



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 149

Arkesden – 5.1 miles (8 kms)

This hilly and rural walk follows a mixture of roads and footpaths, starting with a country walk, mainly on high ground with extensive views, and finishing with an amble through Arkesden's conservation area which includes more than 20 listed buildings, mostly thatched. There are no stiles. Some paths may be muddy. There may be an opportunity to visit Arkesden's parish church and/or the Axe and Compasses pub, so please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. There are several seats along the way.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes from Hampit Road, about 200 yards west of the junction south of Arkesden Church. It should be safe to park considerably along this road where it is wide enough for traffic to pass.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL480345 - Postcode: CB11 4HJ.

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194.

A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

The walk starts by heading East towards the centre of Arkesden village, travelling downhill along Hampit Road and passing houses on the right. Generally, we should keep to the right when on lanes, facing any oncoming traffic. To our left is a deep gully through which Wicken Water flows eastwards on its way to join the River Cam. The gully is often dry.

On the right we pass residential properties including Tallis Cottage and Victoria Cottage, a pair of semi-detached houses dated 1858, and then two individual thatched houses: 17th-century Applebees Cottage (originally three dwellings) and 18th-century Empire Cottage.

When we come to a small green on our left, Pump Green, cross with care to inspect the 19th-century cast iron water pump and an interpretation panel with a plan of Arkesden. We will be passing many of the places mentioned. Ahead, up the hill, is Arkesden's parish church – we will pass it later.

Go back to the road, cross with care and continue heading East. Immediately on our right is Parsonage Farm Cottage, dated 1633 and thatched like so many of the older houses in Arkesden. Pause here and take in the attractive view towards the church, looking over 17th-century Watts Folly which sits down low beside Wicken Water.

Immediately after Parsonage Farm Cottage, turn right onto a public footpath. The path has a ditch and hedge on our left and climbs steadily out of the village and into the countryside. In the next half mile we will gain around 100 feet in height – but the views will be worth it!

The footpath is almost straight. Look back from time to time towards Arkesden Church. For a while we pass woodland on the left.

At the top of the climb, as the path levels off and starts to descend, we may be able to see the chimneys of Wood Hall to our left. A sale brochure in 2019 described it as a “grand Edwardian country residence” in 35 acres with several listed associated buildings. They don’t appear to do teas, so we will carry on.

When the trees on the left end, we reach a crossroads of paths and turn right along a clear path, initially gently uphill. For the next mile we will be walking along a ridge and also along the parish boundary with Arkesden on our right and Clavering on our left.

We are heading in a north-westerly direction with ditch and hedgerow on our right. Our prime view is to the left, across a valley which, further along, includes Clavering Lakes. On the far side of the valley, we can see one of Clavering’s red-brick, white-capped former windmills; sometimes the second mill comes into view, to the left of the more obvious one.

After a quarter mile, we descend gently for a while and continue to pass beside woodland on our right. When the woodland ends, continue ahead, for a while beside a line of oak trees.

When the long field on our left comes to an end, turn right, following the field edge. After only about 30 yards, we follow the path round to the left, now on a broad track and climbing gently with more woodland (Stocking Grove) on our right – with bluebells in springtime.

Our wide track runs beside Stocking Grove, after a while bearing right.

When we reach the end of the woodland, we follow the main track by turning to the left, now with hedgerow on the left. After about 50 yards we turn right, with hedgerow on the right. For the next quarter mile, we keep a narrow strip of woodland (No Man’s Grove – with bluebells) on our right.

When the strip of woodland ends, ignore a track that heads right and keep straight ahead with a new hedgerow on our right.

Below to our left are farm buildings that are part of Clavering Farm.

Ignore a path that heads left downhill to the farm, and continue on our path which soon turns sharp right.

After about 200 yards, the hedge and ditch on our right come to an end and we turn left, with a new ditch and hedgerow on our right.

At the end of the field, turn half right through the hedgerow and in another 10 yards turn half right again. The next stretch may be muddy at times.

We soon pass a house on our right and in another 200 yards we meet the end of that house’s drive to find it is called *Little Fosters Farms*. Keep straight ahead, ignoring the byway on the right.

Soon, ignore a byway to our left and we are now on a tarmac lane.

Pass two 18th-century thatched houses: Clodmore Hill Farm on the left and Bedloes on the right. Stay on the lane which has many horse-chestnut trees spaced along the right.

The lane goes through a ford where the road is crossed by Wicken Water. There is a footbridge if needed. Soon, we pass Little Becketts – 17th century with a tiled roof – and an adjacent thatched cottage.

We reach a small triangular green and turn right onto another lane.

In about 200 yards we reach Great Becketts on our right, dating from 1580 AD and with a splendid central chimney stack. Beside Great Becketts we turn left onto a lane signposted to Newland End. [If we were to go right, this is Hampit Road, about half a mile from where we parked].

Having turned left, our quiet lane climbs gently and passes an interesting and extensive sculpture park and then sculpture workshops at Newland End.

