



# The Hundred Parishes

## Quiet Lane Walks – number 328

### Littlebury – Strethall – 4.6 miles (7 kms)

This walk is mainly on high ground with extensive views and some lengthy climbs and descents. It is mostly in the administrative parish of Littlebury with about one mile in the parish of Strethall. The route is mainly along rural lanes but also passes through some of Littlebury village and the hamlet of Catmere End. The route does not pass anywhere to eat or drink, although there are hopes that the Queen's Head in Littlebury may reopen one day.

The route description starts and finishes at the main gateway to the churchyard of Littlebury parish church.

You may, of course, join this circular walk anywhere along the route.

**Start and finish:** There is usually space to park beside the churchyard wall in Mill Lane at the southern end of Littlebury village, just off the B1383. The route starts from the gate to the churchyard - Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL518395 - Postcode: CB11 4TT – What3words: orchestra.running.shackles

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 195.  
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

Before setting off, you might like to visit Littlebury's parish church if it is open. The main access is through the gate near the corner at the crossroads.

Holy Trinity Church is listed at Grade I for its architectural and historic value. It was built of flint and stone, mostly in the 13th century with the tower added a hundred years later. The southern doorway dates from around 1200 AD. Of particular interest inside is the 13th-century font and its 16th-century carved wooden canopy. The church was probably altered during the 'restoration' of the 1870s. The belltower has 6 bells that mostly date from the 18th century and there is another bell on the roof of the tower which strikes on the hour.

After visiting the church, retrace from the porch to the gateway.

From the church gateway, we turn right for just a few yards to pause at the crossroads with the B1383 . . .

Looking to the left, the main road is dead straight for about half a mile – quite unusual in this area for a road that does not have Roman origins. We will learn why in just a little while.

Looking to the right, the large white-painted building on the opposite side of the road is Granta House. It dates from the 16th century but was largely rebuilt in the early 19th century.

With great care, we cross the main road and turn left along the pavement. Almost immediately, we turn right, signposted towards Littlebury Green and Strethall. We immediately pass a gateway on the right – the entrance to Granta House and its outbuildings.

This route is mostly on quiet lanes, but please follow the usual safety precautions: where there is no pavement, 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 and cyclists may be as surprised to see you as you are to see them!

Having turned off the main road, we are now in Littlebury Green Road. There is no pavement but we have flintstone walls on each side. The high wall on our right is a boundary wall to Granta House. The house and the wall are listed for their historic or architectural interest. We will see more of Littlebury's many listed buildings near the end of the walk.

Flintstones abound in this area. Countless millions have been removed from the fields and used as building material.

We soon pass a turning on the right – Peggy's Walk. Until about 200 years ago the main road – it wasn't called the B1383 then - came in from the left (where there is now a gate) and turned right here, heading towards the church. Then the Hockerill Turnpike Trust, which maintained the highway, acquired land from Lord Braybrook of the Audley End estate so that the road could be diverted, making it "more commodious to the public". The straight road opened in 1811.

We continue along Littlebury Green Road.

We soon pass Goodwins Close on the right.

About a hundred yards after Goodwins Close, we pass over the railway line from London Liverpool Street to Cambridge. It runs beneath us in a tunnel. There is a green EEB box in the hedgerow on the right and through the gap in the hedge we may be able to see the top of the tunnel exit structure to the right.

A few yards further along, a longer gap in the hedgerow gives a better view of the railway route which runs just this side of the houses down to our right. If we wait long enough, we may see a train. We will encounter the railway again towards the end of this walk.

Our lane climbs steadily for around half a mile. By the time we reach a footpath sign on the left, we will have risen about 130 feet (40 metres) since the church. The view back towards Littlebury village will confirm this! Beyond the village, on the horizon, we may be able to see the light-coloured buildings of Chesterford Research Park about 3 miles away.

We pass beneath a high voltage power line. To our left it is heading towards the Pelham substation on the Essex / Hertfordshire border between Berden and Stocking Pelham. To the right, it is heading across Cambridgeshire.

