

The logo for 'RIDE + STRIDE for Churches 2026' features the words 'RIDE + STRIDE' in large, bold, orange letters. Above the letters are decorative elements: a blue chain-link fence on the left and blue bunting flags on the right. Below 'RIDE + STRIDE' is a green rectangular box containing the text 'for Churches' in white, followed by '2026' in large green letters.

RIDE + STRIDE for Churches 2026

RIDE & STRIDE 2025:

Last year, members of our congregation Jo A and Jo B once again rode and strode far and wide, making their way from Goring to Abingdon and back. The first leg began with them both popping into 'base camp' at [St Thomas of Canterbury](#) in Goring. A little time spent lingering and chatting, Jo B then set off, dipping in briefly to St Mary's Streatley to say hello to the welcome party before jogging on to [St John the Baptist](#), Moulsoford. Whilst the church there was open and being cleaned (co-incidentally by a friend), it wasn't officially involved in R&S but should be. There has been a church on that site in Moulsoford since the early 1100s, but this quaint little country church was reconstructed in 1847 by no less than famous Victorian architect [George Gilbert Scott](#) who gave us St Pancras Station and the Albert Memorial, as well as being chief architect of Westminster Abbey for 5 years. Details noted, Jo B then carried on to the much larger and even older church of [St Mary](#), Cholsey. Astonishingly, this church was founded in approximately 986 by King Ethelred the Unready. It was an Abbey church and it retains its cruciform shape. The church stands a little way outside of the village, across the hump-back bridge and the chalk stream channels, marooned centuries ago when the village centre moved due to plague. The space inside is vast and ride and striders were welcomed with refreshments by locals dressed as characters from the many novels of Agatha Christie, who is buried in the church yard here. Onwards then to the next village; as Jo B slogged up Church Hill, she was greeted with a cheery wave from a fellow Ride and Stride sticker wearing free-wheeling Bishop heading downhill and into the gravel-bed flat lands that characterise this big-sky part of the Thames valley.

[St John the Baptist](#) at South Moreton is marked on the OS map with a spire, which indeed it does have but which is not visible from the main road through South Moreton and even enlisting the help of a local dropping flowers at the pub for a wedding reception later didn't help. An exploratory short cut through a public footpath that led to – of course – Church Lane came good and a well-deserved mini-flapjack was happily munched in conversation with a very welcoming party that had set up a drinks and refreshment station outside the church. Henry P from our congregation also stopped by, before cycling off to visit all the Churches on the way to Watlington – an enormous achievement where he visited **21 different churches** - on what turned out to be a day of all seasons in a day.

The sky was blue, and the hidden gems of Didcot beckoned - which is not a sentence I had ever imagined saying! Running through North Moreton and popping out at the beginning (or end if you begin in Oxford) of the [Hanson Way](#) (a national cycle route), the next stop was [Didcot Methodist Church](#) – which was shut! A brief interval in their opening

and bad timing on our part, we missed seeing inside this late Victorian large Methodist-hall standard. Jo A pushed on to find more churches, whilst Jo B turned instead to [St Peter](#), a short ride/stride away. This church has historic links to GWR, which it still maintains although Didcot is far less of a railway town than it once was. It is an open-plan mid-1970s church of some beauty and stillness, and a long conversation about the growth of Didcot confirmed the happy welcome that is offered there. Pushing on to the Church Jo B had wanted to visit for a while, she headed to [All Saints](#), Didcot.

This Church seems hidden in the old village of Didcot, surrounded by arcane cottages and the distinctive Manor and barn, yet it sits at the highest point of the ridge that runs through Didcot with the grand address of 1 Roman Place. A 1200-year-old yew tree watches the churchyard and was still in its infancy when the current church was erected in 1160. It has seen local troops muster in the civil war between Queen Matilda and King Stephen, the Montford rebellion and the Gunpowder Plot, all of which have a connection to this Church. It is a confection of styles with more added every few centuries from its Saxon foundations, late Medieval chancel and early Tudor bells to its Victorian wood-shingled tower and the unusual carved stone figure of an abbot in full vestments wearing a mitre, it has been central to its community and surroundings for more than 860 years.

Onwards then from Didcot. The heavens darkened; the sky became leaden as Jo B ran past the power station ‘the back way’ to Sutton Courtney and when the thunder rolled, the rain came down in buckets. A very soggy runner entered [All Saints](#), with profuse apologies about dripping in the porch being waved away with the helpful instruction that she could dry her kit under the hand-dryer in the loos. Wet lycra will not easily be removed, so positioning herself leg by leg, arm by arm and shoulder by shoulder under the dryer, Jo B dried herself sufficiently to no longer present a skid-hazard to anyone who followed her. A strong hot cuppa and a turn to the graves of Asquith and Eric Arthur Blair – or George Orwell as the prescient writer is better known - and the skies had stopped leaking sufficiently to carry onward to Abingdon.

