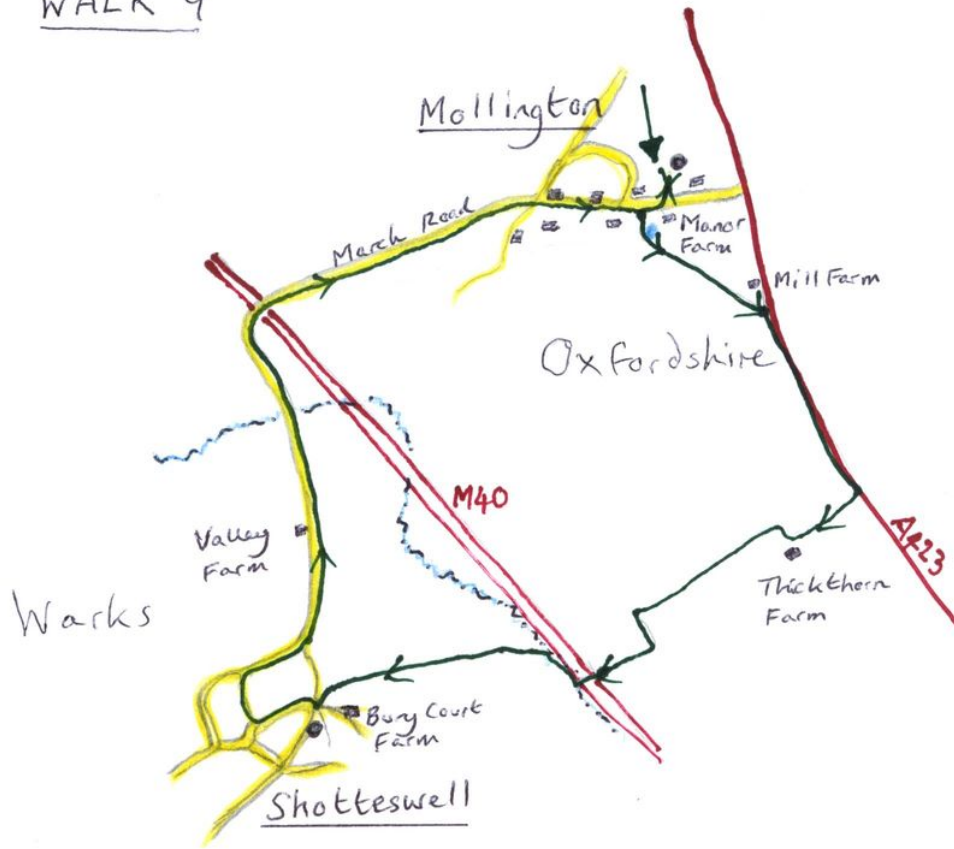


WALK 9



Walk 9 Mollington and Shotteswell (2¹/₄ hours)

This walk traverses the valley now dominated by the M40, passing over the motorway by means of a footbridge. It is an interesting reminder of the reality of walking at the turn of the 21st century. Choosing a circular route which minimises the road's effects has not been easy, but I have assumed that walking beside a short stretch of the A423 is preferable than following a fume-laden footpath right beside the motorway.

Most of the actual walking is along roads. The walk joins two villages which both spill attractively down the hillside on either side of the valley. From Mollington the route is S and then W down the hillside to the footbridge across the M40, beyond to the beautiful Warwickshire village of Shotteswell, and then N along the lane towards Warmington before turning E across the M40, along March road back to Mollington.

The field names cited for Mollington parish have been collected from a local farmer.

Mollington to the Thickthorn Farm footpath

Start at the church. Go down the hill to the T-junction where the lane meets Mollington's main east-west road. Turn right.

The old ironstone house on the left, 'The Garden House', with its courtyard, is interesting for its 6-light windows, rare in a dwelling not built for gentry. It was formerly a Post Office.

Once past The Garden House you'll see a footpath sign pointing left down a track. Follow it, keeping the high stone wall of The Garden House, and a tiny stream, on your left. Ignore the metal gate to the left where the wall ends, leave the track (which bends to the right) and keep straight on along a grassy strip to a gate directly ahead, with cottages to the right. Go over the gate into the pasture where horses are often grazing. There is a wall and stream to the left, which you follow until you get to a small footbridge in a plantation. (There are lots of nettles here). Cross the bridge and then a stile. To the left in a walled and hedged enclosure is a small pond. Keeping the stream and enclosure on the left, go ahead through the trees and climb the hill. There are alders, hazel, cherry and thorn trees here. After about 6 minutes you come to a substantial ditch, which you cross and then turn left beside the arable field beyond.

The purpose of the ditch is not known. Perhaps it marked the southern limit of enclosures associated with Manor Farm, which probably takes its name from one of the Mollington manors referred to in Walk 8. To the south-west a field sloping down towards a plantation known as Angel Piece is known as Big Hill.

