

Walk 8 - A walk around Oakford Village

Time 25 minutes Distance 1.0km (0.6 miles)

The parish of Oakford lies in the beautiful Exe valley. It is still a mainly agricultural area and its lanes are bounded by the typical 'Devon banks' full of wild flowers and butterflies in the spring and summer.

The village grew up around the manor house and farm of the Manor of Alforda, the largest of seven manors which made up the parish of Oakford at the time of the Domesday Book (1086). Today just over 300 people live in the parish, most of them in Oakford or Oakfordbridge.

1. The walk starts at The Red Lion public house which serves lunches, evening meals and light refreshments. You will enjoy sitting by the large inglenook fireplace with its cosy log fire. The Red Lion was probably built soon after 1600 as a private house but there has been a licensee in residence since 1760. It was largely rebuilt in the 1830s. Leave the pub and go down the hill. At the end of the pub you will see the entrance to what was the yard surrounded by its outbuildings, now converted into homes. Just below the yard entrance is what was the brewhouse and the 'beehive' bread oven can be seen projecting from the wall.
2. Continue past the pretty cottages on your left, to the stone building which was the Methodist church, built in 1888 on the site of 4 cottages which had burnt down. Services were held there until after WWII. Later it became homes and until 2010 housed the village shop and Post Office.
3. Turn left and, just before the bridge over the stream, you can see the site of the village smithy and opposite, where the Silver Jubilee seat now stands, was a wheelwright's workshop. Ahead on the right you can see a stone building, now enlarged and a private house. This was the Girls' School, opened in 1876.
4. Opposite that, now two private houses painted white, is a building whose origins can be traced back at least to the 1700s and which, with many alterations, has been various arrangements of cottages, lodgings for the schoolmistress and the boys' schoolmaster, a temporary classroom for the girls before their school was completed and around 1870, was 'The Farmers' Arms' one of three pubs in the village at the time. If you have youngsters with you, you may like to cross the little bridge on the right into the playground.
5. Turn around and return to the main street where the stone building on the left at the junction was the Boys' School, built around 1840 'for the education of 60 farmers' sons'. Both schools closed in 1977. Go left passing the War Memorial Cross and walk down the hill to the entrance to the Village Hall, passing on your right Lower Oakford which was once the farmhouse of a separate farm. Notice its well by the roadside.
6. Oakford has a modern and well equipped Village Hall, built in 1984 on land donated by a local farming family. It hosts many events throughout the year including the pantomime, flower show, harvest supper, quizzes etc. and is available to let.
7. Return up the hill to the centre of the village. The large white house on the left, Greenslades House, probably dates from the 1600s and has occasionally been used as a rectory. Go left up the path here to St. Peter's Church. The parish church of St Peter was established well before 1260 but has been rebuilt

more than once (the last time in 1838). It has a 15th century tower containing 8 bells, said to be amongst the best sounding in the county. More detailed information can be found on leaflets available in the church. Inside, a coloured memorial on the north wall records the death in 1693 of Margaret Spurway, an ancestor of the present owner of the manor house, whose family has held land and manorial rights in the area for more than 800 years and from whom Spurway Mill and Spurway Barton take their names.

8. Return to the main street and continue up the hill passing more old cottages, Oak Cottage once housed the Post Office. Soon you will come to the entrance to the Manor House. There has been a building on this site since Saxon times and the present house dates from the 17th century. Further on, between the high walls, is the entrance to Manor Farm, which together with the Manor House formed the nucleus of the ancient Saxon Manor of Alforda. Opposite the farm entrance is Manor Farm house which for many years was The Colliers' Arms, one of three pubs in the village until the 1870s.
9. Continue up the hill past the modern bungalows until you come to a farm gate. Look across the valley to Parsonage Farm on the skyline to your left. This was the old residence of Oakford's rector and has its mediaeval tithe barn still in use. In the valley to your right you can see the Rectory built in 1872 and now private homes known as Holme Place.
10. Going back past Manor Farm house, you pass three more pretty cottages, probably built in the late 1600s. Next, set back from the road, are what were originally three cottages, which over the years have housed a butcher's, a bakery, a tailor's and drapery shop and the Post Office.
11. You should now have returned to The Red Lion and we hope you have enjoyed your tour of the ancient village of Oakford!

Acknowledgement: Most of the information used above is taken from 'OAKFORD the history of a Devon Parish' by E W Bentley.