

## BARN OWL WALKS

Barn Owls are returning to this area thanks to local conservation efforts. They are elusive birds, out mostly at dawn and dusk. By walking these routes, through the habitat they use, you may be lucky enough to see one.

### Following the routes

The maps are not to scale. For simplicity, we have not shown all of the houses and other details, just some of the main features to help you find your way.

You will follow paths marked as follows:



**Footpath**  
walkers only



**Bridleway**  
horseriders cyclists and walkers



**Byway**  
open to all traffic



**Permissive footpath**  
not a right of way but a path which the owner has given permission for walkers to use

The paths may be muddy at times so wear suitable footwear. There are kissing gates on all but the Holwell walk.

Please keep dogs on a lead where you come across livestock (at Ickleford Common and Pirton Bury) and make sure you clean up after them.

Parking is available at the public houses shown on the routes, where you can get refreshments after your walk.

In Holwell, please park considerately along the road.

## THE BARN OWL PROJECT

The Barn Owl has declined in Britain. The Holwell, Ickleford and Pirton Barn Owl Project aims to conserve the small number of these beautiful birds which are coming back to this part of Hertfordshire. For more information contact the Countryside Management Service (CMS) on 01462 459395.



These routes were devised by the **Barn Owl Project Steering Group**, consisting of local volunteers supported by the CMS.

The Barn Owl Project was developed in partnership with Holwell, Ickleford and Pirton Parish Councils. Funding was provided by Biffaward, North Hertfordshire District Council and Hertfordshire County Council, with support from Groundwork Hertfordshire.

**Biffaward** is a multi-million pound environment fund, managed by the RSWT, which utilises landfill tax credits donated by Biffa Waste Services.

The **Countryside Management Service** secures community led rural enhancement in Hertfordshire. It is sponsored by Hertfordshire County Council and other district and borough councils including North Hertfordshire District Council.

### Acknowledgements

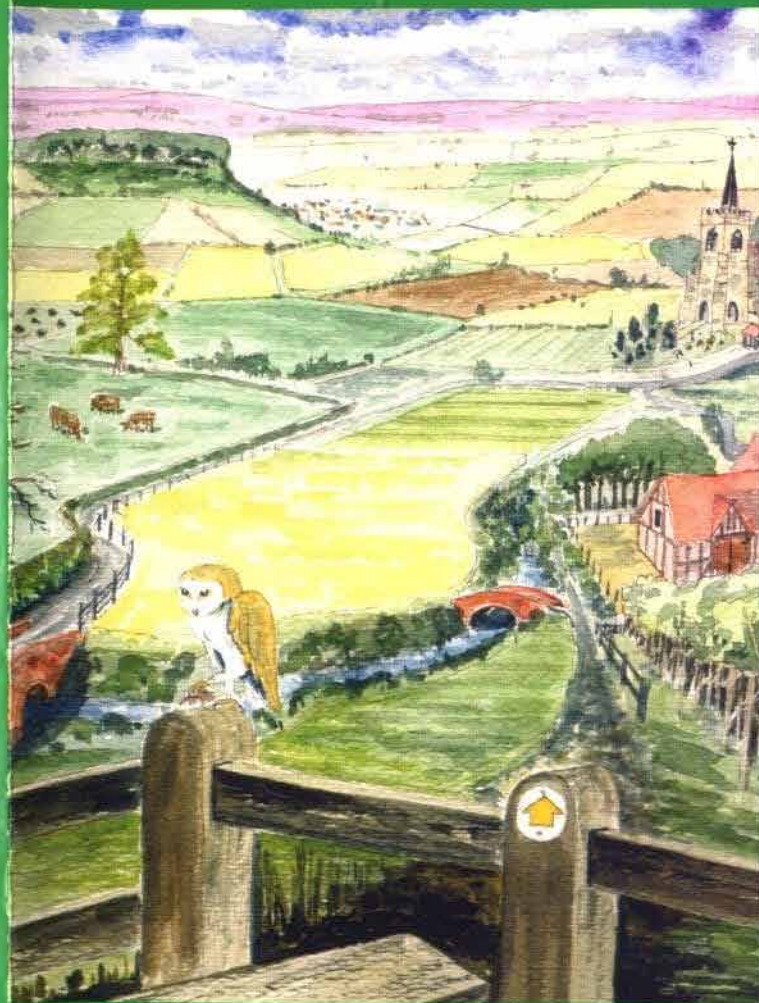
Illustrations by Howard Etherington, 2005

