



# The Hundred Parishes

## Walks between railway stations – number 13

### Audley End to Great Chesterford - 8 miles (13 kilometres)

This walk comprises 7 miles of paths and quiet lanes through undulating, open countryside, followed by a short exploration of the rich heritage of Great Chesterford village. It passes through the parishes of Wendens Ambo, Littlebury, Strethall and Great Chesterford.

The route is mainly rural, mostly well away from human habitation. There is nowhere to buy refreshment along the way, although there are occasional seats where a picnic may be enjoyed, with many seats in Great Chesterford.

The final part of the route is a short circuit through part of Great Chesterford, passing Day's Bakery (01799 218060) that shuts at 3:30 and the Crown & Thistle pub (01799 530278) that shuts at 3pm and does not open on Sundays (times correct in 2022). Please check availability before relying on either of them.

There are no stiles or gates to climb. Some of the paths can be muddy at times. The route passes several parish churches, so please be prepared, before entering any, to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags.

While the walk description starts and finishes at stations, the route could be started from anywhere along the way, using the train to get from Great Chesterford to Audley End.

**Walk Start:** Audley End Station, Wendens Ambo (Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL516363, Postcode CB11 4LD).

**Walk Finish:** Great Chesterford Station (TL504424 – CB10 1NY).

Car Park at Audley End Station (expensive). There is no car park at Great Chesterford, but it may be possible to park considerately along the approach road to the station.

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps 195 and 209. A diagram of the route is provided at the end of this description.

Tip: If travelling by train to and from the two stations it is usually cheaper to buy a return ticket for the most distant station, rather than two single tickets.

Tip: If travelling by car, it is normally suggested that you park near the finish and catch the train to the start, thereby avoiding the possible pressure to finish the walk at a certain time. However, parking is limited at Great Chesterford where there is no station car park.

Assuming we have arrived at Audley End Station by train, we must leave the station from the south-bound platform, the one with the ticket office.

On the far side of the ticket office, we emerge beneath a canopy that was erected for the convenience of important passengers whose connecting journey would be by horse-drawn carriage to or from Audley End House. The railway line was opened in 1845 and only after Lord Braybrooke of Audley End House had approved the route. The line passes through the extensive Audley End estate but, rather than following the obvious route along the Cam valley past Audley End House, the railway passes, out of sight, through tunnels half a mile to the west.

Audley End Station is situated in the parish of Wendens Ambo. When it first opened it was called *Wenden* but it was soon renamed in deference to Audley End House which is a mile or so to the North within Saffron Walden parish. Audley End House passed in 1948 to English Heritage's predecessor and it is now open to the public.

We bear left through the car park, passing Neville House on the left (Neville is the family surname of recent Barons Braybrooke).

As we approach a small roundabout, the long flint-faced terrace ahead was built in the mid-1800s by the then Lord Braybrook, primarily to meet a housing need for workers associated with the new railway.

Turn left past a garage. When safe, cross the road onto the pavement and continue past the terrace of Victorian cottages and then beside the brick wall over the railway line.

We pass a former chapel on the right and then a cricket field on the left. Beyond the field is Wendens Ambo's parish church.

Keep on the right, passing several attractive cottages. When the pavement runs out, keep on the right for a short distance, until the road turns left. Here, we turn right onto the public footpath which soon rises steeply. The path flattens out but continues to climb gently for nearly half a mile.



When the path reaches a wood, turn left, keeping the hedge on the right. This track continues to climb gently. It crosses over the M11 motorway and, half a mile later, passes a telecommunications tower on the right. Immediately after the tower, we turn right onto a lane.

Follow the lane round to the right and stay on the lane for half a mile.

At the top of a rise, the lane turns left and then right, but at the right turn keep straight ahead onto the bridleway.

We pass a thatched cottage on the left with a dog finial on the roof. Just afterwards, keep to the right along the bridleway beneath trees with a ditch on the left. If this looks too muddy, keep left and walk along the field edge, parallel with the bridleway just to the right.

