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## City of streams and spires

A self guided walk along Oxford's waterways



Folly Bridge and island © Webb Aviation [www.webbaviation.co.uk](http://www.webbaviation.co.uk)

Explore a fascinating network of rivers, streams and canals  
Discover how natural and manmade waterways have shaped the city  
Learn about the methods used to prevent flooding  
Find out how water has inspired Oxford's industry, leisure and literature

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the stories of our landscapes  
discovered through walks







This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

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# City of streams and spires

## Explore Oxford's fascinating network of waterways

### Introduction

Did you know that the city of Oxford is built on a series of islands? This walk is an opportunity to explore an intricate network of waterways that are often overlooked by visitors to the city.

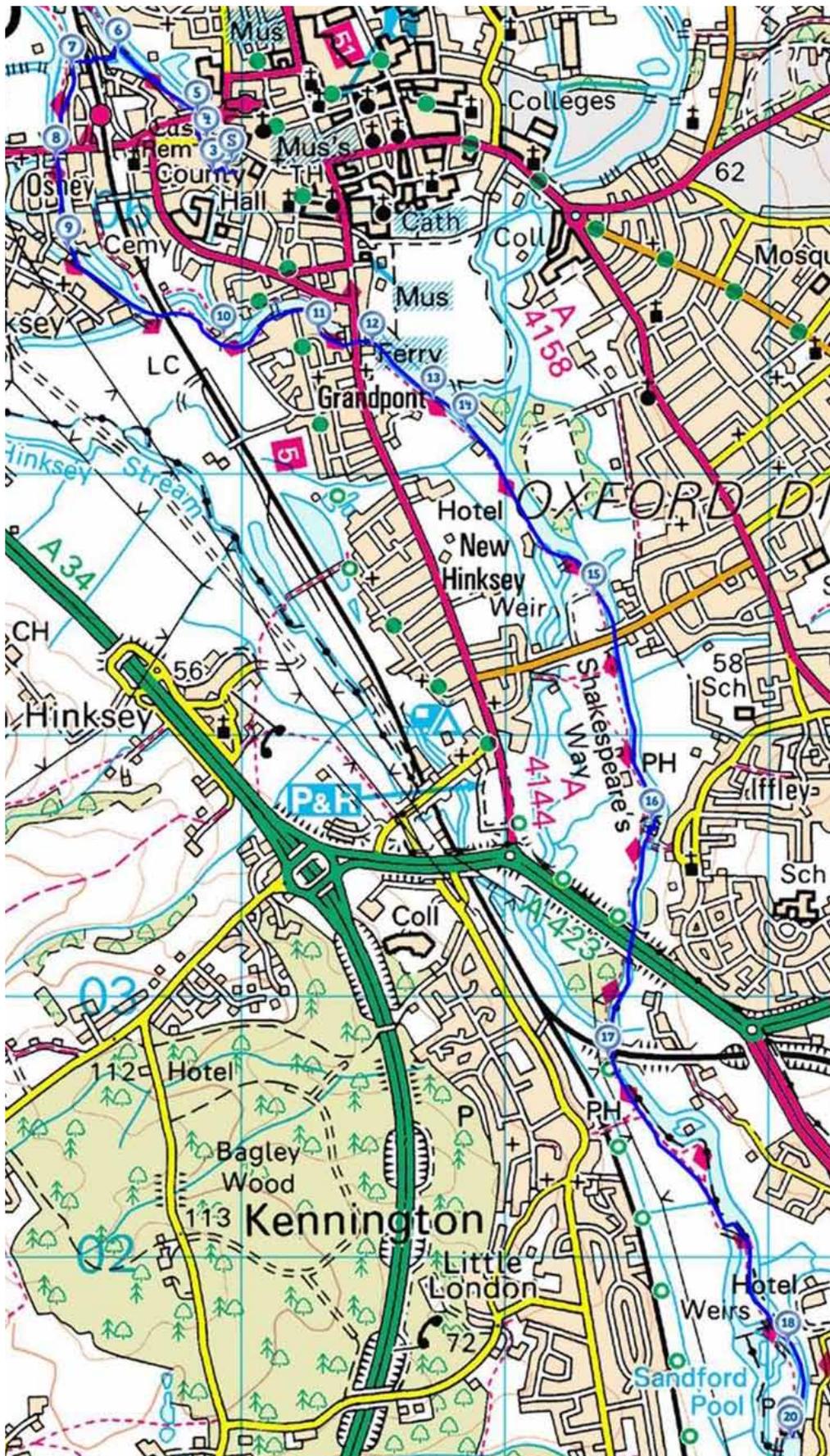
Discover gushing mill streams and picturesque flood meadows, walk along an industrial canal and a working river, watch leisure boating and competitive rowing. Look for evidence in the names of neighbourhoods, streets, bridges and pubs giving clues to the watery history of this city.



