



The Hundred Parishes

Walks between Railway Stations – number 21

Audley End to Gt Chesterford (via Saffron Walden) – 8.0 miles (13 kms)

This walk of great variety passes through four parishes: Wendens Ambo, Saffron Walden, Little Chesterford and Great Chesterford, mainly along footpaths and quiet lanes through undulating countryside, often with extensive views. The route passes a hundred listed buildings, mostly in Saffron Walden and Great Chesterford, and there is one stile.

Some of the paths can be muddy or chalky 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. Little Chesterford Church is usually open only on Fridays from 9am to 3pm. The route passes through Saffron Walden where there are several places to eat or purchase a snack. There are pubs in Great Chesterford, near the finish of the walk. There are many seats at intervals along the way.

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. There is no car park at Great Chesterford, but it is usually possible to park considerably 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 the 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 leave the station from the south-bound platform. Note the Victorian postbox on the platform, beside the door into the ticket office. The postbox is no longer in use and now painted grey.

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 agreement had been reached with Lord Braybrooke of Audley End House as to the route. The line passes through the extensive Audley End estate but, rather than following the obvious route along the Cam valley, like the B1383 (formerly A11) which passes close to the front of the 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 (Neville is the family surname of recent Barons Braybrooke) and, when safe, cross to the pavement on the right to continue along the station approach road.

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.

We turn right, past a small green and the first of many seats along this walk, and continue on the pavement. Our road winds to left and right before reaching the B1383. This used to be the A11 before the M11 motorway was constructed. We turn right but for only a couple of yards to a large stone which declares the population of Wendens Ambo to be circa 400 in the year AD 2000. From here, when safe, we cross the main road and turn left.

On our right, immediately after the entrance to the Fighting Cocks pub, is a small pillbox, now largely hidden behind bushes. It was once part of a long line of pillboxes that were erected as part of the World War II defences for London against a possible German invasion.

We soon reach a road junction and here we turn right, signposted to Saffron Walden.

The road descends, passing another pillbox in the field to our left. As the road starts to bear left, we cross the River Cam and here, when safe, we should cross to the pavement on our left. The river flows from right to left, heading North to Cambridge to join the River Great Ouse and eventually flow into the North Sea at The Wash. As we cross the bridge, we pass from Wendens Ambo into Saffron Walden parish.

We stay on this road for about half a mile. When the pavement ends, we will cross to the right to face oncoming traffic.

When we reach a flintstone wall on the left, we can either cross to the left and walk beside it or stay on the road. Either way, we need to bear left with the wall as it bends away from the road. Our route passes beside a gate and continues ahead on the public footpath which is also part of the Saffron Trail, a 70-mile route that crosses Essex diagonally from Southend in the southeast of the county to Saffron Walden in the northwest.

We keep woodland on our left as our route becomes a field-edge path.

At the end of the field, after a long, low building on the right, the path squeezes between a brick wall on the left and fencing on the right. We continue to keep a wall on our left, crossing a small green and joining a lane. On our left, mostly hidden, is Grade I-listed St Mark's College. It was built as almshouses around the same time as Audley End House in the early 1600s and is now an educational establishment.

We pass the main entrance to St Mark's on our left and follow the lane round to the right. This brings us into Audley End village, an unusual setting. The whole street is listed and some of it dates back to the 16th century. The final building on the right was once the village school and more recently served as a post office.

As we approach the end of the village, ahead is a very high wall, the perimeter wall of Audley End House. If we were to turn left, we would soon reach the entrance to the house on the right – and on the left Audley End Miniature Railway, a favourite with local kids, big and small. However, our route turns right. But first, when safe, we should cross to the pavement that runs beside the wall.

The wall dates from the early 17th century and seems in good condition for its 400 years. We climb steadily beside it for nearly half a mile, passing a couple of seats.

Nearing the top of the climb, we turn left through a gateway into Audley End Estate. In about 100 yards, we go straight across a track. The public footpath descends past mature trees for a quarter mile with changing views ahead – first of parkland and later of Saffron Walden town. Audley End House stands well behind us to our left, possibly just visible when there are no leaves on the trees.

In the distance to the left, the obelisk, designed by Robert Adam, was erected in 1783 by the owner of Audley End House (Sir John Griffin Griffin – yes, two Griffins – who would later become the first Lord Braybrooke) in memory of his aunt, Elizabeth, Countess of Portsmouth, who had left him the estate.

Towards the end of the descent, the spire of the parish church of St Mary's comes into view. We pass through the metal gate beside the castellated gatehouse to exit Audley End Estate.

