



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 150

Ashdon – 6.5 miles (10 kms)

This is a fairly hilly walk, entirely in the parish of Ashdon and mostly along footpaths. Some paths may be muddy. The route briefly visits the parish's centres of population and passes the exceptional Ashdon Village Museum which is normally open only from 2pm to 5pm on Sundays and Bank Holidays from Easter to October. Much of the route is on higher ground with extensive views. There are no stiles. The second half of the walk passes several seats. There may be an opportunity to visit the parish church, museum or pub, so please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. About a mile before the finish, the route passes the Rose & Crown which has limited opening times.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes near Waltons in the hamlet of Steventon End. There is ample space to park on the lane beside the long low wall to the west of Ashdon Place. The route starts from here.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL592429 - Postcode: CB10 2JD.

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 209.

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

From the parking spot, head East along the lane with the wall on the left. Soon, turn left on a public footpath up an imposing drive. To our right is Place Farm, whose exposed timber framing dates from the 16th century. Soon reach a gate and, if closed, turn left through the pedestrian gate.

Continue beyond the gate up the drive. Pass a long red-brick building on the right. This is the back of a range of 16th-century buildings. At the end of this building, through an entrance on the right, we get a glimpse of Waltons to the left and Walton's Cottages across a lawn to the right. Waltons, mostly hidden behind a high wall and hedge, was rebuilt after a disastrous fire in 1954; Walton's Cottages date from the 17th century.

Continue up the drive, now passing the manicured hedge that hides Waltons.

When the walls on the right end, the drive continues gently upwards between an avenue of mature trees.

Pass through a large gate and continue ahead, now on a drive less surfaced, still gently climbing beneath the avenue of trees.

At the end of the avenue of trees, we reach a point where five tracks meet. Here, we turn sharp left, now with a field on the right and gently descending. There are extensive views to the right. After a little while, at the top of the distant hill to the right, we can see the brick water tower on Rivey Hill. This is approximately 3 miles distant and a little beyond the village of Linton.

After a quarter mile, the track bears left and soon meets a crossroads of paths. We turn right onto the bridleway, maintaining our general direction of travel.

The track passes between a sports field on the right and a large area of concrete hardstanding on the left. The path becomes rather narrow and uneven for a short distance as it descends to a road.

With care, cross the road. Turn left and almost immediately right to pass a sewage works on the left. Soon, cross the River Bourn. The river flows from left to right, heading north. In a few miles it will join the Granta, then the Cam and eventually the Great Ouse before flowing into the North Sea. We will encounter the Bourn again later.

Continue along the narrow lane, climbing steadily. After about a quarter mile, the lane turns left and passes between brick walls – a giveaway sign that this was once a bridge over a former railway. The line ran from Ashdon and Saffron Walden to our left to Bartlow about a mile to the right. Looking sharp left from the bridge, the line would have run beside and to the right of the line of trees. Looking on the other side, the line passed between the house and the wood. We will meet the line again later.

Continue along the lane, passing the entrance on the right to Lang Meadows. Our road now becomes a track. Soon, when the woodland on the left ends, turn left onto a bridleway.

The bridleway climbs steadily with woodland on the left and an open field on the right. We will continue in this south-westerly direction for about a mile.

As we approach the brow of the hill, we realise that this is a false summit. After a short flat, the gentle climb resumes, now with hedgerow on the right.

On a clear day, it can be rewarding to pause and take in the extensive views. If we look left and back a bit, east-southeast, we can see the white sails of Ashdon Windmill, close to where we parked. Beyond the windmill, the very tall radio mast is at Castle Camps, about 3 miles away.

Continuing over the summit, our path now has an uneven concrete surface as we descend towards a building. Shortly before the building, ignore a signposted footpath that goes back to the left.

Pass the building, Pantiles Barn, on the left, and pass farm buildings and a roadway on the right. We then approach a long farmhouse on the right, Great Bowsers. The house sits just beyond the Ashdon parish boundary in Hadstock. Surprisingly, Great Bowsers is not listed.

Just as we reach Great Bowsers, there is a signposted footpath to the left. We should take this field-edge path to head southeast.

About 100 yards from Great Bowsers, bear slightly right and follow the path across a field and gently uphill for about 150 yards.

At the end of this field, you may like to pause and turn around to enjoy the view back to Great Bowsers. Looking back, not far beyond the woodland to the left of the house, is the site of a Second World War airfield known as both Little Walden and Hadstock.

Now, continuing on our way, we bear slightly left into the next field, along a field-edge path with hedgerow on the left.

After about 150 yards, at the end of this field, continue straight ahead on an earth bridge over a ditch, to continue on a field-edge path with a ditch on our left.

