

Aldwincle, Oundle & the Nene Valley

A short guide for visitors

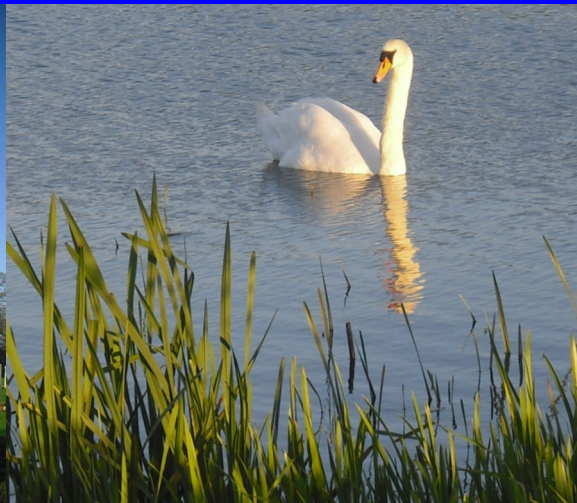
Aldwincle, by the river Nene between Thrapston and Oundle, is set in quintessential English countryside, a mixture of arable, sheep and cattle grazing. For somewhere in the middle of England the countryside is surprisingly unspoilt, thinly-populated and full of small fields, hedgerows and spinneys.

This is a little-known corner of a little-known county, Northamptonshire. But once visited it is not forgotten, and those who know it come back again

and again. There is plenty of peaceful countryside, rivers, lakes, and historic houses, churches and villages to explore, both within walking distance of Aldwincle and further afield.

This short guide is a personal selection of some of the best places to visit - but there is a lot more to discover for yourself. Enjoy!

*Above: Aldwincle from the west. Note the perpendicular tower of Titchmarsh church on the right
Below: Brancey Bridge over the river Nene, All Saints Church, and a swan at Titchmarsh Nature Reserve*



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

The countryside



Fields of wheat to the west of Aldwinle

The terrain of Northamptonshire (often called Northants for short) lacks the drama of the upland moors of Devon and Somerset or the steep chalk downland of Wiltshire or Sussex. Instead the landscape is characterised by flat-topped clay hills and plateaux, lying on top of the limestone which has provided building stone for so many centuries.

These plateaux can be very flat, even fen-like, on top but the land can drop quite steeply at their edge, giving unexpectedly dramatic views across the Nene valley and beyond.

The county's gentle hills have been dubbed "the Cotswolds without the price tag", and while less dramatic they are very similar geologically: Northamptonshire is on the same belt of Jurassic limestone that runs from Dorset, through Bath and the Cotswolds, and on to Lincolnshire.

The countryside has a lot of woodland, particularly to the north and west of Aldwinle: the remains of the former hunting forest of Rockingham. Walk out of the villages and soon you are in deep countryside and it is hard to imagine that large towns like Peterborough and Kettering are only a dozen miles away.

On your doorstep...



St Peter's Church, Lowick



All Saint's Church at dusk

Aldwinle

The name Aldwinle (sometimes Aldwinkle) is thought to derive from the Middle English Winkle meaning nook or corner: the village is situated on a low hillock around which the Nene runs in a bend.

Unusually for a village of its size, Aldwinle has two churches: All Saint's and St Peter's, half a mile to the west down Main Street. Take a walk into the village to see the fine selection of old limestone houses, and St Peter's fine broach spire and some fourteenth-century glass in the windows. There is a small playground in the village - right by the Village Hall and St Peter's - and a

small shop, Watts, at the northern end.

John Dryden, Poet Laureate between 1668 and 1700, was who was born in the house across the road from All Saints church baptised here in 1631. His maternal grandfather, Henry Pickering, had been rector of All Saints.

Several other villages locally have Dryden connections. Although Dryden was born in Aldwinle he was educated at Titchmarsh nearby, where both his mother and father are buried at the church of St Mary the Virgin. There is a memorial to them, and their son, in the church's north transept. Dryden's sister Rose is buried ten miles to the south-east at St Leonard's church, Catworth, a thirteenth-century church with an unusual octagonal spire, and is commemorated in a wall plaque in the south aisle.



Titchmarsh Nature Reserve

Local industry: Leather, Steel and Quarrying

Northamptonshire was until recently a major centre for shoemaking. Many towns from Thrapston southwards expanded rapidly in the late 19th century as the shoe trade prospered: you can still see how the limestone buildings in the town centres are ringed by red-brick Victorian terraces, and ringed again by 20th century developments beyond. In the last twenty years most shoe factories have closed.

Oundle, Stamford and villages like Aldwincle were bypassed by this industrial revolution and saw little expansion in the 19th century, although Oundle did have four breweries. These were only ever served by branch railway lines, with the mainlines going through Kettering and Peterborough instead. As a result they still retain much historic character.

Ten miles north-east of Aldwincle, Corby grew from a small village to a town of 50,000 between the 1930s and 60s, thanks to the discovery of iron ore and the opening of a huge steelworks, many of whose workers came from Scotland. The works closed in the 1980s and the town suffered high unemployment for decades. But Corby today is growing once more with the arrival of new employers in the manufacturing, food and logistics sectors. It has a new arts centre (the Corby Cube) and a new Olympic swimming pool, and a six-screen cinema opened in early 2016.

Limestone is still quarried at Ketton, just over the border in Rutland, but many other quarries and gravel pits - such as those by Aldwincle - have become lakes and nature reserves.



Church of St Michael & All Angels, Wadenhoe

Wadenhoe

A mile to the north of Aldwincle, Wadenhoe is a charming village with a fine 13th century church, whose distinctive Norman tower with a pitched roof - known as a saddleback - with sweeping views over the Nene valley. It has several monuments to the Ward Hunt family, who have been connected to the village for centuries (George Ward Hunt was chancellor of the exchequer under Disraeli in 1868, and First Lord of the Admiralty in 1874-77. At the foot of the hill, with a large garden facing the river, is the Kings Head which is warmly recommended as a place to eat and drink.



