



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 132

Anstey, Barkway and Nuthampstead: a walk of great variety: 6.9 miles (11 kms)

This clockwise walk is fairly flat, mostly on good paths with half a mile along Barkway's main street. It passes through three parishes and offers a great variety of surroundings. There are no stiles and just a few seats. In Autumn, there are numerous opportunities to pick blackberries and sloes so you may like to keep a container or bag to hand. There is a pub in Nuthampstead (The Woodman: telephone: 01763 – 848328), and also a pub in Anstey (The Blind Fiddler – 01763 848000). It's always best to check before relying on a pub to be open.

Start and finish: The walk starts from the car park beside Anstey Infants School and just south of the parish church. The entrance to the small car park is signposted to Anstey Village Hall. Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL404327 - Postcode: SG9 0BY. 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 return to the road. With care, cross to the far side and turn left.

Pass flint-faced Anstey First School and, when safe, cross to the left before the road turns right. At the bend, leave the road and go straight ahead through the lychgate into the churchyard of St George's Church. Just after the lychgate, turn and look back to it. The overall structure is believed to date from the 15th century. To the left of the gateway is a tiny lock-up or cage for the temporary confinement of minor criminals and drunkards. This element was bricked up in 1831 but may already have been in use as a cage. It continued in that role until the early 20th century.

Continue towards the church which merits a visit if open. It dates from the 12th century and is listed at Grade I. Of particular note inside is the 12th-century font which is decorated with mermen, the male equivalent of mermaids, one of only two known examples of such font decoration (the other being in St Peter's, Cambridge). The walls and pillars have been decorated over centuries by graffiti 'artists'.

Leave the church through the ancient porch and turn immediately right to continue through the churchyard with the church on the right. Leave the churchyard through a wooden gate and pass red-brick houses on the left. Beyond the gate, keep straight ahead, passing a pond on the right. The pond is part of a ditch that surrounded an early Norman motte and bailey castle. The mound of the castle, now covered in trees, stands around 30 feet (9 metres) tall. The area is protected as a Scheduled Monument. An American bomber plane, taking off from nearby Nuthampstead airfield, crashed onto the castle mound in 1944, killing all crew but without any bombs exploding. We will visit the airfield later today.

After about 50 yards the path reaches an area of hardstanding. Go straight ahead across a small field. If you have a dog, please put it on a lead because there are often horses in the next field.

Soon, pass through a metal gateway and go straight ahead on a footpath with a wooden fence on the right.

Leave the field through a kissing gate and go straight ahead along a field-edge path with a wood on the left. Pass the thatched 500-year old Woodside Cottage on the right. Originally this was a small open hall house. Immediately afterwards, reach a lane. This tiny hamlet is called *Pain's End*. Turn left and stay on this lane for more than half a mile.

Soon, Barkway communications mast appears ahead, more than two miles distant. 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. We will see the tower from many angles during this walk. 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 this lane for about half a mile. On the way, pass the entrance to Bandons Farm on the left and a single dwelling on the right. Soon afterwards, cross a stream, the River Quin, and then pass an Anstey sign. Our River Quin has nothing to do with the 1960's Bob Dylan song, *The Mighty Quinn*.

After a short rise, ignore a turning to the left signposted to Wyddial and Buntingford.

Further along, pass North End Farm on the left, with a good view over the Quin valley. About 200 yards after North End Farm, as the lane turns right, we keep straight ahead on a grassy public footpath. In 40 yards, fork right, along the path which has a hedgerow on both sides.

In about 30 yards the public footpath enters Barkway Park Golf Course and we pass through it for about a quarter mile. Please stay alert to golfers and give them priority and space. Initially, we keep to the left, following a hedgerow and ditch on the left and at one point cross a wooden footbridge with handrails.

