



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 165

Littlebury and Strethall – 3.4 miles (5 kms)

This countryside walk explores parts of these two parishes, mostly on good paths although some stretches can be muddy at times. There are no stiles. The route passes two churches so please be prepared, before entering, to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. This is a very rural walk and there is nowhere to buy refreshment along the route. However, there are seats beside Strethall Church about midway and close to the start and finish.

Start and finish: The walk starts from the telephone kiosk near the western end of Littlebury Green, about 200 yards west of the green church. There is usually room for two or three cars to park beside the road here. Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL487383 - Postcode: CB11 4XB. The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194. A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

Immediately opposite the telephone kiosk (now housing a defibrillator), is the entrance to 17th-century The Hoops. This private residence was once a pub, one of two in this tiny hamlet which is part of the parish of Littlebury.

From the phone box, we turn right along the road, but for only about 20 yards. Just before we reach a postbox on the right, with care, cross the road to turn left onto a public bridleway, initially with a gravel surface.

Very soon, we pass a house on the right, The Old Rose. This was formerly the Rose Inn. It appears to have dovecotes. This was once Littlebury' Green's second pub. On the left, there is a gently-waving 'crinkle-crinkle' brick wall.

We pass beneath a wide avenue of trees that lean in from either side and meet overhead. This might be considered the Hundred Parishes' response to the Dark Hedges of County Antrim, Northern Ireland (a location often featured in the television series "Game of Thrones").

Our route then becomes a field-edge path with hedgerow on the right. We ignore a path that goes off to the right and continue ahead on the grass path.

At the end of this field, our path bears right and then left (ignoring a bridleway that turns right), to continue in the original direction of travel for another half mile, still on a field-edge path with hedgerow and a line of telegraph poles on the right. This is quite a wide grass path.

We reach the corner of a wood (Free Wood), and here we turn right along a new bridleway, keeping the wood on our left. The edge of the wood defines the parish boundary – we are still in Littlebury but immediately to our left is Elmdon.

When the field on our right ends, we bear slightly left and continue with the wood on our left.

After 300 yards, when the wood on our left becomes quite narrow, we follow the path round to the left and in about 10 yards we meet the Icknield Way, a gravel byway. We turn right onto a short stretch of the Icknield Way, originally a pre-historic hilltop route which ran from Wiltshire to Norfolk. We no longer have the parish of Elmdon on our left: the byway marks the parish boundary between Littlebury on our right and Strethall on our left.

For about 200 yards, our well-surfaced byway runs just inside Strethall Wood. It then bears right, away from the wood. To our left, in the distance, are the red roofs of Strethall Hall and Strethall Hall Farm. Our path is still tree-lined. We ignore paths off to left and right, continuing along the meandering byway.

After a short stretch of fencing on the left, we meet a road and here turn left into a lane that is signed as both a private road and a public footpath. On turning left, we have entered Strethall parish and we are immediately in its main centre of population. Strethall had just 26 inhabitants at the 2011 Census, a good proportion in this short lane.

Soon, on the left we pass the entrance to Potash Cottage and on the right we go beside Lincolns which stands sideways-on to the lane and dates from the 17th or 18th century.

Then we pass Pedlar's Cottage on the left, also 17th-18th century.

The final house on the right is Manor Cottage, dating back even further, to the 15th or 16th century. This building started life as a hall house, having one large room that extended from the ground to the thatched roof and a central fire whose smoke would drift upwards and out through vents at each end of the roof. The chimney would have been added later, probably when the floor was inserted in the 16th or 17th century to create an upper level.

At the end of Pipers Lane, we emerge onto a field. Straight ahead is Strethall's exceptionally old, Saxon parish church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin and listed at Grade I.

We continue ahead on a grassy path between fields, descending and heading towards buildings just to the left of the church.

After the descent, continue straight ahead up the grass path. At the top of the field, we turn half right to follow the path to the gate into the churchyard. Once through the gate, we keep to the right to reach the church porch.

The church is a thousand years old and merits a visit – please remove or cover boots if they are dirty. It was built in the early 11th century, possibly as early as 1010 AD. Elements that remain from that time include the nave (the main body of the church) and the arch that leads into the chancel. These were constructed well before the Norman Conquest of 1066. More 'modern' elements include 14th-century bells and pews from the 15th century.

Here, there is no war memorial. Strethall was one of only 14 parishes in England that incurred no loss in either World War. It is, of course, one of the least inhabited parishes.

