

# Walk 1

## *The Church and Churchyard*

(up to 1 hour)

1. One of the biggest differences, between the natural history and local history walks, is the difference that the season makes to what you will see, hear and smell. This walk is written at springtime, so your walk may be quite different in another season. Starting from the small car park opposite the church, begin by listening, what birds can you hear? You may hear most of the crows – Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Carrion Crow and even Raven. There may be a Buzzard calling, with its piercing *peeee-uuu* call. Goldfinch and Greenfinch will be about, as will Robins, Blackbirds and any of the Tit family, including Marsh Tit. What can you smell?

2. Now, carefully cross the road to the lych gate of St. Peters. Looking back from where you came, the tree standing on the corner, is a mature Sycamore. Below it, a young evergreen Holm Oak is growing to take its place. Looking ahead into the church yard, the path is lined by a long series of 200 year old Lime trees. Many of them have the parasitic Mistletoe, so characteristic of the Gloucestershire countryside, growing in their crowns. Before you enter the church yard, you might want to spend some time inspecting the dry-stone wall that surrounds it. This is constructed from Oolitic Limestone, brought down from the quarries, high above on Leckhampton Hill. If you look carefully, you will be sure to find some fossils. In fact, if you look very closely, you will see that the rock itself, is composed of tiny balls. These are the fossilized Oolite shells, laid down in the seabed during the middle Jurassic, some 170 million years ago.

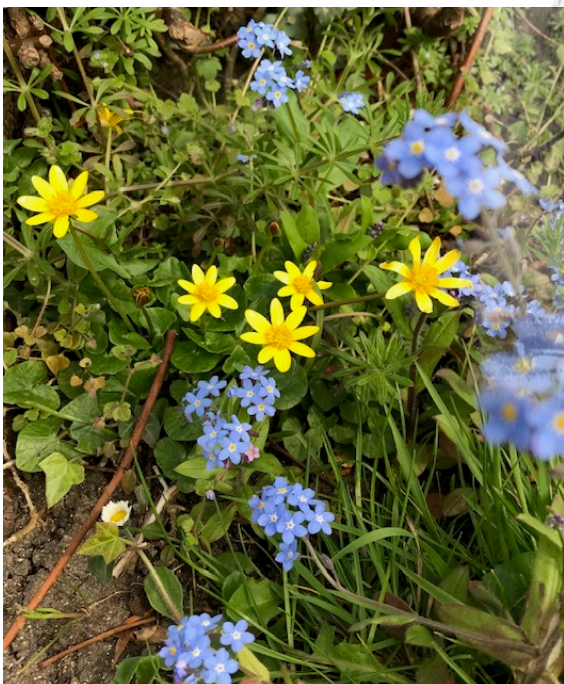


[Annual Honesty and Wood Forget-me-nots]

3. Going into the church yard, the graves to your left may be carpeted in wildflowers. In early springtime there will be Snowdrops everywhere. A little later, you will find bright yellow Daffodil, bright Bluebells, white Violets, drifts of deep blue Wood Forget-me-nots, and clumps of bright yellow Lesser Celandine.
4. Walk up to the bench on your left and sit for a while. What can you see and hear? There will often be a pair of Little Owl nesting in the Yew trees here. A Grey Heron will often fly over. Early in the morning or at dusk, you will often hear the weird calls of Fox or the barks of Roe Deer. Tawny Owl begin to call at dusk and bats appear in the trees above you. There are two bat species commonly seen here – Pipistrelle and Noctule. During the day, you will often hear the loud *yaffling* call of the Green Woodpecker. Great Spotted Woodpecker are very common too. Rabbit are present, but not common. Grey Squirrel are always present. The Wood Mouse is everywhere, but seldom seen.
5. Looking around the bench, there are many less showy plants, that are just as important to wildlife. Small clumps of Common Nettle will be vital as foodplants for many Butterfly species. The large glossy leaves of Cuckoo-pint (known by many other names - Lords-and-ladies, Wild Arum and appropriately in this setting, Devils and Angels - will provide ground cover for many small invertebrates. Catchweed Bedstraw is a foodplant for many insects (aphids and spittlebugs) but is more often seen being slyly stuck to the backs of other children. I always knew it as Sticky Willy!
6. Now head up to the gate leading up to the manor. As you pass the church, you may hear Honey Bees, which are prone to make a nest up in the roof space. Blackbirds will be calling, and possibly a Song Thrush. If your walk is in winter, you will be certain to hear the shrill, piercing call of Redwing overhead, along with Fieldfare and Mistle thrush.



7. When you get to the iron gate at the top of the churchyard, note the line of mature Lime trees, continuing on up to the manor house. Follow the back wall of the church yard south, to your right. If you listen carefully, you may hear a shrill high-pitched call. This may be one of two things, a species of Shrew (if the call is coming from somewhere down low) or if you're lucky, a tiny Goldcrest, feeding among the Yew trees.
8. As you walk through the churchyard, most of the man-made structures – the church, the cottages and most headstones – are made from the local limestone, from the quarries on the hill above. The limestone of the headstones provides an excellent surface for Common Ivy to grow up. In springtime, you will find Common Primrose growing around many of the headstones. Feeding quietly between the graves, you will come across the occasional Dunnock (also known as the Hedge Sparrow).



[Lesser Celandine and Wood Forget-me-not]

9. One of the commonest large birds you will notice in the fields is the Woodpigeon, which love to nest in the large, evergreen trees of the church yard. A less common relative of the woodpigeon to look out for is the Stock Dove. There will only be one pair in this area, but they enjoy the large, mature trees, as it gives them an opportunity to find a nest site. Unlike all of our other pigeons, this species nests in tree holes, and for that, you need large, old, mature trees.
10. Mallard are common at all times of year. There is a large pond in the woodland known as Dog Kennel Grove in the grounds of the manor house. From this part of the churchyard you will also hear Coot calling, from the same source. The Mallard fly from this pond to the many little ponds in gardens of the houses all around Leckhampton. In winter, you will often see and hear the honking calls of a *skein* of Canada Geese flying over in the late afternoon.
11. But back in my walk, it's definitely springtime, and as the sun warms the air, butterflies have begun to appear. Those species that overwinter in an adult form are first to appear (from early March into early April, depending on the season) – Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and often last of this group, the bright yellow Brimstone. But this is still early spring, and those that overwinter as eggs, caterpillar or pupae have yet to make an appearance. The first of this next batch is often the Orange-tip, and that is a sure sign that Spring is fully on the go (more likely April into May).
12. As you walk back towards the Church Cottages, you will pass close by the grave of the Wilson family. Edward Wilson was the artist and naturalist on the final ill-fated Antarctic expedition of Captain Scott. While he is commemorated here, his body lies far to the south.

13. If you spot something of interest that you think we might want to add to this walk, please drop me a note to the email address copied below.



[Daffodil, with St Peter's and Leckhampton Hill beyond]

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