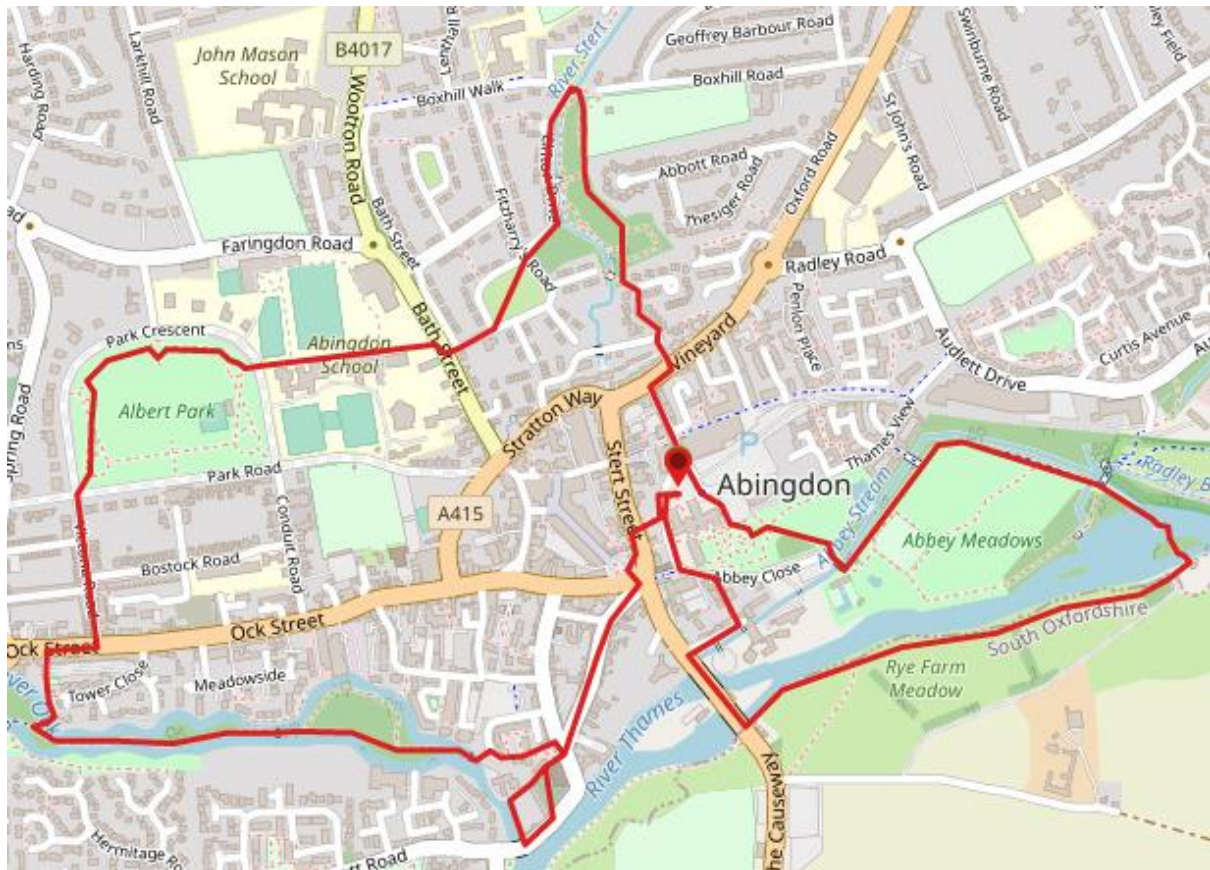


## Round Abingdon 4 miles



Start in the Abbey Close Car Park in front of the Council building. Cross Abbey Close to the right of the Council buildings and go through an alley to Stert Street. Go left, cross at the crossing and go through into Abingdon Market Place.

The County Hall was built between 1678 and 1683 to house the County Assises. It is now a museum. Local dignitaries throw buns from the the roof to the waiting crowds on special occasions.



Walk behind the County Hall and along East St Helens Street. Some ancient houses remain along this street. The oldest house in Abingdon is the Merchant's House, built about 1430. It has medieval wall paintings by the stairs.

At the end of the street is St Helen's Church, built with the profits from the wool trade. Extra aisles were added over the years, making the church wider than it is long.



Cross over to the church and enter the churchyard. Here are three sets of almshouses. They are now owned and maintained by the Abingdon Christ's Hospital charity, and are occupied.

Bear left between the church and the Long Alley Almshouses and leave the churchyard, reaching the riverbank.

Turn right past the Old Anchor Inn. Turn right again just before you reach the bridge over the River Ock. Go ahead to the former mill. On your left is the Ock. The houses on the other side are on stilts because the river is prone to flooding.

Turn right and go back through the churchyard to the road. Turn left, then left again into the Ock Valley Walk. The path leads through woods between two branches of the Ock. Shortly before reaching the road, turn right over a footbridge and continue to Ock Street. Turn right to the pedestrian crossing and cross Ock Street. Go ahead up Victoria Road.

A row of houses on the right belongs to Christ's Hospital. Look for the logo with C and H intertwined with a cross. Go ahead and cross over Park Road. The entrance to Albert Park is on the right. Ahead is Park Crescent which goes in a semicircle round the park. Most of the big houses here belong to Christ's Hospital. They are rented out, and the income is used to help maintain the almshouses and also Albert Park, which belongs to Christ's Hospital.



Follow the path ahead through the park and round to the left. Half way round is a statue of Prince Albert on a tall pillar. Continue round towards Abingdon Bowls Club, and leave the park by an entrance part way along the eastern side of the park.

