



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 126

Great Dunmow – a stroll around the town – 3.0 miles (5 kms)

This walk explores the more historic parts of Great Dunmow. The town is rich in listed buildings and most of the centre is protected as conservation areas. Around two-thirds of this walk is within the conservation areas. Great Dunmow has a choice of pubs and other places to eat or drink as well as several convenient seats. The route is a mixture of High Street, residential streets and some footpaths. There are public toilets near the start and also after about 2 miles. Near the end of the walk, Great Dunmow Maltings and Town Museum is usually open on Saturdays, Sundays and summer bank holidays from 11am to 4pm. There are no stiles.

Start and finish: There is a signposted public car park in the centre of town, just east of the High Street. The route starts from there. The car park may be busy on market days, Tuesdays.
Car Park entrance: Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL629218 - Postcode: CM6 1WX.
The route can generally be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 195.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

Before you leave the car park, have you paid? Allow at least two hours for the walk as there is much to see, and more if you plan to eat or visit the museum. Leave the car park, passing between the Cooperative food store and public toilets on the right and the Library on the left. Very soon, bear left at White Street and in a few yards emerge onto the High Street.

Turn left and immediately pass the Boar's Head. This pub is exceptionally old with elements of the building dating back to the 14th century. This is the first of many buildings we will pass that have been listed for their historic or architectural interest. Great Dunmow has a total of 250 of which we will pass around half. We will mention just a selection, especially those that are listed as Grade I or Grade 2* ["two star"]. Not all interesting buildings are listed, possibly because they have been altered. We will not attempt to mention all interesting buildings! Please take the walk at a leisurely pace to make the most of this opportunity to absorb so much heritage.

Keep to the left pavement – we will retrace on the other side. Very soon after passing the War Memorial on the right, pause at a cream-brick building on the left where there is a memorial plaque to the Reverend Noel Mellish. He was vicar of Great Dunmow from 1928 to 1948. During the First World War, he was the first chaplain to be awarded the Victoria Cross, honoured for his bravery when rescuing many wounded soldiers in the face of enemy machine gun fire.

Continue ahead, crossing the junction with White Hart Way, the entrance to the car park. Soon pass a road entrance on the left and halt outside Fyfield and Gabriel House. Across the road is 18th-century Saracen's Cottage which has relatively new, 20th-century, pargetting decoration and bowed shopfront windows. When safe, cross the High Street for a closer look and then turn right to return on the other pavement.

At the War Memorial, turn left into New Street and cross to the pavement on the right. This colourful street has mostly early 19th-century dwellings with some from the 18th or even 17th. On the left, numbers 11 and 15 are amongst the oldest with their large pargetting designs. There is no number 13, presumably because the number is considered by some to be unlucky.

Next on the left we pass the United Reformed Church, built in 1860. A little further along on the right, behind a red-brick wall, is a 300 year-old Quaker burial ground. Its Meeting House dated 1833 stands on the site of a 1709 predecessor. Here we turn and retrace to the War Memorial.

Turn left into the High Street and stay on the left pavement. Almost immediately opposite on the right, the building with two gables facing the street started life as a single large house in the 16th century.

On the left, just after the pedestrian traffic lights, the shops at numbers 24 to 20 originally formed one elaborate hall house, erected in the 14th century. Turn left immediately after number 20 (with its early 19th-century shop front) into Angel Lane where there is a clearer indication at the far end of this building of its age.

Continue up Angel Lane, passing a small row of shops on the right and The Ark Baptist Chapel on the left. Just beyond is the car park which is used for Dunmow's weekly market on Tuesdays. Turn and retrace the short distance to the High Street.

Almost opposite is a substantial 19th-century water pump which has been well preserved. Turn left and continue along the High Street on the left.

On the right, number 15, with three gabled dormer windows in the roof, was formerly the White Horse pub and dates from the 14th century. A low and narrow alley to the right of the building leads back towards where we parked. Continue along the High Street.

Number 12, on the left and with steps up to the front door, was built in the 18th century as a town house.

Soon after, the 19th-century shopfront of newsagent *A. Willett & Son* now forms just part of what was originally built as a house in the 16th century.

