



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 137

Stansted Mountfitchet parkland 3 miles (5 kms)

This short walk, largely in parkland in the east of the parish, complements Station Walk number 3 (also 3 miles) which explores the village of Stansted Mountfitchet. The two could be walked on the same day. This route is gently hilly at times with no stiles. Much of the walk is along tracks and grassy footpaths through Stansted Park, mostly well-defined permissive paths that opened in 2020. These are not public rights of way and remain open at the discretion of the landowner. Some paths may be muddy at times. There are several opportunities for refreshment near the start/finish. The route passes St Mary's Church; if you plan to visit the church (it certainly merits a visit) or stop somewhere to eat, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. There are several seats near St Mary's.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes in Lower Street Car Park where modest charges apply, including Sundays. The car park is approached from the mini roundabout at the bottom of Chapel Hill, B1051, straight ahead from Chapel Hill and signposted to Shopping Precinct, Car Park and Mountfitchet Castle. The longer-term parking is some way along the car park, either before or just after the skate park. The more expensive Stansted Mountfitchet Railway Station car park is nearby (CM24 8BE), also accessible from the mini roundabout.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL515249 - Postcode: CM24 8XJ – what3words: stumpy.robots.awoke .

The area of the walk is on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 195, but most paths are not shown. A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

Having paid and displayed, from Lower Street Car Park walk back to the mini roundabout, passing Mountfitchet Castle grounds and then its entrance on the right. Mountfitchet Castle was created in the 1990s as a tourist attraction. It is very popular, especially with school parties, and seeks to recreate what the site may have been like when it was the main seat of the powerful Montfitchet family who came with William the Conqueror in 1066.

Keep to the pavement on the left to pass beside the red-brick building and Co-op store. At the end of the building keep straight ahead to the road and turn left onto a pavement, signposted to Dunmow and Stansted Airport, with railings on the left. Take care as this is a busy and narrow road.

Soon, immediately after the red-brick building on the left, the road passes over Stansted Brook and then over the London-Cambridge railway line. Ignore a public footpath sign on the left, opposite the back entrance to the station on the right. Soon turn left into Dairy Lane, a residential development completed in 2020. Stay on the pavement on the left and cross entrances to several small closes on the left.

On reaching James Place on the left, cross the road and turn right onto a very short gravel path.

Continue ahead on grass and almost immediately turn left, passing the backs of several houses on the left. After about 50 yards pass through a metal gate onto a Permissive Path. This is close to the end of the houses on the left.

Keep straight ahead on this path, clearly delineated on the right with wire fencing. Fairly soon ignore an informal path that goes to the left to cross a substantial metal footbridge over Stansted Brook. Continue for about 500 yards with the brook and ponds on the left. Beyond the brook is the railway line which heads in our direction towards Elsenham, Stansted Airport and Cambridge.

When we reach the end of wire fencing on the right we ignore the path that goes to the left – it goes over a substantial footbridge to meet a public footpath that heads east towards Elsenham. But our route turns right here, passing through a metal gateway before continuing on the permissive path, climbing steadily uphill on a grass path with wire fencing on the right and woodland and scrub on the left.

When the hedgerow on the left ends, our route turns left but, before turning, do stop and look back. Over to the left, beyond the houses in Dairy Lane, the village of Stansted Mountfitchet rises up the hill to St John's Church, the parish church built in 1889. Further round to the right, the straight lines running up the hillside are vines – planted in 2021 on the south-facing slope. The first grapes were harvested in 2023 and wine from the Gunyah Vineyard is now on sale from <https://www.thegunyahvineyard.com/>

[Our route turns left but if you would like a shorter route, missing two key features but cutting the distance by over a mile, you can keep straight ahead. When the path emerges onto a gravel drive (leading to Stansted Hall to the left), turn right, passing a lake on the left before meeting a path that comes in from the left. That is where this shortcut meets this walk's main route at a point noted on the next page.]

Having admired the view back, turn left, keeping woodland and scrub on the left and with a farm building over to the right beyond the field.

After a while, the view opens up to the left, over the railway track to houses scattered along the road between Stansted Mountfitchet and Elsenham.

After about a quarter mile, the fenced path comes to an end as it meets a wide track. Turn right onto the tree-lined gravel track. Close by on our left is the M11 motorway and we will walk beside it for the next 600 yards, climbing gently.