When we reach woodland (Harecroft Grove), the path goes ahead into the wood and meanders through, keeping fairly close to the left of the wood. When the path leaves the wood, it continues ahead beneath an avenue of trees.

About a hundred yards after leaving Harecroft Grove, we reach a junction with another path. Here, we go sharp right and immediately cross over a wooden footbridge with metal handrails.

The path now heads south through another narrow strip of trees with a ditch on the right.

Ascend some steps with a metal handrail. Go straight ahead and in only a few yards cross a wooden footbridge with metal handrails. Continue straight ahead and soon cross a narrow field with buildings below to our left.

At the far side of this narrow field, turn left onto the field-edge path, keeping hedgerow on the right and now heading downhill towards a black barn and a white house. Pass the barn immediately on our left and then the farmhouse - this is 17th-century Ashdon Street Farm with an interesting, original hexagonal chimney stack.

Just after the farm, we reach a metalled lane. Keep straight ahead.

Stay on this lane for about 600 yards, soon ignoring a footpath on the left and later a bridleway on the left. Soon after the bridleway, the lane descends.

After the descent, the lane bends to the right and then sharp left. On that left bend, turn sharp left through a gate onto a signposted public footpath (the footpath is not marked on the map in 2021). Follow the clear field-edge path with hedgerow on the left. To our right, on the far side of the field, is Shadwell Wood.

At the end of the field, a bridleway comes in from our left. Continue ahead, passing a hedge on the right and then a red-brick house (Spring Mead). Follow the path to the left.

Now, immediately on our right is the former railway line that once ran between Saffron Walden and Bartlow (through Shadwell Wood). It operated from 1865 until 1964, at its peak providing a weekday service with eight trains each way, pulled of course by steam. What a sight that must have been!

We soon reach another house (Halt Cottage), and here we turn left and then right, around the cottage. Pass a shed with a steam engine on the weather vane. When our gravel drive meets a metalled road, pause and look to the right. Here is the former railway carriage which for many years, from 1911 to 1964, served as a waiting room for Ashdon Halt, a station where trains halted only on request. This photo is displayed in the excellent Ashdon Village Museum.



Continue along the lane, Fallowden Lane. After a few yards there is a turning area on the left – perhaps where carts or even cars would collect passengers who left the train at Ashdon Halt many years ago.

Continue past Fallowden Farm on the right and then climb steadily.

At the top of the hill, we come into the hamlet of Church End.

Just before a road junction, we pass The Croft on the left, a 17th-century thatched house.

Opposite The Croft, turn right into a small parking area, pass a seat on the right, and continue ahead along pavement. Pass several houses on the right and follow the pavement left to meet the road. With care, cross the road and turn left, retracing for about 10 yards. Turn right through the gate and enter the churchyard.

Keep ahead to the church. We are going to turn left around the church, but first, immediately to our right, we can see The Old Vicarage, 18th-century and with a central chimney stack. Then comes The Guildhall. It was built around 1500AD, served as a guildhall, was converted in 1774 to a workhouse for up to 30 inmates, then adapted to three dwellings for poor families. Now it is a single residence. Now, immediately before the church, turn left round the church to the main entrance.

Ashdon's Parish Church of All Saints has a Grade I listing and dates mostly from the 14th and 15th centuries. You are encouraged to visit if it is open, but if your boots are dirty please either remove or cover them. Much of the original interior survives.

From the main church porch, turn right and continue with the church on the right. At the end of the church, go straight on, past a small obelisk, to leave the churchyard. Ignore the footpath that goes right and continue ahead with hedgerow on the left and waymarked as Harcamlow Way.

On our left, behind the hedgerow, is the extensive garden of Ashdon Hall: every so often we get a glimpse of the landscaping, in particular - through a metal gateway - two regimented avenues of small manicured yews - about 80 in number.

The field to our right is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, believed to be the site of a Medieval settlement, and possibly even associated with the reign of King Cnut following his victory over the Danes at the Battle of Assandun in 1016, more than a thousand years ago. It has to be said that this is not the only possible location for that battle and for the minster (church) that is known to have been erected soon afterwards on the battle site.

As we progress, there are further glimpses of the avenues of yews on our left.

When the garden on the left ends, the path emerges into a field. The view ahead includes Ashdon's windmill on the horizon. Continue ahead beside woodland on the right and soon, after about 30 yards, bear half left across the field, heading towards a building with white gable ends.

After the diagonal crossing, turn right along the field edge to pass the rear gardens of houses on our left. One sometimes has a barking dog.

When we reach the end of the field, the path bears left to leave the field. We pass a wooden footbridge on the right which takes another path over the River Bourn.