Church Street, Wadenhoe

Titchmarsh

Just to the east of Aldwincle, Titchmarsh is another fine village whose church has a Perpendicular tower, considered to be one of the finest in Northamptonshire, on a low hill that dominates this part of the Nene valley. The village has a pub (the Wheatsheaf) and a community shop.

The Titchmarsh skyline



Titchmarsh is less than half an hour's walk from Aldwincle through the lakes, reed banks and streams of the Titchmarsh nature reserve - former gravel workings which are now one of the best places to see wildfowl in the Midlands (www.wildlifebcn.org/reserves/titchmarsh). It is said that parliamentary soldiers camped here just before the Battle of Naseby, and were brought gifts of plum pudding by sympathetic villagers.

On a lake to the south of the nature reserve is a sailing club, and fishing at the Elinor Trout Fishery—see www.elinortf.co.uk.



Titchmarsh Nature Reserve, with the Tower of St Mary's Church beyond

Grand Houses and estates



Boughton House

Northamptonshire has always offered good hunting ground, and fertile farmland, within easy reach of London. For these reasons landed gentry in Northamptonshire were always wealthy and powerful and the county still has a huge number of grand estates and country houses, many of which have been in the same family's hands for centuries: for example the Sackvilles at Drayton, the Probys at Elton, the Brudenells at Deene Park, the Cecils at Burghley and the Dukes of Buccleuch at Boughton.

While most such houses in other parts of England have long since been divided into flats, sold to institutions or the National Trust - or in some cases knocked down - here most of them still remain family-owned, and still stand in extensive parkland. As a result, these great houses are not always as accessible as National Trust and English Heritage Properties. Elton Hall, Boughton, Rockingham and Deene Park are open to the public every summer, but check opening hours before your trip as they can be limited and variable.

Elton Hall



Pilton Church and Manor House

Lyveden New Bield



Lyveden New Bield and its moat

A National Trust property, Lyveden is a remarkable survivor of the Elizabethan age: a hunting lodge begun by Sir Thomas Tresham (whose son Francis Tresham was one of the Gunpowder plotters) to symbolise his Catholic faith, but never completed.

The ruin is virtually unaltered since work stopped on his death in 1605. As well as the lodge itself, you can explore the Elizabethan garden with their spiral mounts, terracing, canals, and orchards. There is a very fine tearoom which serves light meals.

Lyveden is highly recommended as an outing. It's about 15 minutes' drive from Aldwinckle (via Brigstock or Oundle), or an hour's walk through unspoilt, wooded countryside (take Cross Lane, a left turn off Aldwinckle's Main Street, and then follow the footpath through fields and into the woods). A circular path, the Lyveden

Way, connects Lyveden to other villages including Wadenhoe and is well signposted. Lyveden is open seven days a week March-October, and weekends only in Winter. More information at www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lyveden-new-bield.

Thrapston

A small market town two miles south of Aldwinckle, Thrapston is a useful place with a Co-operative supermarket, post office, bank and two hardware stores. The parish



High Street, Thrapston

church, St James, is small for a town of this size. But just inside the west doors is a stone tablet bearing the arms of Sir John Washington (a great, great, great-uncle of George Washington (1732– 1799) the first President of the United States of America) who is buried in the churchyard. Sir John held the manor of Thrapston, lived at Montague

Messing about on the river



The river Nene near Barnwell

The river Nene is navigable all the way from Northampton to the Wash, with Aldwincle lying about halfway between. Although the river has locks and a lot of pleasure boat traffic in summer, it still quietly meanders through fields of wheat and grazing cattle.

Canal boats can be hired from Nene Valley Boats, based at the marina at Oundle (more details at www.nenevalleyboatholidays.com). Canoes can be hired, less expensively, through Canoe 2, at several points on the river including Wadenhoe. More details at www.canoe2.co.uk. The sailing club at Thrapston does not have dinghies for hire, but sailing dinghies can be hired at the Nene Outdoors centre, just outside Peterborough. More details at www.neneoutdoors.co.uk.

There are several great fishing locations, both on the Nene and lakes alongside it: see www.nenevalley.net/adventure/fishing-locations.



*Titchmarsh
Nature
Reserve*

House in Chancery Lane, and was buried at St James' on 18 May 1688. Note how the Washington arms contain three stars and stripes, which a century later became the basis for the American Flag.



There is little else to see in Thrapston, though its high street (which hosts a small market every Tuesday, a monthly Saturday Farmer's market, and an annual Charter Fair every July) has some historic charm, with four pubs along it. There is also a good swimming pool and gym at the Nene Valley Centre on the southern side of town. To the south of the town a fine walk leads to Denford, a village right on the river Nene, though its tranquillity is somewhat marred by the roar of traffic on the A14.

Lowick

Three miles west of Aldwincle (about 40 minutes on foot), Lowick has one of the finest churches in this part of England. Its perpendicular lantern is octagonal, similar to Fotheringhay's. To the south-west of the village is the sprawling Drayton House, formerly home of the Greene family, parts of which date back to the 14th century. The house is open only by appointment (see www.hha.org.uk/Property/231/Drayton-House). You can have a close look at the house from a footpath which runs through its park. The village also has a lively pub, the Snooty Fox.

Just north of Lowick is another small village, Sudborough, an hour's walk from Aldwincle through woodland. Its church is a lot simpler than Lowick's but its pub, the Vane Arms, is a great place for Sunday lunch.