There is a fine street scene to the right down Market Place (B184) towards The Star. We will walk up there later. On our left is The Saracen's Head Hotel, originally a 16th-century coaching inn and posting house, a centre where couriers and coachmen could change their horses.

Pause outside The Saracen's Head and look back across the road to the tall building with a clock and a bell beneath a cupola [pronounced *kewpoller*]. This is the Old Town Hall, a former Guildhall, erected originally in the 15th century. Its large first floor oriel window, facing towards us, is a 20th-century addition. The building is now used as offices.

Continue ahead on the left, leaving the Town Hall behind. We are now in Stortford Road. On the opposite side of the road, the railings date from the 18th century. They stand outside The Chestnuts, a sizeable, rambling building now used as offices. Inside there is evidence of the original house which was built in the 16th century.

The Chequers, on the left, claims to be a 15th-century inn but its listing dates it from the 14th. Continue ahead.

With care, cross Chequers Lane to the building that now houses Uttlesford Community Hub. This was the first purpose-built police station in Essex, opened in 1843. Its cells were used as the model for cells created in the Essex Police Museum in Chelmsford. After 165 years here, the police moved to another new building on the outskirts of Dunmow in 2008.

Note the Dunmow coat of arms high on the wall. The arms were officially granted in 1956 and include elements of the arms of several families that once held manors in Great Dunmow and symbols denoting various activities that contributed to the town's early wealth including wool, barley and bacon.

The wall with the coat of arms belongs to number 47, Foakes House. Use the pedestrian crossing to cross Stortford Road. On the far side is the E.T. Foakes Memorial Hall, opened in 1934 and named after Edward Thomas Foakes. It was built with money bequeathed by his sister Miss Alice Foakes. She also gave number 47 to the town, initially for use by the hall caretaker and now used by the Town Council.

Pass the 2020-built Altura Place which offers a stark contrast to surrounding properties. The architect of this block of 12 flats sought to recreate the art-deco style of the 1920s. Opposite, on the left, we pass substantial Westbury House which had been the home of Edward and Alice Foakes.

On the right we pass a row of smaller houses that date from the 16th to the 18th century, of which number 20 has an unusual 18th-century wooden doorcase with fluted Doric columns.

Turn right into Rosemary Lane. Towards the bottom of the slope, we pass a 17th-century thatched house, Talberds Ley, with unusual pargetting. Continue ahead, soon walking uphill on The Downs. Pause at the pedestrian crossing; down to the right, beyond the green, is Doctor's Pond which we will pass later.

Use the pedestrian crossing to cross The Downs and soon turn left into a turning that is also called The Downs.

At the end of the green on the left, note the unusual straw finial on the ridge of the thatched roof of Primrose Cottage on the right: a wizard's hat, perhaps the Sorting Hat from Harry Potter. Go straight ahead beside a metal gate into Downs Crescent. When the road turns left, keep straight ahead along a footpath with fences on either side. For the first time, we have left Dunmow's conservation area. We stay on this path for nearly half a mile, passing through relatively new residential areas.

Great Dunmow has been expanding rapidly in the 21st century, growing from a population just below 7,000 in 2001 to 8,800 in the 2011 census. Since then the town has spread further with the creation of more residential estates, whilst generally leaving the historic centre intact.

Ignore paths that go to left and right, cross a residential road, Emblems, with number 6 ahead on the right.

Cross another road and continue ahead on the pavement, now in The Mead. As The Mead turns left, keep straight ahead.

In 2022, the clearly defined path leaves the established residential neighbourhood and then, with high temporary fencing on either side, crosses an area of open field that appears to be destined to become another residential estate.

At the end of the pre-development area, go straight ahead through a hedgerow onto a green, Castleden Meadow. Keep ahead on a stony path with a hedgerow on the right, to emerge onto a lane with a green ahead, Parsonage Downs.

We are now in another conservation area. Over to the left of the green, out of sight, is Helena Romanes School. Turn right onto the lane and pass Portways, number 3, and then Heathfield, number 1, each dating from around the 15th century.