We are now in the town of Saffron Walden, the largest settlement in the Hundred Parishes. It has great character and more than 300 listed buildings, mostly in the centre, which we will cross. The town merits a longer stay; today's route will give just a glimpse.

We continue ahead on Abbey Lane. In 100 yards, we pass the beginning of the Repell Ditch on the right. An interpretation panel explains that this is part of a substantial defensive earthwork that is believed to date from Saxon times.

Further along Abbey Lane, on the left, we pass a long 19th-century block of almshouses with a central chapel. This is followed by more almshouses and the United Reformed Church, rebuilt in 1811.

We should keep to the pavement on the left, passing still more almshouses before we reach traffic lights at the junction with Saffron Walden High Street. With care and when safe, we should use the pedestrian lights to cross the High Street and then turn left.

Although we have covered less than 3 miles, there are many opportunities as we pass through Saffron Walden to pause for food or drink; after this town, there will be no more opportunities until Great Chesterford.

After only about 50 yards, we turn right into King Street, immediately passing the Crosskeys Hotel on the left and, a little further along, Harts bookshop which has been here for more than a hundred years.

In another 100 yards, we reach the market square. Saffron Walden has been a market town since 1141 AD. Today, it no longer hosts a livestock market but Market Place is full of stalls on Tuesdays and Saturdays, all grouped around the ornamental drinking fountain which was installed in 1862.

We will turn left here, past the library, but a stroll around the Market Place is visually rewarding. To the right is the Town Hall, extending out over the pavement. Just beyond it is the Tourist Information Centre, a treasure trove of information about Saffron Walden and the local area. On the far side of the square is Barclays Bank, once the Gibson Bank which merged with others to form Barclays in 1896. The Gibson family were all-important in Saffron Walden in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The library occupies what was once the corn exchange, built around 1847 AD and fronted by a grand portico with clocktower. After viewing Market Place, we will return to the library.

With the library immediately on our left, we leave Market Place and climb Market Hill to a crossroads with Church Street. Each building at this junction is ancient, dating from the 16th century or earlier.

When safe, cross Church Street and turn left for just a few yards. Opposite is the Grade I-listed former Sun Inn, dating from the 14th century. It is heavily decorated with 17th-century plasterwork including two giants at the far end. Now, retrace the few yards to the crossroads and turn left into Museum Street.

On the right is a red-brick building with a blue plaque which marks this as the birthplace in 1644 of Henry Winstanley. He designed and built the first Eddystone lighthouse.

We continue up Museum Street. On the left we pass an entrance to the parish church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, Grade I-listed and worthy of a short detour or a fuller visit on another day. It is the largest church in The Hundred Parishes.

We pass the entrance to Saffron Walden Museum on the right. This was purpose-built as a museum in 1833 and certainly merits a visit, but definitely another day! The museum stands in the grounds of Saffron Walden's Castle, built around 1100 AD and with some walls still standing.

We keep to the right and follow Museum Street round to the right, merging into Castle Street. Looking back to the left, we get a colourful view of the houses in Castle Street.

We continue to the right, passing many older and listed buildings on the right. These back onto the castle grounds and the museum.

When safe, cross the street and continue up the pavement on the left.

At the end of Castle Street, we turn left into Little Walden Road, soon passing houses that, until recently, functioned as The Victory pub. Just afterwards, we bear left into Catons Lane.

On the right is a small green with a spigot mortar emplacement – a concrete base with a shiny metal support for a mortar gun. This was installed during World War II. A helpful interpretation panel shows how it would have been used in the event of an enemy invasion.

We continue down Catons Lane, keeping to the left and soon with shrubbery on each side. On the left, we pass a large car park and then the ground of Saffron Walden Town Football Club.

We continue ahead across a parking area and passing a 21st-century residential estate on the right. Our route becomes a rather uneven track and then leaves the houses behind. We will stay on this path for about half a mile, still described on maps as Catons Lane.

Our path goes straight ahead, crossing over the River Slade (often dry), and then continues between fields. The land is higher on the left and drops away to our right to a valley through which the Slade flows. This is one of three nearby rivers with the same name, each only 3 or 4 miles long and flowing into the River Cam. We keep straight ahead in a northerly direction. If in doubt, we keep to the left, on the higher route.

As our path rises, looking back, we can see St Mary's Church spire which rises 193 feet (59 metres) above the ground. To its left is a distinctive red-brick water tower, about 90 feet tall, which stands in Debden Road and was erected in 1913.

The path continues to climb gently until it reaches a lane, Westley Lane, where we turn left, signposted towards Springwell and Littlebury.

Soon, we fork left onto a grass path which runs beside and above the lane for a while. The lane passes through a former chalk quarry. On the right, towards the top of the chalk and below the thin layer of soil, we might just see a rabbit in one of the burrows that were probably excavated for them by badgers.

