

## Further afield

### Radley Large Wood



This beautiful area of ancient semi-natural woodland is renowned locally for its carpet of bluebells in the spring. A network of

permissive paths takes you through and around the wood, and on to Kennington.

The wood has a fascinating history. From the mid-13th century it was an enclosed deer park supplying Abingdon Abbey with timber and game, a use continued by the Stonhouse and Bowyer families. Today the wood is managed to protect and enhance the natural environment.

In the 1930s Bigwood Camp was built in the wood; initially a boys' holiday camp, it became a home for wartime evacuees and later a family holiday camp. The name 'Bigwood' lives on as one of three mobile home parks next to the wood.

### Radley Lakes

This wildlife-rich area stretches from the end of Thrupp Lane to the Thames and the edge of Abingdon. Walking routes include one



around Thrupp Lake, pictured here in 2011. A charity, The Radley Lakes Trust, has published a masterplan to protect the valuable natural habitat and to create new walks with information boards.

Part of the Sustrans National Cycle Route 5 passes down the eastern side of Thrupp Lake.

## Acknowledgements

Radley History Club would like to thank:

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- Oxfordshire County Council – Oxfordshire History Centre for permission to reproduce archive photographs from its collection
- Bowyer Arms, Radley Church, Radley College, Radley Parish Council and Radley Village Shop for displaying copies of the leaflet

## More information

We hope you've enjoyed your walk around Radley. There's more about the village's heritage and the points of interest featured in this leaflet on Radley History Club's website ([radleyhistoryclub.org.uk](http://radleyhistoryclub.org.uk)). The website also has details of the Club's publications, which include:

- *A History of Radley*
- *Radley Manor and Village: a thousand year story*
- *Early Modern Radley: People, Land and Buildings 1547-1768*
- *Radley Farms and Families 1600-2011*
- *Radley People & the Railway 1843-2013*
- *The History of Radley CE Primary School*
- *The Story of a Village Church: St James the Great, Radley*

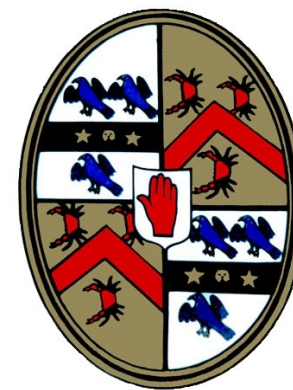
Copies of the Club's publications can be ordered online from its website or bought at Radley Village Shop. A series of Radley postcards produced by the Club are also available at Radley Village Shop.

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Radley History Club  
RHC

# Radley Heritage Walk

An Oxfordshire village on  
the River Thames



*The village emblem – a modern representation of the heraldic shield on the Stonhouse monument in Radley Church*

A walk combining glimpses of  
everyday life in days gone by in  
Radley with an introduction to  
its historic buildings

## About the Radley Heritage Walk

The walk falls naturally into two halves: (1) from the Bowyer Arms up to the Radley Oak in the grounds of Radley College; and (2) from the pub down to the river Thames and back again.

Various points of interest are indicated on the map in the centre of the leaflet. All are visible from the road or from a public footpath. Please keep to the public rights of way (especially those through Radley College). Please also respect the privacy of those living in the houses on the route.

## About Radley

The village lies on the Thames between Abingdon and Oxford. For centuries it was in Berkshire, becoming part of Oxfordshire only in 1974. Today the parish covers about 3,000 acres and, at the time of the 2011 Census, had a population of 2,835.

People have occupied the area since before 3000BC. By Norman times the area was owned by Abingdon Abbey. Following the dissolution of the Abbey in 1538, the manor of Radley was sold to George Stonhouse, a court official from London.

Sir John Stonhouse (1672-1733) built Radley Hall (known today as the Mansion) in the 1720s as a grand home for his family. The Stonhouses were succeeded as lord of manor by their relatives, the Bowyers, in 1795. The Bowyers later leased Radley Hall and its grounds to Radley College; the College was able to buy the property in 1889 when debts forced the Bowyers to sell most of their estate.

Farming was the main occupation over the centuries and most of the land is still in agricultural use. Gravel was extracted in the Radley Lakes area from the late 1940s to about 2000.

Radley has an unmanned railway station on the Oxford–Didcot line, a bus service between Oxford and Abingdon, a church, a pub, a primary school and a flourishing community shop. Its post office closed in 2013.

## From the pub to Radley College

The **Bowyer Arms (1)** was built in the 1850s and named after the Bowyer family, the main landowner in the village at that time. From here go to **Radley Station (2)** where you'll find an information board on platform 1 with a timeline of the railway.

The **stationmaster's house (3)** on your right as you leave the station was built about 1899. Turn right and walk up Church Road until you are opposite the church. Look out for the **Victorian post box (4)** in the wall of no. 89.