As the climb eases, the impressive Stansted Hall appears on the right, red brick with Dutch gables and a host of tall chimneys. This mansion replaced an earlier manor house and was built in the 1870s by the lord of the manor, William Fuller Maitland, primarily to house his extensive art collection. He died before the building was completed. It was later purchased by a wealthy industrialist, Arthur Findlay, a leading light in the spiritualist movement. When he died in 1964, the house was left to that organisation and it now functions as a specialist residential college. Courses include hypnosis, mediumship and spiritual healing and are often attended by overseas students.

Continue past Stansted Hall to meet the drive which goes to the right towards the Hall. We pass through a gate and bear left onto the drive.

We soon follow the drive round to the right, passing Burton End Lodge on the right, built in the 19th century as a lodge house to the Hall. Just after the lodge, the Hall's former stable block can be seen, further away to the right.

Soon reach a road, Church Road. Turn right, keeping to the pavement on the right. After a while, Stansted Hall can be seen through the trees on the right. Further along is a memorial to its former owner, James Arthur Findlay (1883 to 1964). In another 70 yards, we turn right, signposted to St Mary's Church.

Very soon bear right through a wooden gate into the cemetery and keep straight ahead towards the church. There are several seats in the churchyard.

The inscriptions on the gravestones were recorded by Stansted Mountfitchet Local History Society in the 1990s. The record is kept inside the church. It lists more than 2,000 names of those who had a memorial; of course, many families could not afford such a luxury. The book includes several analyses including a chart of mortality trends over the previous 250 years. Of those whose family could afford a gravestone in the 18th century, the average age at death was just 40, compared with 74 for the second half of the 20th century.

St Mary's Church dates from the 12th century. Norman decoration survives from that era, especially visible around the two main doorways. We are approaching the South door which is usually open for visitors. The church is well maintained by volunteers and the Churches Conservation Trust. St Mary's served as the parish church for 800 years before that role passed to St John's which was built as a chapel of ease in the centre of the village.

You are encouraged to visit the church but do please remove or cover your boots if they are muddy. Memorials inside include one of marble that stands 20 feet tall. Its inscription, mostly in Latin, runs to some 500 words, recounting the life and extolling the virtues of Sir Thomas Middleton (1550 – 1631). He served as Lord Mayor of London and bought the former Stansted Hall in 1615.

On leaving the church, turn right around the bell tower – from which the church's eight bells are still occasionally rung - and then turn left along a formal path to leave through a gateway. From here, to the right, is another view of the private Stansted Hall.

Turn left through a small parking area and soon turn right onto a tree-lined footpath with fields to the left.

In 130 yards, we turn right onto another permissive footpath, passing beside woodland and Stansted Hall on the right. This path can be quite muddy for about 200 yards.

After about 300 yards this path meets a gravel drive where we turn left.

[This is the point where the shortened route comes from the right to rejoin the main route.]

If we were to turn right along the drive it would soon become private before reaching Stansted Hall. Having turned left, we continue along the drive for half a mile, gently descending through parkland and heading back towards Stansted Mountfitchet village.

Over to the right is the valley of Stansted Brook where we walked earlier. Gradually the new houses in Dairy Lane come into view. Just beyond them is Mountfitchet Castle.

Approaching a gatehouse in the distance, we pass an area of allotments on the left. Towards the end of the allotments, we turn right onto a grass permissive path with wire fencing on the right. Soon bear to the left, now with Dairy Lane down to our right. Ahead, on the horizon, we can see St John's Church. We pass the gatehouse on our left, visible through the trees. There is a good view to the right of Mountfitchet Castle.

The grass path bends to the right to keep a wooden fence on the left. At the end of the fence, turn sharp left and descend fairly steeply for a short way onto Dairy Lane. Turn left onto the residential road.

When safe, cross to the pavement on the right and soon reach the end of Dairy Lane where it meets Church Road. Turn right onto Church Road, retracing the route we followed at the beginning of this walk, crossing over the railway line and Stansted Brook.

Soon reach the mini roundabout where we turn right, keeping the red-brick building on our right and soon reach Lower Street Car Park. [If you parked in the Station car park, cross Church Road with great care and turn left into Station Road].

There are several options for refreshment in this part of Stansted Mountfitchet. The Castle and its associated Toy Museum are most interesting and merit a visit. If you have planned to also cover Station Walk number 3 it starts from the Station just around the corner.

You can read more about Stansted Mountfitchet on www.hundredparishes.org.uk. There, you will also find many more walk routes.

This route description, last updated 08 April 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.

