatched 17th-18th century houses. One, known as Charles Cottage, allegedly hosted Charles I during the civil war and



was more recently the centre of fox hunting activity as can be seen from the remains on the wooden doors. Other interesting old and thatched houses can be seen along the main road (The Holloway), including a former pub, The Crown, and also along West Street.

OS Grid Ref: SU361875

31 The Hatchet. An 18th century, family-run, Grade II Listed pub open for just a few days a week.

OS Grid Ref: SU361873

32 Maltravers Manor. The current building is late 16th century extended to the rear in the 17th century. Named after the 12th-14th centuries Lords of the Manor, the Mautraviers.

OS Grid Ref: SU359873

33 Cress Bed and Childrey Brook Spring. Childrey Brook, which runs through West Challow and on to the Hanneys and Fawler, a number of 17th and 18th century thatched houses can be seen.

OS Grid Ref: SU320881

(the old Anglo-Saxon name for Childrey Brook and now renamed Waterside Cottage) OS Grid Ref: SU362874, and passes through a disused cress bed OS Grid Ref: SU363875

before crossing the canal and passing through West Challow.

34 The Manor. The original building was early 16th century known as Frethorne's Manor, remodelled ca. 1900.

OS Grid Ref: SU360877

35 Canal Wharf. 500-600m north of Childrey village was a wharf on the Wilts and Berks Canal along New Road.

OS Grid Ref: SU358886

Sparsholt & Westcot

36 Church of The Holy Rood. The existing church, replacing a wooden structure, was built in the 12th century with a 13th century tower and rebuilt in the 14th century by Sir Robert Achard, an effigy of whom is present with his two ladies in the south transept. The wooden spire dates from 1785.

OS Grid Ref: SU346875

37 The Manor. The Manor is not open to the public. Owned by the owner of Cathay Pacific who has a long interest in landscaping and conservation. The owner has recently planted a large wood north of the footpath between Sparsholt and Kingston Lisle.

OS Grid Ref: SU346874

38 The Old Vicarage. This is a 17th century house with one wing modified in 1873. Attached to the right side was a school built in 1873, now private dwellings. Several other 17th and 18th century houses can be seen around the

village and in neighbouring Westcot.

39 The Sparsholt (formerly The Star). Popular restaurant with very high-quality food. Sister to The Woodspeen in Newbury. Closed in December 2024, future uncertain.

OS Grid Ref: SU347877

40 Bowl Barrow. A single unexcavated circular bowl barrow dating from the late Neolithic to the Bronze Age can be discerned just off the B4001.

OS Grid Ref: SU343851

Kingston Lisle & Fawler

41 The Church of St. John the Baptist. The nave and chancel were built in the 12th century with 14th century windows and glass with murals of St. Peter and Paul and the martyrdom of St. John above the altar. The head of Christ can also be seen in a window on the north wall adjacent to the altar. The font is also thought to be 12th century. The 13th century oak door with elaborate hinges is original.

OS Grid Ref: SU326876

42 The Blowing Stone Pub. This is a good traditional pub that used to be associated with the racing industry and serves very good pub food. It offers accommodation.

OS Grid Ref: SU327878

43 Kingston Lisle House (not easily visible). A Georgian house but which dates back to the 17th century surrounded by 1,000 acres of gardens, farmland and woods. The house retains some Jacobean elements.

OS Grid Ref: SU326875

44 Fawler Manor and Other Old Houses. Built in 1660 and since modernised. Both in Kingston Lisle and Fawler, a number of 17th and 18th century thatched houses can be seen.

OS Grid Ref: SU320881

45 The Blowing Stone. According to legend King Alfred blew this sarsen stone in 871 to summon his troops for the Battle of Ashdown. It can still be blown!

OS Grid Ref: SU324870

46 The Fox, Denchworth. Not in these parishes but a splendid 17th century (dated 1688 on the chimney) thatched pub as a goal when following the paths north of East Challow and over the railway footbridge. Before 1883 it was The Carpenter's Arms. There is a wooden shrine on the front wall listing those served and who fell in the wars. Excellent beer and food.

OS Grid Ref: SU380917