



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 131

Barkway estates, Barley village and countryside: 6.5 miles (10 kms)

This anticlockwise walk passes through the extensive Cokenach and Newsells estates in the north of Barkway parish, explores the village of Barley and also includes paths in rural Nuthampstead parish. It is hilly at times with some extensive views. The route is mostly along good paths and quiet lanes, with several stretches along the B1368 including the first half mile. There are no stiles but there is a set of steep steps. There are occasional seats, especially around Barley. The route passes two pubs in Barley, The Fox and Hounds and The Chequers. In 2024, The Chequers opened every day but The Fox & Hounds was closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Please note, for another day, that Walk 132 includes Barkway village and a wider area to the southeast, while Walk 133 explores the heart of Barkway village in more detail.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes at the car park opposite Barkway Village Hall. This is on the B1368 at the far north end of Barkway village.
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL386360 - Postcode: SG8 8DF.
The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

Leave the car park and, with care, cross the main road towards the Village Hall which was erected in 1926 for the Women's Institute. Turn right and head North along the pavement.

In about 300 yards, pause beside the footpath to the left, signposted to Newsells Village. We are not going to use the path but there is a clear view from here of a communications mast, about 600 yards away. This very tall radio mast was erected in 1941 and was designated *RAF Barkway*. It served as part of the RAF communications network and continued to be used for aircraft navigation until 2011. Barkway has the highest ground in the Hundred Parishes and the mast was erected at a point that is 500 feet (150 metres) above sea level. The mast itself is 348 feet (106 metres) tall. Some views from the top are available at <https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/raf-barkway-mast-barkway-herts-nov-2013.86478/>

Continue along the main road. Fairly soon the pavement ends so, with care, cross the road and continue on the other side, pausing at the entrance to Cokenach Cricket Club, a 100-year-old club. Perhaps now is the time to put some of today's walk into context . . .

The B1368 on which we are walking passes, here, between two large estates that have existed for centuries. To the west is Newsells Park and to the right Cokenach. We will pass through both estates and discuss Newsells later.

Cokenach was purchased in 1896 by the wealthy Crossman brewing family. Douglas Crossman, a cricket enthusiast, established a high-class cricket ground on the estate in 1919. The estate side played against other estates and for many years estate staff were recruited only if they played cricket. There was a professional coach and full-time groundsman. The Hertfordshire county cricket side played here from time to time.

After the death of Douglas Crossman, the estate was owned by successive, wealthy Danish families who had no interest in cricket. In 2011, Cokenach Cricket Club was obliged to move from the centre of the estate to a new ground on the outskirts, where we are now standing. Today, Cokenach is owned by the Holch Povlsen family, owners of the international “Bestseller” clothing chain. On the other side of the main road, you may be able to see a tall obelisk through the trees. This is on the Newsells estate and we will see it again later.

Continue ahead, passing an entrance on the left to the Newsells estate, and in due course we arrive at the Cokenach entrance. Grand and imposing it may look, but this is still a public right of way. Turn right and proceed along the drive through an avenue of horse chestnut trees with parkland on either side. We will get only a small glimpse of the 1716 Grade II*-listed Cokenach House, although there is a better view on Walk 132. The house’s gardens and parkland cover some 200 acres and are protected as a Grade II listed park and garden. Should you think that this is a big and spectacular estate, please bear in mind that Anders Holch Povlsen has another 200,000 acres as Scotland’s largest landowner – that’s about two-thirds the size of the Hundred Parishes.

Enjoy the privilege of strolling along this rather special footpath!

After a while, the house briefly comes into view on the right and the roadway bears left. Stay on the main roadway, passing an entrance on the right. Keep to the left of all the various buildings and pass a parking area on the left.

At the end of the car park and before an estate office on the right, turn left, heading away from the house and into woodland. We have now left the parish of Barkway and entered the sparsely-populated parish of Nuthampstead. Descend gently on a wide gravel roadway through *Walk Wood*.

At the end of the wood, keep straight ahead on a twin-track concrete road, passing a large building on the left. The sunnier half of its roof is totally covered in solar panels. The road now climbs gently, bears a little to the right and then descends with a line of trees on the left.

About 100 yards after the line of trees, we meet a grass track which crosses ours. We turn left, but not up the grass margin with ditch on the right – instead we turn sharp left, diagonally across a field towards the left end of a wood (Messop’s Grove). Should our diagonal cross-field path be impassable, it appears that the grass margin around the field may offer a reasonable alternative – firstly beside the ditch and then left beside the woodland.

