



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 123

Chrishall, Langley, Great & Little Chishill and Heydon: a countryside walk on high ground: 8.1 miles (13 kms)

This clockwise, rural walk through four parishes is mostly on upland paths with extensive views over unspoilt countryside – best experienced on a clear day. The route is mostly on good clear paths and quiet lanes. There are three pubs en route: The Pheasant at Great Chishill, King William IV at Heydon (temporarily closed in 2024) and the Red Cow at Chrishall. It is always best to check opening times before relying on one. The route passes 4 parish churches, although some are not always open. If you plan to visit a pub or church, please be prepared to remove dirty boots or cover them before entering. There are no stiles.

Start and finish: The walk starts from the car park beside Holy Trinity Church, Chrishall. The entrance is from Bury Lane, which is on the right about ¼ mile north of B1039. Walkers are welcome to use the car park and are encouraged to make a donation just inside the church porch.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL451386 - Postcode: SG8 8QY (up the lane opposite).

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194.

A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

From the car park, turn right up the gravel path towards the church. If it is open, you are encouraged to visit. In any case, please leave a donation in the porch. The church was mainly constructed between the 13th and 15th centuries and has been recognised for its architectural and historic value with a Grade I listing. This is the only Grade I listing we will encounter on this route although we will pass several other interesting churches.

From the church porch go straight ahead across the grass, with the Vicarage on the left, to leave through the gateway. Beyond the gate, keep straight ahead, descending along a grassy path to the bottom of the hill. For the next 2 miles we will follow the Harcamlow Way, a waymarked 141-mile long-distance walking trail that follows a figure-of-eight route between Harlow and Cambridge.

Cross a substantial footbridge to reach a road, the B1039. With care, cross and turn left. In 20 yards turn right onto a tarmac bridleway, the approach road to Chiswick Hall. This drive ascends gently for some distance. You may like to look back from time to time at the view of Chrishall Church.

A long stretch of fencing on the right comes to an end and about 15 yards later we turn sharp right, leaving the drive. Cross a wooden bridge with handrail and immediately turn left to again follow fencing on the right. When the path meets a track, continue ahead, through a gate with a building on the left. Pass a dressage area on the right and follow the track round to the left. Chiswick Hall, built around 1600 AD, is only partly visible to the left.

Follow the track round to the right, initially with a ditch on the right. Continue in a southerly direction for about a mile, along a straight grassy path.

Further along this path, on a clear day we can see a tall communication tower on the horizon in the distance to the right. This is at Barkway, around 5 miles distant. The tower is 348 feet (106 metres) tall and contributed to various military and civil aircraft tracking and navigation systems from WWII until 2011. As the circular walk progresses, the tower will seem to keep moving to the left.

Continue beside a thin strip of woodland on the right until the corner of the field. Go ahead into the wood, across a dip and follow the path half left through the wood.

The path soon emerges onto a field. We have just crossed from Chrishall parish into Langley parish, at the same time passing the highest point in Essex, 482 feet or 147 metres above sea level.

Turn left and follow the field edge, keeping woodland on the left.

Eventually, at the end of the field, we reach a crossroads of paths. Ahead, straight across a field, is Langley Church. It has 12th-century origins and a 14th-century tower. Today's route does not include the church which is usually open only at weekends. If you wish to add half a mile to the journey go straight out and back on the path across the field. Make sure you come back to this point!

Until this crossroads of paths, we have generally been heading South, along the Harcamlow Way, but here we leave the Harcamlow Way and change direction to head westwards. For a while, we follow a ditch on the right, with Langley Church over to the left.

Keep straight ahead for about half a mile (ignoring paths off) until you reach a road at the tiny hamlet of Killlem's Green. Go straight ahead on the lane, climbing gently.

Pass through Gypsy Corner Farm. A little later there is no official welcome to Cambridgeshire but our departure from Essex is evident from its county sign. The county of Hertfordshire lies only half a mile to our left. At this point we also pass from Langley parish into the administrative parish of Great and Little Chishill.

We pass Manor Farm on the right and then the lane descends fairly steeply into the tiny hamlet of Little Chishill.

Just past a pair of white brick houses on the right, a footpath to the left beckons to Little Chishill Church which is set back from the road. The church merits closer inspection, with much dating from the 12th to the 14th century. The church is usually locked, but from the churchyard you can see 16th-century Rectory Farmhouse to the left. Coming back along the footpath, we get a view of Little Chishill Manor on the opposite side of the lane.

Leave the churchyard and turn left to continue down the lane for a short distance before turning right onto a byway and passing a small postbox on the left. Pass a couple of buildings on the right and then keep to the left on the path. The path is stony and relatively narrow, climbing fairly steeply. The chalky base reminds us that we are in the long chalk hill range that includes the Chilterns further to the west.

When the gradient levels off and the view opens up, the white cap and sails of Great Chishill Windmill come into sight ahead and to the left. This post mill (meaning that most of the structure rotates on a central post) was built in 1819 and, after a major programme of restoration, was reopened in 2019 by celebrity singer Sam Smith who grew up in Chishill.

When the byway reaches a lane, turn right onto May Street and climb steadily to the village of Great Chishill.

Pass White Horse Cottage on the left, a former inn dating from the 17th century. Cross Maltings Lane on the right.

Shortly before the crossroads with the B1039, there is another 17th-century building on the left: Hill Farm House.

Our route goes straight ahead into Heydon Road, but please take care in crossing the junction and pause to view the many interesting features around this crossroads, including the war memorial and village sign. The parish of Great Chishill boasts the highest point in Cambridgeshire (480 feet, 146 metres, above sea level) about half a mile East of this crossroads.