Pilton, Achurch and Stoke Doyle

Three miles to the north of Aldwincle, Pilton is an idyllic small limestone village with a manor house (once owned by the Tresham family, one of whose members was a Gunpowder plotter), rectory and the 12th-century St Mary and All Saints' church set around a green with grazing sheep. Nearby Lilford Hall, a Jacobean mansion once owned by the Powys family, is not open to the public but can be seen across the river. Pilton is about an hour's walk from Aldwincle at a brisk pace (maybe an hour and a half for slower walkers of those with children).



Stoke Doyle Church

Achurch, across the river Nene from Wadenhoe, has a fine church for such a small village. Robert Browne who had previously founded the Brownists, a forerunner of Congregationalism, was its rector between 1591 and 1631. There is a hilly walk northwards towards Pilton on the east bank of the river, passing through a wood called the Linches. The church at Stoke Doyle, just to the north of Pilton, is very different from its gothic and perpendicular neighbours. St Rumbold's is a simple classical church of 1723-25 with a square tower, and fine monuments and box pews inside.

Oundle



Ten minutes' drive from Aldwincle, or a good two hour's walk, Oundle is a charming stone town with a small market every Thursday.

Oundle School, one of the most prestigious independent schools in Britain, dominates much of the town. It dates back to the 15th century when it was founded by William Laxton, a lord mayor of London.



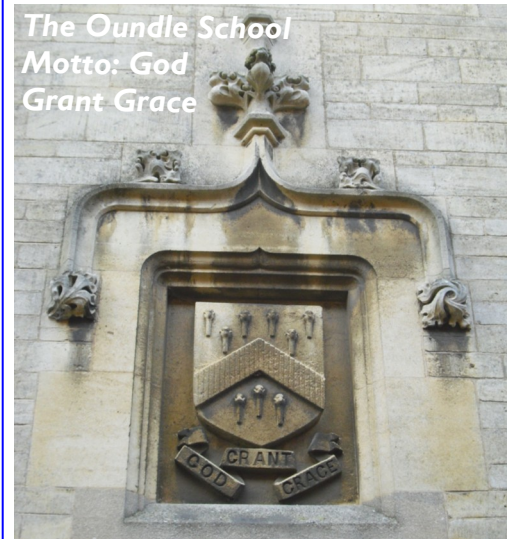
**The Talbot Hotel
and War Memorial**

Oundle has a fine Market Place with a Town Hall (built in the 1820s out of much older stone) in the middle, the Talbot Hotel (parts of which date

back to the 16th century, supposedly using stones from Fotheringhay castle) and St Peter's church, whose fine spire is, at more than 200 feet, the tallest in Northamptonshire. Free concerts, with music provided by Oundle School pupils, take place in the church at 1.15pm on Thursdays in term time. The school's Yarrow Gallery—a Tudor/Art Deco double height space built in the 1920s to commemorate an old boy who died in World War One—has regular exhibitions by local artists.

Livelier attractions include a Classic Car Sprint every December, an Arts Festival every July, the Nene Valley brewery and the Tap and Kitchen restaurant nearby, and a range of antique shops, restaurants and cafes around Market Place and West Street. The school's Stahl Theatre hosts a monthly cinema, and stage shows all the year round. On the Market Place there is a rare survival: an independent bookshop which is

well-stocked with local guides and maps.



Oundle has a sweetness and charm which never quite descend into smugness. The town does not really have any outstanding sights: its charm is its winding streets, its quirky shops, and the way that almost all the town's buildings are built from limestone - whose colour varies between honey and a flinty grey.



North Street, Oundle

Much of the town is not nearly as old as it looks (the school's buildings resemble ancient Oxford colleges but are mostly late Victorian, by Blomfield, and the Chapel dates from the 1920s). But two of the town's main streets—North Street and West Street— have changed little in the last 200 years.



The river Nene near Oundle

In the town's old courthouse is the Oundle Museum. In the good old days all town museums were like this: the emphasis is very much on quantity of exhibits, not the quality of their presentation. Highlights are the model of the railway line that used to pass through

Oundle until the Beeching cuts of the 1960s, and a model of the town's Market Place before the Town Hall was built there in the 1820s.

The only real drawback of Oundle is that it turns its back on the river Nene, which passes around the eastern edge of town in a big meander and can be very hard for a visitor to find. But a riverside path can be joined either on Barnwell Road to the south of town or off new bridge, just to the east, along which a rugged walk along the Nene can be had. It can be very muddy and overgrown but is well worth it. There are steep riverbanks, meadows where cattle graze, and in Barnwell Country Park there's a set of riverside lakes, previously gravel pits.

It's best to drive to Oundle from Aldwincle via the country lane through Stoke Doyle, avoiding the busy A605. There is short-stay parking on street, free 2-hour parking by the town's Co-op on St Osyth's Lane, and a free long-stay car park off East Road nearby.



Oundle Church



St Osyth's Lane, Oundle

Local produce

Oundle Market



This corner of Northamptonshire is still deeply rural, with a lot of local produce to be bought at markets, village shops, or directly from farms. **Strawberries and raspberries** are grown at Lutton, five miles north-west of Aldwinckle, and sold widely when in season. **Titchwinkle Honey** - its name an amalgam of Aldwinckle and Titchmarsh - is a fine clear honey available at most village shops and markets. **Asparagus** is grown in Polebrook and sold at most markets when in season. The best **Farm shops** locally are Dovecote Farm in Newton and New Lodge Farm in Bulwick—both about ten miles from Aldwinckle. Good local **butchers** include Seven Wells in Oundle (which sells beef reared at Stoke Doyle) and H Johnson and Sons in Thrapston.

There is little dairy farming in this part of England so it is not known for its local **cheeses**. Although Stilton cheese originated in the attractive village of Stilton, just off the A1 about 10 miles from Aldwinckle, it is no longer made there. Makers of Stilton in Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire received Protected Geographical Status in 1996, limiting production to these three counties. One of the few cheeses made in Northamptonshire today is Cobblers Nibble - a cross between Wensleydale, Brie and Stilton. Lincolnshire cheeses such as Poacher and the soft Cote Hill can be also bought at local markets and the Stamford Cheese Cellar.