Pollarded trees at Rewley  
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Discover why convicts from Oxford's prison built many of Oxford's canals, locks and other structures. Find out how the river was part of Oxford's Town and Gown division. See which parts of Oxford's rivers featured in works of literature including *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Adventures of Tom Brown* and *Three Men in a Boat*. This walk will definitely give you a different perspective of Oxford.

## Route overview



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## Practical information

**Location** Oxford, Southeast England

**Getting there** **Train** - Oxford station is well served by the railway network with services to London Paddington, Reading, Didcot, Newcastle, Bournemouth, Manchester Piccadilly and Birmingham New Street.

**Bus** - many city centre routes and long distance coaches, including routes to Heathrow, Gatwick and London Victoria coach station

There are 5 **park and ride** depots around the city centre; Pear Tree (route 300), Redbridge (route 300), Seacourt (route 400), Thornhill (route 400) and Water Eaton (route 500)

**Car** - Oxford is accessible via Junctions 8 and 9 of the M40. The city is surrounded by the Oxford Ring Road. Drivers are advised to use park and ride services into the city centre.

**Bicycle** - Oxford is a very popular cycling city and features on National Cycle Route number 5 among others

**Start point & postcode** Oxford Castle, OX1 1AY

**Directions from railway station to start**

From the station turn right. Take care crossing between the bus and taxi stands and join Park End Street. Use the pedestrian crossings outside the Said Business School to cross over the road.

Turn left in front of The Jam Factory and continue along the pedestrianised section of Park End Street. Cross the bridge over the river then turn right into Tidmarsh Lane. Oxford Castle is on the left behind the council offices.

**Finish point** Sandford Lock, OX4 4YD

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**Onward journey**

To return to Oxford by public transport please use the directions on page 14. Alternatively you may want to use a taxi.

**Distance**

5 miles

**Level**

Gentle - a flat riverside route along paved town roads, towpaths and grassland

**Conditions**

The towpaths can be muddy and can get cold in autumn / winter. Wear suitable footwear.

**Suitable for**

**Families** - plenty along the riverside to interest children

**Dogs** - must be kept on a lead in the town

**Wheelchairs / pushchairs** - suitable up to Donnington Bridge (Stop 16). From here there is a short cut to Redbridge Park and Ride

**Refreshments**

Away from the town centre there are no refreshments along the route, until The King's Arms pub at the end. You may want to prepare / buy provisions beforehand. There are many ideal places for a picnic.

