



# The Hundred Parishes

## Circular Walks – number 163

### Little Easton and Great Easton – 3.9 miles (6 kms)

*This walk explores parts of these two adjacent parishes. The first half of the route is mostly on footpaths and the second half is along quiet lanes. There are several stiles. Some of the paths can be muddy at times. The route passes two parish churches, so please be prepared, before entering either, to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. The route passes The Tea Rooms at the Manor near the start and finish and also The Stag pub in Little Easton but each has limited opening. There are many seats along the route.*

**Start and finish:** The walk starts and finishes from the speed limit sign on Park Road, a short distance east of Little Easton Church. This is a straight road and parking to the east of the speed limit sign is suggested.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL606235 - Postcode: CM6 2JJ.

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 195.

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

We should be aware at the outset that much, if not all, of this walk will be in and around what was the estate of Easton Lodge, the family seat from 1582 AD until the twentieth century of the Maynard family. Henry Maynard was granted the estate by Queen Elizabeth I in recognition of his service. Succeeding generations expanded the family's landholding both locally and beyond the immediate area. In 1865 the estate passed to Frances Evelyn Maynard who was just three years old. She grew up to become known as Darling Daisy and, through marriage, became the Countess of Warwick. She was a lady of great beauty, became mistress to the Prince of Wales, and later became a socialist. We will reflect more on the story as we proceed.

Head west from the 30 MPH sign. As usual, we should generally walk on the right, facing any oncoming traffic. Very soon, we pass an entrance on the right to the Barn Theatre and Little Easton Manor.

We then pass Little Easton Church on the right and former almshouses on the left, labelled "1895 W". The W stands for Warwick. We will not see many Ws, but we will pass plenty of houses displaying an "M", usually with a coronet, denoting that they were part of the extensive Maynard estate.

We follow the church wall round to the right and then turn right into the churchyard. As we have just started, our boots should be clean enough to enter the church. If the church is open, a visit is highly recommended. Inside, we will find memorials to many generations of the Maynard family and also to the Bouchier family who were lords of the manor before them in the 14th and 15th centuries. There are two memorial windows to the American airmen who served in the Second World War at Little Easton airfield which was built on the Maynard estate in World War II. The Maynard family home, Easton Lodge, about half a mile west from here, was occupied by American and British forces and was demolished in 1948.

The extensive gardens of Easton Lodge were abandoned for many years but have been partly restored by volunteers and are now open to the public on certain days of the year.

From the church, retrace to the gateway and turn right, heading towards the rather imposing gateway to Little Easton Manor. (This is not Easton Lodge, which stood about half a mile away). Ahead, to our left is the Manor House which dates from the 17th century. Darling Daisy's daughter lived here with her husband, film producer Basil Dean.

Pass through the gateway, or the pedestrian side gate, and keep straight ahead on this public footpath between the buildings. Note the stag on the building to our left – a symbol of the Maynard family – and note the long barn to our right – the Barn Theatre. The theatre was established in the barn by Darling Daisy and its operation was assisted by such luminaries as author George Bernard Shaw and actress Ellen Terry. In 2021, this complex was being used as a wedding venue and/or a tea room

At the end of the buildings, go straight ahead through the gateway and continue downhill on a clear, grassy cross-field path.

At the bottom of the field, bear slightly left onto a gravel path and cross over a stream. Immediately afterwards, keep straight ahead, ignoring the footpath to our right.

The field edge path climbs gently with a fence on the right. At the top of the rise, we reach a T junction and follow the fence round to the right. Here we are on the Saffron Trail long-distance path. Pass a gate on the right to The Spinney and effectively join the drive to that house, still with a wooden fence on the right.

Soon, we pass Little Easton Memorial Hall and a sports field on our left. The land was given to the village by the Countess of Warwick's estate and the hall built in 1952 to commemorate the residents of Little Easton who died in the two World Wars.

We continue ahead, now on a residential road, Manor Road, as we enter Little Easton village.

Shortly before we reach a road junction, Duck Street Cottage on the left was originally constructed as a hall house in the 14th century. The house has been altered over the centuries but retains some of its original structure as well as the chimney that was added in the 16th century.

We reach a T junction with Duck Street, Little Easton's main thoroughfare. Opposite, to our right, is The Stag public house.

When safe, cross Duck Street and turn left, away from the pub. Immediately on our right is Old School House which displays the Maynard family stag.

Soon, we reach Little Easton's village sign. It depicts one of the Marauder bombers that flew from Little Easton airfield and the initials M and W for Maynard and Warwick. The sign displays the name "Estaines Parva" by which this settlement was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 AD.

