

COMMONS

The commons or common land that exist in England and Wales are very varied. They include vast tracts of uplands, heath, woods and marshland as well as small parish commons, such as these here. Commons developed from unused or wasteland that belonged to the lord of the manor and to which cottagers or commoners had certain rights. These might include the right to graze their animals, fish in the lakes or streams, collect fuel and branches to repair fences or buildings or even take stones, minerals and coals. In the 18th century with improved agricultural techniques more commons were enclosed and cultivated, the rights being lost or returned to the lord of the manor.



THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. ANDREW

The round tower of St. Andrew church has an unusual octagonal top which catches your eye from quite a distance. The church dates from the 12th century, although much has been added, altered and repaired since then. Round towers came about because of the abundant flint in the area and that shape was necessary to give strength in the construction.

Recently, while redecorating the church, some unique 12th and 14th century wall paintings were discovered. Before the Reformation of the 16th century all the interior walls of the church would have been covered in colourful and mystical paintings, but these were then lime washed over. Thanks to a generous grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund the exposed part of these paintings have now been conserved, and you are welcome to go to see them. Please see the church notice board for times of opening and the availability of light refreshments in the summer.

WELCOME

Welcome to these walks around five of the seven commons of Ilketshall St. Andrew and St. John. They create a special landscape and provide an important habitat for a wide variety of wildlife including three protected species: the barn owl, kestrel and great crested newt. Tree sparrows may also be seen here; once common, these birds have become very rare in Suffolk.



The random shapes of the commons mean that they have most probably survived due to their boggy nature, being too wet for the plough. Enclosure of the land around them has created some brilliant boundary hedgerows providing a profusion of flowers, fruits, seeds and nuts that attract wildlife and also create a beautiful display.

A wonderful blaze of buttercup yellow brightens the meadows in late spring and summer, joining the pink flower heads of the lady's smock and the waving flower heads of dock. The small scabious may also be found after heavy grazing, such as on Great Common. All these plants are sources of nectar attracting a wide range of insects including the numerous butterflies that abound in the area.

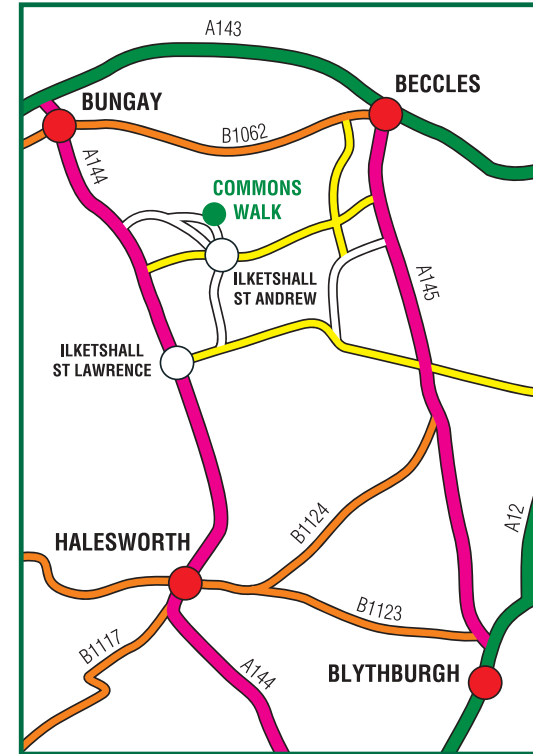


The commons have been grazed throughout the centuries and many now provide hay each year. Historical features are evident especially on Great Common where the animal pounds in which animals were confined at night still exist and the routes of two 'carnsers' are evident.

'Carnser' is a Suffolk dialect term for a raised stoned path over wet ground and these were used by the cottagers to get to church and school. Also, spot the two impressive walnut trees that remain here, out of the five shown on the 1844 tithe map.

'The Mardle', was used in the past for soaking the locally grown flax to soften it so it was easier to tease out for making rope and textiles.

We hope you enjoy the varied sights and sounds of our area.



Managed by
Ilketshall St. Andrew and St. John Land Management Company Ltd.
Great Common, Ilketshall St. Andrew

Sponsors
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Suffolk Wildlife Trust for management advice and support.
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Kestrel, Great Crested Newt and Ladys-Smock illustrations
by Anne Hobday - used by kind permission



THE COMMONS WALKS OF ILKETSHALL ST. ANDREW & ST. JOHN



KESTREL

The kestrel is a familiar sight over the Commons. It's long tail and habit of hovering distinguishes it from other birds of prey. Kestrels hover holding their head still, with wings beating and tail spread to spy their prey below them, their favourite being voles. It is our most common bird of prey here.



ORANGE TIP BUTTERFLY

These butterflies are colourful symbols of spring, attracted to the Commons by the lady's smock plants. The eggs are laid singly on the stems and look like small orange pods. Only the males, as they are more active, have orange tips to their wings to advertise their toxic nature to predators. The mottled pattern of yellow and black scales on their under wings provide brilliant camouflage, helping them to live their full life of 18 days!



GREAT CRESTED NEWT

The Great Crested Newt is frequently to be found around the two parishes. The ponds and damp areas of Great Common especially are an ideal habitat for them. Most newts are only in the water from March to August and spend the rest of the time hiding under stones, leaves, logs and in tree crevices, living on earthworms, snails, spiders and insects. The rough, bumpy skin of the great crested newt gives it its other name of 'warty newt'. It has an orange underbelly with black markings unique to each individual. The species has declined in Britain due to the loss of breeding ponds and is strictly protected.



LADY'S SMOCK

When walking across Great Common in the springtime the white and pink flowers of the lady's smock speckle the damp grassland just as the cuckoo arrives, hence it's common name of cuckoo flower. Together the flower and the bird herald in the spring. The foamy substance found attached to the stems, often called 'cuckoo spit' has nothing to do with the cuckoo, but is produced by nymphs of the froghopper bug.



ILKETSHALL

ST. ANDREW & ST. JOHN WALKS

(NOT TO SCALE)



BARN OWL

If your walk is early or late in the day look out for the ghostly form of the barn owl as it swoops over the grassland hunting for rats, mice and shrews, which it locates by sound as much as sight. This owl, also known as the screech owl, has regular habits, roosting in the same spot and hunting over the same open area. Fossil records show barn owls were present in Britain about 2 million years ago. The natural habitat of the commons enables the owls to feel at home here, often allowing the walker some close views.



SKYLARK

Skylarks like open countryside and nesting in grassy cups on the ground, so these commons prove an ideal site for them. Watch out for their spectacular aerial display. Their distinctive song is often heard before the bird is seen. They can spend up to 20 minutes singing a beautiful trilling, bubbling song as they soar high into the air where they circle and hover before folding their wings and plummeting down to earth.



THE COUNTRY CODE

PLEASE:-

- Keep your dogs under close control and clear up after them.
- Take your litter home.
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees.
- Leave only your footprints.
- Take only memories.

Please keep to the cut grass walkways and footpaths and note that you use them at your own risk.