Less than 100 yards after the footbridge we bear to the right, ignoring two golfers' bridges on the left, and then follow the waymarked path onto an uncut path with a lake on the right. Occasionally there are wooden boards along this path but they are not always apparent and can be a trip hazard. We have now left the parish of Anstey and are following the parish boundary between Nuthampstead on our right and Barkway on the left. The ditch on our left is actually the River Quin which here defines the parish boundary.

When the lake on the right ends, keep to the left of the field, soon bearing right. Keep the stream on our left, ignoring four more golfers' bridges that cross it. Soon after one of these golfers' bridges, going to the 4th tee, we pass an old seat and then turn left over a not-so-smart bridge, crossing the River Quin. Keep to the left, following a new ditch on the left. We are now in the parish of Barkway and the golf course is soon hidden behind the hedgerow on our right.

When the footpath reaches a road, we turn right and keep to the right, facing traffic. This is the fairly busy London Road, the B1368.

After a while, we pass a welcoming sign to "Barkway, historic coaching village".

Soon, cross the road with care to use the pavement on the left.

This was indeed once a busy route between London and Ware to the south and Cambridge to the north. We will continue along this straight road for more than half a mile, passing the majority of Barkway's 65 listed buildings. Helpfully, almost every house has both a number and a name. We will mention just a few of them. Walk number 133, just 1.7 miles long, also passes up and down Barkway's main street and describes more of the buildings.

Pass the Tally Ho pub on the right. It has only limited opening hours and does not regularly serve food.

After the turning on the left towards Buckland, our road changes name from London Road to High Street. Pass thatched Barkway Cottage on the right, dating from around 1600 AD

After Gas Lane and Osborne House on the right, when safe, cross to the right. A little further along on the left is *Clock House Cottage*, with its clock. The right-hand corner of this house has an Ordnance Survey benchmark carved into the plaster, beside an older inscription which seems to read *EW 1762*. The house was built towards the end of the 18th century as a toll house, collecting fees from carriages, wagons and animals passing along this busy road which was managed for many years by the Wadesmill Turnpike Trust.

Continue on the right, crossing the entrance to Townsend Close.

On the right, the long, thatched *Berg Cottage*, number 85, took its name from its owner in the 1930s. It dates from the 17th century and displays the date 1687 above the central window. Below the same window is a Sun Fire Insurance marker, indicating that the property was insured.

On the left, the red-brick Almshouses dated 1909 were erected in memory of John Stallibrass, a local benefactor who died about 100 years earlier. They were erected by his great granddaughters.

Cross Burrs Lane.

Immediately opposite, on the left, number 100 is appropriately called *Century House* and has an interestingly tiled roof.

Number 96, next on the left, dates from the 17th century and was formerly the *Cross Keys* public house. Many properties along this once-busy coaching route once functioned as hostelries.

On the left is a pond with the village sign and an informative interpretation panel about Barkway. Please feel free to cross when safe to check this out. Continue on the right.

Immediately after the pond, number 82 dates from the early 16th century and may have started life as a hall house. In more recent times it functioned as the *White Horse* public house.

On the right, just after the defibrillator housed in a telephone kiosk, *Old Forge* dates from the 16th century and was once two dwellings and a forge.

Soon on the left, a long building has a single, tiled roof with decorative fishscale bands. It dates from around 1700 AD. Its four chimney stacks reveal that this was once four dwellings, numbers 74 to 68, and now it is just *Bumblebee Cottage* and then *Horseshoe Cottage*.

At this point, we will cross the road, with care, and turn left up Church Lane.

Soon, on the left, we reach the wagon wash, dating from 1600 AD. A notice explains that it was in use until the 20th century for the cleaning of farm wagons [and probably also the horse-drawn carriages that stopped in Barkway overnight].

Next on the left is Manor Farm, an impressive three-storey house with mullioned windows on its eastern side. The building dates from the 16th or 17th century.

Continue along the lane and, just after it turns right, turn right again through a gate into the churchyard. The small door on the left would seem to allow only thin bell-ringers into the tower. A visit to this, the only Grade I-listed building in Barkway, is recommended, but please first remove boots if they are muddy. The church, dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, dates from the 13th century and was extensively rebuilt in the 19th, like many of our ancient churches.