**Facilities**

No public toilets en route after leaving city centre

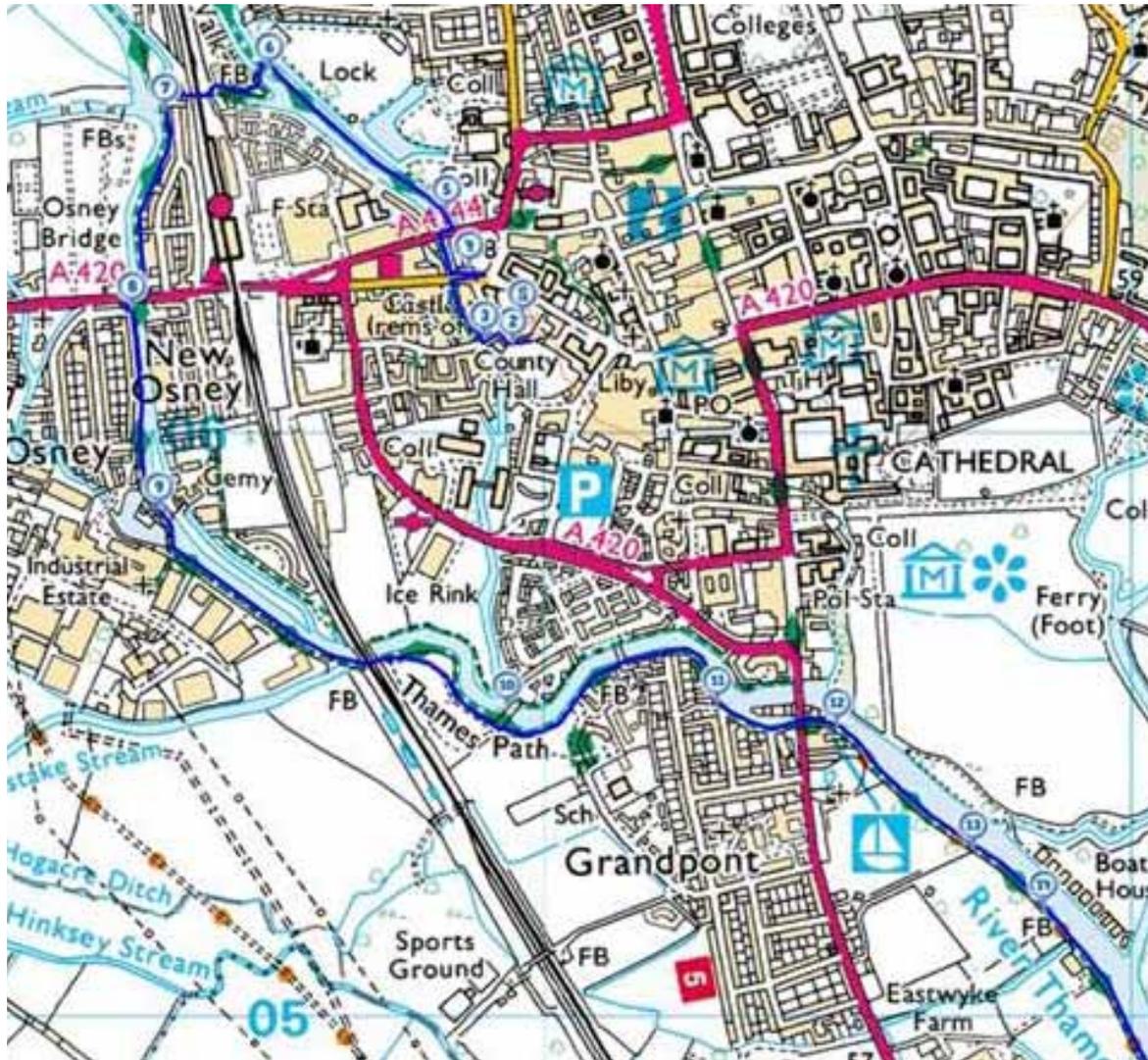
**Other info**

**Oxford Castle** is open daily from 10am. Guided tours available, gift shop and cafe. Tickets £8.95 adults, £5.95 children 5-15 years, £6.95 concs. (Tel: 01865 260666 [www.oxfordcastleunlocked.co.uk](http://www.oxfordcastleunlocked.co.uk))

**Tourist information**

Oxford Visitor Information Centre, 15-16 Broad Street, OX1 3AS (Tel: 01865 252200)

