



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 171

Great Hallingbury – 4.5 miles (7 kms)

This walk is entirely in the parish of Great Hallingbury. The countryside route follows a mixture of footpaths and tracks with just a little on roads. Some paths may be muddy. There are no stiles. There may be an opportunity to visit Great Hallingbury's parish church, so please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. There are no opportunities to purchase refreshment along the route. The close proximity of Stansted Airport and the M11 motorway will cause noise disturbance. There is one seat near the start and others along the Flitch Way, around midway.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes just south of Great Hallingbury Church. There is a generous unofficial parking area or lay-by beside the road on the opposite side to the church. The route starts from here.
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL511195 - Postcode: CM22 7TZ.
The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps 183 and 195.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

We start by walking gently uphill along the gravel lay-by. When we reach the road, and when safe, we cross the road and go through the gateway into the churchyard.

The church is rarely open except for services, so please take a look inside if it is open. If your boots are already dirty, please take them off or don plastic bags or boot covers. Great Hallingbury's parish church is dedicated to St Giles. It dates from Norman times although it was substantially rebuilt in the 19th century. The tower was built in the 14th century. Inside, and most unusually, it retains the original Norman chancel arch that was constructed in the 11th century entirely of recycled Roman bricks.

From the church porch, we turn left beside the church and then bear left to exit through another gate, a copy of the one by which we entered, dedicated to the memory of James Noble who died of cancer at the age of 23.

We go straight ahead on pavement that rises above the level of the road, passing a former Church of England primary school that was built in 1848. It is now private residences.

On the left, we pass a seat and a former telephone kiosk which is now labelled "GT HALLINGBURY" and houses an informal book exchange.

On the right, we pass two adjacent houses: 17th-century Centuries, which displays the date 1673 in the modern part, and 15th-century Tudor Cottage.

After crossing the entrance to a lane on the left, we continue along the pavement, immediately passing Glebe House on the left, mostly out of sight behind trees.

On the right is Great Hallingbury Village Hall, erected in 1930, and the village sign. If safe, we might cross to inspect the inscription at the foot of the sign which was erected in 2011. Images on the sign include one of Hallingbury Place, a Tudor mansion that once stood about half a mile behind the village hall within Hallingbury Park. The mansion, estate and adjacent Hatfield Forest were owned in the 18th century by the Houblon family. One of their forbears, Sir John Houblon, had been the first Governor of the Bank of England in 1694 – his face appeared on £50 notes that were in circulation between 1994 and 2014. The mansion, Hallingbury Place, was demolished in the 1920s.

Returning to the pavement. We continue past the village hall car park on the right and then an entrance to The Grange. Soon, on the left, just before we reach white weather-boarded house number 125, we turn left onto a public footpath. The path goes between wooden fencing on each side and soon becomes a field-edge path with ditch and hedgerow on our right. We will stay on this path for about half a mile.

We become aware that we are close to the flightpath for Stansted Airport which is less than 2 miles ahead.

When the field on our left ends, we keep straight ahead on a clear path between fields, climbing gently.

As we come to the top of the climb, we reach an area of concrete hardstanding and a roadway that goes to the left. We ignore this and keep straight ahead on a path between fields and, later, with hedgerow on the left.

To our left we pass Harps Farm and to the right the distant houses are along the road that runs parallel with our route. This is the road that passes through Great Hallingbury and past the church.

After some time, we walk beside a garden on the right and then through a short, narrow passage between high wooden fences to emerge onto a road. With care, we turn right and keep to the right, facing oncoming traffic. We are now in the hamlet of Bedlar's Green.

Within about 100 yards, we pass new houses on the left and then cross the road with care to turn left beside the Hop Poles, a former public house. The pub dates from the 19th century and ceased to function in 2015. In 2023, there was still a faded notice board on the pub wall, telling the story of Sir John Houblon, after whom the pub was named for a while in recent times.

After the pub, we continue along the lane for a short distance – passing the small National Trust property, Bedlar's Green, on the right before taking the left fork onto a gravel track / public footpath. In 50 yards, we reach another fork where we also bear left on the main track. We are now heading in a north-easterly direction. On the left, we soon pass 18th-century Kowhai Cottage and then 17th-century, thatched The Pyghtle with a flintstone boundary wall.

After these few houses in Bedlar's Green, the path becomes narrower. It soon becomes a field-edge path with hedgerow on the left. We will stay on this path for some time, heading north.

