



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 175

Debden – 3.1 miles (5 kms)

This varied walk, entirely in the parish of Debden, is on a mixture of paths and lanes. Some paths may be muddy. There are several seats along the way; there are no stiles. The walk passes Debden Church. There are two opportunities for refreshment towards the end. If you hope to stop for refreshment or to visit the church, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags.

Start and finish: The route starts and finishes at the car park for Debden's village store and recreation ground. (Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL555334 - Postcode: CB11 3LB, which covers a large area).

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

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

The route passes an Indian / Nepalese restaurant, the Yuva, and a pub, The Plough, but they do not open every day.

Before leaving the car park, please note that this serves the village store, the village hall and the recreation ground. The store was opened in 1982 as a community venture, staffed by volunteers. The front of the building displays an award for Best Kept village in Essex in 2013. The village hall was built in 1922 on land donated by Lady Strathcona of Debden Hall. There are plans to replace it with a new one.

We leave the car park and return to the road, turning left on the pavement and passing a pond.

On the right is Debden Church of England Primary Academy. The school's exterior has hardly changed since it was built in 1862, although a large clock was added to the right gable in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's golden jubilee. The school's construction was funded entirely by the rector, Henry Hodgson. His initials are displayed high up on the left gable.

We pass Yuva Indian restaurant on the left. For many years this 17th-century timber-framed and plastered building operated as the White Hart Inn. The inn survived the accidental "Great Fire of Debden" in 1907 when 12 nearby houses burnt to the ground.

We keep left, passing Debden's village sign and the 19th-century village pump. We are now in Deynes Road.

The thatched house immediately on the right dates from the 18th century and was once the Old Ship Inn.

On the left, we pass weather-boarded Causeway Cottage which dates from the 18th or 19th century. Its thatched roof is topped with a fox straw finial. Just afterwards, set back, is Kelly's Cottage, also thatched and of similar vintage. On our right, standing at right-angles to the road, is Hortons; this was once a small terrace of properties, built in the 17th or 18th

centuries, and is now a single residence. Lime Tree Cottage on the left dates from the 18th century.

Continuing ahead, we soon come to a tiny triangular green. To the left is a long red-brick building whose near portion is appropriately named Red Brick House. The centre element of the building functioned as a general stores until the 1960s – shown here in an old postcard. The building dates from the 18th century although the brick front is somewhat newer; hidden behind is a wing that dates from the 15th century, but we cannot see this.



We will turn right at the triangular green and soon, in about 50 yards, reach the main road, High Street. We will pause here at the corner to explain that we are going to turn right and stay on the pavement on the right. We will comment on some of the buildings on the opposite side of the road. Later, we will pass along this short stretch of road again and comment on buildings on the right.

Almost opposite, just a little to the right and standing sideways to the road, Beaulay Firth dates from the 18th century. It has a rather unusual roof: the style is called *mansard*, having two angles of slope; the upper part is tiled and the lower part has slates.

Now, we will carry on. The next building is a small, thatched . . . garage! This used to be where the blacksmith, who lived at The Forge, had his workshop.

Soon, we come to The Forge, also thatched and dating from the 17th century.

The pavement runs out as we approach the village sign so, when safe, we will cross to the left.

Soon, we pass Debden's primary school on the left. Immediately afterwards, we turn left into Church Lane.

School Cottages on the left may have been built around the same time as the school.

On the right, we pass thatched Treelands.

On the left, we pass a large house called Hill House, then two new homes, then New Cottage and Old Cottage. Old Cottage was built around 1800 AD to serve two estate workers' families. We ignore a footpath that leaves to the left.

Park House, the large red-brick residence on the right, usually has a display of roses along its fence in summer.

On the left there are signs to Debden Hall Gardens: East, West and South. These direct visitors to the houses that now sit within the 4-acre, former walled garden of Debden Hall. The Hall itself was situated over to the right, behind the church, but it has long since disappeared.

We pass beside a parking area and then go through a gateway into the churchyard of Debden's parish church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin and All Saints. The church is listed at Grade I and dates from the 13th century, although the first section we reach is a relatively recent addition, an 18th-century octagonal chapel.

To our left, beyond the churchyard wall, is the high wall of the former walled garden.

The church is usually open and we are encouraged to visit. Our boots should not be muddy, but please remove or cover them if they are. Inside, there are several monuments to the Chiswell family. Richard Chiswell, a wealthy London merchant, purchased the Debden estate in 1715. The estate was gradually expanded, reaching around 5,000 acres (8 square miles) and including some 40 farms. The estate passed down to his descendants for several generations until 1882. Because passage was sometimes through the female line, the descendants' surnames included Muilman, Vincent and Trevilian (we may see some of these names on memorials within the church). The family often bore the bulk of the expenditure required from time to time to maintain the fabric of the church.

Debden Hall was built in 1791 close to the church, surrounded by parkland. The estate left the family when it was bought by William Fuller Maitland of Stansted Mountfitchet in 1882 and then early in the 20th century by a wealthy Canadian, Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, who served as Canadian High Commissioner to the UK until his death in 1914. His daughter succeeded to the title – and it was she, Lady Strathcona, who donated the land on which the village hall was built in 1922.

Following the First World War, Debden Hall became too expensive to run – it had 18 principal bedrooms and 8 servants' bedrooms. It was purchased by Captain Montagu of Shortgrove in Newport and, like so many grand houses, it was demolished in the 1930s and the estate broken up. Most of today's walk passes through the original Debden estate.