As the lane bends to the right, we reach the final 'summit' of the day (117 metres or 384 feet above sea level). There is a fine view to the left – looking northwards towards Elmdon, Littlebury and Saffron Walden although none of the settlements are visible.

Soon, we come to a seat, facing south: perhaps an opportunity to rest awhile.

Ignore the lane on the left and continue beside a very long hawthorn hedge.

The lane then descends gently and passes Hobs Aerie Farm and Mulberry House (with beech hedge) on the left.

At the road junction, turn right and soon come to Quicksie Hill, a small hamlet of Arkesden parish. Continue on this lane, which descends into Arkesden.

Ahead, slightly to the left, the roof of the parish church comes into view. As we descend, quite steeply, more of the church becomes visible and, on a bend, we pass The Old Maltings on the right, a 17th-century house with exposed timbers and thatched roof. Pass the red-brick Old Vicarage on the right before the final descent to the church.

On reaching Church Green on the left, cross when safe and turn left, passing the war memorial constructed from a puddingstone. If the church is open, please visit (remembering to remove or cover boots if they are dirty). St Mary's dates from the 13th century and benefited from a major restoration in 1855. Inside are several sculptured monuments including the memorial to Richard and Marye Cutte. He died in 1592. The memorial's colourful appearance is due to relatively recent decoration.

From the church porch, go straight ahead to leave the churchyard. Keep to the left of Church Green, passing a seat on the right, installed in 1977 at the time of Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee. On the left we pass 17th-18th century Dove House and then 18th-century Church Green Cottage.

We pass Arkesden Village Hall on the left, built on the site of a former Congregational chapel. Here, keep left on the path, away from the road. On the right, we pass the road bridge over Wicken Water. There are several large puddingstones and sarsen stones on the stream bed. These different types of stone were each formed around 55 million years ago. Sarsen stones are extremely hard sandstone rock; puddingstones are a conglomerate of colourful pebbles bound together with a quartz 'cement'. They probably originated in different places and were brought together here by glacial or river movements long, long ago. Arkesden is particularly rich in puddingstones.

On the left, pass close beside 17th-century Watts Folly. Continue on the footpath with the Wicken Water watercourse and roadway on the right.

We will now walk along Arkesden's main street, identifying a few of its buildings, mostly listed for their architectural or historical significance. Then we will retrace.

On the opposite side of the road, we pass Parsonage Farm Cottage 1633 and, immediately afterwards, the footpath that we took at the start of this walk.

Next on the right is the tall Hill House, set back from the road and dating from the 18th century. On our left is The Green Man, formerly a pub and dating from the 16th or 17th century. Then on the left comes 17th-18th-century Sextons. Just after is a K6 telephone kiosk, standing outside The Old Post Office. The phone box has been re-purposed as a lending library. Here, we will leave the segregated path and return to the roadway. When safe, cross the road to continue on the right.

Immediately on our right is the thatched Axe and Compasses pub. It was originally constructed around 1700 AD as a timber-framed building and a brick front added a hundred years later. The pub once featured in the popular 20th-century television series *Lovejoy*. The pub was badly damaged by fire in March 2022 but was rebuilt, reopening 18 months later.

Continuing with the Axe and Compasses on our right, the road continues beside Wicken Water and each house on the left has its own little bridge across the gully.

After a hundred yards or so, immediately after Box Tree Cottage, there is a stone beside the pavement which declares *Audley End Station 3 miles*. That is indeed the distance using the most direct road route past Arkesden Church. When safe, we should cross the road here, also crossing over the gully on the footbridge towards Down House. Turn right and continue along the footpath.

On the left, we pass two 17th-century thatched houses: Long Thatches (which was originally three dwellings) and then Ivy Cottage.

Immediately after Ivy Cottage, we return to roadway and turn left into Wicken Road, also known as Poore Street. At the junction, on our right, is a bench that was installed in 1953.

We will venture just a short way along Poore Street before turning. Bailey's Cottage on the right dates from the 17th or 18th century.

Also on the right, Finchleigh and Reubens share a colourful Norwich Union fire insurance plaque which appears to have been repainted in more recent times.

On the left, we pass 18th-century Glebe Cottage and then 17th-century Byrne's Cottage, much restored in the 20th century and with exposed timber framing. We will turn here and retrace our steps back through the village.

After about 200 yards, we again reach the road junction. Here, Wicken Water passes beneath the junction. Note the cast iron signpost opposite, manufactured in Essex at Maldon Iron Works in 1934.

Keep right, retracing along the footpath beside the thatched cottages and then crossing the gully on the footbridge. With care, cross the road and continue past the Axe and Compasses, using the pavement when you can.

Immediately after the pub, note the puddingstone outside the entrance to Cruachan.

Next on the left is 18th-century Tatlock's Cottage.

Continue ahead. When pavement runs out, it is probably safest to cross to the right and face any oncoming traffic. With care, cross the road junction on our right and pass Pump Green with its seat and interpretation panel. Continue ahead, up Hampit Road to where we parked and started this walk.

This route description, last checked and updated 01 February 2024, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk There, you can read more about the parish of Arkesden and download many more walks.

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.

