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## Ewelme

### Swyncombe Down and Church, Ewelme Park

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Distance: 11 km=7 miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Chilterns

Date written: 27-jul-2019

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Refreshments: Ewelme (a short drive or excursion after the walk)

Map: 171 (Chiltern Hills South) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? *We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Nature reserve, woodland, historic villages, churches, hills, views*

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#### In Brief

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A mellifluous name for a most striking and charming village. As the piece of historic prose below relates, the village is also of great historical importance. The old houses, the church, and the cloister are quite fascinating and you could spend some time here. This walk takes you over the open downs and through woods to find an isolated medieval church before embarking on a return trek back over the downs to return to the village.

The *Shepherd's Hut* pub in the village is but a short hop from the walk and serves Greene King IPA and some good tuck.



This walk is also part of the **Bix-Ewelme chain walk** and can be combined with one or two other nearby walks to make a larger walk of up to 25 km=15½ miles. Look for the “chain link” icons in the margins or the “chain link” symbols in the map.

*This “Ewelme” walk was originally published as a 25 km=15½ mile walk beginning in the Warburg Nature Reserve, Bix Bottom. That same walk is now a chain walk, published as “Bix-Ewelme”, after the long walk was divided into three shorter circular walks with “chain link” points.*



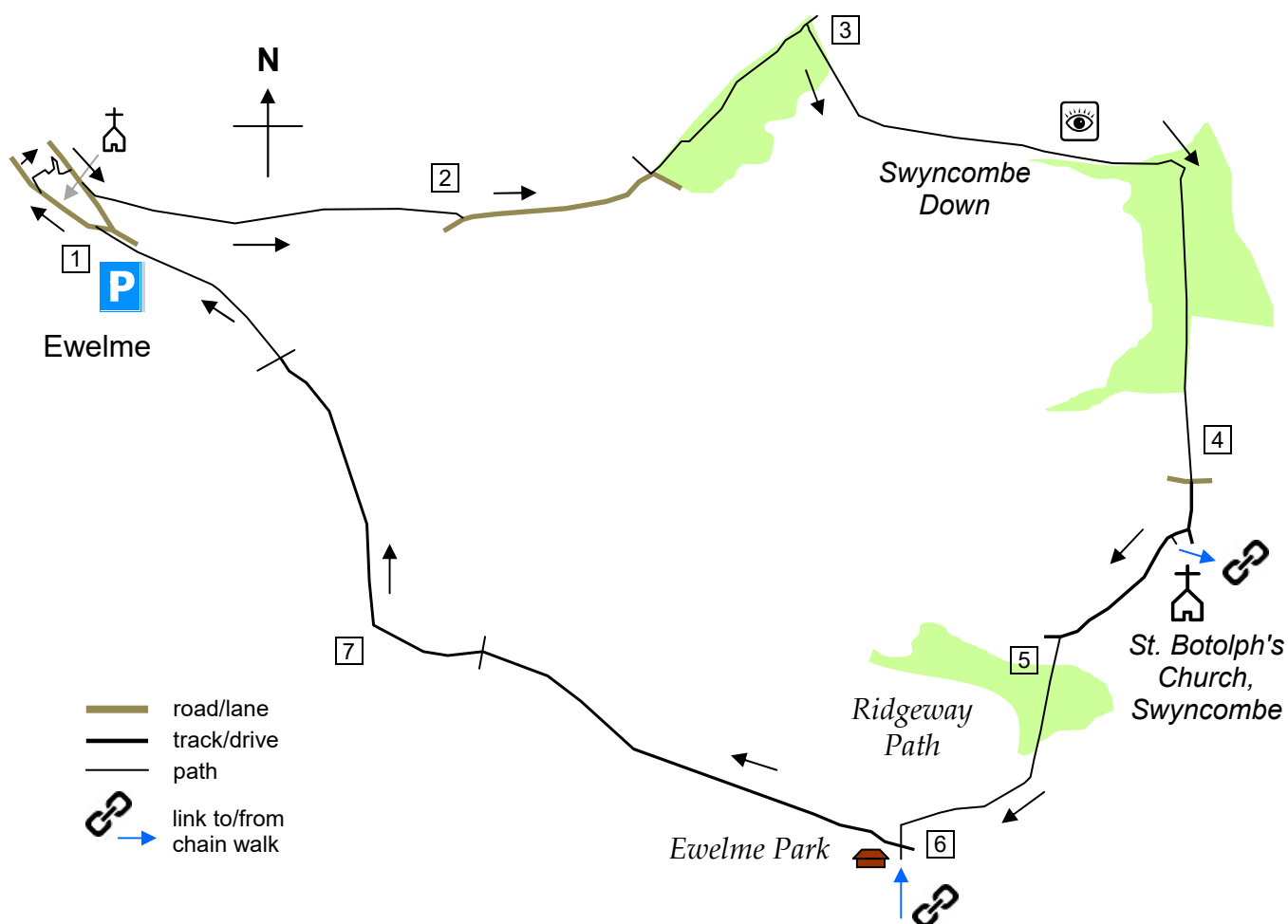
The paths used by this walk are generally clear and fairly dry. Except in extreme conditions, shorts and trainers should be fine. This walk should be ideal for your dog.