Soon you come to a fence which climbs the hill on the right. Turn right, keeping the fence on your left, up the hill towards the barn at the top. To the right of the barn is a metal farm gate: go through it. You will have been walking for about 10-12 minutes.

The view behind over Mollington is very fine. Directly below can be seen the 17th century Manor Farm, with its stone barn, dated 1599, just to the south of it. You are standing on a hill where a windmill once stood; the barns belong, appropriately enough, to Mill Farm, the only Mollington farm to stand outside the village. (It is a Listed Grade 2 building). Away to the right you can see Shotteswell clinging to the hillside.

From the gate the footpath bears to the left, past Mill Farm, where it joins a track. After about 4 more minutes, you come to where the track turns to the right, beyond double metal gates. Go through and the footpath goes left over a metal fence out onto the busy A423. Here a sign tells you that you've walked a quarter of a mile from the village!

The road south from here marks the parish boundary between Mollington and Cropredy, the Oxfordshire parish to the south. This boundary then turns westward across the field to the right, but there is nothing on the ground marking it until it joins the track you encountered just south of Mill Farm. It follows the track down the hillside as far as the brook in the valley bottom. The track may follow the course of what in a 14th century charter is called Mollington Ditch.

Turn right along the verge, pass a lay-by, and after a further 6 minutes you come to a footpath sign on the right to Shotteswell (1½ miles). Turn right. You will have been walking about 25 minutes from the starting-point.

Thickthorn Farm path to Shotteswell

You'll soon see Thickthorn House ahead. Ignore a track leading off to the right. At the gates of the house turn right and go round the wall, which gives way to a hedge. Then turn left, keeping the hedge on your left. About 4 minutes from the main road you'll have reached a nice broad grassy track down the hillside, with fine views. The track soon becomes co-extensive with another parish boundary, that dividing Cropredy from Bourton to the south.

This boundary joins the track from the south, but, once again, its precise course seems to have been obscured by the removal of hedges. There are some old oak stumps on the left-hand side of the track which may mark the spot, in line with another solitary oak in the field to the right, once part of a hedge. After the stumps the boundary soon takes the form of a hedged bank and ditch along the left-hand side of the track.

As you carry on down hill you'll see the footbridge over the M40. The hedge (and the parish boundary) turns abruptly to the left. The OS Pathfinder sheet indicates that the path goes straight ahead, but it may be necessary to follow the hedge round to the left in order to get to the footbridge. Here you join the D'Arcy Dalton Way as it comes in from the right, parallel with the motorway. Go over the footbridge. You will now have been walking for about 47 minutes.

Once over, go through the plantation ahead, with its young willows, hazels and oaks. Go over a wooden bridge across a stream which marks the south-western boundary of Mollington parish, separating it from Shotteswell.

This stream, referred to as Hanwell Brook in the *Victoria County History* for Oxfordshire (vol 10) is also known as Mary Brook. *Mary* here is from Anglo-Saxon *(ge)maere*, meaning a boundary.

Once in Shotteswell parish we have evidence for field-names from a survey conducted by local schoolchildren in the 1930s. Along the next stretch, however, hedges have since been removed, so there are now fewer fields. The one you are in is The Meadow; to the north of it is Abbots or Little Meadow, which was divided from one further west, South Meadow. Today they are one field. *Abbott* may be a surname, or may refer to land cultivated to support an abbot's living.

Turn right after the bridge, keeping the willowy stream on your right. Ahead is a hedge: where it joins the stream there is a little wooden bridge, which you go over into Abbots Meadow. To the right are oaks, ashes, haw- and blackthorns. After another 5 minutes you follow the hedge ahead round to the left, past a plantation known on the field-name map as The Rookery. To the right the hedge has been planted with young alders. Ahead there is a kink in the hedge; look out for a stile on the right. At this point you will have walked about 11 minutes from the motorway bridge.

Go over the stile. The path now goes straight ahead, with the hedge (and stream) on the left. In the 1930s there were two fields here, Bottom Meadow and Middle Meadow. Carry straight on and into a field called Feeding Ground.

After another 10 minutes you go over a stile into a field with a sewage works on the left. To the left is Farm Close. Cross the track you come to, keeping the sewage works on the left. Watch out for a yellow arrow pointing out the direction towards the church. Here you are in a field called Georges Close. The track follows a raised causeway-like ridge through the field; alongside are patches of nettles and what may once have been earthworks, suggesting abandoned settlement. After another 5 minutes you go through a gate onto a gloriously overgrown hollow way and after a minute emerge on to a lane. This is Bakehouse Lane, at the eastern extremity of Shotteswell. This is about one hour and a quarter from the starting-point.

The narrow lanes of Shotteswell cascade down the hillside in a series of loops. The earliest records of the name in the 12th century suggest that *Shot* may derive from a personal name *Scot*; *well* of course means a spring (see below). Not mentioned in the Domesday Book, Shotteswell may have been a hamlet of Warmington just to the north-west. In the Middle Ages land here was held by the Fitzwyth family and, later, the Earl of Ormonde; more recently by the Earl of Guilford. The parish, a small one of 1305 acres, was inclosed in 1793. There is a Draft Inclosure Map which names only some of the fields. Shotteswell was described in 1845 in Kelly's *Directory of Warwickshire* as 'a poor and very unimportant village and parish'. After 1895 it must have seemed even more isolated on the map, being surrounded on three sides by Oxfordshire. Today it is a small parish of 1305 acres.

