



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 145

The Sampfords – 5.2 miles (8 kms)

This walk, entirely in the parish of The Sampfords, explores the village of Great Sampford and some of the countryside between Great Sampford and the tiny hamlet of Little Sampford. The route passes two Grade I parish churches. Most of the route is along quiet lanes and just one-third is on public footpaths or byway. Some paths can be muddy at times. There are no stiles. There may be an opportunity to visit the churches at Little Sampford and later at Great Sampford, so please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. You may like to purchase refreshment at The Red Lion in Great Sampford which in 2021 was open for lunch each day except Sunday. If you bring your own refreshment, the route passes several seats.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes on Hall Road, just north of Little Sampford Church. The lane is quite wide and quiet with ample space for parking on one side.
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL653337 - Postcode: CB10 2FN.
The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 195.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

Leave the car and walk uphill, soon reaching the driveway to Grade I listed Little Sampford Church on the left. Beside the entrance is the village sign for Little Sampford, featuring a kingfisher and Little Sampford Church. Later, we will see a similar village sign in Great Sampford, differing only because that one depicts Great Sampford Church. You are encouraged to visit the church if it is open. It was built in the 14th century, around the time of the Black Death. Inside are some interesting ancient memorials.

Retrace up the church drive to the road and, when safe, cross to the far side. Immediately opposite the church drive is an entrance to Little Sampford Hall, built as recently as 1936 after the demolition of its 16th-century predecessor. Turn left, with Little Sampford Hall on the right, and continue uphill.

At the road junction, keep round to the right, signposted towards Thaxted and Great Dunmow. We are now on Sampford Hall Lane and soon we pass another entrance to Little Sampford Hall and a small thatched cottage just afterwards.

Our lane runs along the top of a ridge, with the land sloping away on each side. For the next quarter mile, the lane is lined with mature trees. To the right, in the distance, you may be able to see some of the buildings in Great Sampford, about a mile distant.

After a while, where the lane bends right, keep watch on the right for an ancient earthwork, a small mound surrounded by a moat, close to the road.

Ignore the turning on the left to Thaxted and Great Dunmow. At this junction, there is a seat on a small green, overlooking Tewes Farmhouse. Ignore the road to Thaxted and continue ahead. Soon, looking back, there is another view of Tewes Farmhouse.

The lane, no longer lined with trees, now descends gently. Pass Providence Cottage on the right with what appears to be relatively modern pargetting.

Pass an entrance on the left to Tewes Farm, a different place to the Tewes Farmhouse we passed earlier. The lane bends right and starts to climb again.

Pass Park Pale Farm on the right, ignoring a footpath that is part of the Dick Turpin Trail (actually a series of three circular walks in the area where the infamous 18th-century highwayman grew up).

At the top of a climb we pass The Lodge on the left. Over to the right, we can see Great Sampford down in the valley.

Pass Salix Cottage and then Salix Farm on the right. Soon afterwards, reach a junction and turn right onto the B1051, leaving Sampford Hall Lane and now heading towards Great Sampford.

Pass 16th-century Hill Farm on the right with two peacocks featured in its pargetting. Ignore the lane on the left and soon pass a small vineyard at Riverfield Farm. Pass beneath power lines and beside several bungalows as we descend into Great Sampford.

Cross over the River Pant on a fairly new bridge that displays the Essex symbol of three seaxes (short Saxon swords). We now enter the main settlement of Great Sampford, most of which is designated as a conservation area to protect its character and heritage.

Pass a seat on the small green on the right and, when safe, cross the road to a small green on the left. Fork to the left of this small triangular green – heading towards the church - but soon, after Post Cottage on the left, halt at the end of the green. Ahead and to the left is a former 15th-century hall house, now converted into three cottages.

Turn right, past the flint-faced Stone Cottage on the left. Very soon, we return to the main road and turn left on the pavement. Stay on this side, passing thatched Riverside Cottage on the other side of the road, then the Storehouse and then Changes, with its former shop window.

Just before reaching the road junction, turn left through a gate into the churchyard of St Michael's Church. Bear right across the churchyard to the porch. You are encouraged to visit Great Sampford's Grade I parish church if it is open, but please remove or cover boots if they are muddy. The church dates from the first half of the 14th century and is said to have been built by the Knights Hospitaller, a Christian military order founded at the time of the Crusades. The ancient main door is reputed to date from the time the church was constructed.

Inside, if you turn immediately right you will come to a particularly fine arch between the south aisle and the chapel: the capitals of the arch piers are decorated with fascinating creatures: a human face looks rather shocked, perhaps having been bitten by a dragon. The church's east window is large and impressive.

After visiting, from the church porch, turn half left to cross the churchyard and exit through the gate in the corner, the way we came in. At the road, when safe, go straight across. Turn left and almost immediately right onto the B1053, signposted to Finchingfield. There is no pavement for just a few yards but it soon begins, outside Bull House which used to be the Black Bull pub until the 20th century.

