



The Hundred Parishes

Quiet Lane Walks – number 306

A rural stroll through 3 counties and 6 parishes – 10.5 miles (17 kms)

This walk is on the uplands where the counties of Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Essex meet. The route goes clockwise, taking the shortest road route around a sizeable “block” and passing through a total of six parishes.

The route description starts and finishes at The Woodman Inn in Nuthampstead. If you wish to park there and take refreshment before or after the walk, you are advised to book in advance on 01763 848328 or <https://www.woodmannuthampstead.com/> Its location is marked **1** on the diagram on the last page of this route description.

Alternatively, you may find somewhere to park in the residential road, Park Farm Lane, SG8 8LT, about 100 yards North and East of The Woodman, or slightly further north along the wide road northeast of Little Cokenach [TL416350 - postcode SG8 8LS, marked **2** on the diagram].

In Anstey, The Blind Fiddler lies only about 200 yards off the route (01763 848000 and <http://theblindfiddler.co.uk/>) although in 2024 it did not serve food every day. It is shown as **4** on the route diagram.

The route passes the Bull at Langley Lower Green, **3** on the diagram, but in 2024 it had very limited opening hours.

You may join this circular route anywhere along the way. Please park considerately.

Start and finish: The route description starts and finishes at the war memorials outside The Woodman, Nuthampstead (Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL412345 - Postcode: SG8 8NB) – marked **1** on the diagram.

If you wish to visit Nuthampstead Airfield Museum, behind The Woodman, please first check opening times - <http://www.nuthampsteadmuseum.com/>

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

From the war memorials (or Woodman car park), we turn right onto the lane, heading north.

This route is entirely on quiet lanes, but 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!

In about 100 yards, at the end of the lane, we bear right, signposted towards Barley, and then in just a few yards, with care, we cross the road to turn left, This junction has no signage apart from a little green arrow that tells us we are following the Hertfordshire Way.

We immediately pass Bulls Farm on the left, with a tiny postbox in the wall, and a Nuthampstead notice board on the right.

Soon we pass a house called Little Cokenach on the left – a house whose dominant feature is the brick chimney stack that was added in the 19th century to the building which originated in the 16th or 17th century. The pointed-arch windows were inserted into the chimney during the 20th century.

Soon afterwards, the lane is unusually wide, a possible parking spot marked **2** on the diagram on the last page.

As we leave the village, we pass the back of the sign welcoming people to Nuthampstead. For the next two miles, we will see few buildings, just attractive countryside.

We pass two gateways on the right that once gave access to the wartime airfield. Today, the second gateway has signs for Nuthampstead Shooting Ground and a model flying club – areas of the wartime airfield that have been re-purposed for activity other than agriculture. We will see and learn more about the airfield in another nine miles when we return to Nuthampstead.

There are just a few homes at Morrice Green Farm before we leave the 30mph zone.

The lane takes a sharp turn to the right as we pass woodland called Wynnel's Grove on our right. At the end of the grove, we imperceptibly leave Nuthampstead and enter the parish of Barley.

Our lane meanders gently on high ground until there is a descent with a view across the valley to the right. To the right, in the distance, the houses along the ridge at the top of the hill are probably in Great Chishill, about 2 miles northeast.

After another descent, we pass the various buildings of Abbottsbury Farm on our right. Just afterwards, the extremely tall “hedge” of leylandii trees appears to be out of control.

The lane continues in a straight line with rather limited views beyond the high hedges.

Then we descend to a road junction – the first for two miles – where we turn right, signposted towards Lt Chishill, Gt Chishill and Barley.

Soon after turning right, a sign welcomes us to Shaftenhoe End. This is a hamlet within the parish of Barley although it will be another 200 to 300 yards before we come to houses.

On the right, we pass Crown House, probably built in the 20th century and unremarkable except for a rather grand wooden roundel on the wall, decorated with crowns and wildlife.

We pass Hillside Farm on the left, immediately before a road junction where we keep straight ahead, towards Little Chishill, Great Chishill and Saffron Walden.

The lane soon descends. At the bottom of the hill, we pass a sign that tells us we are leaving Shaftenhoe End. We cross a stream called Cumberton Bottom and at this point we leave the parish of Barley and enter the parish of Great and Little Chishill. By crossing the stream, we also leave Hertfordshire and enter Cambridgeshire. Almost immediately, our route turns right onto a lane signposted to Little Chishill ½ and Langley 3. We will stay on this lane for three miles until we reach Langley.