Turn left up the lane, past Chapel Lane on the left and into Middle Lane. Pass College Farm on the right and a beautiful tall ironstone house on the left. Then turn right down Snuff Lane, at the lower end

of which are fine ironstone cottages, some dating back two centuries, and some also thatched. You soon come to a T-junction with Back Hill. Turn right down Mollington hill, passing Bakehouse Lane on right. It has taken about 10 mins. to walk through the village.

To the left the Pathfinder map marks a spring, perhaps the well from which the village takes its name. A field in this vicinity was Picket Piece on both the Draft Inclosure Map and the field-name map: this is probably a variant of the common field name Piked Piece, meaning a field with many corners. Two big fields to the N are called Home Ground.

Shotteswell to Mollington

Carry on down the lane, with Feeding Ground on your right.

The field on the left is called Grass Bretch. *Bretch*, from Anglo-Saxon *braec*, is a common field-name meaning land newly 'broken' (i.e. ploughed). It is tempting to suggest that in this case the field was ploughed later than the surrounding ones because it is on a fairly steep hill, more likely to have been used as pasture or common in earlier times.

Soon you come to Manor Farm Buildings on the left, then Valley Farm Equestrian Centre. The field on the right is Abbots Meadow. After this the lane comes very close to the motorway.

To the east of the farm the motorway runs through two fields adjacent to the Mollington/Shotteswell boundary which before 1895 belonged to a detached part of the Oxfordshire parish of Bloxham. To the west on the hilltop is a field known as Varneycumbe - 'ferny valley', as in Farnborough. The initial V is a dialect pronunciation widespread in south-west England. A Farnecumbe was mentioned in a document of 1246. Today there is a young conifer plantation there. On the right of the lane, between it and the M40, is a field called Mere Meadow - appropriately enough, as its northern side is bounded by a stream dividing Shotteswell and Mollington parishes. The forms Merecombe and Merefurlong were mentioned in a document of 1309. All derive, like Mary mentioned above, from Anglo-Saxon (*ge*)maere, boundary.

Opposite, on the left are Lower Allotment, then Little Meadow and, just at the parish boundary, a tiny meadow called Maidens Dole. *Dole*, a share, refers to the practice of drawing lots to obtain tenure of a particular piece of land.

Where the lane crosses the parish (and county) boundary a road forks to the right, ending at the motorway. This used to be the original course of the lane as it joined March Road into Mollington. *March* here may mean boundary. From this point as far as Mollington many of the fields belonged to Lower Farm, in the south-west of the village. On the left was Lower Billsbrook; on the right, now bisected by the M40, Longyards.

It is tempting to explain the *bill* of Lower Billsbrook in relation to a form such as *Cockbillhook*, a name not uncommon in this area referring to an acutely-angled corner of a parish.

The boundary is about 14 minutes walk from Shotteswell. To the west, just south of Warmington, is Deddington Hill, with its wooded Warmington Fox Covert. After about 5 more minutes you come to a signpost, informing you that Shotteswell is $1\frac{1}{4}$, Mollington $\frac{3}{4}$. Turn

right over the motorway (Bronze Age spearheads were found in this vicinity) along March Road, which climbs gently up to Mollington. The road was established when Mollington was inclosed. The field to the left was Great Ground; to the right Bridge Meadow. After about 4 more minutes you pass the sealed-off old road to Shotteswell; shortly after that you cross a brook.

Between here and the village were cow pastures; stock-farming and dairying were common in the early years of the twentieth century.

The road bissects a field known as The Marsh. It is possible that March Lane takes its name from this, since *march* can be a dialectal pronunciation of *marsh*. To the north of it are Acre Ditch and White Hill; to the south were Bottom and Top Old Hay (the latter probably meaning hedge).

The road now goes straight between hedges of young elm. After about 8 more minutes you come to the Mollington road-sign, then a right-hand kink in the road. The old parish and county boundary crossed the road soon after this. Soon you come to a turning on the right, leading to Lower Farm. Just before it is a 17th century house called Poplars Farm; along Lower lane, which leads to Lower Farm and a Field known as Barley Piece, is a row of 18th century two-story cottages built out of ironstone rubble. Carry on and you'll soon pass a house called Chestnuts, like Church Farm one of the original pre-Inclosures farms in the village; Chestnuts Farm actually had two sites. Carry on past the red-brick Primitive Methodist chapel (dated 1845) on the left and a road on the right with modern houses called Orchard Piece, straight ahead past old thatched ironstone cottages, then The Garden House and Manor Farm on the right, and you'll see 'The Green Man' on the left. Cut up to the left and you're back at the starting-point.