When the bridleway / field-edge path reaches the corner of a wood, continue straight ahead with the wood on the left. The path winds for a while just inside the wood.

On emerging from the wood, bear left, keeping the wood on the left and a field on the right. Ignore a footpath that heads right across the field. The field edge gradually bears right, passes between gardens and reaches a road. The distance to this point is 2.8 miles.

Here, we turn right, but there is an opportunity to take a break if you wish. Just opposite where the bridleway comes onto the road, a gate leads into a small recreation ground with seats and tables.

We are now in the hamlet of Littlebury Green, part of the parish of Littlebury, and the highest point on this walk at 387 feet (118 metres) above sea level.

From the bridleway turn right, or from the recreation ground turn left, along the lane. Soon, pass the delightful St Peter's Church on the right. The corrugated iron structure was assembled from a kit in 1885. It was erected as a 'chapel of ease', allowing local parishioners to avoid the 2-mile walk to the parish church in Littlebury. Do visit St Peter's if it is open, first removing or covering boots if they are dirty (in 2022 the church was open from 10am to 4pm each day except Saturday when it opened from 9am to 1pm). It is larger inside than it appears from the outside. Hundreds of 'tin tabernacles' were erected in the 19th century but few survive. Much of the interior is unchanged, including the "stained glass" windows which are actually transfers between two panes of glass.



Immediately after the church, on the right, The Bumpy is a former gravel pit that is gradually being turned into a nature reserve.

200 yards after the church, turn left onto the byway, passing a seat and Catlin Cottages on the left.

The byway descends for a quarter of a mile. Then, we keep straight ahead on a footpath, now heading uphill for another quarter of a mile, ignoring paths to right and left.

When the path reaches a road, we turn left to pass through the hamlet of Catmere End, part of Littlebury parish.

After about 200 yards we reach a road junction. Immediately before it, on the left, The Thatch dates from the 18th century. The road to our right is signposted to Strethall  $\frac{3}{4}$ , but we will take a shorter route, keeping straight ahead along Piper's Lane. Immediately after the junction, Piper's Cottage dates from the 17th or 18th century.

We pass a new property, Oakfield House, on the right and just after it, set back, is 16th-century The Old Rectory. We have just left Littlebury and entered Strethall parish. Strethall is one of England's smallest parishes, registering just 26 inhabitants in the 2011 Census.

We ignore a path to the right, signposted as Ickniel Way. In another 200 yards, we turn right, still on Piper's Lane but here marked as a private road. It is just a short road.

We pass the entrance to Potash Cottage on the left and on the right we go beside Lincolns which stands sideways-on to the lane and dates from the 17th or 18th century.

Then we pass Pedlar's Cottage on the left, also 17th-18th century.

The final house on the right is Manor Cottage, dating back even further, to the 15th or 16th century. This building started life as a hall house, having one large room that extended from the ground to the thatched roof and a central fire whose smoke would drift upwards and out through vents at each end of the roof. The chimney would have been added later, probably in the 16th or 17th century when the floor was inserted to create an upper level.

At the end of Pipers Lane, we go straight ahead and emerge onto a field. Ahead is Strethall's exceptionally old, Saxon parish church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin and listed at Grade I.

We continue ahead on a grassy path between fields, descending and heading towards buildings just to the left of the church. You may be lucky and see deer, like the herd captured in this photo.

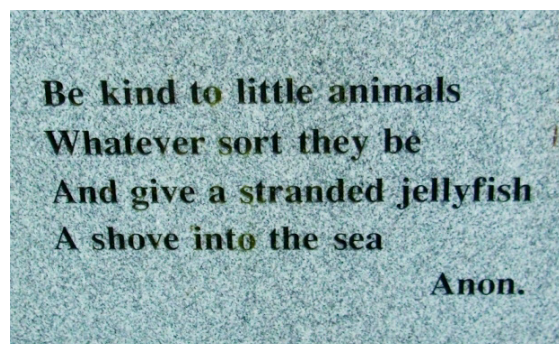


After the descent, continue straight ahead up the grass path. At the top of the field, before reaching the barn, we turn half right to follow the path to the gate into the churchyard. Once through the gate, we keep to the right to reach the church porch.