About 200 yards after The Pyghtle, we follow the path as it kinks left through a gap in the hedge, briefly facing new houses in the distance at Tile Green. Immediately turn right to continue northwards, now following the hedgerow on our right.

Ahead, in the distance, we can see large commercial buildings at Start Hill.

At the end of a long field, shortly before the commercial buildings, we pass through shrubs and turn left onto the Flitch Way, now heading west. This 15-mile bridleway and country park runs from East to West along the trackway that once carried a single-track railway line between Braintree and Bishop's Stortford. Steam engines hauled passenger and freight trains along here for a hundred years until the line's closure in 1972. The route has been preserved and protected and is popular with walkers, runners, cyclists and horse riders.

About 100 yards to our right, the B1256 runs parallel with the Flitch Way. The B1256 was previously classified as A120 and was originally called Stane Street following its construction by the Romans. In recent years, the gap between that road and our route has been largely filled with commercial premises, conveniently situated within 1 mile of Junction 8 of the M11 motorway, albeit very close to Stansted Airport's flightpath. We will stay on the Flitch Way for half a mile and part way along we will pass directly beneath the flightpath.

In due course, after about half a mile, we pass over a lane on an old iron railway bridge. Very soon after the bridge, we turn sharp left onto a path which takes us down to that lane. On reaching the lane, we turn right, staying on the right to face oncoming traffic.

In about 200 yards we turn right onto a gravel drive, signposted as a public footpath. Immediately on our right is a house called Lewismead which dates from the 16th century. We go straight ahead through a gateway (there is a pedestrian gate to the left of the main gate), past small industrial premises, and then through another gateway. After a few brambles, we come into a field and continue ahead along a field-edge path with hedgerow on our left.

The path climbs gently.

At the top of the climb, to the far right we can see the M11 motorway and service buildings near junction 8. We also see lots of trees that hide Bishop's Stortford Golf Course. What we cannot see is Bishop's Stortford itself: the town of some 40,000 people begins only a mile away, just beyond the golf course, but it is situated on the other side of the hill.

Here we are close to the airport flightpath. If planes are landing from the south west, they will be coming towards us, quite low to the left of the hedge. If planes are taking off towards the south west, the more usual direction, they will overtake us at greater altitude.

When we reach an oak tree on an 'island', we ignore the track that leaves to the left (towards Harps Farm). We keep ahead, kinking slightly left, and now with the hedgerow on our right. Our route now follows a wide gravel track. Away to our left, we can again see houses strung out along the road between Great Hallingbury and Bedlar's Green. Ahead and to the left, we should be able to see the spire of Great Hallingbury Church.

After a while, the track switches to the right of the hedgerow and then gently bears to the right to approach the motorway.

[Just before we reach a bridge over the motorway, there should be a footpath that heads left but it was badly overgrown and obstructed when tested in 2021 and 2023, so this route description ignores it.]

We keep straight ahead on the road to cross over the M11.

On the far side, we keep left to step down off the concrete and pass beside a gate. We then turn left along a wide farm track with the motorway immediately on our left.

In about 150 yards, we ignore the turn to the right, continuing straight ahead and gently downhill. (This is not a public right of way, but all public footpath alternatives tested in 2021 were considered too challenging). We continue on this farm track for another quarter mile, with the motorway just to our left.

The track descends, rises and then descends again. As we approach a solitary tree, just off the track on our right, we turn left into a concrete tunnel that passes beneath the motorway.

At the far end of this long, straight tunnel, we emerge onto a field and turn left along the field edge with the motorway on our left. Very soon, in about 20 yards, we follow the field edge round to the right with hedgerow on our left. Over to the right, we can see the spire of Great Hallingbury Church.

After about 200 yards, at the end of this field we go ahead into a new field and immediately turn right, now walking beside hedgerow on our right. We head gently downhill, directly towards the church.

After about 300 yards, at the end of the field, we ignore the stile just ahead, turning right into the next field. Almost immediately, we turn left and then left again to a gateway. We bear right through the gate into the churchyard and keep to the right. We pass a hut on the right and the church on the left to reach the church porch.

If you didn't visit earlier, please consider doing so now – after removing or covering boots if they are muddy.

From the church porch, we go straight ahead to leave through the gate by which we originally entered at the start of this walk. This brings us onto pavement where we turn right. When safe, cross the road to the lay-by where we parked.

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

This route description, last updated 30 August 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.