Culham’s [St Paul](#) is another church steeped in history, having been an outlier church of the Abbey at Abingdon in Medieval times. Imagine the scene as Humphrey Stafford and his brother Thomas, Plantagenet loyalist who started a failed rebellion against Henry VII in 1486, fled for their lives in a mile-dash across the water meadows from Abingdon and sought sanctuary across the river in Culham. Charged with treason, the Staffords were hauled out of the church and taken to London to be tried, where they claimed sanctuary had been broken on their removal from inside St Paul’s at Culham, and the absolute right to be returned to this place of sanctuary. The Judges of the Kings Bench disagreed and determined that whilst the Church could offer sanctuary against charges of theft and even murder, it could not provide sanctuary against treason – the Monarch being appointed by Divine Right – and Humphrey and Thomas Stafford were hanged. The case changed English common law and could even be said to foreshadow the far greater shift in the power of the Church a mere generation later. The current church is a quaint Georgian re-build, enlarged to serve what was once a busy village; painted inside by the

Victorians in reds, blue and gold, it is a chapel in need of love and a community. The guide who showed me round told me she had been married in the church and both of her daughters were baptised there. The tradition was not kept by them though; they had moved to London and her grandchildren had not been christened. She recounted how as recently as the 1990s, the church was busy; full on Sundays and packed at Christmas, but then fewer people came to church, people got busier with jobs that took them out of the area for work and older members of the congregation who saw to the church passed away. A plaster memorial to a generous donor and notable local family lies in pieces by the door – Ozymandias like – with no-one able to track descendants who may be able to see to its repair and restoration to its prominent original position. These stories are repeated in every parish and at each neglected church up and down the country and are a stark reminder of why Ride & Stride is a vital conservation and preservation lifeline for them all.

So on to Abingdon. As well as Ride & Stride the town was celebrating open house at numerous of its other historic buildings and, as the rain had started up again converging on the town from west and south, Jo A & Jo B dipped straight into [St Helen's](#). It was busy with tours and talks and we marvelled (as always) at the painted roof and magnificent stained glass. The gloriously neo-Classical [Abingdon Baptist church](#) welcomed us with equally enthusiastic guides who told us much of its history, it being one of the oldest Baptist churches in England (founded in 1649) and Ock Street being famed for its non-conformist gatherings. Having suffered at least two meteorologic soakings already on the way up to Abingdon, it seemed apt to investigate the huge font in the floor that enables full immersion on baptism here; but this was perhaps the driest Jo B had been since midday! The lofty spire of [Abingdon Trinity Methodist](#) URC church called next. It had a very informative display of the development of its congregation which helped make sense of the place and the photos of the early 1980s Songs of Praise filmed there brought back memories of big hair, pastel colours and full churches belting out hymns from small print books on prime-time national TV!

It does feel as Abingdon town has an abundance of churches despite its missing Abbey, and we were grateful for this as the downpour became a deluge when we left the churchyard of Abingdon Trinity and dashed around the park to [St Michael and all Angels](#). Another George Gilbert Scott church, 20 years 'younger' than Moulsham, it is three times the size but still feels like a country church; despite the genteel houses that surround it, when it was built it would also have served the tanners, the cordwainers, brewers and weavers whose houses crowded Ock Street at the time. Here we had very welcome hot tea and (delicious) cake as we gently steamed-dry listening to a free piano recital.

A clear sky led Jo A and Jo B to head off in different directions; the first to the Norman church of [St Peter](#) at Drayton (which boasts a ring of eight bells), the latter to [St Nicholas](#), one of the only remaining parts of the original Benedictine Abbey that gives Abingdon its name.

Two more churches for Jo B, before the planned rendezvous at Wittenham Clumps. [St Michael & All Angels](#) in Clifton Hampden sits high above bend in the river, a bucolic 12th century stone guardian to those crossing the river by ferry and later on the bridge – forgive me for name dropping – designed by one Mr Gilbert Scott. If I tell you that he had a hand in remodelling the church, you won't be surprised. The church retains three 13th century lancet windows and a 14th century chapel, and does have the feel of a chantry as well as a parish church where many a bride must have seen her bouquet lofted far further than she expected as she tossed it at the church door to the guests waiting on the steps below.

The penultimate stop for Jo B was Long Wittenham. Footsore and rather regretting the second pot of tea at the other St Michael & All Angels in Abingdon, but telling herself it must be downhill, she arrived at [St Mary the Virgin](#). Hidden from the main street, this is a beautiful contemplative space, enjoyed equally from the shade of the porch and vast yew at the entrance, as from inside where the ancient timbers seem to hold onto the words of extinct matins and compline. A Norman church with Mediaeval additions, the stall and pulpit were originally from Exeter College, Oxford. Finally, on to [St Peter](#) at Little Wittenham. This is a church often visited by Jo B, but which she found lock. It stands looking up to the ancient hill fort above, and across the Neolithic cursus and Iron Age barrows to one of the earliest Christian sites in England, founded by St Birinus in 634 at what later became Dorchester Abbey.

One last climb up The Clumps, and the vast Thames valley stretched out below; half a turn around the hill and our entire route was laid out before us. How glorious it was to be able to do this and what a privilege to be able to raise money doing it.

Thank you to everyone who supports us and to everyone who takes part.

Links of all of the churches Jo A and Jo B visited can be found here:

Goring, St Thomas of Canterbury	Abingdon, St Helen's
Moulsford, St John the Baptist	Abingdon, Abingdon Baptist church
Cholsey, St Mary	Abingdon, Abingdon Trinity Methodist
South Moreton, St John the Baptist	Abingdon, St Michael and all Angels
Didcot, Didcot Methodist Church	Abingdon, St Nicholas'
Didcot, St Peter	Drayton, St Peter
Didcot, All Saints	Clifton Hampden, St Michael & All Angels
Sutton Courtenay, All Saints	Long Wittenham, St Mary the Virgin
Culham, St Paul	Little Wittenham, St Peter