In another quarter of a mile, our lane passes over the M11 motorway. Traffic heading left is going south, towards London, while traffic heading to the right is heading towards Cambridge. If we look to the right, we may be able to see the next bridge over the motorway – we will be crossing it later.

We continue ahead and our lane soon starts to descend, now with views ahead rather than behind.

After a while, we fork right, leaving the main lane. There is no signage.

In another 300 yards we reach a road junction where we turn right. Still no signage.

The lane climbs gently and we come to a sign that tells us we are entering Catmere End. This is an outlying hamlet of Littlebury parish.

We pass Clayhall Cottages on the left and soon afterwards the lane turns left.

Over to the right is the extensive Howe Wood.

About 200 yards after the bend, we enter Catmere End proper, a mixture of old and new houses.

After passing Ash House on the left, look out for a property called The Old Well on the right. Outside, in the hedge next to the road, there is an old pump with a 'steering wheel' that still turns.

Just afterwards, on the left, Graves Farm dates from the 16th or 17th century.

Next on the right, an area of land with a pond is part of Howes Wood. Part of this is a Scheduled Monument, a protected site with an ancient moated area and fish pond.

On the left, we go past 18th-century Nunns Farm, hidden behind the hedge.

Over the next 300 yards, we pass several groups of houses on the right until we reach a junction with a lane on our right.

At last, we have a signpost - an ancient one manufactured in Essex at Maldon Iron Works, probably in the 1930s. Sadly, in 2024 most of the finger pointing in the direction from which we have come was missing. Just part of the distance remains –  $\frac{3}{4}$ . Some years ago, the full story was "Saffron Walden  $3\frac{3}{4}$ ".

The other fingers survive and we will shortly follow the one that points right, towards Strethall and Ickleton. Before we move on, take a moment to view the houses on either side of the signpost . . .

Just to the right, Piper's Cottage dates from the 17th or 18th century; to the left, The Thatch dates from the 18th century.

If, instead of turning right, we were to go straight ahead along Piper's Lane we would soon be in the parish of Strethall. The 2011 Census revealed that there were just 26 inhabitants in this parish, one of the smallest recorded populations in England. This walk does not go into Strethall village although Station walk 13 and Walk 165 do go there using footpaths – perhaps another day!

Today, we turn right, actually signposted to Strethall. This is a single-track road, and also signposted as part of National Cycle Network route number 11, a 60 mile route between King's Lynn and Wendens Ambo. We are heading in the direction of Kings Lynn.

We soon pass a house on the right called Cuckoo Hill and then start a steady descent. From here we should be able to see Strethall's parish church, a quarter of a mile across the fields to our left. The church is believed to be over a thousand years old.

Soon after a national speed limit sign, we imperceptibly leave the administrative parish of Littlebury and enter Strethall parish.

We continue to follow Howe Wood, over to the right.

We pass a sign that warns that the road ahead is single-track with no passing places.

Just afterwards, a lane on the left is signposted to Strethall Church. It lies about 600 yards up this no-through road. By all means try it if you wish; the church is usually open. If you do, please retrace to here to continue heading northwards.

We continue ahead for another 300 yards until we reach a crossroads.

Here we turn right, signposted towards Littlebury and Saffron Walden. By turning right, we leave NCN route 11. We are now in Strethall Road.

Our new lane climbs steadily towards Howe Wood.

Before we reach the wood, do look back at the open countryside that is Strethall parish.

When we reach the wood, our lane defines the parish boundary with Strethall on the left and Littlebury on the right.

We continue with the wood on our right for half a mile. Howe Wood has a great show of bluebells in springtime. It is a private wood, but the spectacle can be viewed from the road.

After a while, the parish boundary goes off to the left. We leave Strethall parish totally and are now entirely back in Littlebury.