The walk begins in the car park by the playing fields in the village of **Ewelme, Oxfordshire**, [www.w3w.co/gratuity.repaid.admiral](http://www.w3w.co/gratuity.repaid.admiral), at the southeast end of the High Street, very approximate postcode **OX10 6HP**, closest to the south-eastern junction of Parson's Lane and High Street. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

## The Walk

*The whole of English history is written in the stones and pastures of Ewelme. Its euphonious name is obscure Anglosaxon meaning a water spring. The poet Geoffrey Chaucer wrote "In worlde is none more clere of hue / Its water ever freshe and newe / That whelmeth up in waves bright / The mountance of three fingers height". It was his granddaughter Alice whose "strange eventful history" did so much to bring Ewelme into the light. She married William de la Pole in 1430 and the wealth of both powerful families enabled the construction of the church, school and almshouses that you see today. King Edward III and John of Gaunt visited the Manor on occasions. William de la Pole fell foul of the politics of court and was banished for "sundry treasons". On the crossing to France, he was seized by the crew and put into the ship's boat where his head was brutally struck off with a rusty sword after several blows by "one of the lewdest of the ship's company". King Henry VII, the first Tudor, took stock of the amenities of Ewelme and decided that it would be suit him as a country retreat and had it converted into a royal palace. TV historian David Starkey claims that Henry VIII was conceived at Ewelme in 1490.*

*Unsurprisingly, Ewelme has its ghosts. William de la Pole, without his head, and Alice both appear in the Cloister. Another is an enormous growing dark shape like a hairy animal seen near the cress beds. People live or dead may suddenly relocate in the fields. There was also a witch's curse put on all the sons of one family. An outstanding account of Ewelme past and present will be found at: <http://www.fordsfarm.co.uk/History-of-Ewelme.html>.*



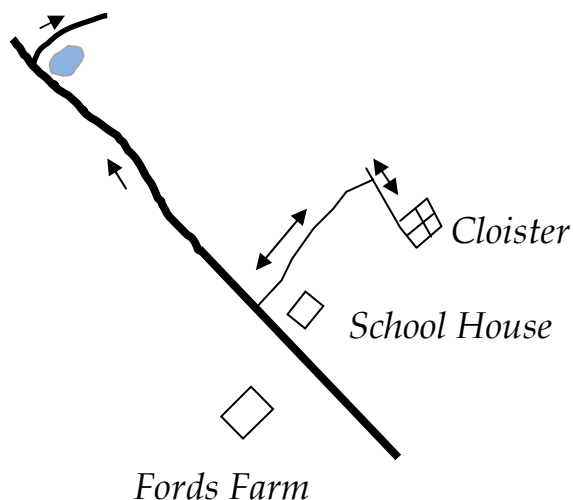
- 1 From the car park just outside Ewelme, go out to the road and turn immediately **left**, signposted *Benson, Wallingford*. As you pass Ford's Farm and its farmhouse (which does B&B) and approach the old School House, you soon realise that this is no ordinary village. To begin your exploration,

