

Walk Number 2

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Heath to Heath

A circular walk between Overton and Cuddington Heaths starting from Malpas Cross, and taking in some peaceful Cheshire countryside.

You should allow about 1 ½ – 2 hours for this walk which will lead you through some of the fields surrounding Malpas.

The features of interest on this trail are numbered on the map.

The narrative will attempt to illustrate many of the changes that have taken place and the evidence for these which survive in the landscape.

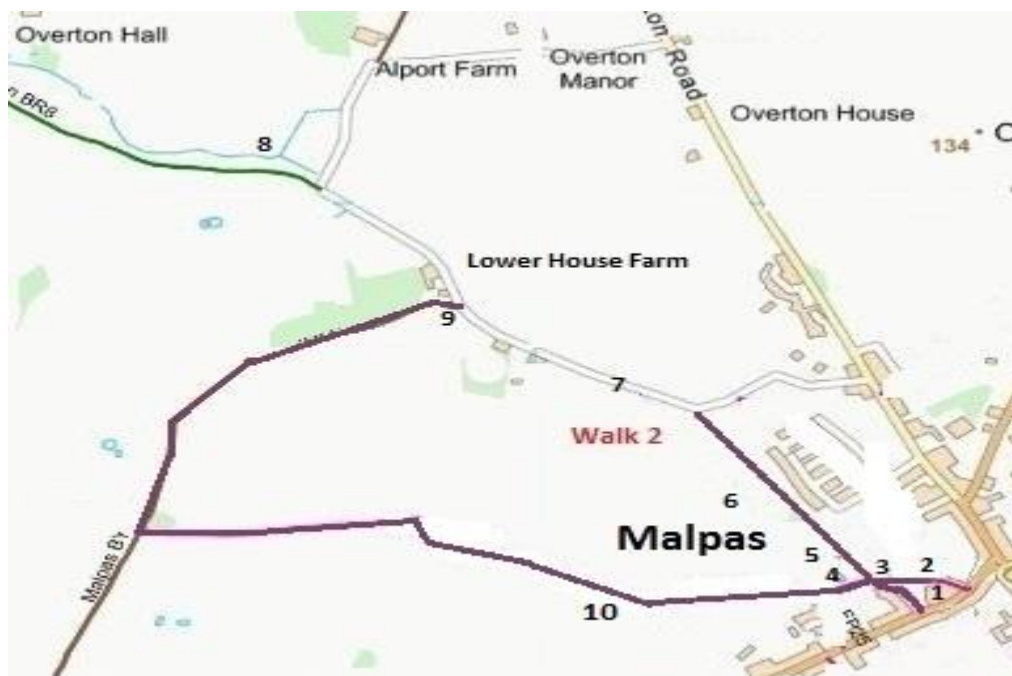
The walk requires stout footwear and involves climbing stiles. The natural history is noted.

[Download the pdf file for further clarity](#)

All access points are provided by kissing gates.

Remember to wear strong shoes.

The best time to take this walk is on a sunny afternoon when the light is good for taking photos.



A map of Overton Heath showing the area footpaths and bridleway

The trail starts at the cross (1), in the centre of town.

Leaving the Cross, walk up Church Street to St. Oswald's Church and follow the path through the Churchyard.

Take a look around the church (2) and its gravestones.



A picture of the Cholmondeley Tomb in St Oswald's Church

Look out for inscriptions to past church wardens within the churchyard walls or take a further detour behind the church to view Castle Hill mound.

Once you leave the churchyard, turn right along the tarmac drive. Keep to the left track past the disused Parish Hall. The way is marked by a wooden fingerpost.

The Parish Hall **(3)**, now derelict was converted to a meeting hall by the Reverend Guy Hephher in the 20th century.

It was originally the stables for the Higher Rectory.

Malpas Parish is unusual in having had, until the 19th century, two rectors.

In the 12th century, Baron Robert Fitzhugh had no male heirs, so the barony of Malpas, with the right to appoint a rector, was divided between his two daughters.