Outside, we may like to sit in the small churchyard and contemplate the peace of this remote place. Opposite the porch, is a relatively modern gravestone to Janet Patience Cameron

Adams, MBE. She served as a Red Cross nurse for 25 years, usually in war zones or following natural disasters in various parts of the world. The back of her gravestone has an unusual verse.

From the church porch, we head half left and leave the churchyard through a gateway in the corner. We then follow a short, narrow path down to join a more substantial path. Keep right onto the new, surfaced path. This was once the main 'roadway' between the village and the church and is now designated as the walkers' route of the Icknield Way.

The path descends for a short way and then continues uphill between fields.

At the top of the climb, we leave the fields and pass an old wooden barn on the right and a new house on the left. Our track passes between ponds and soon reaches a lane where we turn left.

We ignore a footpath that goes off to the right. On our left, set back from the road, is 16th-century The Old Rectory. Immediately after The Old Rectory, we leave the parish of Strethall and return to Littlebury, specifically into the hamlet of Catmere End. The new development, Oakfield House, on the left will not, then, increase Strethall's population.

Just before we reach a road junction, Piper's Cottage on the right dates from the 17th or 18th century.

The lane to the left is signposted to Strethall $\frac{3}{4}$. From the fingerpost we can enjoy the view in that direction. This single-track lane provides today's road access to Strethall Church. The lane heads north, and for nearly 2 miles it passes through the uninhabited farmland that constitutes the majority of the parish of Strethall. The hamlet of Strethall that we walked around sits at the southern end of the parish.

We keep straight ahead, signposted merely to " $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Before this finger of the signpost broke, it used to read "Saffron Walden $3\frac{3}{4}$ ". The thatched house on the right immediately after the junction is, appropriately, called The Thatch. It dates from the 18th century.

As we walk through Catmere End, most houses are relatively modern and not listed.

On the right, we go past a long hedge that hides 18th-century Nunns Farm and, just afterwards, we ignore a public footpath on the right. Then, set back on the right is Graves Farm, dating from the 16th or 17th century.

Almost opposite, on the left, is a property called The Old Well. Outside, next to the road, is a pump with a 'steering wheel' that still turns. Behind the houses on the left is Howe Wood, part of which is a Scheduled Monument: an ancient moated site and fish pond.

On the right, we pass Ash House and immediately afterwards (before The Drift) we turn right onto a public byway, Birch Lane. A blue sign warns that it is unsuitable for motor vehicles.

After about 100 yards, we pass Keeper's Cottage on the left, a fairly large 16th-century building. According to its listing, the upper storey was constructed as a single chamber, suggesting that the building's original purpose may not have been as a dwelling.

Soon after, the byway is tree-lined and descends steadily.

Ahead and to the left, we can see traffic on the M11 motorway.

After a while, the path becomes quite a sunken lane, well below the fields on each side – and possibly muddy at times.

At the foot of the descent, our byway meets another and we turn sharp right on a wide path.

After another 150 yards, we come to a crossroads of paths and turn left.

We are now on a wide, tree-lined track, climbing steadily.

When we reach the top of the climb, there is a good view back. Ahead and to our left are various farm buildings at Howe Farm. We keep ahead, now on a wide track.

We pass several houses as we come into Littlebury Green. When we reach the road, we turn right, passing a seat. This is the road where we parked and we have about a quarter mile to go. We should keep to the right, facing any oncoming traffic, quite possibly the first we will have seen since we started this walk.

Set back on the right is Catlins Farm which dates from about 1600 AD, albeit much altered in the 19th century.

On the left, we pass The Bumpy, a former gravel pit that has been turned into a nature reserve.

Just after The Bumpy, we pass the delightful St Peter's Church on the left. The corrugated iron structure was assembled from a kit in 1885. It was erected as a 'chapel of ease', allowing local parishioners to avoid the 2-mile walk to the parish church in Littlebury. Do visit if it is open, first removing or covering boots if they are dirty (in 2022 the church was open from 10am to 4pm each day except Saturday when open from 9am to 1pm). It is larger inside than it appears from the outside. Hundreds of 'tin tabernacles' were erected in the 19th century but few survive. Much of the interior is unchanged, including the "stained glass" windows which are actually transfers between two panes of glass.



On the right, we pass Littlebury Green Recreation Ground (where there are seats if you wish to relax before driving off) and in another 100 yards we return to where we parked and started this walk.

This route description, last updated 04 September 2024, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk where you will find many more walk routes and further information about the parishes of Littlebury and Strethall.

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.