The grass path descends to rejoin the lane. About 100 yards after the quarry, we turn right onto a footpath signposted to Springwell. To our left is Westley Farm. This chalky track heads north for over half a mile, climbing gently with a ditch on the right.

As we climb, the view back reveals more and more of Saffron Walden town. Looking back and to the left of Saffron Walden, we may see the rotating radar station at the former Debden Airfield, about 4 miles away. The radar station primarily serves Stansted Airport.

At the top of the climb, the field on our left ends. From here, looking straight ahead and slightly right we can see Chesterford Research Park, a cluster of office and laboratory buildings around a former country house. As we continue ahead, with hedgerow on our right, we pass from Saffron Walden parish into Little Chesterford.

To our left, we can see the M11 motorway, about 2 miles to the west.

We pass a seat and, about 200 yards later, when we reach the end of the field, we follow the field-edge track to the left. The chalk path descends fairly steeply for a while and then, after passing beneath a power transmission line, continues generally downward towards the Cam valley. The pylons stride off to our left, heading south-west towards Pelham electricity substation.

From this lofty height it is hard to imagine that the chalk on which we are walking was once beneath the sea. The chalk was formed over millions of years from dead plankton and other sea creatures as they sank to the bottom of the sea.

Ahead, in addition to traffic on the M11 at the top of the hill, we may see an occasional train on the West Anglia line down in the valley. Not far to our left, a stream or drain runs roughly parallel with our route.

As we pass two Nissen huts on our left, the path becomes grassy and more narrow, now with hedgerow on each side. The grass path comes onto a concrete roadway and we keep straight ahead.

The roadway soon reaches a road, Springwell Road, the B184. Opposite is Springwell Farmhouse. We turn right, keeping to the pavement, passing 17th-century Wakefield Farm and then Springwell Nursery and Garden Centre on our right. Also on the right, we soon reach pretty Springwell Cottage, dating from early 18th century. From here, when safe, we cross the main road and go straight ahead on a public footpath.

This is a field-edge path with hedgerow on the left. After a while, there is also a fence on our right.

The path kinks to left and right, and then passes through a little woodland.

At the end of the woodland, we cross over a stile into a long, narrow field with the River Cam immediately on our left. The path goes across a field with no clearly marked route, but we should head for the right of the red roof we can see ahead.

As we draw closer, we find that the red roof belongs to Little Chesterford's parish church.

We ignore a footpath that forks to the right, continuing ahead towards the right side of the red roofed church.

The half-hidden, white building to the left of the church is The Manor. Sadly, we do not get a very good view of this exceptionally old domestic property, possibly the oldest in Essex, dating from around 1200 AD and listed at Grade I.

We reach the brick and flint wall which borders the churchyard. We keep the wall on our left. We leave the field through a kissing gate and enter a small church car park. Cross the car park and pass through another kissing gate. We have now reached the main settlement of Little Chesterford parish, Little Chesterford village. The whole parish registered a population of 215 in the 2011 census, so it's a small village.

The entrance to the churchyard and church is on our left. Like The Manor, the church dates from the 13th century and unusually has its nave and chancel under a single roof. Two bells hang in the bellcote which was added in the 19th century, a time of considerable restoration, here and in many other churches. If it is open (usually Fridays, 9am to 3pm), please remove or cover dirty boots before entering.

Just outside the churchyard is a parish notice board with a carved heading. The seat next to it may be suitable for a stop before the final two miles – there is more seating just inside the churchyard and also in the church porch. On the opposite side of the car park is the village hall, a re-purposed village school with the inscription GS 1862. GS was George Sandars of

Little Chesterford Park. He was MP for Wakefield from 1847 to 1857. It is understood that he led fund-raising and personally made a generous donation towards the cost of the school.

From here, we join the road and turn right. On the opposite side of the road is The Old Cottage, built in 1590 AD. This building survived a disastrous fire in 1914 that leaped from thatch to thatch and destroyed nine homes and two pubs. This explains why much of the village is relatively new. We will stroll to the end of the High Street and back again, where possible keeping to the pavement or facing oncoming traffic.

On the right, we pass Reading Room Cottage. This and the cottages on either side are believed to have been a reading room (a forerunner of today's libraries), a caretaker's cottage and a laundry. High up on the gable are the initials GS and the date 1862 (the same as on the village hall, so presumably another George Sandars initiative). The significance of the bull with horns is a mystery - does anyone know?

After a while, we come to a long, tall white-painted house on the left, The Old House. It displays the date 1703 but may be even older.