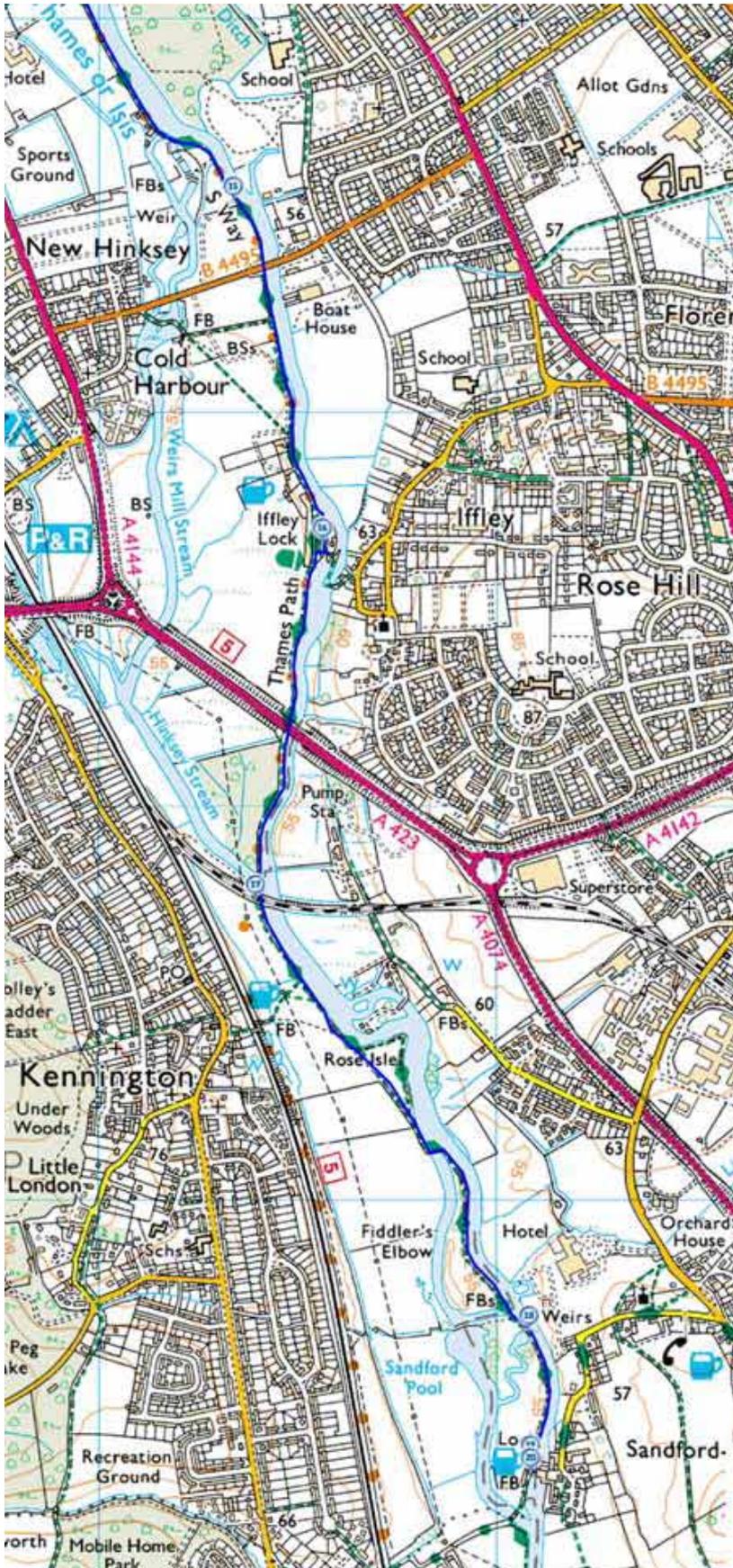
## Detail of the first part of the route



### Stopping points

1. Oxford Castle
2. Oxford Castle
3. Quaking Bridge
4. The Duke's Cut public house
5. Hythe Bridge Pocket Park
6. Isis Lock
7. Four Streams, Rewley
8. Corner of North Street and East Street
9. Osney Lock
10. Gas Works Bridge
11. Corner of Cobden Cresc and Buckingham St
12. Folly Bridge, downstream side
13. Confluence of the Thames and the Cherwell
14. Opposite boat houses

## Detail of the second part of the route



### Stopping points

15. Opposite the former Corpus Christi College Barge
16. Iffley Lock
17. Kennington Railway Bridge
18. Sandford Lasher
19. Sandford Lock
20. Sandford Lock

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## Directions

These directions are for use with the Oxford industrial heritage walk audio commentary. Listen to each track then read the directions below to get to the next stop.