The church is a thousand years old and merits a visit. Please remove or cover boots if they are dirty. St Mary's was built in the early 11th century, possibly as early as 1010 AD. Elements that remain from that time include the nave (the main body of the church) and the arch that leads into the chancel. These were constructed well before the Norman Conquest of 1066. More 'modern' elements include 14th-century bells and pews from the 15th century.

Here, there is no war memorial. Strethall was one of only 14 parishes in England that incurred no loss in either World War. It is, of course, one of the least inhabited parishes.

Outside, we may like to sit in the small churchyard and contemplate the peace. Opposite the porch, there is a relatively modern gravestone to Janet Patience Cameron Adams, MBE. She served as a Red Cross nurse for 25 years, usually in war zones or following natural disasters in various parts of the world. The back of her gravestone has an unusual verse, shown here.



Continue with the porch on the left to exit at the right corner of the churchyard. Turn right to follow a short, narrow path down to join a more substantial path. Turn sharp left onto the good path.

After a short climb, we meet a metalled road where we turn right. We follow this lane gently downhill, passing beside a long line of trees on our right: cherry, horse chestnut, apple, etc. Soon, straight ahead in the distance, we may be able to see the white buildings of Chesterford Research Park, just over 3 miles away at the top of the hill.

Continue downhill to the junction where we turn left onto the lane. We should keep to the right to face any oncoming traffic.

After 300 yards, we keep straight ahead at a minor crossroads.

After another 300 yards, the Icknield Way leaves the road, turning half right to cross the field diagonally, descending gently across this field for about half a mile. Sometimes the path can be muddy and make the route too challenging; if this should be the case, you may prefer to take an alternative route (about 200 yards longer) described in the next paragraph. If you do take the Icknield Way, signposted as a public bridleway, continue in a straight line towards the far corner of the field where there is a small gap in the hedge that comes down the hill from the left. At the corner of the field, bear slightly left and follow the well-defined tree-lined bridleway for a considerable distance.

If you choose to avoid the cross-field path, continue along the road for about three-quarters of a mile, climbing gradually, until you reach a signposted path on the right, leaving the road at right angles. This clear path descends between two fields until it meets the line of trees. Turn left and follow the well-defined path which is largely tree-lined.

The two options in the last two paragraphs have now merged.

The narrow tree-lined path continues for some distance (about a mile after the end of the diagonal cross-field path) before climbing gradually and then descending towards the M11 motorway. In summer time, the narrow path can get somewhat overgrown and, after the climb, it may be easier to walk along the field edge just to the right.

Turn sharp right and soon turn left onto a long footbridge over the motorway.

On the far side, follow the path round to the left and, after a descent, follow the path as it turns right through trees.

The path becomes a lane, passing a few houses, and then reaches a road (within sight of the Cambridgeshire county-boundary sign to our left).

Turn right and, with care, cross the level crossing over the railway line. Just to the right is Great Chesterford railway station.

[If you wish, you can shorten the route by a mile and head directly to the station – simply keep bearing right and skip to near the end of the route description.]

The route now covers a short circuit around part of Great Chesterford, passing a variety of ancient buildings and two potential eating places before returning to the station.

Keep to the right until it is safe to cross the road and then continue past the modern Plextek building on the left. Follow the pavement round to the left to join the Newmarket Road, the B1383. This was once classified as the A11 until the M11 motorway was opened in the 1970s.

Pass over the River Cam or Granta. To the left, there is now no sign of the Roman fort and town that once stood here but an extensive area to the right of the river and beyond the houses is protected as a Scheduled Monument.