Cross over Park Crescent and take a footpath ahead, leading through Abingdon School. Abingdon School grew up alongside the Abbey and was mentioned in 1256 in the will of the Abbot of Abingdon. It was re-endowed by John Roysse after the dissolution of the Abbey, and was in Stert Street in the centre of town. It moved to its current location in 1870. It is now an independent day and boarding school. This path does not give the best view of the school.

Cross over Bath Street, go a little to the right and go through the gap in the wall into the Fitzharrys Estate, which was built to house employees at Harwell. Nothing remains of the original house other than a mound in the ground, though some of the mature trees were kept. Go ahead for a short distance, then walk diagonally across the grassy mound. Among the trees ahead is a dip and another mound. This is the site of the original Abingdon Castle. It was occupied by a Norman knight, but belonged to Abingdon Abbey. Continue along to the end of Clifton Drive and take the footpath on to Boxhill Walk.

Turn right and cross over the Stert, the smallest of Abingdon's three rivers. The Stert rises in Sunningwell and makes its way across fields and through modern estates to this point where it enters a narrow belt of woodland. Turn right and follow the path through the woodland towards the centre of Abingdon. Turn left at the end of the path and then right into The Motte. The Stert continues for a short distance then vanishes into a grill and into a culvert under





Stert Street, emerging into the Mill Stream near Abingdon Bridge. The culvert was built in stages over many years. The oldest part probably dates from 1170, and it goes under St Nicolas' Church and nearby buildings. Gradually the culvert was extended until in about 1800 the river was underground for the whole length of Stert Street and beyond.

At the end of The Motte, cross over the main road at the crossing and continue ahead along Abbey Close. The flats on the left were once the site of one of Abingdon's many breweries. Pass Station House on the right, so called because Abingdon Station was once there, and Waitrose on the left, where the railway and goods sidings used to be. The area beyond, now the car park where we started, and Abbey House, offices of the Vale of the White Horse, was once a thriving cattle market. Bear left into the cattle market car park and look for a gate on the right. Pass through the gate.

You are now in the Abbey Gardens. All this area was once part of the Abbey. Later the gardens belonged to Mr Trendell, who enhanced them in the 1880s by building some ruins known as "Trendell's Folly". They are not the remains of the abbey, though the stones are ancient and came from the renovation of local churches. A statue of Queen Victoria



hides in the shrubbery. It was formerly in the market place. Notice tiles set into the grass. These represent the extent of the Abbey Church, which was once a most impressive and huge building. It is thought to have looked rather like Wells Cathedral. After dissolution, the stones were removed for building and now only traces of the underground foundations remain. Continue out of the gardens and across the bridge over the mill stream into Abbey Meadow.

Go left and follow the cycle track along the edge of Abbey Meadow, adjacent to the millstream. Abbey Meadow offers an open air swimming pool (if they open it), a splash pad for children (beware of geese and their residue) and a playground, as well as a large grassy area. At the far end of the Abbey Meadow, the cycle track crosses a bridge and continues on to Radley lakes. The Thames path runs more or less parallel and rather more muddily in the same direction. Instead of crossing the bridge, continue on across the weirs to Abingdon Lock.

Cross the lock, and turn right through the gate into the meadow. We now see the Abbey Meadow again on the other side of the river. Continue on to Abingdon Bridge and go up the steps to the road. (Or go under the bridge and up the slope, but then you have to cross the road.) Walk across the bridge back into Abingdon. On your left is the mooring place of Salters Steamers with Annie's Tea Room. Then comes the Old Gaol. This was probably built by prisoners in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, though not by French prisoners of war as local stories tell. When it was no longer needed as a prison, it was used as a grain store and fell into disrepair. In the 1970s it was renovated, extended, and converted to an arts and sports centre. Later the



buildings were sold to a developer for conversion to flats. The new build flats in the grounds were built first, but conversion of the main building was painfully slow and continues. The promised restaurants and public access to the river frontage have not materialised and neither has the associated affordable housing. The council did not receive the agreed price either. Another of Abingdon's long term grievances is the derelict hotel on the right.

Turn right into Thames Street with the millstream on your right. The mill was straight ahead. The old waterwheel used to be visible from the hotel dining room. On your left are genuine abbey buildings. They were probably a guesthouse, storehouses and a counting house rather than anything grander, but they are all that we have left. Go up the stairs to the left and through a covered way. Emerge into Chequer walk and look back for a better view of the buildings.

The buildings house the Unicorn Theatre and the two doors on the right in the covered way lead to the stage. The door on the left leads to the dressing rooms in the half-timbered house, which is perhaps not the most convenient arrangement for the actors. At the far end of the building is the Long Gallery where theatre patrons can usually get a drink in the interval, though the open side makes it a bit chilly in winter.



At the end of Chequer Walk turn left. On your right is Old Abbey House, which is being converted to a hotel after being unoccupied for some time. It was the home of Trendell who built the ruin in the garden, and after that was used by Abingdon Town Council. On the left is Abbey Hall, something of a white elephant and liability for years, but now in use as a cinema. Continue through the Abbey Gateway with St Nicolas Church on the right. This was the church for the abbey servants and tenants, dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, though it has been extensively restored and remodelled. On the left are the Guildhall buildings, now used by the council. There are arches in the stonework of the church and the Guildhall. These are to take some of the weight off the Stert culvert which runs below. The Stert can be heard through a grating in the ground if there is not too much traffic. To the right is Stert Street, with the Stert in its culvert under the pavement. To the left is Bridge Street. Here the culvert goes under the Guildhall buildings and under the Crown and Thistle and the other buildings. Ahead is the High Street. Go back under the arch and turn left to return to the car park.



Steps – up from river can be avoided by continuing under bridge and up slope then crossing the road. –up through Abbey Buildings can be avoided by continuing up Bridge Street and back to the market place. No stiles that I recall. Not sure about narrow gates.