Turn left from the church porch to continue down the path through the churchyard, passing beneath a giant cedar tree and the lychgate. On the left, we pass the grounds of Barkway House before returning to the High Street.

Turn left and, when safe, cross to continue northwards on the right side.

Next on the left, number 64, *Coachlamps*, and 62, *The Old Coach House*, are halves of what was once a coaching inn, *The Angel*, built in the late 17th century. By 1800 AD it had been renamed as *The Wheatsheaf*. The inn was re-fronted and re-roofed around 1820 AD and later converted into two houses.

Next, *Milestone House* stands beside an ancient milestone, installed around 1730 and one of a series that mark the miles on this route between London and Cambridge. They 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.

Please cross the High Street and continue on the left.

After 100 yards, on the right, steps lead up to the rather imposing *Red House*, number 11, which has 16th-century origins.

On the left, number 14, *Duck Cottage 1692*, with ducks on the roof, is joined to a red-brick building which is used by Barkway Parish Council.

Soon afterwards is number 2, High Street, built originally around 1500 AD as a hall house.

Cross Royston Road with care and on the far side, by the flint wall, turn around and look back along Barkway High Street to see how little has changed from the image which appeared on a postcard that was sent in 1904 and is copied on the next page. The red-brick building on the left was yet another pub, *The Chaise and Pair*.



Now, with care, cross the High Street to the war memorial, which takes the form of a large Celtic cross.

Pass to the right of the war memorial to join the footpath signposted to Nuthampstead. We soon come onto Barkway's recreation ground. Keep straight ahead with a ditch and hedgerow on the right. Towards the end of the ground bear left, past a semi-circular seat on the right, before going right and continuing in the original direction. We continue in a fairly straight line for more than a mile, heading East South East ("ESE").

After about 150 yards, the view opens up to the left across parkland, part of the Cokenach estate. After a while we walk beside a rose-lined fence on the right with a garden and house beyond. At the end of the fencing, bear slightly right to continue in the same direction along a gravel driveway.

When the driveway reaches a crossroads, keep straight ahead, now with Earl's Wood on the right for a quarter mile. Over to the left, *Cokenach House* comes progressively into view. This substantial mansion is privately owned, dating from 1716 and with additions over the last 300 years. The house has a Grade II* listing. Its gardens and surrounding landscaped park cover some 200 acres and are listed as a Grade II Park and Garden. The gardens include a network of canals that date back around 300 years.

The house remains in sight for some distance and along this stretch of path we pass imperceptibly from Barkway parish into Nuthampstead, a very rural parish with a total population of around 140. It is one of only two parishes within the Hundred Parishes without its own parish church.

When the field on the left ends, keep straight ahead, now with woodland on the left. The wood on the right ends and we now have a field on the right. In about 60 yards, the field on the right ends.

At this point we turn left over a wooden footbridge with handrails and immediately turn right over another bridge. Keep straight ahead, initially with woodland on the left.

After the wood, the view opens up to the left. In the distance is a large farm building whose roof is totally covered in solar panels. Continue straight ahead, passing through woodland and later going straight ahead through a kissing gate onto a clearly-defined path with a fence and hedgerow on the left.

When woodland on the left comes to an end, turn sharp left and in about 10 yards turn right on a brick bridge over a ditch. Continue in the same ESE direction, gently uphill on a field-edge path with a low hedgerow and ditch on the right, heading towards a single oak tree on the horizon.

Our route crosses another path (with a footbridge to our right) but we continue straight ahead on the grass path. About 100 yards after passing the single oak tree, we reach a second and then a third oak. Immediately after the third, turn right on the footpath into a new field with woodland on the left.

In about 80 yards, nearing the end of the field, we turn left into the woodland and then bear right, joining the long-distance Hertfordshire Way.