For the next quarter of a mile, we follow the stream on our right, usually not visible at the bottom of a deep and wide canyon. The explanation for this unusual gully may lie in human activity more than a thousand years ago. Cumberton Bottom or Cumberton Brook once marked the boundary between the Saxon kingdoms of Essex and Mercia, with Essex on our left and Mercia on our right. Is what we see today purely natural – or was it widened to keep out the enemy?

On our side of the gully, we are in the parish of Great & Little Chishill which was once part of Essex until a boundary change in 1895 moved it into Cambridgeshire.

After a while we pass another curiosity – a metal pipe protruding from a concrete base with a padlocked cap. Perhaps this is used to sample water quality. What is intriguing is the painted TL43031 – it looks like an incomplete Ordnance Survey Grid Reference. But it is not for this location which is approximately TL413378. If you are able to shed any light on either the gully or the pipe, please post feedback on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

The gully on our right seems to come to an end as the lane bears left.

We pass a sign which declares that we have arrived in Little Chishill and soon afterwards there is a public byway on the left which is used on Walk number 123. Soon afterwards, the lane starts to climb. A long wooden fence on the left largely hides Little Chishill Manor.

We come to a pair of gault/yellow-brick cottages on the left. Opposite, on the right, a public footpath leads up to Little Chishill's parish church, dedicated to St Nicholas. The church dates from the 12th century. It is usually locked but the churchyard offers a view of Little Chishill Manor.

We continue up the lane, 'up' being the nature of our walk for some distance as we ascend around 130 feet in half a mile. The climb eases as we pass Manor Farm.

At the very top of the climb, the lane bears left; there is often a large haystack close to the bend.

At the next bend, the lane bears right and we leave Cambridgeshire. We are welcomed into the county of Essex and move on from the parish of Great & Little Chishill into Langley.

After passing between the various buildings of Gipsy Corner Farm, we have a brief encounter with the parish of Chrishall. Our lane marks the parish boundary between Chrishall on the left and Langley on the right.

After a short descent, the lane turns right as we ignore a track that turns off to the left. We are now entirely in the parish of Langley, heading south and walking briefly through the hamlet of Killem's Green.

After a quarter of a mile, we pass between white-painted handrails as the lane crosses a stream. Beneath us is the River Stort which rises about half a mile to our right. It flows to our left and meanders for over 20 miles, mostly through the Hundred Parishes, before joining the River Lea at Stanstead Abbots.

We pass an entrance on the right to Langley Park Farm and a rally driving school.

After a couple of bends, we pass a sign which announces that we have arrived at Langley Lower Green.

As we reach a road junction, there are two interesting thatched, timber-framed and plastered houses on the right. The first is a tiny single-storey property called Friday Shop; it dates from the 17th or 18th century. The second cottage, Brooms, is much larger and was once a range of small dwellings. It dates from the 18th century and has a wooden plaque which declares, "Notice by order of the Magistrates. All Persons found begging in this Parish will be taken up by the Vagrant Act and Punished as the Law Directs".

Opposite, The Bull pub faces the Green, but it has very limited opening hours. However there are picnic tables and a bench outside. This spot is marked **4** on the route diagram.

Our route goes straight ahead, signposted towards Clavering and Newport, etc. The fingerpost sign was manufactured at Maldon Iron Works in Essex, probably before the Second World War.

In another hundred yards or so, we come to another Maldon Iron Works sign. Here, we turn right onto Waterwick Hill, signposted towards Meesden.

We soon cross a ford – with a footbridge just to the left if required to cross the stream.

Just afterwards, we pass a former Methodist chapel, now a private house called La Capella.

The lane climbs past thatched cottages on the right with straw finials on the roof ridge – the first a cat pursuing a pair of chickens and the second a speeding hare.

After the lane turns left, we go by a number of black-painted farm buildings followed by a contrasting white farmhouse – New Farm.

The lane descends and at a bend to the left, we cross a stream. On our right is the back of a sign that says "Welcome to Essex" – we have just left Essex and entered Hertfordshire, leaving the parish of Langley and entering Brent Pelham & Meesden, an administrative combination from many years ago.

About half a mile later, a lane to the left goes to Meesden Bury, but we keep straight ahead, signposted towards Meesden and Brent Pelham and passing red-brick Meesden Bury Cottage on our right.

A gateway on the left indicates that the track leads to Meesden Church – it stands at the top of the hill about 150 yards up this tree-lined track – an attractive diversion if you wish, although the church, dating from the 12th century, is likely to be closed.

Our route continues uphill. Over to the left, amongst the trees, we may be able to see the church and, close by, Meesden Hall, the former rectory, which dates from around 1710 AD.