At the end of the cross-field path, keep straight ahead on the footpath into Messop’s Grove. The path follows a fairly straight route through the wood. At the end of the wood, kink slightly right and then left to continue in a northerly direction for some distance, at first on a clearly-defined path between fields.

On reaching a new wood on the right, keep straight ahead, just inside the wood. Emerge from the wood and continue ahead on a grass path between fields, and then with a hedgerow and trees on the left.

Parish boundaries seem to be rather unpredictable in this area. For a while, our path defines the boundary between Nuthampstead on the left and Barley on the right; soon we will have Barkway parish on the left. Over to the left, Barkway’s mast appears above the trees.

To the right, the village of Great Chishill can be seen about 2 miles away at the top of the ridge with the white Chishill windmill to its left.

At the end of a long field, cross a track and keep straight ahead with wire fencing on the left and hedgerow on the right. The path now descends gently and soon has a tidy hedgerow on either side.

After a short, steep descent, our path reaches a road junction at Pinner's Cross. Keep straight ahead on the road, now entirely in the parish of Barley. Very soon, the tower of Great Chishill church is quite clearly visible on the horizon to the right.

We soon enter the hamlet of Smith's End, part of Barley parish, and here we start to see some of Barley's 67 listed buildings – almost a quarter of all its buildings; we will refer to only a few. Most of the houses in Smith's End are listed, dating from the 17th or 18th centuries and generally updated in more recent times. Ignore the footpath on the right just after the pink *Rose Cottage*. *The Thatched Cottage*, set back on the right, is probably the oldest in Smith's End, dating from the 16th century.

When the road turns left, we go right onto a footpath, signposted to *Shaftenhoe End Road*. The path runs beside the ground of Barley Cricket Club which is even older than Cokenach CC, having been founded in 1882. At the end of the ground, continue straight ahead on the grass path, ignoring other paths to left and right.

When the path reaches a lane (Shaftenhoe End Road), we turn left and soon pass the appropriately-named *Lovely View Stables*. In another 200 yards we arrive in the centre of Barley and reach a busier road, Church End. Cross the road with care and turn left along the pavement.

We soon pass the busy village store on the right and then the substantial Margaret House on the left. This was built around 1830 as the rectory, has since been extended, and is now a retirement home.

Next on the left is Barley's parish church, dedicated to St Margaret of Antioch. Various elements of the church date from the 12th century to the 19th. As always, a visit is recommended.

From the church, cross the road with care and turn left to continue in a south-westerly direction, coming immediately to the unusual Town House, with two covered stairways rising to the first floor. Dating from the early 16th century, the Town House has served as a guildhall, marriage feast room, school, workhouse and almshouses; these days it functions as Barley's village hall.

Continue past the Town House and immediately turn right beside the building's grand chimney stack. Behind Town House follow a little lane to the right. Keep to the right of the scout hut and soon reach a large field. It is understood that this patch of land, *the Plaistow*, was given to the residents of Barley by King Edgar, back in the 10th century.

Turn half left and cross the field diagonally to exit through a gateway. Follow a short path to reach a road, with *Tudor Cottage* and *Wheelwrights*, both from the 17th century, immediately opposite. This is Barley High Street, the B1368. There are many listed buildings within a

hundred yards or so to right and left. We will turn left, staying on the slip road slightly raised above the High Street.

Almost every building on our right dates from the 17th century. They include two former post offices and a former pub (*The Ramblers* was once the *King William Inn*). Beside *The Ramblers* is an “anonymous” Victorian post box, so-called because it was manufactured without the usual VR insignia. In recent years, this and other post boxes in Barley have been decorated around Christmas time with imaginative knitted festive displays.

On the left we reach the *Fox and Hounds* pub, a former coaching inn dating from the 17th century that has the distinction of appearing regularly in the Michelin Guide.

From the Fox and Hounds cross with care to the entrance to Richmond’s, a popular coach company. Look back at the pub and especially its distinctive 1950s sign that spans the road. Diagonally opposite is the War memorial, standing beside a 17th-century lock-up or cage, once used to temporarily house drunkards and petty criminals. Between the cage and the memorial stands the surviving base of a village cross, probably dating from the 14th century.