Further afield.... (within half an hour's drive)



The view from the top of
Fotheringhay Castle Mound

Fotheringhay

Fotheringhay is one of the great "what ifs" of English history. Its castle was the birthplace of Richard III and the place of execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1585. Had the Yorkists won the War of the Roses it would probably be one of the great Royal castles of the land today. Instead the castle was completely demolished by James I, and all that stands today is a grass mound (well worth a climb - it has great views across the Nene valley to Oundle and beyond). The church is now a fraction of its original size, but still has a remarkable Perpendicular tower and a well-lit nave. Inside is the tomb of Cicely Neville (mother of Edward IV). The Falcon Inn, a few hundred yards from the church, is a good place for a meal or drink.

crosses. The two other crosses stand at Hardingstone near Northampton, and Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire.

Polebrook and Ashton



Polebrook Church

Geddington

A large village just north of Kettering, and home to the best-preserved of England's three surviving Eleanor crosses. In 1290 Eleanor of Castile, the wife of Edward I and mother of his 14 children, died at Harby in Nottinghamshire. The places where her body rested during the journey south to its tomb in Westminster Abbey were marked by stone

Polebrook, a village just east of Oundle, has a distinctive church whose large transepts mean it is as wide as it is long. It is described by Pevsner as "interesting rather than beautiful" and contains stained glass windows dedicated to two members of the Ferguson family - Colonel J. S. Ferguson, who died in 1885, and his eldest son Major Victor Ferguson,



A field of Linseed in flower near Clopton

who was killed in the fourth Anglo-Ashanti war, in what is now Ghana, in 1896. The large north transept is now a chapel dedicated to American airmen who flew from the village's airfield during WWII. The village's thatched pub, the King's Arms, retains a lot of historic character but also serves a Spanish menu alongside the usual pub grub. Ashton, a hamlet a mile to the north-west, is a model village rebuilt by the Rothschild family, who still own Ashton Wold. an Edwardian mansion nearby. Another thatched pub, the Chequered Skipper, overlooks the village green. Its interiors is a lot more modern than its exterior as it was badly damaged by fire in the 1990s.

Kimbolton

A charming small town about 25 minutes drive from Aldwinckle, Kimbolton is dominated by its castle, in which Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, died in 1536. However, the castle was rebuilt as a

baroque palace in 1707-1720 by Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor for Charles Edward Montagu, later the 1st Duke of Manchester. The castle is now a school and is not normally open to visitors, through it can be clearly seen from the B660, which runs southwards from Kimbolton to Bedford, and a footpath runs through its grounds. The village itself has a wide main street with a number of Inns, shops and cafes.

Little Gidding

Little Gidding is a tiny village whose parish church was home to a religious community, founded by a merchant's son, Nicholas Ferrar, in 1626. The village church which the community used was sacked by Puritans in 1646, and was the inspiration behind the final poem TS Eliot's Four Quartets, *Little Gidding*. The tiny church of St John, rebuilt in 1714 after Ferrar's death, would be well worth a visit even if there was no TS Eliot connection. The narrow church has pews running along the nave

lengthways, like a college chapel, and outside there has lovely views south-westwards across the valley of the Alconbury Brook to Winwick and into Northamptonshire.



Little Gidding Church

In Steeple Gidding, another hamlet only a quarter of a mile away, there is a Churches Conservation Trust church, the 14th-century St Andrew's.



Near Sudborough



Barnwell's bridge

Barnwell

A small village off the A605, two miles south of Oundle, Barnwell has a castle owned by the Duke of Gloucester (though it has been let out since the 1990s). Its grounds are not open to the public but you can see the keep from the road and there are good views of the Manor House attached to the castle from a footpath which runs to the immediate east of the village. The village is centred on a pretty stream, and has a useful shop and Post office and an unpretentious

pub, the Montagu Arms.

Rockingham Forest & Castle

Much of the woodland to the west and north of Aldwinckle can claim to be the remnants of a once great hunting forest- Rockingham, which became a Royal Hunting ground in the reign of William the Conqueror but was mostly sold off by Charles II.

Two big chunks of woodland remain: the woods between Aldwinckle and Lyveden, and further north the woodlands around Fineshade, a historic abbey, which are now managed by the Forestry Commission and are well worth walking around. Fineshade Woods themselves can be a little flat and over-sanitised, with many signposted walks and cycle rides, though there are wilder walks to be had around the former railway line on the southern edge of the woods, and the countryside around

Kings Cliffe further to the south.

Rockingham Castle, just north of Corby, is a former Royal Castle, built by William the Conqueror, which lent its name to the forest. Most of its gatehouse and Hall are Norman medieval. It is often open to the public and is well worth a visit (see www.rockinghamcastle.com)

Other villages that are worth exploring in and around the Forest are King's Cliffe, Bulwick (which has a fine pub, the Queens's head), Deene, and Lower Benefield (whose fine Victorian church spire is almost as



West Street, King's Cliffe



Near Slipton

grand as Oundle's).

Glaphorn, Tansor, Cotterstock & Southwick

These four villages north of Oundle all have a quiet charm. Cotterstock, right by the river Nene, has an important church with a Decorated chancel and fine windows. Glaphorn, a larger village closer to Oundle, has a church with an airy, whitewashed interior and thirteenth-century wall



Southwick Church and its Roubiliac monument (right)

paintings. Southwick's small church is, unexpectedly, home to a monument



The Conker Championships at Southwick

of 1758 by the French Rococo sculptor Roubiliac, dedicated to George Lynn, a local landowner. The box-like nave and chancel of the church are also eighteenth century, but the windows are Victorian. Nearby is the Shuckburgh Arms, a simple village pub. Each October the World Conker Championships are held in a field alongside.

