



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 133

Barkway – a leisurely stroll through the village: 1.7 miles (3 kms)

This walk goes slowly up and down Barkway's High Street, B1368, taking a look at some of its many heritage buildings. The route passes La Vita tea room which in 2025 opened each day except Wednesdays and Sundays (telephone: 07894 055575). The walk is best tackled when the sun is not bright and low as this can make it harder to distinguish features of buildings on the opposite side of the road. There are no stiles. Walk 132 also passes along the High Street as part of its 6.9 mile route, while walk 131 starts from Barkway's car park and covers a completely different 6.5 miles.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes at the car park opposite the Village Hall and beside the Recreation Ground. This is on the B1368 at the far north end of the village.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL386360 - Postcode: SG8 8DF – what3words: surnames.signified.goggles.

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

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

Leave the car park. Opposite is Barkway Village Hall, erected in 1926 for the Women's Institute. With care, cross the main road to the pavement and turn left, soon passing another hall on the right - for Barkway Social Club. Continue past the entrance to Birch Meadow on the right and then Flint House on the right to the junction with Royston Road and pause here.

Please contemplate the view ahead and compare it with the scene in 1904. Surprisingly little has changed. The red-brick building on our left was then a pub called *The Chaise and Pair*.



Today, we are not expecting too many young ladies and gentlemen to be greeting us in their Sunday best clothes or fancy bonnets and caps, but we never know!

We also don't expect to pass a pub although we will see a surprising number of residential properties that once provided refreshment or lodgings for travellers of bygone centuries on what was once a busy coaching route between London and Cambridge.

We are going to walk on the right side of the road, heading South along the High Street and talking mostly about the buildings on the left, the East side of the road. Near the southern end of the High Street we will cross to the East side and retrace, talking mainly about the buildings on the western side of the road.

From this road junction, if we were to proceed along Royston Road on our right, and then continue along a byway for a total distance of three-quarters of a mile we would reach Periwinkle Hill where there are some remains of a motte and bailey castle that stood in a commanding position. From this vantage point, Ely Cathedral can be seen on a clear day (with binoculars), around 30 miles to the North. Such a diversion is not part of today's walk.

Before we set off, please take a look at the war memorial opposite the junction. It is in the form of a large Celtic cross and commemorates the men of Barkway who lost their lives in the First World War. Some were probably related to those who posed for the photographer just a few years earlier.

Now, let's go and see where some of those people lived, worked, worshipped or socialised.

With care, cross Royston Road. Here on the corner is number 2, High Street, built originally around 1500 AD. We generally will not attempt any detailed analysis of Barkway's architecture; if you would like to know more, please see either <https://historicensland.org.uk/listing/the-list/> or <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/>.

Immediately after number 2 is La Vita tea room. We will pass it again near the end of the walk.

From now on, we will generally be looking out for buildings on the other side of the road . . .

Swan Cottage, with cream-coloured plaster, dates from the 17th century. It functioned as *The Swan* pub in the 19th and 20th centuries. Note the hexagonal chimneys.

The next building, *The Manse*, dates from the early 19th century. In 1884 it became the manse for the minister of the Congregational Church which was built next door at that time.

Numbers 7 and 9, faced in flintstone, are also early 19th century and are believed to have originated as three or four dwellings.

Steps lead up to the rather imposing *Red House*, number 11, which has 16th-century origins but has been remodelled over recent centuries with a 'new' brick front.

Number 19, *Horseshoes* dates from the 19th century and was once *The Three Horseshoes* pub.

Further along on our side, we pass an ancient milestone, installed around 1730 at a cost of £6 and one of a series that mark the miles on this route between London and Cambridge.

The milestones were funded by a trust established in 1586 by a former master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge for the upkeep of roads in and around Cambridge. The shield at the top on the left is of Trinity Hall; the other is of the benefactor's executor. The metal plate was added around 1804 by the Wadesmill Turnpike Trust.

Looking to the other side of the road, numbers 33 and 35, *The Robins*, have an interesting tiled roof. They date from the mid-19th-century. The single storey building on the left was once a shoemaker's workshop.

