

River Thames Walks Around Buscot

Buscot and St John's – Walk Two

This walk is about 2 miles long; however it gives you the option to extend the walk to 3 miles if you wish. It leads you around Buscot, north to St John's Lock and into Lechlade.

Starting from Buscot Lock walk upstream, following the right hand bank. After rounding a long left-hand bend you will see Buscot Church and fine old Georgian rectory next to it.

Continue following the river until you get to a gate at the end of the field. The large bay in the river at this point is called 'Bloomer's Hole' – no-one knows why, but there are two entertaining local legends about this deep hollow in the river bed. The first says that a waggoner named Bloomer disappeared into the water along with his horse and cart and was never seen again; the second concerns a Reverend Bloomer who shocked his parishioners by bathing nude here – keep a look out for either ghost!

Before passing through the gate, on either side of the river, you will be able to see some concrete manhole covers marked with bright yellow paint. These mark the position of a pipeline that passes beneath the Thames at this point. You will be able to see other markers showing its progress in either direction.

Follow the Thames Path over the new footbridge installed in 2001 by a Chinook helicopter from the RAF Brize Norton, and **along the river to St John's Lock and bridge.**

For a longer walk, cross the bridge and take the path on the left which will lead you through Lechlade churchyard to the Market Square. If you take the Swindon Road (first turning on the left) you will come to Halfpenny Bridge with its old toll house on the left. Once you cross the bridge you will find a footpath, which starts on the right hand side, you must take this path to return to St John's Lock via the other bank of the river, after passing under the bridge you have just crossed.

The area around St John's Bridge and lock is full of history. The first bridge here was built by the local Prior of an order of Pontine Brothers, or Bridge Building Friars, in 1229. By 1234, the local Prior had been granted the right to hold a five-day fair at the end of August. This soon became a very busy fair, with all kinds of local produce being loaded onto boats and other goods off-loaded for distribution in the area. A famous history of the Thames written in 1692 mentions this flourishing trade, and adds "Here is hard by the bridge a very good inn for entertainment". Whether or not it is the same inn, The Trout is still on the site to carry on the tradition. No trace remains of the Priory or the Pontine Brothers, except in the name of the filling station and caravan site on the road to Lechlade.

The first part of St John's Bridge was the work of the friars and didn't need any major refurbishment until 1820. The bridge over the pound lock was built much later, in the 18th Century and had to be repaired in both 1795 and 1879.

St John's Lock is now home to a famous statue: Old Father Thames. He was originally made for the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace. When it burnt down, he was moved to the source of the river at Coate, near Cirencester. However, he was repeatedly vandalised and was relocated to the lock in about 1973 when the new lock houses were built. He has become a much photographed tourist attraction.

Leaving St John's Lock, turn right onto the road and continue until you reach the National Trust picnic area on the left. Although this is labelled 'the Malthouses', it is in fact the site of Buscot Cheese Wharf, which was used to send local speciality cheeses to London. These cheeses came in exotic shapes and colours such as 'pineapples' and 'hares' made green using sage. If you look carefully, you can see traces of the old wharf and the lying-up cuts in which the barges waited their turn to be loaded.

From here, a short walk along the road brings you to a turning signposted to Buscot Church; the footpath goes down this lane and through the churchyard (see our "Historic Walk around Buscot" fact sheet for more information) Buscot Church is usually open and well worth a visit. **After leaving the churchyard walk along the edge of the backstream until the path emerges at the approach to Buscot Lock.**