

1

Church Yard - As you admire the 12th century Church of St Mary can you hear the squawks from the Rookery high above your heads? Did you know Crows have over 250 different calls, used for warnings, food discovery and social bonding. Ironically, they hold 'funerals', - when a crow dies others gather round the body. This behaviour is thought to help them learn about danger, not to mourn in the human sense. In the spring look out for the Star of Bethlehem plant. The white flowers have six pointed petals, forming a perfect star shape.

2

The Bury - This ancient bury you're walking across becomes a sea of yellow Buttercups in the summer. What makes them look glossy? Buttercup petals have a unique microscopic structure that reflects light, giving them their bright, glossy appearance. This shine helps attract pollinators like bees. In the winter look out for an occasional Bewick Swan all the way from Siberia that may be spotted in the old moat (which is hidden behind hedging to the left as you face the Church), or maybe a Short-Eared Owl sitting on the fences waiting for a vole to appear. The Toot (the mound to the left of the church) is a great area for wildlife, and Wild About Pirton rake the trimmed vegetation twice a year to encourage more wildflower species to grow.

3

Recreation Ground - Despite the recreation ground being an open area of short grass, it holds a lot of interest at its perimeter due to the neighbouring land which is mostly farmland and rough ground. Surrounded by native hedges and trees these act as valuable wildlife corridors.

As you walk beside the row of trees away from the clubhouse can you guess what they are? – Walnut Trees. If you are here in the autumn, you can collect some free walnuts from the ground.

4

Strawplaiters Green Play Area - The 'pond' drainage area is full of all sorts of wild plants, most notably Rumex, Mallow, Carex, Teasels and Artemesia. There are many willows growing on the banks, their red/orange stems really show up in the winter months. Lots of wildlife will have made this wild place their home. The surrounding trees and native hedgerows are home to many songbirds, can you see them flitting from one tree to another? The adjacent field is full of wildflowers and is a hugely rich and diverse habitat for small mammals and birds as well as amphibians from the pond. Trees include Pyrus, Fraxinus, Salix, Malus and Betula. Several wood piles have been built to house minibeasts and small mammals. Can you see any track pathways going into the field that mammals use? If you're here in autumn or winter have a sit and watch the birds feeding from the plant seed heads. As you walk further along Hambridge Way can you see some round grey boxes in the trees with a slot – what are these for? – they are for bats to roost.

5

Blacksmiths Pond - The resident blacksmith who lived in the cottage opposite used this pond to cool newly repaired carriage wheels – hence its name. Can you see a Heron on the far side waiting for a fish to pass? See the large weeping willow at the end of the pond – they love water and can grow 1–2 metres per year. Did you know Willow bark contains salicin, a natural compound that led to the development of Aspirin. Willows are among the earliest trees to flower, providing vital pollen and nectar for bees. They support hundreds of insect species, which in turn feed birds and bats.

6

Methodist Church Nature Garden - This community garden was officially opened in 2025 and is a peaceful haven. The garden creators have ensured that it is as wildlife friendly as possible. Key features include a wild flower area, bird boxes, log piles, and a dead hedge to house insects and small mammals. Along the back of the garden is a privet hedge, giving safe shelter for birds and mammals and providing a nectar rich food resource with its abundance of white scented flowers in summer. The garden is bursting with trees, shrubs and flowers for all to enjoy no matter the time of year. Pollinators benefit from the huge variety of plants, you can sit and watch them at work whilst resting on one of the many seats here. Enjoy light refreshments, available from the Chapel itself if you visit on a Friday or Saturday.

7

Wrights Farm - As you walk past the remnants of Wrights Farm you will see the only remaining structure from the original farm (which had a farmhouse, many outbuildings and a watermill) – the 18th century grade II listed wooden barn. Look to see if there is any water flowing in the ditch near the barn – this is known as the Wash Brook, once a flowing chalk stream, now greatly reduced due to over abstraction and being engineered as a straight line ditch. Wild about Pirton are campaigning to get this recognised and restored by the authorities.

8

Saxon Rise Nature Area - In early summer you may see 3 different types of orchid growing - Bee Orchid, which mimics the appearance and scent of female insects to attract males for pollination, Pyramid Orchid and Common Spotted Orchid. How many species do you think there are in the Orchid family? – 25,000 spread across every continent. You may also see and hear the 3 whistling calls of Red Kites that circle over the farmland leading up to the Chiltern Hills. You can identify them by their forked tail. They are opportunist feeders clearing the landscape of carrion, also taking mice, voles, and even earthworms raised by the farmer's plough.

9

Church Nature Reserve - Here you will find a pair of beautiful cherry trees with red golden bark and white flowers in spring. Also, an excellent example of a hornbeam tree with its smooth bark and brilliant yellow autumn foliage colour. Have a sit on the bench and admire the mosaic art wall. Here work is underway by Wild About Pirton to improve the hedges and encourage more wildlife into this area by wilding more of it and only cutting back when needed.

10

Wood Lane - If you want a more challenging walk take the track up Wood Lane, a steady climb where it meets the start of the Chiltern Hills and the ancient Icknield Way. You will notice the track becomes chalk at one point, this is where the topsoil has been eroded over many years. Look out for deer who have crept out of the woods to feed on young crops. When you get to the top admire the far-reaching views, can you see Shillington with its hilltop church? Continue to the right towards the wood where you will find the entrance to Knocking Hoe Nature Reserve, renowned for several nationally rare plant species and a bench for a well-earned rest. Don't forget to look out for birds of prey gliding over the hilltops using thermals to gain height.



Refreshments - Available from Village Shop, Motte and Bailey Pub, The Fox Pub, Methodist Church, Pirton Pavilion – **check opening times.**

