



The Hundred Parishes

Quiet Lane Walks – number 302

Hempstead – 3.4 miles (5 kms)

This walk is entirely within the parish of Hempstead. About a third of the route is similar to Walk 135 which uses footpaths as well as quiet lanes.

The route description starts and finishes at Hempstead's parish church. Alternatively, you may join this circular walk anywhere along the route.

Although the route passes a pub soon after the start, The Bluebell Inn was closed in 2020. A number of local enthusiasts have been trying to acquire and re-open it.

If walking in Autumn, you may like to take a container for fruit that can be picked along the way.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes beside Hempstead's parish church, situated up Church Hill which leads east off the B1054 opposite the Bluebell Inn in the centre of the village. There is usually space for two or three cars to park on the lane beside the railings of the churchyard.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL635379 - Postcode: CB10 2PB.

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 195

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

This route is mostly along quiet lanes although two sections, totalling about half a mile, use the B1054 / B1053. Please follow the usual safety precautions: keep to the right so as to face oncoming traffic, crossing occasionally to the left if this offers a clearer view around a right-hand bend. Drivers may be as surprised to see you as you are to see them!

Before setting out, you might like to visit St Andrew's Church. It dates from the 14th century with a tower that was rebuilt in 1933 after collapsing around 50 years before.

The church crypt is the final resting place for around 50 members of the extended Harvey family, most of whom did not live in Hempstead. The crypt contains most of their coffins, but not that of the most famed member of the family, the royal physician William Harvey (1578 to 1657). His body was moved in 1883 by the Royal College of Surgeons from the damp crypt into a rather grand marble sarcophagus inside the church. William Harvey is famed for changing the course of medical practice by his explanation of the circulation of blood.

The crypt, which is not open to the public, does still hold the remains of Admiral Sir Eliab Harvey (1758 – 1830) who commanded HMS Temeraire at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. The presence here of all these Harveys is due to William Harvey's brother, another Eliab, who lived in Hempstead. He funded an extension to the church and the creation of the family vault. The church contains many Harvey memorials and documents related to William Harvey, the physician.

Leave the church and retrace through the churchyard. To our left is a short obelisk memorial stone on which are recorded the names of several people whose cremated remains have been buried here.

Just before we leave the churchyard, the red-brick house on the right is The Miller's House, dating from the 17th century or earlier. It is a timber-framed building but was encased in bricks in the 19th century. Until around 1900 AD, a windmill stood opposite the church, about 100 yards into the field on the opposite side of the lane.

From the churchyard, we turn right onto the road, soon descending towards the Bluebell Inn.

On the left, we pass the former Primitive Methodist Chapel, 1853, which has been in use as a private house for many years. On the right, the village pump has, probably been here for 200 years.

Ahead of us, the Bluebell Inn has had an interesting history. It was called The Bell in 1705 when Dick Turpin was born here. His father was the inn's proprietor. In more recent years it was known as the Rose and Crown and then the Bluebell Inn before its closure in 2020.

Dick Turpin entered a life of crime, most infamously as a highwayman. He evaded capture for his brutal crimes by fleeing to York and adopting a new identity. He was held in York for a local offence and wrote to his family in Hempstead. His handwriting was recognised by his former teacher and his true identity was revealed. He was tried and executed in York.

At the road junction, we turn left onto the B1054, heading towards Radwinter and immediately passing the war memorial. We should keep to the pavement on the left.

Next on the left, we come to the thatched Dick Turpin's Cottage (with a thatcher's hare on the roof). Whilst the cottage existed at the time Dick Turpin was born, it acquired its present name only in the 20th century so any direct connection is purely speculative.

We continue along the pavement until we reach a road junction. Here, we want to stay on the main road, bearing right towards Saffron Walden and Radwinter, on the main road which is now numbered B1053. Keep to the pavement on the left around the bend, taking care in crossing the two lanes as they come in from the left.

The pavement ends as it reaches the second lane. Stay on the left of the road for just a few yards until it is safe to cross to the pavement on the right.

Continue on the pavement, now climbing gently.

When the pavement ends, stay on the right for the next quarter of a mile, facing any oncoming traffic and exercising great caution.

At the top of the hill, turn right into the lane, signposted as Wincelow Hall Road. Our route follows this quiet lane for more than a mile.

The tall communication tower that can be seen ahead in the distance is at Castle Camps, 2 miles away. It stands around 300 feet tall.

About 500 yards along this lane we pass an entrance on the right which leads to Old Hall Cottage that sits inside a moated area. The cottage dates from the 16th or 17th century and is all that remains on the site after Wincelow Hall was destroyed by fire in the 19th century.

The former Wincelow Hall had belonged to the Harvey family and was apparently the home of William Harvey, the physician, in 1630. The moated site is protected as a Scheduled Monument.

Continue along the lane which has damsons, blackberries and sloes in September / October.

About a quarter of a mile after the moated site, we pass Wincelow Hall Farm on the right and a barn on the left, and then the modern Wincelow Hall on our right.

Further along, we pass Spitland, set back on the left behind a more recent dwelling. Spitland is a timber-framed and plastered house with thatched roof, dating from the 17th century. Just after, we pass a bungalow called Barrells on the right.

In another 200 yards, we follow our lane as it turns right, ignoring the track that continues straight ahead. There is no signage at the junction, but we have now left Wincelow Hall Road and are in Witchtree Lane.

We pass Wychtree Cottage on the right, followed immediately by Howlands

Witchtree Lane continues in an almost straight line for more than a quarter of a mile before passing Witchtree Farm on our right – a “timber-framed and plastered house of C16 origin but much altered” according to its listing.

Soon, we pass a property on our left, just before a road junction.

Here, there is no helpful signage, save a fingerpost to advise that we have come down Witchtree Lane. We have reached the main road again, the B1054, and here we turn right, heading southwest in the direction of Hempstead village. A sign soon confirms that we are entering Hempstead in the district of Uttlesford. In fact, we have never left the parish.

Having been spoiled by the quietness of the last two miles, we should now again remain on alert, keeping to the right and facing any oncoming traffic. This road is used by some drivers as a ‘rat run’ between Stansted Airport and Haverhill and some of them do not always respect the conditions or the speed limit.

Within 200 yards, we pass another reminder that we are in Hempstead, this time accompanied by a 40mph speed limit sign.

Soon afterwards, we come to the entrance to Parsonage Farm on our right. Here, when safe, we should cross the road into Boytons Lane which is deemed unsuitable for HGV’s.

After a while, we pass Boytons Farm on the left, a timber-framed farmhouse built originally in the 16th century.

For a little while, we are on a sunken lane, below the level of the fields on either side. We reach a junction where we go right. There is no signage except to say that the option to the left is a bridleway.

In another 200 yards, we pass a house on the left and immediately reach a junction. Once again, there is no signage that is helpful to us, but we will bear right along what is actually Church Road.

We soon pass Pollards Cross on the right, a 16th-century farmhouse, now renovated whilst retaining the original central chimney stack.

The lane climbs, heading up towards Hempstead church. As we come into the village, we pass several attractive and individual houses, many of which are listed for their architectural or historic interest. Their origins range from the 17th to the 19th century, with a mixture of thatched and tiled roofs, some with their original brick chimney stacks.

In due course, we reach the top of the climb and walk beside a long pond on our right. Soon afterwards, we reach the church on the right where this walk began.

If you didn't look inside the church before starting the walk, you might like to try now to see if the door is unlocked – see our church introduction on pages 1 and 2.

This route description, last updated 25 April 2024, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk There, you can read more about the parish of Hempstead and Dick Turpin and also find many additional walk routes.

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.