take a small excursion **right** at the School House, up some steps and into the garden. Turn **right** on a path into the cloister, with its little central well. *There is a loo on the right as you enter the cloister.* The cottages here are almshouses, occupied mainly by pensioners. Return to the road and continue onwards. (You can visit the church by climbing the stairs at the centre of the north-east side of the cloisters and opening two doors that are normally unlocked.)

WC

You pass various brick and thatched cottages and soon the King's Pool on your right, at a junction with Parson's Lane. Your route is **right** here on the lane, immediately passing the Ewelme Store (closed Sunday afternoon), originally a Methodist chapel.

Continue up Parson's Lane and, where the major road curves away sharp left, veer right, still on Parson's Lane. Soon, you pass the churchyard and church on your right, both unmissable.



*The church of St Mary the Virgin has hardly been altered since it was rebuilt in 1430 by Alice and William de la Pole. The style is perpendicular with the nave aisles and clerestory extending into the chancel. If you look up above the ancient font, you will see the image of a king on the corbel. This is believed to be of King Edward III, patron of Chaucer.*

If you leave the church by the south door, entering another part of the churchyard, you will soon find the grave of Jerome K. Jerome, author of *Three Men in a Boat*. Continue along the road, passing the Old Rectory. 50m after this, fork left on a track, marked as the Chiltern Way (CW). Keep ahead on a grassy path between hawthorns and then continue straight on across a field with many comfortable lodgings for pigs on your left. After the first field, continue similarly alongside the next field with views of Swyncombe Down ahead. The path descends to a metal gate and a road. Turn **left** on the road.

- 2 Ignore a byway on your left, thus leaving the CW. Where the road bends right, leave it by continuing straight ahead on a track. Go straight over a crossing track, quickly reaching a *Restricted Byway* sign. Here, fork **right** on a narrow path and bear **left** on a woodland path that runs parallel to the byway. (You can of course stay on the byway but the woodland path is much more comfortable and interesting.) Keep left at all times so that you are always within sight of the byway. You pass several horse jumps as this area is used by the Ewelme horse trials. Where the woodland ends and you reach a field, turn sharp **right**, as directed by a yellow arrow on a post [Aug 2025: gone], onto a path with the field on your left.

- 3 The path leads uphill to the top of Swyncombe Down with great views. At the top, a path joins from the right. Keep ahead with banks on your right and the field on your left, visible through trees but later affording an uninterrupted view. *The village of Britwell Salcome is visible as you face northwards, as is the large Britwell-House (Grade II listed) to the north west; the new housing seen three miles north is in Watlington.* You pass between two metal gates and, after around 1km, the path reaches a fork. Take the **right** fork as directed by a yellow arrow on a post. The path curves away uphill and meets a wider path. You have rejoined the Ridgeway. Turn **right** on it uphill. Near the top, it snakes left and right as you simply follow the acorn symbols. The path descends through woodland and finally reaches an open field. Your route here is straight down the right-hand side of the field and straight up the other side. After thankfully reaching the top, go through a modern kissing-gate to a road. Go straight over the road to a lane opposite and, at the bottom, turn **right** on a track beside St Botolph's Church. If you come in February, round the east side your eyes can feast on a profuse display of snowdrops.



*This tiny early Norman church was significantly restored in early Victorian times (a very common predicament). More unusual details of this church are fully described in the neighbouring walk "Swyncombe Church and Ewelme Park".*



For the Bix-Ewelme chain walk, switch now to [Swyncombe Church and Ewelme Park](#), from the start of that walk.

