

# Bucklebury

## West Berkshire

Exploring the footpaths and  
bridleways in the parish of  
Bucklebury.



© Jo Andrae

*St Mary's Church, Bucklebury*

**Leave only footprints.  
Take only photographs.**

Footpaths and bridleways are maintained through the Parish Council. Volunteers regularly clear the paths. If you would like to join us please contact the Parish Clerk.

## Bucklebury Parish

Bucklebury is a rural community with many of its historical roots still affecting life today. Thatcham Angling Association fish the same ponds on the Common that fed the monks of Reading Abbey in the 12th century and Roman tile fragments still clatter against the plough. Past residents include John Winchcombe, son of “Jack of Newbury”, and his descendants including the colourful husband of Frances Winchcombe, Lord Bolingbroke. The Palmers of Huntley & Palmer biscuits set up home in Marlston House, now Brockhurst School, at roughly the same time as the Suttons of Sutton’s seeds moved into Bucklebury Place. Of local fame is John Morton who saved Bucklebury Common from enclosure in 1834 and founded the Congregational Chapel.

Christine Storey



The network of paths walked over the centuries to work, school, church and clubs are now designated rights of way for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and give access to the countryside.

The underlying rock is chalk covered with more recent deposits of clay, sands and gravels producing mainly acid soils. The ancient woods such as Bushnells Green, the river Pang and the acid heathland of Bucklebury Common support a diverse wildlife.



# BUCKLEBURY Parish Paths



TO HERMITAGE & M4

TO SHAW & NEWBURY

TO THATCHAM

TO BRADFIELD

TO WOOLHAMPTON



**KEY**

- Footpath.....
- Bridleway.....
- Road used as a Public Path.....
- Byway.....
- Parish Boundary.....
- Public Telephone.....
- Car Park.....
- Post Office.....





## Spring

In spring, Bluebells cover the ground in woodland with occasional patches of Wild Daffodils, or Wood Anemones where the soil is more chalky. The Wild Daffodil can be distinguished from garden escapes or well-meant plantings by their forward pointing petals and more delicate growth. They have been growing in Britain since Roman times, probably many thousands of years before that, and so are considered native.



Wild Daffodils

Another uncommon native flower, the Meadow Saxifrage, flowers in May. It is scattered around the parish but is found in both St Mary's Bucklebury church yard and the cemetery. It is highly likely that ancestors of this clump were gazed on by the congregation in the early 11th century.

Just north of the church was the Foundry, an important employer in the area for centuries until it closed in 1986. Its water wheel, visible from the bridge to Foundry House, was pictured on a test card shown in the early days of BBC television.

## Summer

The Nightjar returns to the Common in May. This nationally scarce bird needs patches of open ground like Bucklebury Common to breed. It sings at 1900 notes per minute producing an unusual motorbike-like churring at night.

The Nightjars are brief summer visitors and by August they are preparing to fly back to Africa, just as the Common turns purple with flowering heather. Lowland heath habitats such as Bucklebury Common are now very scarce. In the UK at least 90% of lowland heath has been lost over the last two centuries. The combination of nutrient poor soils and climate that allowed heathland to develop only exists in north-east Europe and Britain has 20% of Europe's surviving lowland heath.

The heathland plants and animals survive only if the constantly invading scrub is regularly cleared, a job best done by grazing animals. Unlike many commons, Bucklebury Common was not enclosed and commoners still grazed their animals and thus kept the area open well into the 20th century. Many can still remember the distant views from the Common Road when the area was free of trees.

The large mounds near the Common Road are the piles of topsoil bulldozed off the surface to provide level ground for hardstanding for a massive 2nd World War military vehicle depot. Both British and Allied troops camped on the Common prior to the Normandy landings. The brick relics of their hut bases and water supply can still be found.



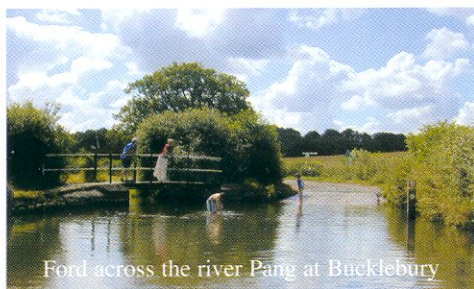
The Avenue in winter

## Autumn

The double lines of mature oaks along The Avenue are one of Bucklebury's landmarks. The first of these oaks are reputed to have been planted in honour of the visit of Queen Elizabeth I. In autumn the natural grass verges are dotted with colourful fungi and some trees have large, yellow, fleshy masses of "Chicken in the Woods", *Laetiporus sulphureus* fruiting high up on their trunks. A rare species of fly living on this fungus was first found in Bucklebury.

Already a large tree by 1902, the Coronation Oak near Vanners has a plaque on it commemorating the coronation of King Edward VII. A service under this tree was part of the festivities which included an oak tree planting at Mulberry Corner and tea at Vanners barn (only the base remains) where the children were presented with mugs. The tradition of presenting children with mugs has continued for many national celebrations including the parish Millennium party in June.

Christine Storey



Ford across the river Pang at Bucklebury

Bucklebury Farm Park can be noisy at this time of year from the bellows of the rutting deer. Wild Roe and Muntjac are more evident now too as the undergrowth dies down. The loud, staccato bark of rutting Muntjac can be heard anytime, anywhere in the parish.

## Winter

Even in winter there is plenty to see on a walk. As vegetation dies down, mosses and liverworts are more visible. Low patches of alien looking grey plants on the Common are likely to be one of the *Cladonia* lichens. Many of these have scarlet tipped branches and are easily seen in late winter.



*Cladonia macilenta*

Most coppicing work is carried out during the winter when there is least disturbance to the wildlife and the trees are easier to cut. Worked coppices are identified by the multitrunked stools. There were woodsmen working the Common and woodlands up to the 1950's producing tools, handles, hurdles and bowls. One eighty year old parishioner remembers her father stripping the bark from a felled oak for use in the tannery at Stanford Dingley. The same woodsman used to cut gorse, or furze. The straight regrowths were cut for parasol and umbrella handles. This trade died out when bamboo handles replaced the furze.

## Please follow the Country Code

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risks of fire
- Fasten all gates
- Keep your dogs under close control
- Keep to public paths across farmland
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone
- Take your litter home
- Help to keep all water clean
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees
- Take special care on country roads
- Make no unnecessary noise

Bucklebury Common is in private ownership. There is a management agreement with West Berkshire Council and the bylaws are displayed at various locations. Please treat this area with due respect and follow the country code.