In a short while bear right, joining a busier road, Beaumont Hill. Keep on the right and pass several charming 18th-century thatched cottages, most of which have “eyebrow dormers” in the thatch facing the road.

At the foot of the hill, the beautifully thatched 18th-century house on the left is, appropriately, called Thatchers.

Keep to the right, and pause at a brick gateway on the right soon after the junction with Lime Tree Hill. The red-brick house beyond is one of two buildings in Great Dunmow that have the highest listing, Grade I. This is The Clock House. It dates from the 16th century and the house wall facing us is early 17th century. Note the single-handed clock. A blue plaque records that Sir George Beaumont was born here in 1753. He became a noted amateur artist and an influential art collector, probably leaving Dunmow around 1785. He was instrumental in the establishment of London’s National Gallery in 1824, donating 16 paintings from his personal collection.

Retrace a few yards and, when safe, cross to join the pavement on the left of Lime Tree Hill. Descend the hill and follow the pavement round to the left, passing the 17th-century Angel and Harp pub and then the 1836 National School on the right.

Do not follow the main road round to the right, but keep straight ahead, signposted to Town Council Cemetery. This is Church Street. The first building on the right dates from the 15th century and was formerly the Six Bells public house. The vintage of the houses that follow on the right ranges from 15th to 19th century.

Go just past the church to see the Old Vicarage on the left with its interesting mix of beams and pargetting. The exposed timber framing dates from the 16th century.

Now retrace just a little way to the parish church of St Mary. It dates from the 13th century, was substantially restored in the 19th and early 20th, and has been awarded a Grade I listing. As with all old churches, you are encouraged to explore the inside.

From the church, retrace down Church Street, keeping on the left. At the end, cross the main road with care and continue ahead past the Angel and Harp. Bear right and soon turn left beside a complex building on the left. In the 14th century this was a single hall house; now it is three dwellings. Pass through a gateway onto a tarmac path that heads across a large recreation ground.

Keep straight ahead on this path, but after a while, look back towards the parish church.

Pass a skate park and play area on the right. On the left is The Pavilion, a community hall. Pass through two gates and turn left onto a busy road, The Causeway. Immediately on the left is a small car park with toilets.

Pass the car park entrance. Soon keep left at a mini roundabout, passing 16th-century Brook House on the left. We are now in North Street. Soon pass a Victorian postbox in the wall on the left. Continue ahead beside colourful 19th-century houses on both sides of the street. Some used to be shops.

Immediately before a pedestrian crossing, on our left is the former 15th-century Kings Head Hotel (now converted to eight flats). Cross North Street on the pedestrian crossing and turn left.

We soon reach Doctor's Pond. An interpretation panel offers an explanation for its name and goes on to say that a Great Dunmow man, Lionel Lukin, invented the first "unimmergible" (unsinkable) lifeboat in 1784, having tested models on Doctor's Pond.

Continue ahead with the pond on the right, soon passing the Town Lock-up on the right. A plaque tells its story. When safe, cross North Street to continue gently uphill on the left.

Pass the Starr Inn on the right as we enter Market Place. Many of what are now mostly shops on either side were originally houses. Most of the buildings here are listed. Their origins range from the 15th century to the 19th. Number 12 on the left and numbers 7 and 9 on the right fall into the 15th-century category.

At the top of Market Place, we reach the Old Town Hall on the left. This building served as the administrative offices for Dunmow Corporation for 300 years until 1885.

Turn sharp left beside the Town Hall into White Street. Soon turn left again, into Mill Lane. Pass the car park exit on the right and red-brick The Old Exchange on the left. Immediately afterwards, on the left, is the entrance to Great Dunmow Maltings and Town Museum. The Museum is usually open on Saturdays, Sundays and summer bank holidays from 11am to 4pm and is certainly worth visiting.

From the Museum cross the road, turn right and very soon turn left into the car park where we started.

There are two exits from the car park, either the way we drove in a while ago or the way we just arrived on foot.

This route description, last updated 11 September 2022, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk There, you can read more about Great Dunmow within the parish introductions and download many additional walk routes.

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.

