



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 102

Walk in the parishes of Great Waltham and Felsted through attractive countryside and the interesting village of Felsted – 7.5 miles (12 kms)

This is a mainly rural walk of varying terrain, fairly flat and generally away from through roads. Several stretches can be rich in blackberries in the Autumn. The route passes a number of World War II heritage sites and goes through the village of Felsted where there are several places of interest and establishments offering refreshment (not all open every day so it is advisable to check opening times beforehand). If you hope to visit a church or a pub, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags.

Paths are generally well maintained. There are two low stiles.

Start and finish: Ford End in the parish of Great Waltham. There is a small car park in Church Lane, just off the B1008, opposite the church (Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL678168, Postcode CM3 1LH).

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps 183 and 195.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

Before setting off, you may like to look at the interpretation panel in the car park and also visit the red-brick church. The panel describes the Ford End / Hartford End World War II Trail. We will walk along some of this trail and pass several concrete pillboxes and spigot mortar emplacements, each of which formed part of a defensive line constructed in 1942 in preparation for a potential German invasion. In this area the defensive line followed the River Chelmer.

The church was built in 1870 and its style is described as “mid-Victorian Gothic revival”. It was designed by a local architect, Frederic Chancellor, who served as mayor of Chelmsford on eight occasions. Unfortunately, the church was built on a former osier bed where willows were grown for basket-making, etc. Such a site was typically damp or prone to flooding, and it was not long before the church suffered from foundation problems. The chancel at the east end – to the right – had to be rebuilt 20 years later and it was demolished in 1984 after further problems. The inside of the church is well maintained, with brick interior and more evidence of local craftsmanship: the pulpit, lectern and stalls were carved in 1869 by Colonel Nevill Tufnell of nearby Langleys in Great Waltham. [Walk number 110 passes this grand house].

Leave the church and turn left along Church Lane, passing what remains of the chancel on the left and the car park on the right. Pass Connaught House and follow the lane round to the left, passing thatched 18th-century Little Owls over to the right and the red-brick former vicarage on the left.

Stay on the main roadway through Hill Farm.

Ignore a footpath that forks to the left (we will come back that way) and keep to the roadway past several large buildings and agricultural yard. After the buildings, continue ahead on a well-defined, wide farm track past farm equipment on the right.

The farm track can be muddy as it meanders, passing an overgrown concrete structure, a former WWII pillbox, on the left and then bearing right. Pass several mature trees on the right and, just as the track again bears right, turn left through a gate into a field to continue along the public bridleway.

Descend gently, keeping the hedgerow on the left. At the bottom of the field continue ahead through a gateway into woodland called The Gorse. From April to June you should smell the wild garlic which covers much of the woodland floor. Pass another WWII pillbox on the left and soon emerge from the wood onto a private drive. Turn left and almost immediately right onto a relatively new public footpath which follows a pretty section of the River Chelmer on the left.

Look back and to the left to see the former Hartford End water mill, built in the 18th century and now a private house. Until about 2010, the public footpath crossed the river on the bridge immediately in front of the mill. The route was then diverted onto the new path that we are using.

Pass a residential area on the left, on the other side of the river. This development is partly a conversion of the former Ridley's Hartford End Brewery which operated here for around 150 years before its closure in 2009.

When the path reaches the road, turn left (over the Chelmer). Cross the road with care and turn right, signposted to Littley Green.

After about 100 yards, pause to look back to the right towards the road where we crossed the river. On the opposite river bank are the remains of another left-over from World War II - a concrete spigot mortar emplacement, usually visible because of the small shiny steel post on top of the round concrete base. This small post was the mounting for a lightweight anti-tank weapon known as a spigot mortar. The gun crew would crouch in the surrounding pit, turning the gun to fire on an enemy tank. Thousands were installed for use by the Home Guard if Germany invaded. The weapon had a range of only about 100 yards; fortunately, they were never required.

A little further on, another pillbox is visible on the other side of the river.

Continue up this lane, ignoring footpaths to either side. The lane rises and turns to the left. Look back from time to time to enjoy the view as you climb away from the Chelmer valley.

The road skirts round Littley Park – note its giant magnolia tree.

When the road turns sharp right, our route goes straight ahead on the bridleway.

Continue for about half a mile on a wide gravel track lined with trees on the right and extensive views across the countryside. At the high point of this track, we pass imperceptibly from Great Waltham parish into Felsted parish.

When the track reaches a road, keep straight ahead along the road. Soon, part of the medieval, brick-built Leez Priory comes into view. This is an extensive property, built by Lord Richard Rich for his home on the site of one of the priories which he helped Henry VIII secure from the church during the dissolution of the monasteries. The extensive Leez Priory is partly in Felsted and partly in the adjacent parish of Great and Little Leighs which lies outside the Hundred Parishes.

Leez Priory is now used as a wedding venue. Pass the entrance and follow the road round to the left. Soon turn right, signposted towards Felsted and Rayne. The fingerpost sign was manufactured by Maldon Iron Works and probably pre-dates the pillboxes we have seen. Almost immediately, turn left through the hedge onto a footpath, part of the Saffron Trail, a long-distance path from Southend to Saffron Walden. The path runs beside an area on the right that is prone to flooding.

