

Bentley Old Vicarage Nature Reserve is a small woodland site north of the Uxbridge Road in Harrow Weald. Together with the churchyard of All Saints' Church to its immediate south it forms a quiet oasis off this busy road.

Begin by walking through the lych gate and into the churchyard. This is maintained for wildlife by working parties organised by Revd James Mercer, the Vicar at the church. In spring look for flowers of primroses (*Primula vulgaris*) lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) and wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*). In summer among many other wildflowers you may notice the reddish flowers of Great hairy and Rose-bay willow-herbs (*Epilobium hirsutum*, *E. angustifolium*), the yellow creeping cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*), meadow vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*) and ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) and the blue common vetch (*Vicia sativa*). White is also represented, by meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and the ten-rayed flowers of lesser stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*). Broad-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*) is also in bloom, although its familiar dry brown seeds are more prominent.

The church itself is the work of the prolific and controversial Victorian architect William Butterfield, most famous now for Keble College, Oxford. He was responsible for both the original building, dedicated in 1849, and the 1890 enlargements which included the elegant side steeple. The interior has interesting items including a stained glass window by the great preRaphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones. Access to the church is possible by prior arrangement with the Parish Office tel 020 8954 8865 (Monday-Friday 9 - 12).

From the church porch turn right to walk between the burial plots of the Crosse family on the left and the Blackwell family on the right. Crosse and Blackwell, now best known for foodstuffs, made their money making bricks and tiles. The house called "The Kiln" and the adjacent plant nursery on Common Road in Stanmore was the site of one of their enterprises. The Blackwell family in particular were great benefactors to the local community.

After passing the Blackwell plot continue ahead to enter the woodland reserve itself.

Plants to look out for.

All year

Ivy (*Hedera helix*) romps over most of the ground and most of the trees. Notice how the leaves on the ground have the familiar five-lobed shape, while above the ground the leaves on free branches have a completely different, simple rhombic shape. The white flowers (October-November) and black fruits form only on these high branches. In the butterfly meadow note the large clumps of pendulous sedge (*Carex pendula*).



Ivy flowers.

February

Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*) is blooming in the wood. Where the rough path to the butterfly meadow leads off from the main loop look for flowers of the winter heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*).

March

In the wood snowdrops are still flowering, and are joined by the blue *Chionodoxa*, a garden flower that may be a relict of the vicarage. All through the wood the wide, triangular leaves of Lords-and-Ladies (*Arum maculatum*) are pushing up and for a month or so form the dominant ground cover.

April

A number of gean (wild cherry, *Prunus avium*) are also in bloom. Cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) is growing through the leaves of Lords-and-Ladies and now becomes the dominant ground cover in the wood as the trees begin to leaf.

May

Horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) is in bloom and hawthorn (*Crataegus*) is lovely at the edge of the butterfly meadow. From the butterfly meadow one can also see two apple trees in bloom, probably relicts of the vicarage garden. Under the trees the cow parsley is in bloom, together with bluebells (*Endymion non-scriptus*), violets (*Viola riviniana*) and Lords-and-Ladies.

June

The butterfly meadow is glorious with elder (*Sambucus nigra*) and dog rose (*Rosa canina*) in bloom along the edges and red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) crowfoot (*Ranunculus repens*) and tormentil (*Potentilla anglica*) in the grass.

High summer under the trees

Most of the flowering at ground level is now over as the trees come into full leaf and shade out the lower plants. Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) and Wood avens (*Geum urbanum*, like tormentil, a member of rose family that looks like a buttercup) continue to flower from June onward, and are joined in July by the tiny white flowers of Enchanters Nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*). Bright red fruits of Lords-and-Ladies stand on stalks that are now isolated, all the leaves having died back. Even the cow parsley dies back, leaving the ivy once more as the dominant ground cover. Clumps of Male Fern (*Dryopteris felix-mas*) can be seen in many spots.

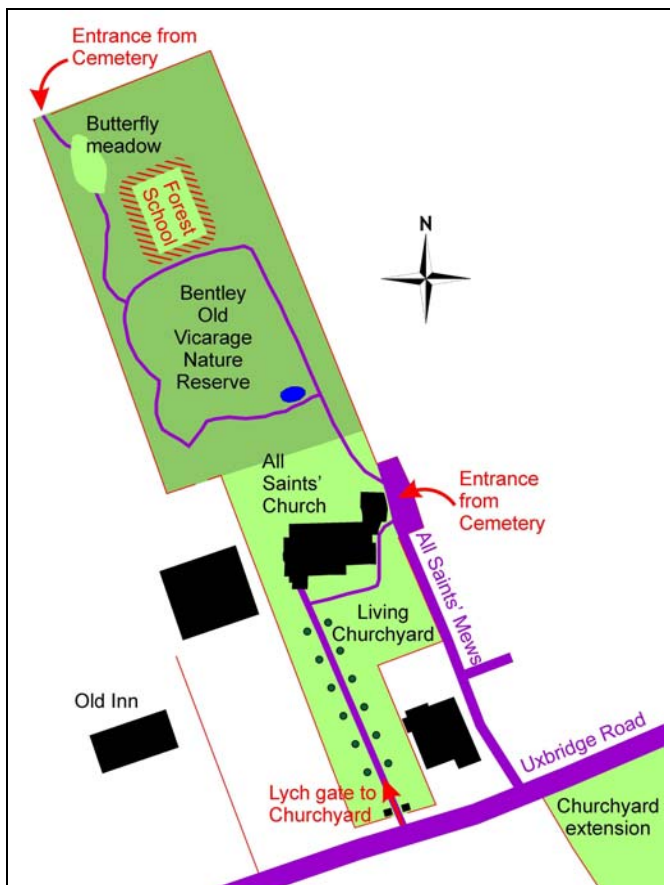
Also of note in the area

Old Inn

The frontage of this fine Grade 2 listed house can be seen well from the Uxbridge Road. Built to serve traffic on both the Pinner-Uxbridge and Harrow-Bushey roads, this was built in the early 18th century and had the traditional if prosaic name of the Nag's Head. In the early 19th century it was converted to a private house, called Harrow Weald Lodge, and later to offices.

Grave of William Leefe Robinson

At the southern tip of the churchyard extension is the grave of William Leefe Robinson, awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery in shooting down a Zeppelin over Enfield during the first world war. He died in the great influenza epidemic of 1918.



History Where the reserve is now was the vicarage of All Saints' Church, built along with the church itself in 1848. The vicarage fell out of use in 1924 and was finally demolished in 1955. A few of the trees on the site now are relicts of the vicarage garden while most have grown up since that time. In 1987 a group of volunteers took over the site and were soon sponsored by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. The site is now managed by volunteers from the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum.

The reserve is host to the Forest School, an educational partnership between Harrow Council, All Saints' Church and John Lyon's Charity. A trained Forest School tutor supported by volunteers works with children between the ages of 4 and 18 from schools in Harrow. They learn about local flora, fauna and outdoor skills, all of which develop confidence and team building.

How to find the reserve

The reserve is at rear of All Saints' Church, Uxbridge Road, Harrow Weald. The 340 and H12 busses run along the Uxbridge Road, while the 258 and 182 pass very close. There is no dedicated car park but parking is possible on local streets.



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Bentley Old Vicarage needs volunteers. If you would like to help, whether at one of our working parties or as part of the warden team, contact the wardens or Harrow Nature Conservation Forum at <admin@harrowncf.org>.

Bentley Old Vicarage Nature Reserve

Find out more about your local nature reserve



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