We soon leave the woodland. Turn right, keeping the hedgerow on the right. In about 100 yards, go straight ahead through a metal kissing gate and in another 40 yards turn right through another kissing gate, then cross a wooden footbridge with handrail. Turn immediately left and follow a hedgerow on the left. In 100 yards, we reach a lane.

Turn left onto the lane.

Pass the entrance on the left to *Caylers Farm* and in another 200 yards turn right onto a lane signposted to Anstey. In about 100 yards, we reach The Woodman pub whose thatched element dates back to the 17th century. Turn left onto the drive to the pub.

On the left are two memorials, erected to commemorate the thousands of Americans who were stationed at Nuthampstead airfield between 1943 and 1945. Over 300 airmen from here were shot down and a similar number taken prisoner. The airfield, with three runways, was constructed in less than a year, just one of many airfields built rapidly across East Anglia by American civil engineers. The Hundred Parishes was home to thirteen wartime airfields.

The pub exhibits photos and other memorabilia from those days, much of which has been donated by the Americans who served here and visited in later life.

From the Woodman, continue up the drive, leaving the war memorials behind on the left. Continue ahead on a grassy path which leaves the area of shrubbery and becomes an old concrete pathway. We are now entering what remains of Nuthampstead airfield.

Ahead and to the left is the former control tower for the airfield. In 100 yards or so we turn right onto a straight concrete track. This was either a taxiway or airfield roadway.

Nuthampstead airfield was decommissioned after World War II but in 1968 it was one of the sites considered by the Roskill Commission as a possible location for London's third airport, a fate which eventually fell upon Stansted.

Follow this rather unusual straight footpath for about a quarter mile and then stay on it as it bears left. Soon reach woodland on the left and continue beside it for a short distance.

At the end of this strip of woodland, pause and look left. This track and the area beside it, now planted as woodland, used to be the main runway. The runways and airfield roadways were mostly dug up and used as aggregate.

We turn right, with our back to the runway, and continue past woodland on our left. We have now left Nuthampstead and returned to Anstey parish.

Looking to the right, we can see two tall communication towers: the one on the right is the former RAF Barkway. Slightly nearer, and to the left of the two towers, amongst the trees is Wisbridge Solar Farm, covering around 50 acres.

Continue along a clear path, after a while bearing left to keep the wood (East Wood) on our left. Almost immediately, ignore a footpath that goes left into the wood. At the end of the wood, the path bears right.

Near the end of the next field, and after a large barn on the left, we bear left and immediately right onto a gravel track. On reaching a road, turn right.

Pass a terrace of houses on the right and then several attractive cottages, mostly dating from the 17th century. Follow the road to the left, past a small green on the right where a signpost shows our direction towards Hare Street. Pass a small chapel on the left, erected in 1902, then 18th-century *Hope House* on the right, and then a telephone kiosk (unusually, still in service in 2023).

Pass a small crowded green on the right with an old cast iron wellhead mechanism and a fingerpost sign. Keep ahead towards Hare Street, immediately passing thatched, 17th-century *Well Cottage* and then 17th-century *Red Stack* on the right.

On the left, the pub, *The Blind Fiddler*, is currently named after a legendary Anstey resident.

George was a blind fiddler who, for a wager and accompanied by his dog, entered a nearby tunnel that was said to lead to a distant castle mound. The sound of his fiddle gradually became fainter until, suddenly, there was a terrible scream. After a while, the dog emerged, badly singed, but George was never seen again.

The pub was previously called *The Chequers*.

Continue along the lane past the pub on the left and then *Wayside Cottage* on the right. On the right, *Rose Cottage* has an ancient AA sign for Anstey.

On the right is the rather grand *Anstey Hall*, a manor house dating from the 17th century. Then we pass Anstey Church (another opportunity to visit if it was closed earlier – first removing boots if muddy). Follow the road around to the left. Pass the school and soon turn right, signposted to Anstey Village Hall, into the car park where we started.

You can read more about each of the Anstey, Barkway and Nuthampstead parishes on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 25 October 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.

