



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 159

Takeley and Hatfield Broad Oak – 5.0 miles (8 kms)

This walk visits the south-western part of Takeley parish including part of Takeley Street, but is mainly in the parish of Hatfield Broad Oak. About a third of the walk is in Hatfield Forest. The route is mostly on footpaths with some quiet lanes and a stretch of the B1256. Some paths can be muddy at times, so stout footwear is recommended. There is at least one stile. The route passes the Shell House café in Hatfield Forest at around half distance. There are several seats along the way. Some of the eastern element of Takeley parish is included in Walk number 158.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes in the car park outside Takeley's Silver Jubilee Hall, on the B1256 about 200 yards West of the traffic lights at Takeley cross roads.
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL559213 - Postcode: CM22 6QH.
The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps 195 and 183.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

In the car park, the war memorial includes the names of those from Takeley who were killed on active service during the two World Wars and also of seven parishioners who died when a German bomb fell on Takeley Street in December 1940.

Leave the car park and turn right on the pavement, heading West along the B1256. Until 2003, this road was classified as A120 and, long before that it was Stane Street, constructed by the Romans between Colchester and Braughing.

On the left, pass The Christian School and the related Takeley Chapel. The buildings are about 200 years old. The small school provides education for pupils aged between 7 and 16.

On the right, we pass a 19th-century cast iron water pump and then the white-weatherboarded The Chestnuts, a former hall house dating from the 15th century or even earlier.

We cross the entrance to Church View Close and then Church Lane which leads to Takeley's Holy Trinity parish church. Walk 158 goes past the church.

The housing estates we have been passing on the left were built in the 21st century between the B1256 and the Flitch Way, a long-distance footpath along the route of a former railway line. We will see some of the Flitch Way later.

On the right, we pass 19th-century Millers and about 70 yards later we turn right onto a public footpath. Pass through a narrow strip of woodland (ignoring a path to the left) and, just beyond the woodland, turn left along the field-edge path with the woodland on our left.

After about 120 yards, turn left into the wood. There is no signpost. Pass through a short stretch of woodland, go straight across a field and then cross a track, straight ahead through a gap into woodland.

Within the wood, the path is fairly clear, meandering to left and right with a ditch on the left.

At the end of the woodland, cross a long footbridge with metal handrails. We are crossing Pincey Brook which flows from balancing ponds on our right.

On the far side of the bridge, we turn left on a field edge path, with Pincey Brook on our left.

After about 50 yards, the path reaches a corner of the field. Do not follow it round to the right but go straight ahead to a fence. Follow the fence on the right and river immediately on the left. Care! This is a narrow path with a deep drop. After about 50 yards, switch right onto the driveway of PRIMO to soon reach the road, Dunmow Road, B1256. Immediately opposite is Kingfisher Meadows.

We turn right along the pavement. We are now in Takeley Street, a historic element of Takeley parish. We will focus on some of the listed buildings on this side of Dunmow Road.

Soon we pass Street Farm: first its brick-built 17th-century barn; then the 17th-century timber-framed and plaster farmhouse; and then the 19th-century brick stable block.

Opposite is a turning to Bush End and Hatfield Forest. We will return here fairly soon.

The Green Man pub was originally a 16th-century residence.

Yew Tree House and Yew Tree Cottage each date from the 17th century.

White's Farm dates from around 1500 AD and the small barn in front is about 200 years younger.

The appropriately-named Four Gables is a 17th-century house with a 20th-century shopfront.

The more recent dwellings in Joseph's Drive are soon followed by Josephs. This was built as a hall house in the 15th century, mainly comprising a hall with central fire for cooking and heating, with smoke rising to the roof and mostly leaving the building through gaps at each end of the thatch roof. The chimney was added later.

Here we will turn, by using the traffic island when safe to cross the road. On the southern side of the road, turn left to retrace. Until the 19th century, there was no development on this side of the road – it was part of Hatfield Forest. Then the railway came in the 1860s – less than 100 yards to our right - connecting Bishop's Stortford and Braintree. Gradually, there has been in-filling between the railway and the road, especially since the railway closed in 1972 and then in the 21st century after the opening of the new A120. There are no listed buildings on this side of the road, but we will get a fresh view of the more established properties on the north side.

For example, we can better appreciate the four gables of the former shop and various ancient chimney stacks including those on the Green Man pub.

When we reach the road junction, take another look at the buildings which constitute Street Farm, opposite the junction, and then turn right towards Bush End and Hatfield Forest.

Within 100 yards, we pass beneath the bridge which once carried steam trains and immediately afterwards we turn right onto a path which takes us up to the track of the railway.

Here, we turn left and soon arrive at Stane Street Halt, one of the places along the line where trains would stop if flagged down. There are interesting panels explaining some of the line's history. After the line closed, the route was designated as a bridleway and nature reserve. It became known as the Flitch Way and is now maintained mainly by volunteers.

Continue along the Flitch Way for another hundred yards and then turn left, through a gate, into Hatfield Forest. At this point we leave Takeley and pass into the parish of Hatfield Broad Oak. Go straight ahead on a fairly well-used path. Soon, the path forks and we take the right fork with a major area of woodland over to the right of the path. We immediately pass to the right of a small oak tree and soon beneath a large ancient oak. Our path then runs beside the woodland on our right.