On the left is 17th-18th century Horrells, with steps up to the front door. A little further along we pass thatched Burleys, 1824. Next on the left is the Red Lion Inn, built of white brick in the early 19th century. In 2021, this was open at lunchtimes from Monday to Saturday.

After the Red Lion, stay on the right to pass Great Sampford County Primary School on the left. Just before the pavement ends, cross the road with care to The Old Village Hall, now a private house. We will turn here and retrace, passing School House and then the school which we can see was built in 1876 as Great Sampford Board School.

Retrace back past the Red Lion to the road junction.

Turn right onto the B1053 towards Saffron Walden, immediately passing The Manor House on our right, displaying the date 1595. Note Great Sampford's village sign on the opposite side of the road.

The next building after the Manor House has a cameo high up on the wall. This appears to depict Queen Victoria on an occasion when she was not amused.

Pass the Manse which is now a private house. Next comes the Baptist Church, built in 1875 of light-coloured stone. To the left of the church is the Old Baptist Hall, which now serves as the manse, the home of the Baptist minister.

Pass the entrance to The Corn Mill and Mill Hatch. To the rear of the garden, the base survives of the windmill which once stood here.

On the left, we pass 16th-century Stow Farmhouse with unusual pargetting.

On the left, Hardy's was formerly the Cock Inn, built around 1686.

You may wish to divert for a few minutes by turning up the footpath on the right, signposted as the Turpin Trail. This leads to The Sampford's cricket field and a view of the former windmill, now residential with thatched roof. Retrace to the road and turn right to continue.

The final building in this part of the village is The Nurses House on the right. It was once the home of the district nurse.

Keep straight ahead on the pavement which is now separate from the roadway and considerably higher than the road.

Pass another seat and then, on the left, the half-thatched Carpenters and the fully-thatched Briars, both dating from the 18th century, possibly the 17th.

On the right are two 18th-century thatched cottages, Windmill Cottage and then Mill Thatch, and on the left is Rose Cottage of similar vintage.

After Mill Thatch, turn sharp right into Sparepenny Lane North, a public byway that climbs steadily. The lane passes a few houses on the left and then continues without a tarmac surface, sometimes muddy.

As the unsurfaced section ends, we pass several thatched cottages on the right including Gill Mill from the 17th or 18th century, then a lighthouse and windmill in the garden of the first of several bungalows on the left. After Goodwins Cottage on the right, we pass the main entrance to The Sampfords Cricket Club.

About 30 yards later, we turn sharp left onto a public footpath, another section of the Turpin Trail. This point is about 50 yards before Sparepenny Lane reaches a road (the B1053, close to the Primary School where we were earlier).

The footpath heads in a northerly direction for about half a mile, initially passing bungalows and then climbing steadily into open countryside.

For a while there is a ditch and hedge on the right and later the path switches to right and left so that the hedge and ditch are on the left.

At the end of the field on the right, our path meets another path. The Turpin Trail heads left but we turn right. Almost immediately, we switch left and right to continue with a fence on the left and ditch on the right - and still climbing.

At the end of the field, cross a ditch on planks and continue ahead on a cross-field path to a lane (Parsonage Farm Lane) which we cross. Go straight ahead on another cross-field path.

At the end of this field, cross a ditch and continue with ditch and hedgerow on the left.

At the end of the next field, the path bears right to soon reach a lane. Turn right and in about 20 yards (just before a bungalow called Hawksmead) turn left over a footbridge with metal handrails.

Pass beneath power lines and then, on the right, pass a large field that has many daffodils in springtime. Continue ahead, ignoring the footpath on the right that enters the field.

On the right, we soon come to a substantial moat around a 17th-century house called Maynards. At the end of the moat we reach a lane where we turn right. Pass the front of Maynards House and then Walnut Tree Barn, also dating from the 17th century. The house and barn are listed at Grade II and the whole moated site is protected against development

and unauthorised excavation through its designation as a Scheduled Monument. The site was associated with the family of one Symon Maynard in 1327 AD.

Continue along the lane for a considerable distance as it bends to left and right.

After about half a mile, pass Sampford Lodge and Mount Hall. Thereafter, the lane descends quite steeply.

Ahead and slightly to the left, beyond the valley and towards the top of the hill, we should see the tower of Little Sampford church. This is where we started this walk and we are approaching the finish.

At the end of the descent, our lane reaches a road, the B1053 again. On the corner to the right is a thatched cottage, 17th century with five gabled dormers protruding from the thatch along the front. When safe, cross the B1053 and turn left. Very soon, pass Green Farm Dairy on the left and then turn right into Hall Road, signposted towards Thaxted.

The road soon crosses the River Pant and starts to climb. Pass 17th-century Green Farm on the left and, before long, reach the point where we started. If you didn't visit Little Sampford Church at the start of the walk, here is another opportunity.

You can read more about The Sampfords on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 05 November 2021, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to hundredparishes@btinternet.com.