### 1. Welcome to Oxford Oxford Castle

#### Directions 1

Stay within the castle grounds and listen to Track 2.

### 2. Forced labour Oxford Castle

#### Directions 2

There are several ways in and out of the Oxford Castle complex. Make your way to the well-hidden exit near the tower between Oxford Castle Unlocked ticket office and the Castle 1071 café. Go down the ramp to the corner of Tidmarsh Lane. Turn left and you immediately come to the Quaking Bridge over a stream. Stop on the bridge and listen to Track 3.

### 3. Harnessing the power Quaking Bridge

#### Directions 3

From Quaking Bridge, go along Fisher Row with Castle Mill Stream on your right. Go up the steps to Park End Street and turn right. Cross over at the traffic lights. Stop at the side of The Duke's Cut public house, facing the car park behind, and listen to Track 4.

**Note:** To avoid the steps up from Lower Fisher Row, go along Tidmarsh Lane, which runs parallel to Castle Mill Stream. At the junction with Park End Street, The Duke's Cut will be directly opposite.

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## 4. The end and a new beginning

### The Duke's Cut public house

#### Directions 4

Go past the front of The Duke's Cut pub. After crossing the bridge turn right to continue along Fisher Row with Castle Mill Stream on your right. When you reach Hythe Bridge Street you need to cross the road and go over the bridge to continue along the stream on the opposite side. Do use the pedestrian crossing as this road is very busy. A short way along the path is the end of the canal. There is a circular monument with six protruding black and white beams. Stop here and listen to Track 5.

**Note:** To avoid the steps on Fisher Row, follow the pavement which skirts the car park alongside Worcester Street, cross Hythe Bridge Street at the lights and turn left. The canal path is on the right immediately before the bridge.

## 5. A thousand-year-old wharf

### Hythe Bridge Pocket Park

#### Directions 5

Follow the towpath with Castle Mill Stream on your left and the Oxford Canal on your right. Stop at the lock and listen to Track 6.

## 6. A lousy past

### Isis Lock

#### Directions 6

Cross the bridge over the canal then turn immediately left to cross the bridge over Castle Mill Stream. At Rewley Road, go straight across and follow the path under the railway bridge. This bridge is very low so please mind your head. If a train passes overhead it can be a little alarming so be prepared for that too! At the junction of waterways is a footbridge on the left. Cross the bridge and stop on the other side to listen to Track 7.

## 7. Where the rivers meet

### Four Streams, Rewley

#### Directions 7

Follow the towpath with the river on your right and the backs of houses on your left. At Botley Road you need to cross the road and the bridge to continue on the towpath on the opposite side. This is a very busy road so you should use the pedestrian crossing down to the left. Immediately after crossing the bridge take the footbridge on the left and go down the steps to North Street. Stop at the corner of North Street and East Street beside the bridge and listen to Track 8.

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## 8. Town and Gown united

### Corner of North Street and East Street, Osney Island

#### Directions 8

Go along East Street with the river on your left hand side. Where the road turns right into South Street is a pub which, until recently, was known as the Bargeman's Arms. Join the riverside path at this point and follow it over the overflow weirs to the lock. Stop at the far end of the lock and listen to Track 9.

## 9. Flooding and fiction

### Osney Lock

#### Directions 9

At the end of the lock cross the footbridge and off Osney Island. Continue along the towpath with the river on your left. After some distance cross another footbridge over Bulstake Stream and then under the railway. Where the path forks keep right which will lead you gently uphill and onto a path running parallel to the river. When you reach the large bridge go onto it and listen to Track 10.