A gateway on the left gives an opportunity to stop and enjoy the view to the North, especially on a clear day. To the right, we have a good view of Chesterford Research Park, about 3 miles away on top of the hill above Little Chesterford. On a really clear day, straight ahead through the gate we may be able to see rotating wind turbines on the horizon – there are 13 altogether in the Wadlow Wind Farm in West Wrating, about 10 miles northwest of our location and well beyond the Hundred Parishes.

Just before we reach the end of Howe Wood, there is an informal parking area on the right – popular with bluebell spotters in the spring.

About 30 yards beyond Howe Wood, we might be able to spot a triangulation pillar in the hedgerow on the left. This marks a high point that is 112 metres, 367 feet, above sea level. In the days before satellite navigation, it was a key measuring point for Ordnance Survey's map-makers.

About 200 yards after the wood, our lane passes over the M11 motorway at just about the highest point on the motorway, over 100 metres, 330 feet, above sea level. Our lane is somewhat higher. To the right, we can see the bridge by which we crossed the motorway earlier in this walk.

We continue along the plateau for about a quarter of a mile before the lane starts a steep descent to lose 150 feet in elevation, down to Littlebury which lies in the Cam valley.

On the way down, we again pass beneath the high voltage power cables.

We complete about half of the altitude drop by the time we pass the signs that tell us we are in Littlebury with a 30mph speed limit.

Soon after, we should use the pavement on the right.

We pass several blocks of 20th-century houses until the pavement ends, just before the road narrows over a weak bridge. We should continue with care and pause on the bridge to look over the parapets.

Beneath us is the West Anglia railway line. From the end of the bridge, to the right, we can see where the track runs through a tunnel on its way to London. The tunnel is about 300 yards long and one of two that enabled the line to negotiate the hilly terrain to the west of the Cam valley rather than go past Audley End House. It was the only way that Lord Braybrooke, the owner of the Audley End estate, would allow the railway to be constructed through his land in the 1840s. When safe, we should cross to the left side of the road – looking down, the rail track heads towards Cambridge.

We should continue on the left for just a few yards to the parking area on the left, beside the right-hand bend. Through a gap in the hedge on our left, we can see the valley of the River Cam as it heads north.

After the parking area, when safe, we should cross back to the right side of the road and continue our descent into the older parts of Littlebury. Ahead, above the rooftops, we can see the tower of Littlebury Church.

We descend, past houses that were built in the 20th and 21st centuries, until we reach a junction with the main road. Here, we should cross to the left and turn left, pausing immediately on the pavement outside Kents Farm.

Looking back a few feet, note the large stone beside the corner of Kents Farm, no doubt positioned there to prevent cart wheels from damaging the building.

Looking back across Strethall Road, through the gateway, The Gatehouse dates from the 16th century and is probably on the site of a 13th-century building that was owned by the Bishop of Ely.

The main road is the B1383. On the opposite side of the B1383, The Queen's Head was closed in 2024 although there have been attempts to raise sufficient interest to buy the pub as a community resource.

Between us and the pub, the triangular traffic island has been here for a long while. The photo on the next page appeared on a postcard in 1936 – The Queen's Head is on the left of the picture.



The girl is standing by the village pump which can still be found on the traffic island, albeit no longer in regular use.

We continue along the pavement past Kents Farm and pause at the former telephone kiosk. Now, if we look right we can see the pub and the water pump from the same location where the photographer stood all those years ago.

We need to cross the main road. From the telephone kiosk there is a reasonable view of traffic in both directions, so we will cross here with great care. On the far side, we turn left, to pass Jasmine Cottage on our right and the phone box and parish notice board on the left

A little further along on the left, we pass 16th/17th-century Parrishes, a former farmhouse whose first floor is jettied over the pavement with pargeting beneath the windows.

On our side, we pass several cottages that date from the 18th or 19th centuries; they include The Old Telegraph House which once served as the village post office.

We follow the pavement round to the right, passing The Old Post Office – yes, another.

As we pass The Old Post Office, we leave Cambridge Road, the B1383. At the corner opposite, a small, walled garden includes the village sign and a signpost pointing to the right, towards Saffron Walden.