After the bend, with care, cross Newmarket Road using the traffic island. Continue with a flintstone wall on the right to Church Street. The Crown House Hotel lies straight ahead, just after Church Street. The hotel was built in the 18th century, possibly on the old Roman town wall, and served as a coaching inn on this once busy road. In 2022, the Crown House did not serve lunch or dinner.

Turn right into Church Street and continue beside the high wall of All Saints churchyard on the right. We will come back to the church. We pass The Elm Tree on the left, built in the 15th century and a pub until it became a private house in the 1990s. On the right, we pass The Old Vicarage, dated 1672, and soon afterwards, Fiddler's Rest, 1841, a former lodge house.

On the left, we pass a small green with the village sign, and then on the right another small green with seats leading down to the river Cam. On the corner of the green, the telephone kiosk displays information about Great Chesterford's history.

We pass 20th-century Manor Cottages on the right and immediately turn right into Manor Lane, with several attractive houses and gardens. 16th-century Brock House on the right, a former farmhouse, has exposed beams, as do Timbers (pictured here) and then Little Barn on the left, each dating from the 17th century. Before the end of this cul-de-sac, we turn around and retrace back past the thatched roof whose finial depicts a dog with a string of sausages, and then the 16th-century Crown and Thistle inn on the right corner.



Carefully cross the road to go straight ahead down Carmel Street, immediately passing a former shop on the left and then a group of ancient buildings, many with a jettied upper storey. On the right, The Gables dates from the 17th century. On the left, 16th-century The Old House was once a butcher's shop and slaughterhouse.

On the right, thatched Carmelstead Cottage and then Carmelstead each date from the 17th century.

Further along, we pass a small garden, just before an 1841 Congregational Chapel.

Not long afterwards, we come to a staggered crossroads and turn left into School Street. We immediately pass the village store / tea room on the right.

A little further along, 17th-century The Old Maltings on the right has four gables facing the road. It is a former pub and had a substantial brewery at the rear until the 1940s.

The primary school on the left dates from 1849 and is faced with knapped flint.



School Street returns to the green with the village sign. Here, we turn right and retrace along Church Street. Soon, immediately after passing The Old Vicarage, we turn left into the churchyard of All Saints, the parish church.

After the war memorial on the left, we pass alongside the church to reach the doorway near the far end. If open, we should take a look inside (but please remove or cover boots if dirty). The church dates from the 13th century and has a Grade I listing.

On leaving the church doorway, we go straight ahead, across the churchyard to the gate. Before leaving the churchyard, straight ahead we may see Mary Poppins – or at least her umbrella above the rooftops. Pass through the gate and return to the road. With care, cross the road to the pavement and turn left to continue along Church Street.

Before reaching the end of Church Street, we should cross back to the left where there is now a pavement.

Turn left onto Newmarket Road, the B1383.

We follow the main road as it turns to the right, crossing over the River Cam, and then round to the left. Over to the left and almost hidden by the hedgerow is a former mill, Kings Mill, built in the 19th century and now converted into apartments. This photo was taken before the hedgerow grew.



The second turning on the right is the station approach road. We should cross the main road with care, using one of the traffic islands, and then go down the station approach towards Great Chesterford Station. You may have parked here before catching a train to Audley End to start the walk.

At the station, a ticket machine and the southbound platform (for Newport, London, etc) are on this side of the track. Cross the footbridge for trains bound for Cambridge.

Not all trains stop at all stations so, before boarding one, please check that it is scheduled to stop at your intended destination.

This route description, last updated 29th May 2022, was downloaded from [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk) where you can read more about the parishes through which this route passes. The website has many more downloadable walks including a completely different route between Audley End and Great Chesterford stations (number 21).

Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to [hundredparishes@btinternet.com](mailto:hundredparishes@btinternet.com).

A map of the route, drawn by Glyn Kuhn for the Hundred Parishes Society, is shown on the next page.