Tansor probably has the most interesting church of the lot, St Mary's, much of it 11th century.

The countryside here rises gently away from the river Nene, and there are fine views towards Oundle from

the road between Southwick and Glaphorn, and from the footpath that passes near to Biggin Hall to the south-west of Glaphorn.

Clopton & Thurning

A nondescript village on a hill north-east of Aldwinckle, Clopton has modern houses on one side of the street and an Edwardian Hall - hidden by trees and inaccessible - on the other. Clopton has a very distinctive Victorian church at its eastern edge, whose saddleback tower is similar to the medieval one at Wadenhoe. South and west of Clopton there are fine views towards Aldwinckle and Titchmarsh.



Clopton Church

Thurning, three miles to the north of Clopton, holds a fantastic annual Feast, with live music, a fun fair and food and beer tents, every July.



Maiden Lane, Stamford

Stamford

A bustling town on the river Welland, Stamford is a good half an hour's drive from Aldwinckle but is well worth the trip. It is a jewel of a town, similar to Oundle with its Limestone buildings but all on a much larger scale. Dubbed by Pevsner "the finest stone town in England", it was very prosperous in the middle ages, thanks to the wool trade and its location on the Great North Road, and by the 13th century was one of the ten largest towns in England. Because it was largely owned by the Burghley estate Stamford was left untouched by the industrial revolution.

Today it has two theatres, a pedestrianised centre with a fine range of shops and places to eat and drink, and five medieval churches. Particularly worth visiting are St Mary's (whose spire dominates the town) and two perpendicular churches: St John's and St Martin's, which has fine tombs of members of the Cecil family of Burghley (see below). There are great walks on the water meadows by the river Welland.

The town hosts a big market every Friday and an annual Georgian Festival every September with converts, events and a parade through the streets.

Burghley

Believe the hype: Burghley, just east of Stamford, is indeed "England's



Burghley House

greatest Elizabethan House" as its marketing material says. Since the 1560s it's been home to the powerful Cecil family: William Cecil, first Baron Burghley, was Queen Elizabeth I's chief advisor and Lord High Treasurer.

There is something for everyone here. You can if you wish, park in the

large Park and walk around for free (it's open all year round from 8am to 8pm or dusk if earlier). If you're making a day of it, you should pay to go into the house and gardens, which have water fountains which children love playing in. The interior of Burghley House is worth a visit to see its fine art, its kitchens, and spectacular 18th-century painted rooms by Verrio.

There is a smart Orangery restaurant, a less formal garden cafe and a host of stalls. A small hill just to the west of the House offers a great view of the spires of Stamford. The park is home to the world-famous Horse trials every September, and hold concerts, car shows and film festivals at other times of year. More details at www.burghley.co.uk.



The view of Stamford from Burghley Park



Near Ashton, just east of Oundle

Elton Hall

Home to the Proby family since 1660, Elton Hall is a rambling country house set in spectacular gardens. Its architecture represents all styles from late medieval to Victorian. Much of the exterior is Gothic, but there are fine Victorian neo-classical interiors by Henry Ashton and many paintings by Joshua Reynolds and other old masters. It is open to the public a couple of days a week in summer and also on bank holiday weekends.

Elton can be found just off the A605, five miles north of Oundle and less than twenty minutes' drive from Aldwinckle. The village of Elton has two pubs, a church with a Burne-Jones window and various Proby monuments, and a watermill.

Buckworth

All Saints church, first mentioned in the Domesday survey in 1086, is in a great hilltop position in the centre of

this small village. The oldest parts of this rubble and stone church are 12th Century, but its mostly 13th and 14th century, including the remarkably ornate spire, described as "splendid" by Pevsner. The church is normally unlocked on Saturday mornings, and



Buckworth Church

is well worth a visit even if locked for the fine views from its churchyard.

Apethorpe

Built around three courtyards lying 120 feet wide by 240 feet long, Apethorpe is acknowledged as one of the finest Jacobean houses in England, and was the main seat of the Fane family, Earls of Westmorland. The hall—now renamed Apethorpe Palace—is privately owned but has recently been restored by English heritage and is open to guided tours in July and August.

St Leonard's Church nearby is mostly Perpendicular but has a chapel of 1621. There is a monument to Sir Anthony Mildmay, eldest son of Sir Walter Mildmay who served as Chancellor of the Exchequer to Queen Elizabeth I and founded Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

Apethorpe itself is a beautiful village a few miles north of Oundle, with a quaint Edwardian thatched pub, the Kings Head.

Higham Ferrers

Nowadays a northern extension of the industrial town of Rushden, Higham Ferrers has unattractive outskirts but an unexpected wealth of historic buildings in its centre: this is an ancient place which used to be at an important crossroads.



St Mary's Church has a fine West Door with intricate carving as well as a fine crotched spire, a double nave and a rood screen by Sir Ninian Comper. The Market Square contains a good set of limestone buildings including the Town Hall which was rebuilt in 1808 to replace a much earlier edifice.