Continue on the pavement, past Richmond’s Coaches on the right. This is London Road, B1368. Soon we come to a house called *Milestones*. Just beyond the entrance, in its hedge, there is a distinctive milestone, installed around 1730 and one of a series that were funded by a trust established in 1586 by a former master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge for the upkeep of roads in and around Cambridge. There is a similar survivor in Barkway, also on the B1368, somewhat south of where we started this walk.

Next on the right is the 17th-century, thatched *Greenbury* with a Sun fire sign above the door, indicating that it was insured by that company. On the left we pass Smiths End Lane which would take us back to Barley Cricket Club.

When the road bears left, we keep straight ahead into *The Mount*. At this junction, on the left, is Barley’s other pub, *The Chequers*. We have covered 4.5 miles to this point.

Keep the *Chequers* on the left and continue westwards on a road and then stony track, signposted to *Stockbank Bush*, and soon pass *Mount House* on the left and the unusual *Homestall* with tower on the right. This lane, a mixture of tarmac and loose stone, descends steadily. At the foot of the hill, we turn left onto what is signposted as a Public Highway towards *Newsells ½*. This is a wide, straight, sandy track. After about 200 yards we pass imperceptibly from Barley parish into Barkway parish.

After a while, a tarmac drive crosses our track, revealing that we are passing through Newsells stud farm, with horses in neat paddocks to right and left. Whilst we get only limited views of the Newsells Estate, perhaps now is the time to recall a little history.

Newsells was owned by a long line of wealthy people with close connections to royalty, starting with Eudo Dapifer, the steward to William the Conqueror. In 1926 the estate was purchased by Sir Humphrey de Trafford as his family home. He established a stud which went on to breed several horses that won classic races, including 1959 Derby winner *Parthia*. Newsells Park has been a successful stud ever since. Sir Humphrey’s grandson, Andrew Parker-Bowles, was the first husband of Queen Camilla.

The estate's well-hidden red-brick Newsells Hall was built in the 1950s to replace a 17th-century manor house that was destroyed by an accidental fire during the Second World War.

The present owner, Graham Smith-Bernal, who made his money by developing legal software, bought the 1,200 acre estate in 2021 from Jacobs Holding AG of Switzerland who had owned it for 20 years. Smith-Bernal intends to continue the traditional stud farm and to develop the estate's vineyard.

Let's press on.

After a while, we pass 17th-century Fox Cottage on the right and soon reach a road junction.

On the left is a war memorial to the 7 men killed in the Great War who came from this tiny hamlet of Newsells. There are just a few houses ahead on the no-through road but we will turn right, opposite the war memorial, climbing gently along a sunken lane.

In about 100 yards, shortly before reaching a tall, thatched house on the right, turn left onto a public bridleway, initially up some steep steps. On the right we pass the 17th-century, thatched Pump House. Continue ahead on the path beneath an avenue of trees.

At the end of the avenue, keep straight ahead through a wooden gate. After about 20 yards, bear left to follow the main path and then bear right, heading gently downhill through woodland, after a while following a picket fence on the left.

At the end of this fence, go through the gateway and bear right, keeping a thatched cottage on the left. After the cottage, turn left through a metal gate and continue on the path, gently uphill with hedgerows on either side. This path continues uphill for some distance, generally with a hedgerow on the right and fence on the left. To the left, mostly out of sight, are buildings of the Newsells estate. Ignore occasional gates to left and right.

When the woodland on the left ends, we continue with fencing on the left, still climbing. After another 100 yards, look back to see how far we have climbed and also to view a tall obelisk. The obelisk has no inscription but is believed to have been erected in the 19th century by a former owner, Baron Strathnairn, a retired general. He had been a senior British army officer in the Crimea and India in the 1850s and later erected the obelisk in memory of a favourite horse who had carried him during the Indian Mutiny of 1857.

Continue ahead and pause at a crossing of paths, just before a metal gate. Now on the right are two communication masts, the nearest of which was RAF Barkway.

Pass through the gateway and continue fairly straight ahead along the path. Just before reaching a residential road, the path bears left and soon passes Barkway Social Club on the left just before reaching the main B1368 road. Turn left on the pavement and after about 40 yards cross the road with care and return to the car park where we started this walk.

You can read more about Barkway, Barley and Nuthampstead on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 24 January 2024, 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.