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# BARN OWL WALKS



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A series of walks in  
Holwell ■ Ickleford ■ Pirton



## PIRTON ROUTES

**The Wood Lane walk is 3.5km (2 miles).**  
**The Hambridge Way walk is 5km (3 miles).** Both start at Great Green.

### DIRECTIONS Wood Lane route

From the Motte and Bailey pub, head left then bear right to the end of Great Green. Cross onto Wood Lane. As this track climbs the hill, where the beech trees start in the hedgerow, turn left up the bank and along the field edge path. Go straight up through the grassy meadow keeping the wood on your right. At the top of the hill, turn sharp left and follow the path back down across the meadow. Pass the 17th century Highdown House on your right. Through the gate in the corner turn left along the path. At the next field turn right down to the road. Cross into Walnut Tree Road. After 20 metres, take the gate on your left into The Bury. Cross towards the church. In the corner by the old castle mound take the gate and path down to the road. Turn left to Great Green.

### DIRECTIONS Hambridge Way route

From the Motte and Bailey pub, turn right into Crab Tree Lane, turn right along the path next to the church and onto The Bury. Bear right, then ahead up amongst the mounds, then left to the gate. Leave via the bridge. Across the road, turn left along the pavement. Turn right onto the path between the houses and left up the side of the playing field. From the gate in the corner follow the path straight ahead. At the end, go left onto Mill Way. Turn left onto Hambridge Way back into the village. Cross onto High Street. Opposite the Fox public house, turn left into Crab Tree Lane to Great Green.



## POINTS OF INTEREST

Hambridge Way and Wood Lane may have formed a strategic Roman loop off the Icknield Way, an ancient trade road. For centuries, Hambridge Way was the route to West Mill in Ickleford and to Hitchin market.

Along Wood Lane, look out for plants like Cowslip, Harebell, Quaking Oat Grass and Black Knapweed, thriving in the thin chalky soils.

## BARN OWL FACT

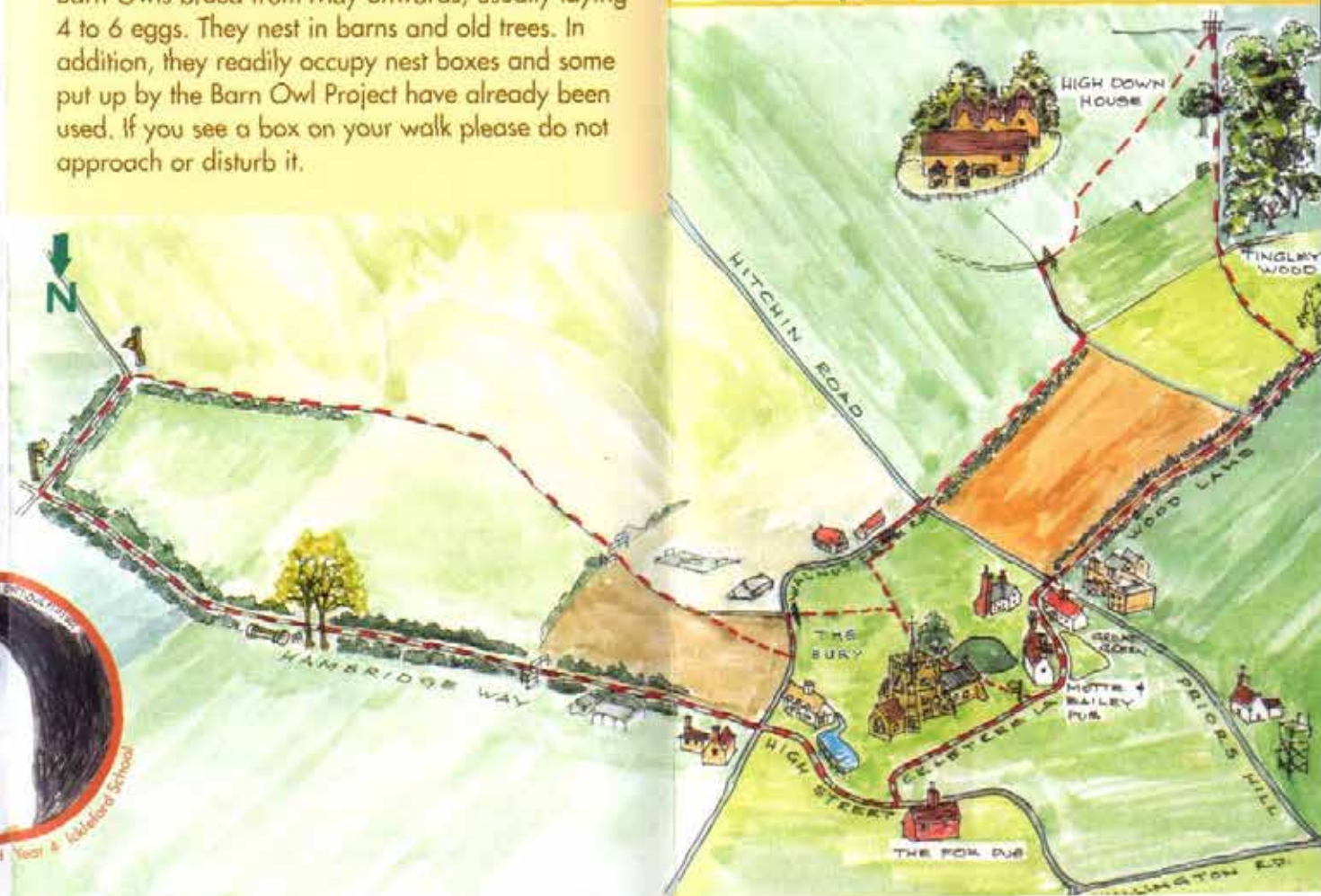
Barn Owls breed from May onwards, usually laying 4 to 6 eggs. They nest in barns and old trees. In addition, they readily occupy nest boxes and some put up by the Barn Owl Project have already been used. If you see a box on your walk please do not approach or disturb it.