From the churchyard look across to the **School House (5)**, where the headteacher used to live and which adjoins the Victorian part of **Radley CE Primary School (6)**, built in 1872. Most children didn't attend school until the Victorian period; by 1900 schooling was compulsory up to the age of 12 and was free.



From here you can also see the **Vicarage (7)**, a timber-framed building said to date from the 14th century, with alterations in the 16th century. The timber frames are oak, probably from Radley Large Wood. The building has a claim to be

the oldest one in the country in continuous use as the home of a church's vicar or curate.

The grass-covered mound you see as you walk round to the church porch is the roof of the **Stonhouse and Bowyer family vault (8)**. Just past the porch is a large chest tomb known as the **Cavalier's tomb (9)**, thought to be the grave of one or both of the Royalist officers buried at Radley in 1643 during the Civil War.

The oldest parts of the **Church of St James the Great (10)** date from the 13th century.

The church has a Norman font, a fine peal of bells, and stained glass windows picturing Tudor and Plantagenet kings by Thomas Willement, an 'artist in stained glass' to Queen Victoria. Please enter the church. Look inside for the card, *Our Church in 10 Minutes*, which will tell you more.



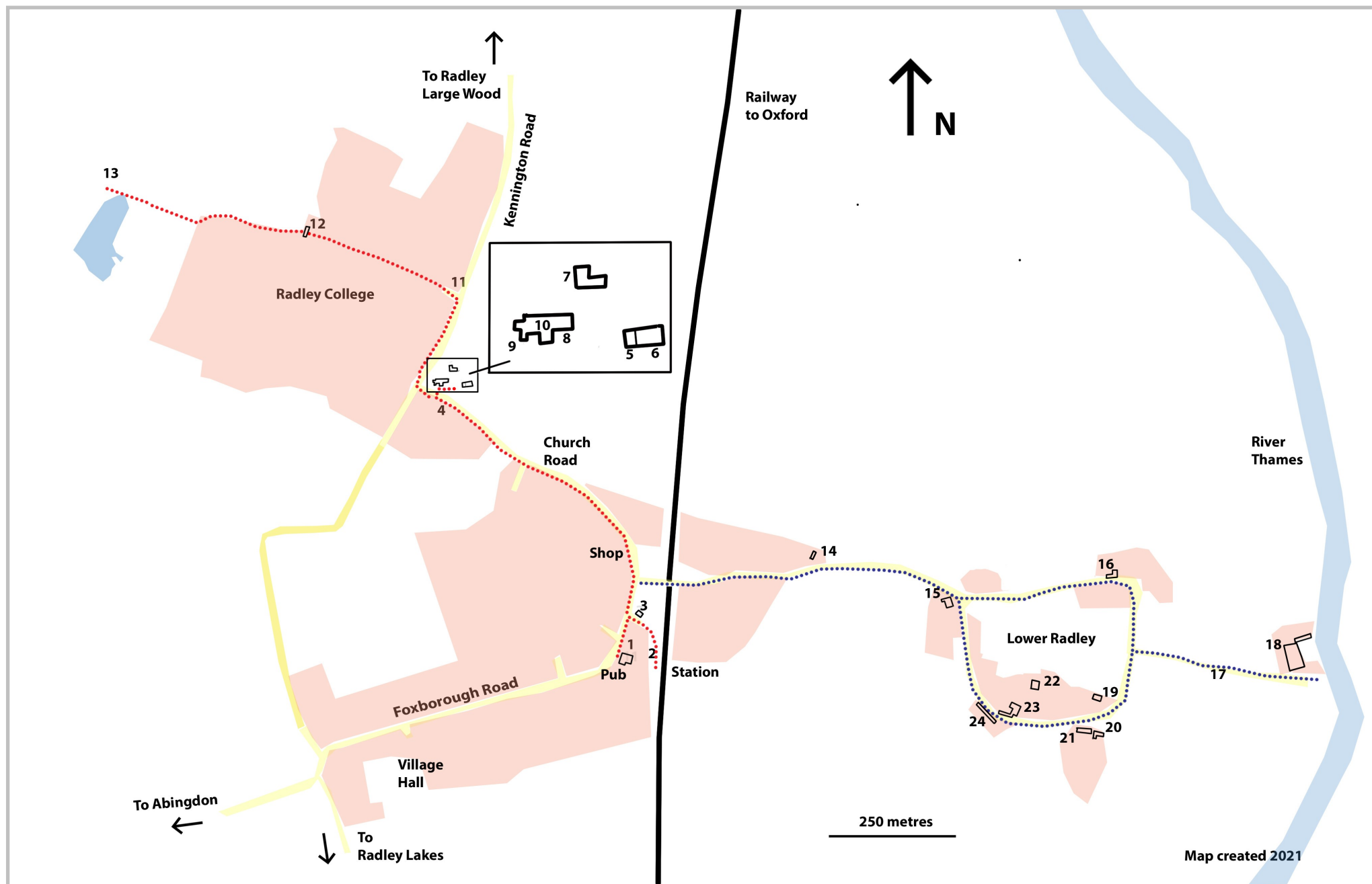
Turning right out of Church Road, cross over and walk along to the main entrance to **Radley College (11)**, founded as a boys' boarding school in 1847. Follow the public footpath up the drive and through the **Memorial Arch (12)**, which commemorates College old boys and staff killed in the two World Wars. Continue along the public footpath towards Lodge Hill until you reach the ancient **Radley Oak (13)**.