Opposite the village sign is Little Easton's war memorial.

We turn right beside the village sign into Butcher's Pasture.

At the end of this short residential close, we keep straight ahead between bungalows and then through a gate, following the public footpath which has been surfaced with tarmac for a short stretch. Soon, we cross a wooden footbridge with metal handrails.

10 yards after the footbridge, we turn half left on a grassy path between fields. We head towards what appears from a distance to be a dead tree.

When we reach the 'dead' tree, we go straight ahead on a wooden footbridge with metal handrails.

On the far side, keep straight ahead, but for only about 40 yards. Turn right to cross the River Chelmer on a concrete footbridge with a kind of stile at each end. This is known as Fleck Bridge – does anyone know why?

We cross a traditional stile into a field and turn left. As we crossed the Chelmer, we passed from Little Easton into Great Easton parish. Now, we follow the field-edge path with hedgerow and river on our left.

Towards the end of the field, the river turns to the left but we keep on the path, bearing slightly right to soon cross another stile. We continue ahead on a field-edge path, now with trees on our left. We are still on the Saffron Trail and also, for the next half mile, one of the Five Parishes Millennium Walks. The Five Parishes is an association of local parish churches: the two Eastons plus Broxted, Tilty and Chickney.

Soon, straight ahead at the top of the hill, we can see Great Easton parish church with its distinctive short tower and pyramid roof.

After about 100 yards, our path bears left, following the river. After a further 70 yards, as the path comes close to the river, we fork right, leaving the field edge and following a cross-field path. Initially, we head for the second telegraph pole from the left.

Just before we reach the telegraph pole, we cross a ditch on a wooden footbridge with metal handrails. On the far side of the bridge, we bear slightly right, now following the line of telegraph poles as they climb towards houses at the top of the hill.

After the 4th telegraph pole, the path deviates just a little to the left of the line of poles in order to cross a wooden footbridge with metal handrails. Beware the hole on the left just as we alight from the bridge!

After the bridge, we immediately turn right. Soon we turn left, now with a fence on our right.

At the top of the field, we bear left and soon right, now with a fence on the left and garden on the right. We are now coming into the centre of Great Easton village, passing Croat Cottage on our left.

As we reach a road, immediately on our left are the exposed timbers of 16th-century Essex House. Straight ahead, across the road, is the former Bell Inn, dating from around 1500 AD.

We turn sharp right here, keeping the war memorial and village green on our left. The pink house next to The Bell is called The Garth: in the early 20th century it served as an orphanage and care home, run by a single nun. The centre of Great Easton is protected as a conservation area and many individual buildings are listed for their historical or architectural significance. We will pass some exceptionally old buildings over the next half mile.

As we reach the end of the green, we pass seats and the village sign on the left.

At the end of the green, we go straight ahead, through the gateway into the churchyard of the parish church, dedicated rather unusually to St John and St Giles. If the church is open, you are encouraged to visit, but if your boots are muddy please remove or cover them. The church dates back to the 12th century and retains much from that time, and even some Roman tiles. The church was renovated in the 19th century and is lovingly cared for today.

From the church porch, we turn left to continue along the path, with the church on our left, to leave the churchyard through another gate. Immediately on the right is a barn that was constructed originally in the 14th century, although its red peg-tiled roof is a 'modern' enhancement, added in the 17th century.

We keep straight ahead, crossing a drive and for a short distance following a pathway beside a hedge with a small green on our left. On the right is Great Easton Hall, dating from the 15th or 16th century.

When the path reaches the road, with care, cross the road to the pavement and turn right for a short distance. We pass a gateway on the left to Little Ryse and just 20 yards later we pause, opposite a telegraph pole. Looking over the hedge beside the pole, we should be able to see a mound, surmounted by two large trees. This mound was once the base of a small motte castle, probably built during the period of civil war in the mid-12th century. The castle mound measures about 40 feet across the top and probably had a wooden palisade. The mound was surrounded by a moat. A number of similar castles were built around Essex at that unsettled time to afford some protection to the landowners.

Now turn and retrace along the pavement. We continue back past the church on our left. We cross a cul-de-sac called Rebecca Meade, passing Great Easton's village hall on the right.

Continuing along the pavement, we immediately pass red-brick, 19th-century Easton Hall Cottage, sporting a large "M" for Maynard.

Next on the right is 17th-century The Clerk's Cottage, followed by Stone Cottage, 1822, with a round flintstone above the door.

The next building, a pair of houses, has been greatly modernised and disguises its origins. It dates from the 17th century when it was a single-storey thatched cottage.