The village sign has different pictures on the two sides, each depicting a horse-drawn cart outside the mill – which we will see soon.

We continue round to the right, now in Walden Road.

We soon pass an opening on the right to Bakers Row, a block of four 17th or 18th-century cottages.

We continue ahead, now on a slightly raised pavement with white railings on our left. On our right we pass 2, The Old Priest's House and the adjacent Ring Hill - they date from the early 16th century and are jettied out over the pavement.

On the left, Thatched Cottage dates from the 18th century.

Further along, on the left, Folly Cottage with the jettied upper storey and red-tiled roof was built in the 17th century.

Here, we should cross Walden Road to continue on the left, soon passing an entrance on the left to Littlebury Village Hall.

Just after a turning on the right, we should pause to look back on the left – to Midsummer House which dates from about 1600 AD. The house and surrounding land were owned by the Braybrooke family of Audley End House from 1770 until the mid-20th century when part of the land was given by Lord Braybrooke as a site for the construction of Littlebury's village hall.

We continue ahead, beside the flint wall on our left. We soon come to a bridge where we will pause. The bridge crosses the River Cam. When safe, we will cross the road – on this side we can hear the water flowing over a weir, just out of sight. We will turn here to retrace a few yards, passing 18th-century Riverside Cottage on the left.

We soon return to the junction where we now turn left into Mill Lane.

Almost immediately, our pavement runs out so, when safe, we should cross to walk on the right. There is a striking contrast in building styles between 19th-century Flint Cottage on the right, totally faced in flintstone, and 18th-century, thatched Mill Cottage on the left – note the duck straw finials on the ridge.

Just afterwards, we may get a glimpse of the River Cam to our left.

Immediately afterwards, on the left, we come to the three-storey mill house, known as Kings Mill. We should continue past it for a few yards and then look back to see the mill house and, behind it, the mill itself. Both buildings date from the 18th century and both are of timber-frame construction. The mill house is plastered and painted white/cream; the mill is weatherboarded and painted black. Each building has a mansard roof - a two-sided roof with two slopes on each side.

The River Cam passes beneath the mill to provide renewable energy for the mill. The mill ceased to operate in 1924. Having run beneath the mill, the river continues northwards through Cambridge, later joining the River Great Ouse and flowing into the North Sea at The Wash.

For a while, early in the 20th century, the mill was run as a guesthouse and tea room and later it became the home of Dorothy, Lady Braybrooke after the death of her husband, the 7th Lord Braybrooke, in 1941. She lived here until 1971.

We should continue on the right, soon joining a pavement and heading uphill beside the flint wall of the churchyard.

If we were here 300 years ago, there would have been a totally different scene to our left. For around a hundred years, from the 1670s to the 1780s, the site opposite the church was occupied by Henry Winstanley's "House of Wonders".

Henry Winstanley was born in Saffron Walden and became Clerk of Works at Audley End House, about a mile south from here. He built his own, rather grand, house here in extensive grounds. Winstanley was an architect and inventor, most famed for designing and building the first Eddystone Lighthouse, off the coast of Cornwall, in the 1690s.

His home and grounds included a model of the lighthouse and a great number of other unusual inventions including trick chairs. It became known as Winstanley's House of Wonders, attracting paying guests, a kind of 17th-century Disneyland. Winstanley died in 1703 during a visit to Eddystone Lighthouse. A great storm washed the lighthouse and Winstanley away. His House of Wonders was demolished in the 1780s.

Soon, we return to the gateway to the churchyard, where this route description started.

If you did not visit the church before setting out, you may like to do so now. There is a brief introductory paragraph near the beginning of this route description.

If you started somewhere else along the route, please join the route description from page 1.

This route description, last updated 03 September 2024, was downloaded from [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk) There, you can read more about the parishes of Littlebury and Strethall and also find many additional walk routes.

Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to [hundredparishes@btinternet.com](mailto: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.