Go back to the College entrance and turn right. On your left as you walk back to Church Road you'll glimpse the front of the Vicarage. As you near the pub, the village shop will be on your right. A 100 years ago, as well as a shop, a post office and a bakery, there were deliveries of various foodstuffs to the village such as fresh fish on Thursdays. Household goods such as matches and brushes were also brought by tradesmen, while a man on a



bicycle came to sharpen knives and scissors. Coal for cooking and heating was delivered by horse and cart.



Each half of the walk is about two miles there and back.

Note: Lower Radley is a quiet but uneven road with no pavement for most of the route.



## From the pub to the River Thames

The Lower Radley 'loop' was, until the 1930s, the largest part of the village. On the walk you'll see various old timber-framed houses, some of which are listed buildings. Most were built in the 16th and 17th centuries by yeoman farmers, who worked small amounts of land for themselves. The oldest were built with just two rooms, open to the thatch; cooking was on an open hearth.

In the 18th century the land was enclosed into larger farms with new farmhouses and barns which you'll see. The old yeoman houses were divided into tiny cottages for the labourers needed by these farms.

Once over the railway bridge the first thatched cottage you'll see is **Walnut Cottage (14)**, at one time the village post office.



At the fork in the road you come to **Neat Home Farmhouse (15)**.

Taking the left-hand fork you come to **Spinney's Cottage (16)**, which was once three separate dwellings. Its name today is because 'Spinney' Comley once lived here. His job was keeping the roads in good repair; he rode around on his bicycle with a broom and a shovel.



Before the Second World War, hardly anyone in Radley had a car; when children went to secondary school in Abingdon they cycled or went on the bus or the train.

As you go down the **causeway to the Thames (17)**

you see Nuneham House on the far bank. The Harcourt family had the causeway built in the late 19th century as part of a scheme to connect their grand house with Radley Station. The planned bridge was never built but there was, for many years, a ferry across the river to Nuneham Courtenay. The ferryman lived in a cottage opposite **Radley College Boathouse (18)**. The photo shows the Thames near the boathouse with Nuneham House in the distance. Today the towpath at this point is part of the Abingdon to Oxford section of the Thames Path National Trail.



The Boathouse was at one time the main training base ahead of the Boat Race for the Oxford University crew and their highly successful coach Dan Topolski. In 1987 there were complaints about his training methods and the replacement of an American crew member. The other Americans refused to row and were replaced by reserves. Oxford still won the Boat Race.



Turning left when you return to the road, you'll come on your right to **Peacock Cottage (19)**, which was still two cottages at the time of this photo.

Opposite you'll see another former farmhouse, **87 Lower Radley (20)** and its **18th century barn (21)** behind what used to be the village green. Next to no. 87 is Lower Farm, one of Radley's two remaining working farms; the other is Peach Croft Farm to the west of the village. Slightly further along on the right is **Lower Farm House (22)**.

At the beginning of the 20th century there were 13 farms in Radley, mostly mixed farms with cattle, sheep, pigs and chickens as well as cereal crops and hay meadows. Most were quite large, employing several labourers. They and their families accounted for most people in the village and were often related to each other. Gardens might have space for chickens and fruit trees; some people had an allotment as well.



Next to Lower Farm House is one of the oldest houses in the village. It was once The Bakery and Radley Stores, and is now called **Baker's Close (23)**. Its original parts date from the early 16th century. It's shown here in the 1930s when it was the centre of the village and where you could buy sweets as well as bread!

On your left as you walk back towards the fork are a row of houses once known as **Rose Cottage Terrace (24)**. Originally thatched, the houses were (and most still are) accessed from the side away from the road.



Until about 1960 the houses in Lower Radley had a well for water, sometimes shared between two or more houses. People remember the water having frogs in it! The toilet was outside, connected to a cesspit. Cooking was done on a range.

*The photograph of Baker's Close was taken in the 1930s. The other photographs in this section probably also date from this period.*