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### Landscape and Wildlife notes

This route takes you along quiet country roads to Holton village and then through the old parkland of Holton House back to Brookes.



**Point 1** Most of the hedges along the road are hawthorn, with white flowers in May and red berries in autumn, providing food for birds and small mammals.

**Point 2** Stone, probably quarried at Wheatley, is used in roadside walls as well as farm buildings and houses. Several different types of limestone occur in the hills of Shotover and the Oxford Heights, which surround Oxford and extend around Otmoor to the north. In the Jurassic period, about 160 million years ago, an extensive coral reef lay

to the east and west of what is now the Thames near Oxford. This became a type of limestone called Coral Rag and with other deposits, forms the present line of hills.

Some old farm buildings have been converted into houses and offices so conserving vernacular buildings which otherwise would fall into ruin or be replaced with modern structures unsympathetic to the local landscape in materials or design. Other old buildings but are commemorated in the house name. Notice Holton Cottage and the Rectory on the right, near the church; both have old established gardens containing large specimen trees such as redwoods. These must have been planted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as both these buildings and gardens appear on a map of 1886.



**Point 3** Some modern gardens have less grand trees and plants but there is an interesting variety. Look for variegated species with leaves that are partly yellow or white. These forms are mutations from the normal plant, but have been bred for their attractive appearance. Another variation to look out for is contorted hazel or willow, more obvious in winter when the branches are bare. Many garden plants originated from around the world, such as yucca from Mexico, budleia (butterfly bush) from China and hebe from New Zealand. Budleia is unrelated to any British plant, yet remarkably provides food for a range of British butterflies and caterpillars, which usually feed only on native plants species.



**Point 4** As you approach the A40 look up to Shotover to the south-west. The original road to Oxford from London was on this high ground, away from the valley, which would have been very muddy in wet weather. This route can be traced from prehistoric and Roman times to the

18<sup>th</sup> century. A new turnpike road was built through Wheatley in about 1790 when materials and techniques allowed a better surface. The current A40 was built in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century taking the traffic away from Wheatley village.

**Point 6** The site of Holton Manor has been occupied since the Middle Ages, although the village predates the Norman Conquest in 1066. The first building was a castle, followed by a manor house. The present house was built in 1808 for the Biscoe family, but since 1910 has had several owners and uses and is now part of Wheatley Park School. In the Middle Ages, Holton Park was a deer park for hunting, but now is typical ornamental parkland with specimen trees such as oak, plane and beech. The trees grow to their full size and shape in these spacious surroundings. The mown grass gives good feeding grounds for rooks and gulls, particularly in winter, although you may also see them in fields as well along this walk.