Of general interest inside the church is the very large 14th-century parish chest which is in fine condition. It is made of oak and iron.

On leaving the church, we turn right from the porch, continuing gently downhill through the churchyard on a grass path, augmented with stone slabs for part of the way.

A glance back to the church will reveal its unusual "battlements" all around the roof. These were added at the same time as a new tower was built in 1786 after the collapse of the previous tower. The 1786 tower was itself taken down and replaced in 1930 by the one we see today.

We leave the churchyard through a metal kissing gate. We turn left, joining the Harcamlow Way (an 80-mile long-distance trail that follows a figure of 8 route between Harlow and Cambridge). This narrow path descends and can be muddy at times.

On the right of the path, we pass a large puddingstone – a conglomerate of many small, rounded and colourful pebbles that appear to have been cemented together. Geologists

explain that they were formed around 50 million years ago and were deposited in this area by a retreating glacier, possibly only 10,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age.

The large, apparently abandoned, red-brick building over to the right was built in the 18th century as the stable block for Debden Hall.

Soon, we meet a fairly wide track and here we turn left. Almost immediately, we cross a bridge over a stream that flows from the large lake to our right. This is Debden Water. Debden Hall used to overlook the lake, further along and out of sight from here. This is how the mansion appeared on a postcard a hundred years ago . . .



We continue along this track, gradually climbing towards woodland. We ignore a footpath on the right.

As we reach the woodland, we should look back. At about 1 o'clock on the clockface, we may be able to see the church spire, emerging above the surrounding trees.

We continue along the track through the wood, still climbing gently. This is Cabbage Wood. The origin of its unusual name is unknown.

We pass through a metal kissing gate and leave the wood. We are now at the top of the hill, on the parish boundary with Widdington. Widdington village lies straight ahead, about half a mile distant but mostly out of sight.

We turn sharp left, keeping within the parish of Debden, and now on another wide track, actually a byway open to all traffic – that probably explains why it is muddy in places. The track passes through woodland for about 100 yards and then emerges. We continue ahead, now with hedgerow and woodland on our left and open countryside to the right.

In the distance, over to the right at about 2 o'clock on the clockface, the tall metal structure is a microwave radio mast, about 2 miles distant and just inside Debden's parish boundary. This communication tower was erected during the Cold War in the 1950s. Further round to the right, the white water tower is about 1 mile away at the eastern end of Widdington village.

We ignore paths that go into the wood on our left. After a while, the byway turns sharp left and then right, to continue with hedgerow on the right and field on the left.

If we pause and look back to the left, we can see a rotating radar scanner. This installation is 1.5 miles away, on what was once Debden airfield, now Carver Barracks. The radar station now primarily serves Stansted Airport.

The track descends into Rook End, a tiny Debden hamlet. We pass beside number 20, an 18th-century thatched cottage with an attractive thatched porch, to turn left onto a tarmac lane, Rook End Lane. We will continue along this lane for about half a mile until we return to Debden village. Ignore the signed footpath that goes off to the left across a field.

We soon pass Rook End Cottage, built in 1580 AD, and further along the lane we go past 17th-century Rook End Farmhouse.

Later on, we pass a sewage works. Ignore the signed byway to the right, opposite the sewage works. For a while, a stream runs beside the lane to our left.

Later, our lane passes 16th-17th-century Broctons Farmhouse and then Broctons Farm before bending to the left and going past a few relatively modern houses.

Rook End Lane reaches a junction with a main road, Thaxted Road. When safe, we should cross and turn left along the pavement.

We go past relatively modern houses and then Debden Pentecostal Church. The first church was erected on this site in 1950 and this was replaced by the present building in 1996.

When the pavement runs out, when safe we should cross the road to continue along the pavement on the left.

We cross the entrance to Highfields and, just afterwards, on the right behind the hedge, thatched West View dates from the 17th century.

Soon, we pass The Plough public house on our left – a possible opportunity for refreshment.

After the Plough, we continue along the pavement on the left.

Shortly before the road junction on the right, Crouch End House was once another village shop, Francis Stores. Crouch End is the name of this most populated area of Debden parish.

We pass Deynes Road on the right and reach a stretch of High Street where we have already walked today - on the right, soon after the start of this outing. This time, we will stay on the left and refer to a few buildings on the right.

Immediately after Deynes Road, the thatched house is called Raymond's Cottage and dates from the 18th century.

Next on the right, standing sideways to the road, is Hortons. This was once a small terrace of properties – we saw the other end as we walked along Deynes Road.

After passing beneath a row of chestnut trees, we come to a long, thatched building on the right. On the roof, there are three straw finials in the shape of swans. The building was once a public house called The Old Ship. Now it is two separate cottages, number 2 Old Ship

Cottages and then number 1. It is perhaps appropriate that the 1901 Census indicates that the pub landlord, William Tant, was also a thatcher.

We pass the village sign on the right and soon come to the school. When safe, we cross the road and continue along the right pavement, passing the pond and turning right into the car park where we started this walk.

You can read more about the parish of Debden on www.hundredparishes.org.uk. Other Hundred Parishes walks pass through more remote parts of Debden parish: numbers 15 and 106.

This route description, last updated 15 July 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 of this route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