Nearby, Chichele College was founded by Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1422 as a college for secular canons, and later an inn and then a farm. Only ruins survive today apart from a hall now used for art exhibitions, managed by English Heritage. Adjoining the churchyard is a Bede House, almshouses for 12 men over 50 years old to live "in close company", founded by Chichele at the same time as his College at Higham Ferrers,

Washingley

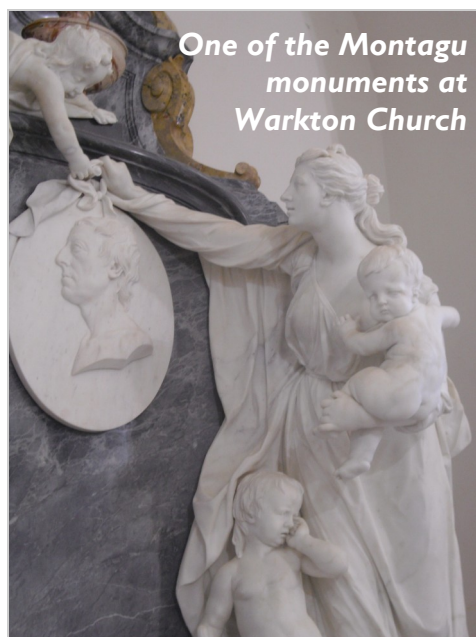
A deserted Medieval village on a country lane towards Peterborough Washingley used to be a village with a moated castle, fishpond, mound, motte and bailey. Its church is thought to have fallen into decay by 1534, and the village was abandoned

about the same time. There's not a great deal to see today, but the outlines of the old buildings and moats can still be seen on a walk through the peaceful fields with a bit of imagination.

Boughton House & Warkton

Sometimes dubbed 'the English Versailles' because of its grandeur and French mansard roof, Boughton is a colossal house which is still home to the Duke of Buccleuch. It is normally only open to the public in August but events are sometimes held there at other times of the year.

Even if you can't get inside the House and its park, you can get a taste of its grandeur at the church at nearby Warkton. The chancel was rebuilt in about 1749 as the mausoleum of the Duke of Montagu's family, and has elaborate monuments by Roubiliac to the Duke of Montagu (1752), and of his wife Mary (1753). Alongside



are later monuments ones to Mary, 3rd Duchess of Montagu (designed in 1775, by Robert Adam, a Scottish architect, and Pieter Mathias van Gelder, a Dutch sculptor) and Elizabeth Montagu (who died in

1827).

They are considered among the best monuments in the country of this period and have just been extensively restored. The church is normally locked but can be opened by appointment. Boughton and Warkton are about fifteen minutes drive from Aldwinckle, en route to Kettering. More details at www.boughtonhouse.co.uk.

Hamerton Zoo Park

Just over the border in Cambridgeshire, twenty minutes drive from Aldwinckle, Hamerton's collection of animals make a diverting afternoon excursion. Open since 1990, it's not as big as city Zoos, but the collection of Cheetahs and Bengal Tigers is impressive. The cafe there is very simple so it may be best to eat at a pub in Old Westcon, Titchmarsh or Great Gidding.

Helpston, Glinton and Barnack

Although just north of Peterborough and much expanded with modern development, these three villages nevertheless retain a lot of historic character. Barnack's church is one of the most important in this part of England, with an 11th-century





Drayton House, near Lowick

tower. Glington and Helpston are both associated with the peasant-poet John Clare. Clare was born and buried in Helpston - whose church has a distinctive octagonal tower of 1864 - and is commemorated by a simple grave in the churchyard and a simple monument on the green nearby. Clare was dedicated in the vestry of the church at Glington, whose tall needle spire has a curious bulged shape.

Stanwick Lakes

Similar to the Titchmarsh nature reserves, and a good excursion for children who want a less improvised day out than a walk around Titchmarsh's lakes, Stanwick lakes are twenty minutes' drive to the south of Aldwinckle, just off the A45. They consist of a chain of old gravel workings which are now a nature reserve and lakes used for boating, with cycle routes around them. There is a visitor centre, heritage trail, cafe, playground and assault course. More information at

www.stanwicklakes.org.uk.

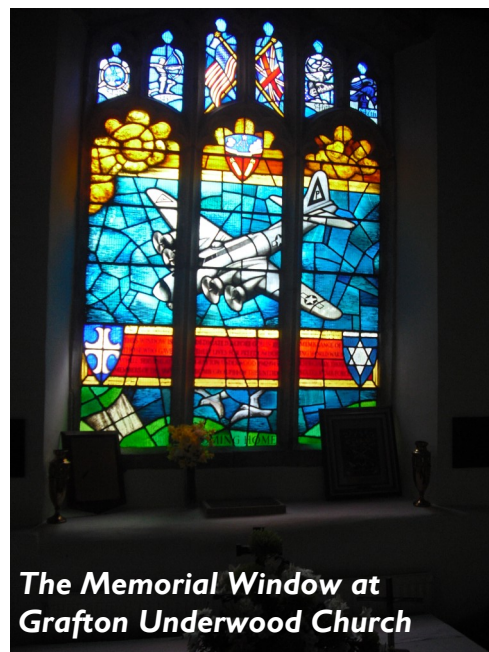
Winwick

A small village near Hamerton, juts over the border in Cambridgeshire. Winwick has a fine 12th-century church, which is normally locked but a keyholder lives nearby. Much of the village was destroyed by fire in 1910, though it retains a lot of character and there are pleasant walks nearby. The village should not be confused with another Winwick, to the north of Northampton, where the poet Thomas Mallory used to live.

Grafton Underwood

A tiny stone village, whose main street runs parallel with a stream, between Thrapston and Kettering. During WWII there used to be a USAF air base just outside the village, which is commemorated by a

fine stained glass window in the church.



The Memorial Window at Grafton Underwood Church

Warmington

Another fine Northamptonshire village (about fifteen minutes from Aldwinckle) with a huge church that points to previous wealth. Proof

that a church can be interesting without being necessarily beautiful, St Mary's was built over a relatively short period between 1180 and 1280, and was little changed by its Victorian restoration.

So if you are looking for an intact Early English village church locally, there is probably no finer example. The church has a distinctively squat spire with very high, prominent lucernes. It is normally unlocked, so go inside to see the fine, and rare, timber barrel vaulting in the roof. The ground rises sharply to the south and east of Warmington, and there are fine views across the Nene valley to Oundle and Fotheringhay from the top of the hill.