BLACK  
KNAPWEED



BEECH





## ICKLEFORD ROUTE

This walk is 5.5km (3.5 miles) long with a short cut of 3.5km (2 miles)

### DIRECTIONS

Start opposite The Plume of Feathers public house on Chambers Lane. Follow the footpath signposted "Raymond Cottages" out into the field and straight on. At the end the path crosses to the left side of the hedge. Beyond that turn right down Snailswell Lane, bearing right at the 'Y' junction. At the main road turn left up the bridleway. Shortly after the pond turn right, then left through the gate into the lower part of Ickleford Common.

Ahead, cross the bridge into the upper common. Here, the main route goes along the river to the end of the common. (For the **short cut**, turn left and leave the common via the corner gate. Bear right. Be careful not to turn right up the private track to Pestol Farm. After 50 metres turn left onto the field edge path and back onto the main route – see \* below).

By the bench at the end of the common bear left. Follow the hedge on your right and go through the gate in the corner. This permissive path is not a public right of way but use has kindly been allowed by the farmer. Follow it along the field edge. Turn left onto the broad, grassy public footpath. At the end take the bridleway round to the left. When you reach the horse paddock on the right turn right. \* Take the bridleway onto the road and turn right into Snailswell Lane. Turn left at the end and retrace your route straight back to the village.