## 10. An elevated position

### Gas Works Bridge

#### Directions 10

Leave Gas Works Bridge the way you came, turn left and take the footpath on the left back down to the riverside. Follow the towpath with the river on your left. After some distance go under a footbridge and pass the end of Marlborough Road. Stop where the riverside path meets the corner of Cobden Crescent and Buckingham Street and listen to Track 11.

## 11. The Oxen-ford

### Corner of Cobden Crescent and Buckingham Street

#### Directions 11

Continue along the riverbank. Go over the footbridge and up to Abingdon Road. Use the pedestrian crossing to go straight across and down the slope back to the riverbank. Stop on the next footbridge and listen to Track 12.

## 12. Leisure boating

### Folly Bridge, downstream side

#### Directions 12

Continue on the riverside path. Look for an arched footbridge on the opposite side of the river. Stop opposite this bridge and listen to Track 13.

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### 13. Two become one

#### Confluence of the Thames and Cherwell

##### Directions 13

Continue a short distance further along the riverside path. Stop opposite the row of boathouses on the opposite bank and listen to Track 14.

### 14. Flowing prose

#### Opposite boathouses

##### Directions 14

Continue along the riverside footpath for some distance. Go past a boat house on the right and then cross a pair of footbridges. A short way further and almost at the next bridge over the Thames is a boat house on the opposite bank and immediately to the left of it is a white barge. Stop opposite this barge and listen to Track 15.

### 15. Pollution and preservation

#### Opposite the former Corpus Christi College Barge

##### Directions 15

Continue along the riverside path. Go under Donnington Road Bridge erected in 1962 near the site of an old ferry. Continue on the path until you reach Iffley Lock. Go over the stone footbridge to the left. As you cross note the ramps and rollers once used to haul small boats from one level to the next without the need to enter the lock chamber. Stop beside the lock and listen to Track 16.

### 16. The Waterpoet

#### Iffley Lock

##### Directions 16

At the end of Iffley Lock cross the footbridge on the right and then turn left to continue along the riverside path with the river on your left. Go under Donnington Bridge which carries the southern ring road. After some distance go across a footbridge and then under a railway bridge. Immediately after the railway bridge is the entrance to a field which has electricity pylons running across. Stop here and listen to Track 17.

**Note:** The route beyond Donnington Bridge is not suitable for wheelchairs. From here you can use the cycle path alongside the bypass to reach the Redbridge Park and Ride (about 700 metres) and from there catch a bus back to the city centre or collect your car.

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## 17. The last tributary

### Kennington Railway Bridge

#### Directions 17

Continue along the riverside path through the field with the river on your left and the pylons on your right. At the next footbridge turn left over the bridge following signs for Sandford Lock. Follow the path which lies between the two river channels. Stop on the next footbridge and listen to Track 18.

**Note:** After wet weather this section from Kennington Railway Bridge to Sandford Lock may be waterlogged and boots are recommended. Alternatively you can use the surfaced cycle path beside the railway.

## 18. Swept down the lasher

### Sandford Lasher

#### Directions 18

Continue along the riverside path a short way. Stop by the lock and listen to Track 19.

## 19. A water turnpike

### Sandford Lock

#### Directions 19

Remain at Sandford Lock and listen to Track 20.

## 20. A final ford

### Sandford Lock

#### Directions 20

There are two means of getting back to Oxford by public transport from Sandford. You can walk across the lock and up Church Road to the village of Sandford where a limited local bus service operates.

Alternatively follow Sandford Lane to the right just below the lock. This will lead to the main road through Kennington where buses run between Oxford and Abingdon. There is a stop near the Redbridge Park and Ride if you have parked your car there.

Either way you will probably want to rest awhile at the King's Arms, a pub which is rare in having retained the same name for all its known history. It features in numerous works of fiction.

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## Credits

This walk was created in collaboration with the Oxford Preservation Trust. For more information about their work please visit [www.oxfordpreservation.org](http://www.oxfordpreservation.org)

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

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