Warmington:
admire the barrel vaulting and the squat spire



Leighton Bromswold

Just over the border in Cambridgeshire, Leighton Bromswold has an unusual hilltop church, 17th century tower attached to a medieval nave. In the 1620s its rector was the poet George Herbert. The suffix Bromswold is derived from Brunewald - an ancient forest that used to straddle the Northants/Huntingdonshire border.

Welland Valley

Set in a more dramatic valley than that of the Nene, the Welland runs along the border of Northants and

Rutland. Among many pretty limestone villages to explore are Wakerley, Harrowden, Easton-on-the-Hill and Collyweston (which gives its name to the distinctive roof tiles found across Northants and Rutland) and Harringworth with its gigantic railway viaduct. There are fine walks, and great views across the valley into Rutland, especially along the ridge between Gretton and Rockingham.

The Welland Valley, near Gretton



Conington

A Churches Conservation trust church with a remarkable interior and fine Perpendicular windows (sadly some of the are currently boarded up awaiting restoration). Normally locked, though two keyholders live in the village.

Conington Church



Denton

A ruined church in the middle of this tiny village just over the border in Cambridgeshire, which fell into disrepair in the 1960s and is now without its roof. The ruins are open, have recently been cleared of weeds and are occasionally used for outdoor services. It makes an

atmospheric, off-the-beaten track excursion. More details at www.denton-village.org.uk/.

Denton Church: a ruin now used once again for worship



Morborne

A historic red-brick hamlet, an interesting contrast to the limestone villages of Northamptonshire. The church has a tower which lists to the east by a few degrees. Just west of the village is a huge transmitter on a hill that marks the Cambridgeshire/Northants border.



Morborne Church

Twywell Hills & Dales

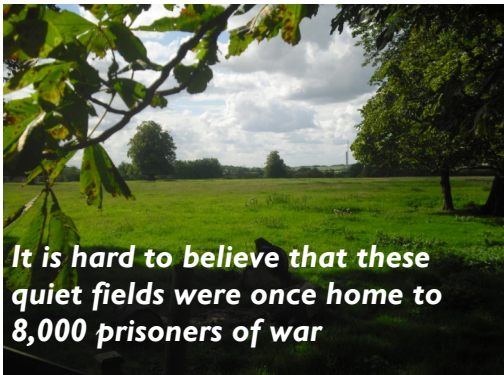
A nature reserve in an old limestone quarry, with lots of ravines and pits which are great for walking or

mountain biking. Accessed off junction 11 of the A14, a 10-minute drive from Aldwincle.

Norman Cross

Nowadays just a small hamlet just off the A1. But a modest limestone column with a French eagle on top by the slip road from the A1 gives the game away: during the Napoleonic wars Norman Cross was home to Britain's first purpose-built Prisoner of war camp, in service 1797-1814. At its height the camp had 8,000 prisoners, mostly French but also Dutch, Spanish, Danish, Italian, and some black prisoners from French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean.

The camp was carefully located to be within easy reach of the east coast (where most prisoners landed and would be brought to Norman Cross by the River Nene), sufficiently inland and remote to make escape difficult, but also near the Great North Road and other transport routes. It was designed with a central watchtower so it could be maintained with only a skeleton garrison, in case soldiers had to be diverted to quell a French invasion.



It is hard to believe that these quiet fields were once home to 8,000 prisoners of war

It seems that the regime was quite humane: prisoners had their own church theatre and hospital, gambling was tolerated and many inmates made ornaments out of wicker and animal bone which they were even allowed to sell at a weekly market held by the camp gates. French soldiers are said to have reported that the food at the camp was better than the rations they had back home. However, careless disposal of sewage

near the camp's wells led to a major fever outbreak, which claimed many hundreds of lives - in the winter of 1800-1801 200 prisoners were dying a month. After the end of the Napoleonic wars the prisoners were repatriated and the site was auctioned off by the Admiralty in 1816. Almost all the buildings were demolished soon after.

Nowadays the site is mostly fields, with no rights of way. However, on the southern edge of the site, just off the A15, is the Norman Cross art gallery, in an original straw barn next door to the Governor's house. The gallery contains a small exhibition about the camp, and there is a much larger one in Peterborough Museum.



The Memorial



The former Governor's House



A Napoleonic re-enactment at Norman Cross

Kettering

A large town 20 minutes' drive from Aldwincle, Kettering has more to offer than its railway station, supermarkets and out-of-town

Odeon cinema. The Museum and the East Art Gallery (named after Sir Alfred East, whose painting collection was given to the Borough of Kettering in 1910) are surprisingly large for a provincial town like Kettering. They adjoin a fine Edwardian public library by the same architect, Gotch, and the town's medieval church. Wicksteed Park, on the southern edge of town, is one of the world's oldest purpose-built theme parks: its roller coasters, boating lake and other rides have been drawing the crowds since 1913. See www.wicksteedpark.org.

Peterborough

Don't be put off by the industrial estates and roundabouts that girdle the place: Peterborough is, at heart, an ancient cathedral city, albeit much expanded since it was designated as a New Town in the 1950s. Its church was only elevated to cathedral status by Henry VIII - whose first wife Catherine of Aragon is buried here - in 1541, but it is one of the finest, and least-known, medieval cathedrals in the land. The nearby Market Place has recently been well paved, with the Old Guildhall of 1671 in its centre and many good restaurants around its edge. Peterborough's most historic streets are to the south and west of the Market Place, and to the north is the modern Queensgate Shopping Centre with a large John Lewis and Marks and Spencer, which blends in to the city better than many other centre of its kind. Just to the south of the Market Place, on Bridge Street, is a fine 1930s Town Hall of brick and limestone in the Baroque style.