- 4 Your route is straight ahead on a wide track but first you will want to have a look at this historic church by turning left through a small gate into the churchyard with its cup-shaped yews. The church is normally open but please use the mud scraper! Note the bell over the porch. Follow the new Ridgeway Path sign which is in front of the new graveyard, leading back on the wide track. Ignore a private drive on your left and continue straight ahead on the broad track, passing through an open metal gate. In around 350m you reach another familiar grey fingerpost for the Ridgeway. Follow the wide track, through two (open) large wooden gates. Where the high wooden fence ends after 250m, the views open up on your left. In a further 200m, look for a Ridgeway signpost [\[Aug 2025: completely obscured by a large wood pile - don't miss!\]](#).

- 5 Turn **left** here (*don't miss!*) through a metal kissing-gate, up the left-hand short side of a long meadow, and through another kissing-gate into woods, (2025: now felled, making a large open valley) known for some reason as *Jacobs Tent*. You now have more than 250m through this wood, on an uphill course which can be quite tiring. The path levels out and runs beside a cereal field on your right. At a 3-way fingerpost, veer **right**, staying beside the field. The path runs beside a wood on your right, then a hedge, then through a maple and beech avenue to end on a farm track that passes through Ewelme Park Farm. Turn **left** as directed by a fingerpost, passing a large barn on your left. Immediately, as you leave the farm, turn **right** at a 4-way fingerpost, thus leaving the Ridgeway Path. The large house over on your left is *Ewelme Park*. (See the adjoining walk *Swyncombe Church and Ewelme Park* for more details of this historic site.)



The Bix-Ewelme chain walk joins this walk here.

- 6 You pass a large stable yard, immediately joining a wide descending track. Go straight over a crossing track to a junction. Continue **straight ahead** as directed by a blue arrow on a marker post, soon reaching an open field. Keep straight on down the left-hand side of the field. In the corner, pass between two old gate posts and some shrubbery and continue straight ahead, along the right-hand side of the next field. There is a tall fence to your right bedecked with barbed wire. Your path runs between fields and reaches a hawthorn hedge on your right. At the end of the field, by a post with arrows, go over a track and continue **straight ahead**. In around 200m your path becomes enclosed. After 350m you pass a post with blue arrows. Turn **right** here on a gently descending enclosed track.
- 7 This drovers' trackway, known as Grindon Lane, has fields each side, with various shrubs, hedges and small trees, a testament to its antiquity. It crosses a farm track, curves left and reaches a tarmac lane, part of the old Icknield Way. Cross straight over, go through a swing-gate and across a large meadow, a piece of commonland known as Cow Common. The path at first crosses the centre and then rises towards the hedge on the right-hand side. When you reach the hedge, ignore the stile on your right and stay in the meadow, keeping next to the hedge. At the end, go through two small wooden gates beside a cowpen, to reach the parking area just outside Ewelme where the walk began.



Or, for the Bix-Ewelme chain walk, if you did not start in Ewelme, "re-wind" this text back to the beginning and resume from there.



For final refreshments, there is a pub in Ewelme, the *Shepherd's Hut* (Greene King) a well-liked local which serves good food. It is at the other end of the village, a short walk or drive away. See the adjoining "Ewelme Pub Walk"\* for more details (\* coming shortly). The nearby Ewelme Brook nature reserve (the old water cress beds) is also worth a visit.

## Getting there

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By car: Ewelme is signed just off the B4009 near Watlington. Coming from the London area, the easiest way is via the **M40**. Come off at junction 6 (*Watlington*). Turn **left** onto the B4009. In 3 miles, in **Watlington**, follow signs for the B4009, as for *Britwell, Benson, Wallingford*. 1 mile after Britwell, just after the road elbows right, turn **left** at a sign for *Ewelme*. Park at the far (south eastern) end of the village by the sports ground.

By bus/train: bus to Watlington, e.g. no. A40 from Beaconsfield or no. 40 from High Wycombe; change to bus 137 which runs between Watlington and Wallingford, via Ewelme. Check the timetables.

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