Number 41, The Oak House, is densely-covered in Virginia Creeper. It was once The Royal Oak public house and dates from the 18th century. Note the entrance for carriages on the right.

Turn right into Church lane, immediately passing the entrance to Barkway House, number 66, on the right.

Soon fork right onto a footpath, passing the grounds of Barkway House before going beneath a lychgate and a giant cedar tree into the churchyard. On the right there is a gravestone that features a shrouded urn. Whilst this is a feature frequently found on Victorian graves, here it commemorates Anthony Jackson who died somewhat earlier, in 1813.

A visit to Barkway's parish church, dedicated to St Mary Magdalene is recommended, but first please remove or cover boots if muddy. This is the only building in Barkway listed at Grade I. It dates from the 13th century and was extensively rebuilt in the 19th century, as were so many churches.

From the church porch, turn right and continue along the path through the churchyard. The small door on the right would seem to allow only the thinnest of bell-ringers into the tower to ring the church's eight bells.

Leave the churchyard through a gate onto a lane. Turn left and immediately follow the lane round to the left. Pass Manor Farm, an impressive three-storey house dating from the 16th or 17th century.

Next on the right is the wagon wash, dating from 1600 AD. A notice at the far end explains that it was in use until the 20th century to wash farm wagons. Given that Barkway was a popular coaching stop, horse-drawn carriages were also probably washed here before their onward journey. Sometimes the vehicles would be left in the water to allow their wooden spokes to swell and fit more snugly into their rims.

Pass *Rosemary Cottage* and *Forge Cottage*, a former smithy, before arriving back at the High Street.

Immediately opposite is a former 18th-century coaching inn, The Bull, now converted into two houses, number 47, Somerton, and number 49, Black Bull House.

Turn right and continue heading South along the High Street. We will again focus on buildings on the other side of the road.

Old Forge, number 53, dates from the 16th century and was once two dwellings and a forge. Next is a model K6 telephone kiosk, a listed 'building' now housing a defibrillator.

In about 50 yards, on our side, we pass a small pond with the village sign, erected in 2000 AD, and an informative interpretation panel about Barkway.

Almost opposite is number 61, with three gables, appropriately named *The Gables*. It was built around 1620 AD and was once an inn.

On our side of the road, we pass Barley and Barkway Voluntary Aided Church of England First School. The school was erected in 1840 on land that had previously been used over many years for an annual market that drew sellers and buyers from far and wide. The regular market also used land on the other side of the High Street where houses now stand. The market was revived in recent years and is now a major annual village event.

On the left, number 75, *The Retreat*, dating from around 1800 AD, is followed by number 75A, *The Coach House*.

On our side, the red-brick *Almshouses* were erected in 1909 by the great granddaughters of John Stallibrass, a local benefactor who died long before, in 1820.

Opposite, number 81, *Bath House Cottage*, is adjacent to *The Baths*, whose foundation stone records that they were built in 1867 by the Hon Mrs Vernon Harcourt. She lived at Newsells, a manor house to the north of the village, and also funded much of the church restoration.

Thatched number 83 dates from the 18th century.

Next, the long, thatched *Berg Cottage*, number 85, took its name from its owner in the 1930s. It dates from the 17th century and displays the date 1687 above the central window. Below the same window is a Sun Fire Insurance marker, indicating that the property was insured against fire.

Berg Cottage is followed by *Fern Cottage* and then the long, thatched roof of numbers 93 to 97, now two dwellings but previously three. The building dates back to the 15th century and was improved around 1600 AD.

Pass the entrance to Townsend Close on the left.

Number 129 dates from the 19th century and number 133 from the 17th.

On our side, we soon come to *Clock House Cottage*, number 158. The near, bottom-right corner of this house has an Ordnance Survey benchmark carved into the plaster, beside an older inscription which seems to read *EW 1762*. A benchmark is a horizontal line with arrow beneath. It will have been carved by an Ordnance Survey surveyor as an altitude reference point. Benchmarks were used for plotting altitudes from around 1840 until the 1990s but have now been superseded by GPS, the global positioning system.