Then we get a closer look at The Garth and The Bell, and a fuller view of Essex House opposite.

Further along, we pass White Gates on the right. The Maynard emblem "M" appears on the front, together with the date 1860, and at the far end of the building there is a Maynard estate stag, high up on the gable.

We continue down the hill, passing The Swan, until recently a thriving pub and, with new owners, aiming to reopen later in 2021. Remarkably, the building started life as an open hall house around 1400 AD. A hall house usually consisted primarily of one large main room with a central fire. Its smoke would rise and mostly leave the building through openings at each end of the roof. Chimneys were invented later and installed into many hall houses.

A little further along on the right, we pass The Old House, another former hall house, this one dating from the 15th century or even earlier.

As we reach the bottom of the hill, we pass Lings on the left. This house has timber-framing which dates from the 14th century. Part of the house was rebuilt in the 17th.

Immediately after Lings, somewhat set back, is Bridgefoot, another timber-framed and plastered hall house, also dating from the 14th century.

Here, our pavement runs out so, when safe, we cross the road to continue along the path on the left.

The path climbs to cross a river, the River Chelmer again, on a footbridge high above the ford and potential floodwater of the river. Below is an old postcard view of this bridge in the early 1900s.



From the bridge, ahead and to our right, we can see beneath trees a former concrete-roofed anti-tank gun emplacement, installed as part of the World War II defences.

As the path rejoins the road, we pass the very smart Croys Grange on the left. Behind the red brick and imitation timber framing is a pair of timber-framed houses from the 16th century. We will stay on the left as we will soon turn left.

We reach a staggered crossroads and turn left, signposted towards Lt Easton and Dunmow. When safe, we should cross to the right side of the lane.

We pass Brook End House on the right with lions at the gate and a Terracotta Army warrior in the porch. Just afterwards, the lane crosses a stream and we pass back from Great Easton into Little Easton parish.

The lane climbs a little. When safe, we cross over a turning on the right, signposted to Broxted. Opposite, on the left, is 18th-century Kings Farmhouse.

In another 200 yards we come to another lane on the right, Laundry Lane, and here we turn right.

The lane climbs quite steadily and after a while sweeps around a green on the left before passing 18th-century Plowlands.

A little further along we pass the entrance on the right to the Laundry Lane ground of Dunmow United Football Club. Just afterwards is The Old Laundry, displaying what looks like a pub sign for The Laundry. This has never been a pub but may have been a laundry for Easton Lodge.

We follow the lane round to the left and soon pass a lake which is used by Billericay and District Angling Club. The club's website claims that they are the biggest in Essex, offering members fishing in 31 lakes and rivers around Essex.

Soon we come to the entrances on the right to Easton Glebe. Between 1910 and 1928 this had been a home of HG Wells (1866 – 1946), a prolific author. He shared Darling Daisy's socialist views and helped organise events at the Barn Theatre. Wells is perhaps most remembered as a science fiction writer. His works included *War of The Worlds*, published in 1897 and subsequently filmed several times, most recently by Steven Spielberg in 2005 and starring Tom Cruise. From the second entrance, we can see a large magnolia tree beside the house. Behind the house is a barn that was used by Wells and his family for games and dramatic productions.

For now, we will forget Martians and other aliens and ignore footpaths as we continue along Laundry Lane.

We soon reach a road junction where we turn left onto a new lane. If we were to turn right, we would reach the Gardens of Easton Lodge in a quarter mile or so, but they are open only a few times each year. We turn left, when safe crossing to the right to face any traffic.

After a short descent, we pass between two lakes and then start to climb again.

We pass Church Cottage on the left, with the almost obligatory big M, and then Church Lodge, a 17th-century lodge house with 19th-century verandah.

Next on the left, we pass the entrance to Easton Manor – or perhaps we will divert left and succumb to the temptation of a snack at the Tea Rooms.

Next on the left is Little Easton Church. If we didn't gain access at the start of the walk, let's try again – it certainly merits a visit. Otherwise, we continue ahead for a short distance to where we parked.

Darling Daisy, the Countess of Warwick, died in 1938. After an early life of entertaining lavishly, her later years were devoted to helping the less fortunate, especially through provision of education and employment for women. Before her death, most of her estates had been sold off, largely to her tenant farmers, to pay debts incurred through her generosity and extravagant lifestyle.

You can read more about the Countess and about the parishes of Little Easton and Great Easton on [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk).

This route description, last updated 13 August 2021, was downloaded from [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk) Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to [hundredparishes@btinternet.com](mailto: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.