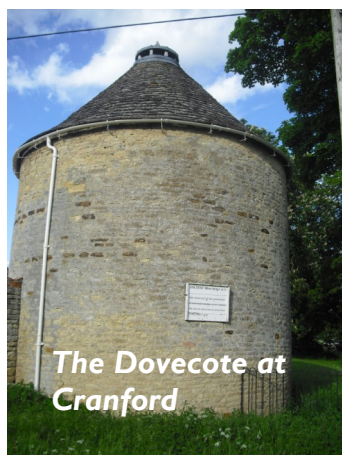
Peterborough has all the large shops, cinemas and parks that any visitor could possibly need. The city's station offers very good connections: London and York are both about an hour away, and there are also direct trains to Birmingham, Leicester, Lincoln and Norwich. The historic Nene Valley Railway runs from the city centre to Wansford.



A stream near Upper Benefield

Cranford

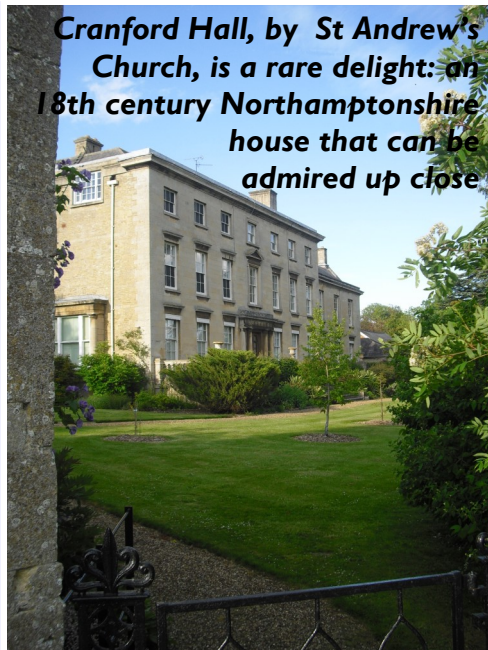
Cranford, five miles to the west of Aldwinckle, is really two adjacent villages - Cranford St John and Cranford St Andrew - of which the latter has the finest church, now looked after by the Churches Conservation Trust. Overlooking a large wildflower meadow, St Andrew's is a very simple eleventh and twelfth century church with box pews and a fine monument to Sir William Robinson, and a circular dovecote nearby. Alongside is a



The Dovecote at Cranford

grand Georgian house, Cranford Hall, set in private grounds but easily visible from a footpath just to the north of the village.

Cranford Hall, by St Andrew's Church, is a rare delight: an 18th century Northamptonshire house that can be admired up close



Wansford

Wansford is today a quiet village just off the A1 today, but before it was bypassed it was, for centuries, an important staging post on the Great North Road. It is still recognisable as a seventeenth century coaching town, all in limestone with a wide main

street with fine seventeenth century Haycock Hotel, two other inns nearby, and an ancient narrow bridge over the river Nene.

Sometimes known as Wansford-in-England, because of a local folk tale of a man who fell asleep on a hayrick and woke up to find himself floating down the River Nene. He asked a passer-by on the riverbank where he was, and upon being told "Wansford", asked, "Wansford in England?".

Papley and Lutton

Now just a small cluster of farms and cottages north of Lutton, Papley was a substantial village in medieval times which was abandoned in the 16th century. A footpath passes through the site and the outline of the village street and a moated house can be seen next to a pond. There are sweeping views on the walk eastwards towards Morborne.



Near Upper Benefield

Lutton itself has little of interest, though the church contains a memorial to the 19 USAF aircrew who died when their two Flying Fortress bombers, from the former airfield at Polebrook, collided in February 1945 just to the south of the church.

Old Weston and Molesworth

Another Cambridgeshire village just over the border, Old Weston's church is quite separate from the village. It has a remarkably unspoilt interior with three medieval wall paintings.

Molesworth village has some fine half-timbered houses and a rambling village church with a medieval painting of St Christopher on the north wall. A few miles to the north is RAF Molesworth, a WW2 airfield that became the focus of peace protests in the 1980s when it housed American Cruise Missiles. The runways were later removed and the site is now a communications centre for the RAF and the USAF. As the site is still in military use there's no public access to it, but footpaths pass close by from which you can ponder the large concrete silos behind the barbed wire.

Maps and Further Reading

For anyone wanting to explore the area on foot with a **paper map**, the Ordnance Survey's Explorer Sheet 224 (Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough) covers many of the places listed in this guide and is a must. For explorations on the east side of the river Nene Sheet 227 (Peterborough) and/or Sheet 225 (Huntingdon and St Ives) will be needed.

There are several good **online guides** to the area. Guides, walks and up to date information on where to eat, drink and stay can be found at www.nenevalley.net. Goings on in Oundle are listed at www.oundle.info, and for Stamford go to www.southwestlincs.com/visit-stamford. For those wanting to know more about the history of the Nene Valley from Aldwincle northwards, there is an outstanding guide to download at www.wadenhoehistorygroup.org.

Really good **guidebooks** to Northants are a bit thin on the ground as the area is not visited as

much as it deserves, but there are plenty to browse at the bookshop on the Market Place in Oundle. One of the better ones, although now a little dated, is Ian Bishop's *Exploring Oundle and Surrounding Villages*, published back in 1995.

Anyone wanting to learn more about local **architecture** should obtain a copy of the Pevsner Guide to Northamptonshire, first published in 1961 and updated many times since. Although part of Stamford was historically part of Northants, today it all comes under the Lincolnshire volume, and places over the border in Cambridgeshire are recorded in the Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Peterborough volume (some Pevsner guides still stick to old county boundaries).

To learn more about the local flora and fauna, an excellent **Wildlife guide** can be bought from the Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs and Northants at www.wildlifebcn.org.



The Tower of the Church of St Mary and All Saints, Fotheringhay