We are going to turn here and start on our return journey. Please cross the road with care.

We get an improved view of *Clock House Cottage* with its clock. The house was built towards the end of the 18th century as a toll house, where fees were collected from passing carriages, wagons and animals for the upkeep of the highway. For many years this stretch of road between Puckeridge and Barley was managed by the Wadesmill Turnpike Trust whose

main responsibility was the Hertfordshire stretch of the Great North Road, between Cheshunt and Royston.

We will now head North, with our main focus on buildings on the West side of the road.

Thatched number 148, *Turnpike Cottage*, dates from the 18th century and was once two dwellings.

We cross Townsend Close and immediately pass beneath a walnut tree on the corner.

On the other side of the road, thatched number 130, with a butterfly permanently above the door, dates from around 1700 and was once two dwellings.

Ash Tree Cottage has very neat thatching around its five dormer windows. It was also once two dwellings, numbers 126 and 124.

Number 106, *The Want House*, has an interesting chimney stack and a curious name. The building dates from the early 16th century and was a shop in more recent times – might that be the origin of the name?

Cross Burrs Lane.

On the left, number 100 is appropriately called *Century House* and has an interestingly-tiled roof.

Number 96 dates from the 17th century and was formerly the *Cross Keys* public house. There was stabling at the rear of the pub, as there would have been for most inns.

Numbers 92 to 88 were once a single house, originating in the 17th century.

We should keep to the pavement, passing beside number 61, *The Gables*, on the right.

Immediately after the pond on the left, number 82, with white weatherboarding, dates from the early 16th century. In more recent times it functioned as the *White Horse* public house.

Number 78, opposite the phone box, has three high dormer windows and dates from around 1700 AD. The left of the building once functioned as a store and post office.

The White House, number 76, was also a shop and dates from the 17th century.

The next building, having a single, tiled roof with decorative 'fishscale' bands, dates from around 1700 AD. Its four chimney stacks reveal that this was once four dwellings, numbers 74 to 68. There are now just *Bumblebee Cottage* and then *Horseshoe Cottage*.

Pass Church Lane on the left and then the long wall of Barkway House.

Next on the left, number 64, *Coachlamps*, and 62, *The Old Coach House*, are halves of what was once a coaching inn, *The Angel*, built in the late 17th century. By 1800 it had been renamed as *The Wheatshaf*. The inn was re-fronted and re-roofed around 1820 and later converted into two houses.

Next, *Milestone House* stands beside the ancient milestone.

On our side, the wall of number 21 is decorated with an unusual roundel: an image of the Flemish artist, Peter Paul Rubens (1577 to 1640).

On the left we pass *Barkway Stud*, breeders of children's ponies.

Further along, numbers 26 and 24 were once a single building, the *Half Moon* public house. The taller, weatherboarded number 26 with tiled roof was an extension to the thatched 17th-century element, now called *Half Moon Cottage*.

The date 1692 on number 14, *Duck Cottage*, with its tall chimneys, is consistent with its listing as being from the 17th century.

Around 1870, Duck Cottage was joined by a Reading Room, an early kind of library and another contribution to village life by Mrs Vernon Harcourt. Today, the former Reading Room is used by Barkway Parish Council.

Now, please cross the High Street with care and continue on the left side. We soon pass La Vita tea room again.

Cross Royston Road with care and on the far side, by the flint wall, turn around and take another look back along Barkway High Street. On our stroll, might we have met any descendants of the folk in the 1904 postcard?



Now, continue North along the main road for about 200 yards, crossing the entrance to Birch Meadows. Just before the car park, we pass Recreation Ground and Barkway Pavilion on the right. The Pavilion was erected in 2015 and is the latest in the impressive range of village halls that serve the various social needs of a parish with fewer than a thousand residents.

With care, cross the road to the car park where we started.

This route description, last updated 16 May 2025, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk where you can read a little more about Barkway and also find many more walks that can be downloaded.

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.