Opposite, on the right, is the long, thatched Bank Cottage of similar vintage.

Next on the right is The Maltings, dating from the 16th century.

Soon on the left is 16th or 17th-century Kings Farm, behind the line of cypress trees.

A little further along, we reach a crossroads with what was once the main road, Walden Road. Now it has been bypassed by the B184 (which we crossed not long ago at Springwell Nursery). When safe, we will cross this road, but halt on the far side. If we were to continue ahead we would soon come to a roundabout with the B184; and if we went straight across we would climb up to Chesterford Research Park, Little Chesterford's largest employment site with far more workers than the resident population of the parish.

Now, we will turn around. Looking back, on the corner just to our left, is Woodene. To its left, much taller, is 18th-century Rider's Croft which in the mid-20th century was known as Tudor Guesthouse, serving travellers on this road between Saffron Walden and Cambridge.

We will retrace back down the High Street, sometimes getting a different perspective of individual buildings. The first two houses on the right were constructed after the 1914 fire: Woodstock Elm replaced the destroyed Crown Inn and served as a pub until the 1960s; next door, Roslyn resulted from the partial rebuilding of the former beer house, the Bushel and Strike.

As we approach the corner near the church, we should keep to the pavement on the left to avoid the blind bend. Then we follow the lane round to the right.

We will **not** stay on the lane as it turns left so, before reaching the next bend, we cross to the right when safe. If we were to stay on the lane, we would soon cross the River Cam on a narrow bridge that dates from 1791, but instead we bear right onto a public footpath / gravel drive, passing Orchard House on the right.

We pass Manor Cottage on the left and a small green on the right before bearing left on gravel and then following a field-edge path with hedgerow on our left. Behind the hedge is the River Cam, also sometimes referred to as the River Granta.

After a while, the path swerves left and right to continue with the hedgerow now on the right. About here, we leave Little Chesterford and come into the parish of Great Chesterford. We keep straight on, heading towards relatively new houses in the distance.

We cross a gravel drive and pass a new housing estate on the right. At the end of the footpath, we pass the entrance on the right to these new houses: a 'private estate' no less!

We are now on Rose Lane, with more established dwellings. The Old Thatched Cottage on the left dates from the 18th century and is indeed thatched.

At the end of Rose Lane, we meet Great Chesterford's High Street. Opposite, to the right, is Elizabeth House with 17th-century origins. With care, we cross the High Street and turn left. Next on the right, set back, is Saffron House, 17th-century and formerly the Three Horseshoes pub.

The village of Great Chesterford stands on the site of a Roman town. Our route passes through a large conservation area.

Soon, we pass another former pub on the right, The Old White Horse, also dating from the 17th century.

On the left is the Crown and Thistle, a functioning pub dating from around 1500 AD.

Immediately after the pub, we go straight over the crossroads when safe, crossing Carmel Street on the right.

We are now in South Street. On the left, in an arc, are Manor Cottages which were built in the 20th century.

A little further along on the left is Old Engine House; the small building in front, with a bay window, was once the village fire station.

Soon afterwards, the pavement on the right ends so, when safe, we should cross to the pavement on the left. On this side, we pass a small green, Horse River Green, which leads down to the River Cam.

We pass the village sign on a small green on the right. Also to the right, just beyond the green, is the village primary school, erected in 1849 and faced in knapped flintstones. Out of sight, just beyond the school, there is a small village store.

We continue ahead, along Church Street, soon looking back to Fiddler's Rest, 1841, a former lodge house.

A little further along, we pass The Old Vicarage, 1672, and immediately afterwards we turn left into the churchyard of All Saints, the parish church.

We pass the war memorial on the left and then 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. Around the back of the church, there is a fine view of the grounds of Bishops House which was built as a vicarage in the 18th century.

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. We pass through the gate and return to the road. With care, we 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. When we reach the corner, to the right we can see another of Great Chesterford's hostelrys, The Crown House, built in the 18th century, possibly on part of the wall of the Roman town.

We turn left onto Newmarket Road, the B1383, which we last saw soon after leaving Audley End Station. We follow the main road round to the right, crossing the River Cam, and then round to the left, passing the former mill, Kings Mill, built in the 19th century and now converted into apartments.

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.

We may have parked here before catching a train to Audley End to start the walk. Alternatively, if we now need to travel to Audley End Station, the 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.

You can read more about the parishes of Wendens Ambo, Saffron Walden, Little Chesterford and Great Chesterford on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

The website has many more downloadable walks including a completely different route between Audley End and Great Chesterford stations (number 13) and a route that includes a more detailed look at the centre of Saffron Walden (number 101).

This route description, last updated 18 August 2021, 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 on the next page. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