Having crossed the main road, continue along Heydon Road, beside the parish church on the left. The church is worth visiting, but please remove or cover boots if they are dirty. St Swithun's dates from the 13th century and survived a fire in 1789 that destroyed most of Great Chishill. The church has 6 bells, dating from 1686 to 2021 – yes, 2021. When you get home, you may like to read an account of the 2022 project to re-hang the old bells and to install the new one - <http://www.greatchishill.org.uk/subpages/Bells1.html>

About 100 yards after the church, pause at the entrance to Rectory Farmhouse on the left to enjoy the view into the far distance. On the right, thatched Rectory Cottage was built originally as two homes in the 17th or 18th century. The Pheasant public house on the right offers food and drink.

Cross New Road on the left. About 30 yards later, on the right, is the former village lock-up, erected in the late 19th century.

Set back on the left, number 31, Walnut Tree Cottage dates from the 17th or 18th century.

Further along on the left, a pair of thatched cottages, numbers 57 and 59, also date from the early 18th century, possibly late 17th.

Continue along the lane, and when the pavement ends on the left, please cross to the right to face any oncoming traffic.

We leave Great Chishill and enter the parish of Heydon. For many years until 2021, Wood Green Animal Shelter stood on the right with an unofficial 'blue plaque' commemorating a former resident, Arthur the cat who found fame in Kattomeat adverts in the 1980s. Sadly, the animal shelter has now closed. A two-storey, 18th-century thatched house called Miss Long's Cottage, number 59, stands just beyond the former animal shelter.

On the right, the King William IV pub and restaurant was closed in 2024. Its website claims 17th-century origins and explains that it was named after the monarch in whose reign the Beerhouse Act of 1830 abolished the tax on beer and extended the opening hours of licensed public houses.

Continue along the lane with the pub on the right. When safe, cross to the pavement on the left.

Pause beside The Old School House on the left, dated 1846. Looking back a little, on the other side of the road is the entrance to Heydon Place. This, mostly-hidden, private residence was built in 1853 as the Rectory for Rev Latimer Neville (1827 – 1904). For over 50 years, he served as Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge. He was the 4th son of the 3rd Baron Braybrooke. Older brothers succeeded to the title but failed to produce an heir, so when Latimer Neville was aged 75 he inherited the title as the 6th Baron Braybrooke and presumably took up residence in the family seat at Audley End House, Saffron Walden. Sadly, he enjoyed the title for only two years until his death when the Braybrooke title passed to his son, Rev Grey Neville.

Latimer Neville was Rector of Holy Trinity Church, which is the next building on the right. It dates from the 15th century but much was rebuilt in the 20th century following WWII bomb damage that caused the tower to collapse into the nave. If you would like to look inside, first please remove or cover boots if they are dirty.

At the road junction, turn right, passing a green on the left and then The Old Post Office which dates from the 17th century. Keep to the pavement on the left, beside a red brick wall, until you reach a pond with waterlilies and fish. Here, cross the road with care and turn right onto a track which is signposted as Icknield Way. The Icknield Way is an ancient trackway that follows chalk escarpments between Wiltshire and Norfolk – we are heading towards Norfolk.

The wide, stony track meanders, after a while turning left and then right. It passes between fields for 100 yards or so and then bears slightly left, away from woodland on the right, and now heading fairly straight between two fields towards houses in the distance. On a clear day, in the distance way over to the left, you might be able to discern the giant aircraft hangar at Duxford Airfield, 5 miles away, and perhaps even the 220-foot chimneys at Addenbrookes Hospital about 10 miles distant on the edge of Cambridge.

On reaching a hedgerow, turn left and in about 30 yards turn right across a wooden footbridge with metal handrails – in so doing, we leave Cambridgeshire and return to Essex. Go straight ahead with a fence on the right. The footpath becomes a gravel drive, passing Springfields on the right before emerging onto a lane. Turn left and in just a few yards turn right onto Palmer's Lane.

Pass a school on the right and then The Old Telephone Exchange before reaching a road junction where the Chrishall village sign, on a small triangular green, confirms that we are back in the parish where this walk started. Keep to the right, passing the tiny Old Post Office on the left and, on the right, a Stanton Ironworks fingerpost sign, manufactured in Derbyshire. Keep right, signposted to "Great Chishall" which seems to be a mistaken spelling of Great Chishill.

Pass a war memorial on the left and continue ahead on High Street. Pass the Red Cow pub on the left, complete with thatched cow on the roof. Stay ahead on the High Street (do not turn down Hog's Lane). As the lane descends gently, pass a series of lovely cottages, some thatched and mostly dating from the 17th or 18th centuries.

As we leave the village, just past the national speed limit sign, turn left into a lane, opposite the *Hollow Road* sign.

Pass Chalky Lane Cottage on the right and a water pump on the left. Cross over the Harcamlow Way path and continue along the lane.

At a T junction, turn right onto another lane.

Again ignore the Harcamlow Way footpath to the left and soon reach the lane on the left that heads up to Chrishall's parish church. On the right, opposite the junction, is the 16th or 17th century, timber-framed and plastered Glebe Farmhouse with a thatched shed.

Turn left towards the church, passing 17th-century Church Cottage on the right, to return to the car park. If you didn't visit the church or leave a parking donation when you arrived a few hours ago, please consider doing so now (after changing out of those boots if they are muddy).

You can read more about each of today's parishes on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 05 October 2024, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk where you can find short introductions to each of the parishes and many more walk descriptions. 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.