The path bears right, crosses a substantial footbridge over a stream and continues with the stream on the left. The path keeps to the higher ground, close to the hedgerow on the right. The lower area to the left was once a series of large fish ponds serving Leez Priory.

At the end of the field pass over a stile and continue ahead through a narrower field.

After about 200 yards, take the path that turns left. Almost immediately, cross a concrete bridge over a stream. On the left is a surviving, large pond. Pause to enjoy the sound of the birds. Just as the pond ends, turn right, following a hedgerow on the left.

After passing a wood on the right, turn right onto a wide concrete track. Soon, at the end of the wood, the concrete track bears half left but we turn sharp left to follow a ditch on our left.

At the end of this field, pass through a gateway and cross over a footbridge to join a road. Turn left.

The road passes through Cobbler's Green. After Hamilton House on the left, and before the road bears left, we fork right onto a public byway.

Pass Potash Farm on the left and then its garden with two giant ducks, carved from tree trunks, standing beside the far end of the pond.

Just after passing 17th-century Jollyboys on the right, turn right onto a lane. After about 30 yards turn right again onto a footpath (waymarked *Saffron Trail*), passing houses behind the hedge on the left.

Start to pass playing fields on the left and, 70 yards further on, turn left through a gateway and turn immediately right. Soon keep to the left of a field with the hedge on the left. Pass a children's play area on the right and emerge into a car park.

Keep straight ahead to exit the car park onto a road. Immediately opposite are sports fields for Felsted School and then a water tower.

Turn left past Felsted's war memorial and memorial hall. Outside is the first of several interpretation panels that recount elements of Felsted's interesting history and heritage.

Much of Felsted revolves around education and its long-established private school, founded in 1564 by Lord Richard Rich. Continue along this road, Braintree Road, passing many school buildings and occasional private residences – including 15th-century The Folly on the left with its elephant topiary, and then The Chequers pub on the right. Felsted has several places to eat but they may not open every day.

Continue past The Chequers and then almshouses on the right – founded by Lord Rich in the 16th century and rebuilt in 1878.

A little further on, the junction with Chelmsford Road (on the left) is surrounded by interesting buildings. On the right, opposite the junction, is the original school, founded in 1564 within an existing building, possibly a guildhall. Beside the school, to its right and with a slightly lower roofline, is the Old Schoolmaster's House, dating from the 16th century.

Behind the old school (which is still in use), Felsted's Norman church merits a visit if it is open – but please remove or cover boots if muddy. Inside, there is a fine memorial to Richard Rich. If the church is closed, there is an interpretation panel outside the porch. The old school and the church are each listed at Grade I.

Note the building on the corner at the junction with Chelmsford Road. Immediately around the corner, its bressumer beam is richly carved and proudly declares that "George Boote made me in 1596". For many years, the building functioned as a popular Chinese restaurant.

With care, cross Chelmsford Road and continue ahead, passing The Swan Inn and then another interpretation panel.

Take the next turning on the left, Mill Road, signposted to North End and Barnston. This road descends past a variety of larger, mostly modern, houses.

At the bottom of the hill stands Felsted Mill, now a private residence.

Just before the mill, the public right of way goes into the mill's parking area and soon turns right to cross a footbridge over the millstream immediately before the stream flows beneath the building. Almost immediately, cross a second footbridge and stile, turning left to continue along the footpath with the River Chelmer on the left.

Follow this path beside the meandering river for more than a quarter of a mile until the path reaches a road. Cross the road with care and return to the footpath on the opposite side.

The path continues to meander with the Chelmer River on the left for another mile. The river is gradually descending towards Chelmsford. The banks are lined with willows, many of which have been planted in recent years. Pass at least one more overgrown concrete pillbox.

About 200 yards after the pillbox, at the end of the long field, follow the path as it turns right. Almost immediately turn left across a footbridge over a stream (in 2022 the footbridge had only one upright metal handrail). Immediately turn left and continue with the Chelmer on the left.

About 200 yards later, turn left over another footbridge (with a wooden handrail) and continue ahead with the river still on the left. The path passes a field of young willow trees on

the right; in 2020, they were very obviously newly-planted, all lined up like soldiers, but by 2022 they formed a dense forest. It may have changed again by the time you follow this route.

The river and the footpath turn sharp right (at the end of the field of willows). Soon, after only 40 yards, the river turns left, just before the corner of a wood. Do not turn left but go almost straight ahead into the corner of the wood. The entrance is not very obvious but, just inside the wood, the path crosses a footbridge with wooden handrails over a ditch.

Continue uphill on a clear path through the wood. At the top of the hill the path turns right, still with the woodland on the right.

The path emerges opposite a large building that we passed early on at the start of the walk. Turn right, following the main drive through Hill Farm, bearing right and then turning left into the car park where we started opposite the church.

This route description, last updated 13 November 2022, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk where you can find introductions to the parishes of Great Waltham and Felsted and many more walks. Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to hundredparishes@btinternet.com.

A diagram covering this route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown on the next page. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