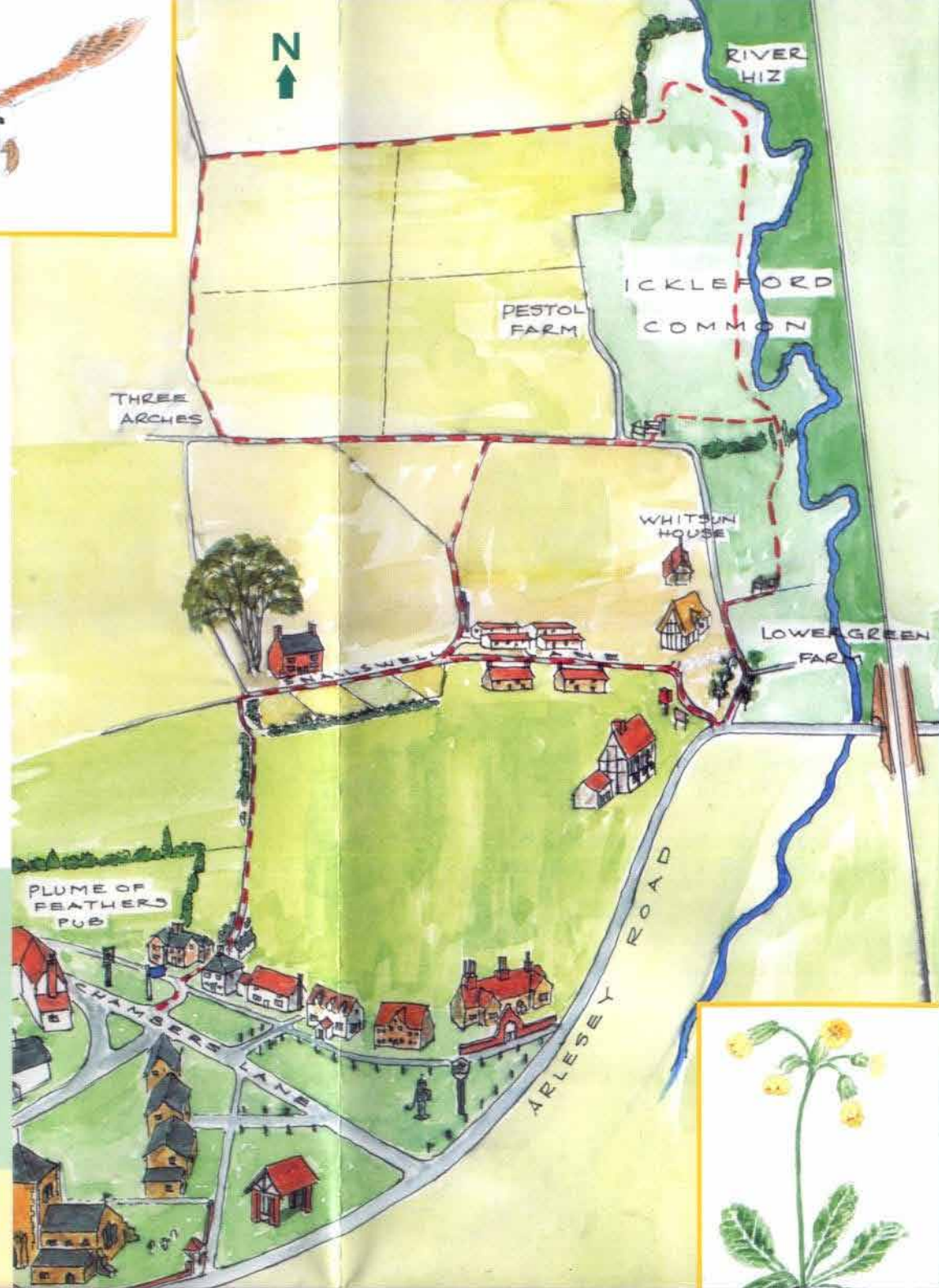
### POINTS OF INTEREST

Ickleford derives its name from being sited where the Icknield Way, an ancient trade route, crosses the River Hiz. The name Pestol Farm relates to a pit that was dug to bury victims of plague.

Ickleford Common was formed following the 1776 Act of Enclosure. It is rich in wildlife, with wild flowers such as Cowslips and Marsh Valerian. Look out for Water Voles and Kingfishers along the river.

### BARN OWL FACTS

Barn Owl numbers have fallen by three quarters in the last 70 years.





Reasons include changes in farming, lack of suitable areas for roosting and loss of nesting sites. Many are also killed on the roads. Sadly, only one in four survive their first year. By improving the local habitat, we hope to give our Barn Owls a better chance for the future.

Look out for long grass in fields and along tracks, which is ideal habitat for Barn Owls. They fly over it about 3 metres above the ground hunting for prey. Large eyes help them see more clearly in the dark. Soft feathers make owl flight silent and allow their sharp ears to pinpoint mice and voles scurrying below.

## HOLWELL ROUTE

This walk is 3.5km (2 miles) long

### DIRECTIONS

Start near the church on Holwell Road.

Go up to the end of Gurneys Lane. Take the footpath straight ahead along the field edge. Cross into the next field and follow the track straight up and over the hill, looking back to see a pretty view of the village. At the bottom, with Holwellbury Farm off to the right, turn left and follow the path near the overhead wires. Join the grassy lane between the ditch and thick hedges. Old maps show this was once the site of Fakeswell, a small hamlet which the name suggests developed around a natural spring.

The lane leads you onto another field edge with trees on your right. At the next corner continue left. Follow the path until it turns right and soon left. Across the ditch, take the cross-field path to your right back up to the church.

### POINTS OF INTEREST

Holwell is over 1,000 years old, having been granted a charter by the Saxon King Edgar in 968. Although it looks older the present church, dedicated to St Peter, was actually built in 1878. It houses 2 bells taken from its predecessor and dated 1841.

Note the thick hedges providing food and nest sites for birds such as Song Thrushes and Long-tailed Tits. Look for Crab Apple, Dog-rose and Bramble – in blossom in spring and fruiting in autumn.



COWSLIP