Turn left by the entrance to the Rectory and follow the old Sandstone Way, encrusted with mosses and lichens to the stile which will take you into the group of fields known as the Ox Heyes.

Pass through a kissing gate, turn right and follow the top edge of the field.

(4) The Ox Heys meaning a hedged enclosure for Oxen, and is a reminder of the time when the plough teams of oxen used on heavy clay lands until early in the 20th century, would have been put out to pasture here.

(5) Behind the hedge on your right is The Old or Higher Rectory.

Originally one of the two Malpas rectories, it is famed as the birthplace in 1783 of Reginald Heber, who was one of the first Anglican hymn writers and for the last two and a half years of his life served in India as the second Bishop of Calcutta (a brass plate on an internal door commemorates the fact that he was born in the top room of the middle of the house – the one with the squat tower).

The copse at the end of the Rectory garden is the site of an active and closely watched badger sett. As well as badgers it has been the home at various times to foxes, rabbits and the Rectory cat.

The area further along the Ox Heys (6) was the town's recreation ground and at one point it even had a bandstand.

Malpas celebrations for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 were held when a tea party and sports events took place for all the towns' people.



A winter scene of a Sycamore Tree on the Ox Heys – sadly now felled.

Take a moment to pause here and enjoy the views of the Clwydian Hills including the Moel Famau peak.

The line of twelve sycamores trees were planted to symbolise the 12 apostles. The largest tree, now just a stump due to vandalism, used to accommodate a small "cave" within its trunk.



The remains of one of the 12 Apostle Trees on the Ox Heys footpath

Passing diagonally across the field is the line of the aqueduct from Lake Vyrnwy in North Wales to Liverpool.

The route was originally constructed in the 1880s by the old Liverpool Corporation Waterworks, and in the following decade Malpas was connected to line via a new reservoir constructed at the Oathills. This replaced the former water supply from the reservoir in the Castle Hill.

During drought conditions, when the grass on the Ox Heyes becomes parched, the lines of the three aqueduct pipes show up clearly as "field marks" on the surface.

Pass through 2 kissing gates and into the deep cutting of Overton Lane (7).

Known locally as Love Lane, this sunken and shaded way marks the boundary between the ancient townships of Overton and Malpas.

It could well have existed as the parish boundary marker from before the Norman Conquest up until 2019, when Overton became part of the Malpas Parish.

Turn left and follow the lane downhill.

Look out for the sandstone wall which was the pigsty of Top House Farm

If you want a diversion, continue down along the lane to the rear of Overton Hall, **(8)** where you may see earthworks of a deserted medieval settlement. Overton Hall is private property, please respect this.

Turn left at the fingerpost onto the "Bishop Bennet" Byway to follow an ancient drover road **(9)** which links Overton and Cuddington Heaths.

You will now pass through what remains of what was once a much larger heath land. Overton Common is gradually changing over time.

In summer, the lower half of the common is covered by fern, but as the land is no longer used to graze livestock, young trees, bushes, wildflowers, and many species of plants flourish. However, this provides a safe haven for the Malpas wildlife.

Journeying along the drover's road provides a sanctuary and a welcome contrast from the urban development, now a yearly feature of the town.

Take a short respite to listen for the song of robins and wrens, view the swallows and swifts swooping low above the wheat and barley, scooping insects as they go.

If you're lucky, you'll hear the screech of a Kestrel or the whistling call of a buzzard, gliding over the open country in search of their prey.

Food is plentiful along this track, not only for the many species of mammals and birds that live here, but the blackberries and hazelnuts can be enjoyed by humankind too.

Where the footpath crosses the drover road, turn left and follow the footpath back to Malpas.



A picture of a Kissing Gate on the Bishop Bennet Way

Following the footpath, you will cross the football pitches at the Malpas Sports club.



A view of the Malpas Sports Club from the Ox Heys footpath

Published by Chris Whitehurst
December 2025