Now, immediately on the right, is Ashdon Village Museum, most definitely meriting a visit if it is open, not only for the excellent history displays but also for its tea room! The building's foundation stone was laid in 1927 by Frances, Countess of Warwick. She donated the site for use by the Labour Party and construction was carried out by volunteers. It has served as a museum since 1998.

From the Museum, bear left to cross the road when safe and turn right along the raised pavement. When the pavement returns to the road, cross back with care to continue on the right, facing traffic. Take extra care as this narrow road can be busy.

Pass Clayes on the left, quite hidden but dating from the 16th or 17th century. This private house was used as a hospital during World War II. As we reach Jesters Cottage on the right, immediately opposite is a small milestone indicating that it is 2 miles to Bartlow Station (which closed long ago).

Soon pass a nursery and plant centre on the left.

From the right pavement we get a good view of three attractive cottages on the left: Redwells, Archers Cottage and then Moss Cottage, all from the 17th or 18th centuries. Moss Cottage was once a shop and retains its shop window. It was once the premises of a saddlemaker. Imaginative finials decorate the thatch roofs. In the bus shelter, there is a "QR" code for mobile phone users, one of a series posted about the village and linking to an element of history on the Museum's website.

Continue on the right, soon passing Rectory Lane on the left, once known as "Home Boys Lane". Some way up this lane is a house that was built in 1890 by the Waifs and Strays Society. It functioned from 1890 to 1972 as a home for up to 12 young boys.

On our right are a seat and 19th-century water pump. Behind them, on the other side of the Bourn, is the Village Hall. Note the weather vane and two thatch hares on the roof of the hall. This end of the hall dates from the 18th century and is believed to be the only thatched village hall in Essex.

We soon come to a road junction. Facing it, on the left, is the Rose and Crown Inn (with limited opening times in 2022).

Just before the pub, the postbox is positioned in the wall of the former post office, part of a building that dates from the 16th or 17th century. The inn is of similar age and has some wall decoration that is believed to date from the 17th century.

Ashdon was a focal point in the 1914 Agricultural Strike and for a while 70 policemen were billeted at the Rose and Crown. Eight Ashdon men were sent to prison.

With care, cross the junction and continue ahead for a short distance. On the left is Ashdon's 19th-century school and on the right the war memorial and village sign. The sign proclaims *Ascenduna 1086*, a reference to Ashdon's entry in the Domesday Book.

When the pavement runs out, turn and retrace to the road junction and turn left into Radwinter Road. Cross over the River Bourn and cross when safe to the right. The river floods here from time to time so we may see sandbags and barriers in doorways. Outside the Village Hall a number of medallions are displayed, showing that Ashdon has won several awards for being Essex's best kept village.

The centre of the village is a conservation area and many individual buildings are listed. Amble slowly up Radwinter Road where many of the buildings date from the 18th or 17th century. White Horse House on the right was once the White Horse public house, and The Old Fox on the left was formerly The Fox Inn.

Ashdon Baptist Church was built in 1835 while Chapel Farm, immediately afterwards, dates from the 16th or 17th century.

On the right we pass a small car park and then come to Tudor Croft, a 16th or 17th-century timber-framed house with all its timbers exposed. This lovely house seems to be leaning.

With care, cross the road to walk up Kates Lane. We pass Appletree House on the left and soon after, as the lane turns right, we turn left onto a public footpath that is waymarked as Harcamlow Way.

Cross a stream and continue uphill with hedgerow on the left.

At the corner of the field, we turn right along the field edge, ignoring a footbridge to the left.

Soon, as our path bears left, we look down on Ashdon to our left. In the distance, we can again see Linton's water tower on the horizon. On a very clear day, we can also see the tops of the rotating wind turbines at Wadlow Wind Farm, 5 miles distant and close to the A11, beyond the Hundred Parishes. Continue around the field edge.

At the end of the field, go straight ahead, signposted as a Public Footpath, into the hedgerow. Cross a dip and on the far side go straight on with hedgerow on the left.

As we near the top of the hill, we start to get glimpses of Ashdon Windmill through the hedge on the left.

We pass a seat with a view and continue ahead, still with hedgerow on the left.

At the end of this field, follow the path as it turns left, heading towards the windmill, now keeping the hedgerow on the right. When our path reaches a lane, turn left onto the lane. Pass several houses on the right and the windmill on the left. The post mill is known as Bragg's Mill and was erected in 1757. The whole of the windmill building, when in operation, would have rotated about a central post so that its sails were facing into the wind.

Continue along the lane for a quarter mile, descending until it reaches a road. Turn right, and soon we will return to where we parked and started this walk.

You can read more about the parish of Ashdon on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 27 June 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.