At the top of the hill, we reach the most southerly point of the walk. Here, we turn right beside a small triangular green, signposted towards Meesden.

As we enter the village of Meesden, we pass a tall concrete water tower on our right, and a series of similar-looking semi-detached houses on the left, all boldly displaying the date 1921. Note the interesting variety of trees that have been planted through the village.

On the right, Meesden Village Hall was erected in 1900 AD.

The village street passes beside a series of greens, with houses often set well back from the road.

On the left, a listed mid-20th-century K6 telephone kiosk has been repurposed to house a defibrillator. It stands beside the entrances to Puddles Barn and Home Farm, each dating from the 17th century.

Further along on the left, the distinctive Walkers Farmhouse, with exposed timbers, is the oldest house in the parish, dating from the 15th century and rebuilt in the 18th.

After a stretch of open countryside, we pass through another small hamlet, another Lower Green, with Thatched Cottage and Alma Cottage on our left each probably dating from the 17th century.

Soon, we leave Meesden and enter the parish of Anstey.

Further along, we are welcomed to Anstey. Here we will find two buildings that are far older than they appear at first.

The first of these is on our left - a long white weather-boarded barn with corrugated iron roof. It dates from the 16th century and once served as the house of the coachman for the former 17th-century rectory which is largely hidden, behind the barn.

Soon afterwards, Anstey church appears in the distance, ahead and a little to the left – about 10 o'clock on the clock face. It is about half a mile away.

We come into the hamlet called Cheapside. The second surprise is on our right - Low Hall – a black weather-boarded house that dates from the 16th century. It was built as an open hall house – one tall room with a fire on the floor and smoke escaping through a vent in the roof. Later in the 16th century a floor and chimney were inserted, creating an upstairs and downstairs and allowing a better exit for smoke.

We pass a group of buildings that constitute High Hall Farm and then go beside Cargreen Cottage. The left (west) part of the cottage - timber-framed and plastered with a thatched roof – dates from the 17th century or earlier and the right (east) element with white weatherboarding was added in the 19th century.

Further along, we pass two more 17th-century thatched houses: Chappells Cottage standing sideways on to the road and Little Thatch.

Just after Little Thatch, we turn right at a small grass triangle, signposted towards Nuthampstead. [If we were to turn left, in about 200 yards we would come to the Blind Fiddler pub, marked **4** on the diagram on the final page of this description]

From the grass triangle, we head north, signposted towards Nuthampstead. The lane climbs for a while.

This is a narrow, meandering lane that takes us through open countryside for about a mile, all the way back to The Woodman pub.

After the climb, the view opens up ahead with a view that extends northwards for many miles – beyond Hertfordshire and into Cambridgeshire. Around this high point, we cross the parish boundary, leaving Anstey and entering Nuthampstead, still in Hertfordshire.

Now, we can see two very tall communication towers in the distance ahead and slightly left. They are identified on the Ordnance Survey map as Wireless Stations. The left tower is at Reed and the right one at Barkway. They are about 3 miles away, standing on a ridge about 500 feet above sea level. The Barkway station was once known as RAF Barkway; it was erected in 1941 and served for 70 years as part of the RAF communications network.

About half a mile after leaving Anstey, the lane heads generally northeast, running parallel with a line of trees about a quarter of a mile to our right. The trees were planted after World War II beside what was the main runway of Nuthampstead's airfield.

The three-runway airfield was constructed by American civil engineers in 1942 / 1943 on farmland that was requisitioned for the war effort. The air base was known officially as Station 131 and up to 3,000 American servicemen were stationed here. Initially, it was a base for fighter planes and then it became used primarily by bombers. The last mission was flown in April 1945, just two weeks before the war ended. By then, more than 300 airmen had been killed and a similar number were taken prisoner. Behind The Woodman, a museum tells the story of the Americans and the planes that flew from here.

In due course, we pass a sign that welcomes us to Nuthampstead. Soon afterwards, we see the black and white war memorial ahead, where we started.

Just before we reach the memorial, The Woodman pub is on our right. The thatched element of the pub dates back to the 17th century.

Behind the pub, at the back of the car park, Nuthampstead Airfield Museum has limited opening times - see <http://www.nuthampsteadmuseum.com/>

This route description, last updated 01 May 2024, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk There, you can read more about the parishes of Nuthampstead, Barley, Great & Little Chishill, Langley, Brent Pelham & Meesden and Anstey 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. The numbers refer to possible eating or parking spots mentioned in the route description. The arrow indicates the direction of the walk from the start as described in this route description.