The Forest covers around 1,000 acres, more than 1.5 square miles. The forest was adopted as a royal hunting forest by King Henry I around 1100 AD. It is a rare surviving example of a medieval royal hunting forest and has many ancient trees. It still has hundreds of deer, but we are far more likely to see some of the cattle that roam freely.

Sadly, the tranquillity is disturbed far too often by aircraft departing from Stansted Airport which lies only a mile or so to the North.

The open plain to our left is carpeted in buttercups in springtime – it is claimed that there are 100 million !

Since 1924, Hatfield Forest has been owned and managed by the National Trust.

After a while, ignore a path that goes beside a seat and through a gate into the forest on our right. Keep straight ahead.

When the plain on our left comes to an end, we pass beneath a giant oak tree and then through a gate to continue straight ahead, now with woodland on both sides of a wide grassy ride.

When the ride meets a roadway, keep straight ahead. We will stay on the road for about half a mile until it reaches a car park.

Shortly before the car park, we pass a giant oak tree on the right. An area beneath it has been marked off to discourage visitors from compacting the soil above its roots.

We walk along the left side of the car park and then turn left through a gateway. This is where we may find a concentration of visitors, attracted by picnic tables, café, discovery centre, shelter and toilets, etc.

Follow the path round the buildings and on the far side we reach the Shell House. This was built around 1759 and is decorated with shells inside and out. It was built as a garden room or folly by the Houblon family, owners of the Forest at that time. One member of the family, Sir John Houblon, was the first Governor of the Bank of England in the 1690s. His portrait appeared on £50 notes issued between 1994 to 2014.

The Forest remained in the Houblon family until it was purchased in 1923 by Edward North Buxton so that he could leave it to the National Trust when he died in 1924.

From the Shell House, we turn right, passing two large puddingstones, and follow the path with the lake on our left. Follow the lakeside path round to the left and stay on the path.

When we reach the end of the straight, as the main path bears left (to become a board walk) we turn right off the main path, down a slope onto the Three Forests Way (a long-distance path which appears not to be waymarked here). While the path is not signposted, it is fairly clear, initially with a fence on our right and then with a fence on the left. Some of this path can be muddy at times. The path through woodland is fairly straight.

When the path reaches a drive, bear half right onto the drive and pass through a gateway. Continue along the drive, now crossing a pasture and heading towards buildings.

At the end of the drive, pass through a gate and turn left along the lane. We are now in the hamlet of Bush End, part of Hatfield Broad Oak parish. When safe, cross to the right. Pass The Old Vicarage on the right and soon reach the Church of St John the Evangelist. This was built in 1856, so is much younger than many of the local trees. If open, you are encouraged to visit.

From the church, turn left and retrace along the lane about 100 yards to the junction. Turn left, signposted to Bush End, soon getting another view of The Old Vicarage on the left.

This narrow lane is a “Red Route Clearway”, more usually found in urban settings but presumably so designated to prevent the congestion that would arise if any visitors to Hatfield Forest sought to leave their cars here rather than pay to park in the National Trust car park north of the church.

Our lane descends to cross over Pincey Brook – we crossed it on a footbridge near the start of this walk – and then rises again.

Follow the lane round to the right, but only for a few yards to catch a glimpse of the first house on the left, Ploughden. The building dates from the 14th century and its original purpose is unknown. Today it is a private residence.

Turn and retrace to the bend. Here, we turn right on a footpath which is signposted as Harcamlow Way. This 80-mile trail is encountered across much of the Hundred Parishes as it weaves a figure-of-eight between Harlow and Cambridge.

Almost immediately, we climb over a stile and continue ahead, crossing a field to the far side.

There, pass through the gate or over the stile into the next field and continue ahead – but for only about 70 yards - on a field-edge path with woodland on the left.

Keep watch for an opening on the left after 70 yards. Turn left, down a slope, through trees, and in only about 5 yards turn right beside a not-too-obvious concrete post with painted arrow and “FP” (for footpath), into woodland. Soon, the path meets a ditch that flows alongside on the left. Soon, cross the ditch on a concrete footbridge with no handrails. About 20 yards later, we emerge from the woodland onto a field where we turn right, waymarked as Harcamlow Way, on a field-edge path with woodland immediately on our right.

Continue with woodland on the right, now gently uphill. We stay on this clear path for about half a mile with a thin line of trees on our right.

As we approach the end of the field, near the top of the hill, looking to the left we may be able to see the pyramid roof on the tower of the church at Bush End. It is amongst trees, not on the horizon.

Continue ahead into the next field, still beside trees on our right. Ahead, about two miles away, we can see some of the larger buildings at Stansted Airport. Soon, the roofs of residential properties on the East side of Takeley come into view.

At the end of the field, go straight ahead through the undergrowth onto the Flich Way. Look right, look left and if clear go straight across and continue along a rather narrow footpath with newer residential development on our left and, soon, also on our right.

After about 200 yards, this narrow path emerges onto Dunmow Road, the B1256, and we turn right, passing Takeley Chapel and the Christian School.

When safe, cross the road and soon return to where we parked outside Takeley Silver Jubilee Hall.

You can read more about the parishes of Takeley and Hatfield Broad Oak on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 12 January 2023, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk 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 below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

