



# The Hundred Parishes

## Quiet Lane Walks – number 335

### Brent Pelham - Anstey – Meesden – 6.3 miles (10 kms)

This walk explores two Hertfordshire parishes: Anstey and the combined parish of Brent Pelham and Meesden. It passes through these three villages and lots of open countryside with good views. The route is fairly flat and on higher ground, mostly more than 400 feet (120 metres) above sea level, with only occasional ups and downs.

The route description starts close to Brent Pelham parish church, marked **1** on the route diagram at the end of this description. An alternative start is from the small car park at Anstey Village Hall, just south of Anstey church and school, marked **2** on the diagram (Grid Reference: TL404327 - Postcode: SG9 0BY – what3words: microchip.built.pinks (approx)). You can, of course, join this circular walk anywhere along the route.

The route travels in a clockwise direction and passes two possible places for refreshment: the Black Horse pub in Brent Pelham (01279 778925, [www.blackhorsebrentpelham.co.uk](http://www.blackhorsebrentpelham.co.uk)) and The Blind Fiddler in Anstey (01763 848000 - <https://theblindfiddler.co.uk>). In 2024, neither served food on Mondays or Tuesdays. If you hope to take refreshment at one, please check availability. Their locations are marked, respectively, **3** and **4** on the route diagram.

Some parts of the route are also used in other walks, including number 306 which includes about 2 miles in the opposite direction and number 142 which follows about half of this route in the same direction and also includes footpaths.

**Start and finish:** The walk starts from a small parking area in Brent Pelham opposite the parish church and just a few yards north of the war memorial. Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL434308 - Postcode: SG9 0HF – what3words: innovator.urge.smoker

If there is no space here, it should be safe to park along the B1038 road that runs southeast from the church. It may also be possible, with permission, to park at the Black Horse pub, about 200 yards after the start, north of the church.

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

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

This route is mostly 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 and cyclists may be as surprised to see you as you are to see them!

Before setting off, you may like to add a few yards by visiting Brent Pelham church, a short diversion described in the next four paragraphs . . .

From the parking area, cross the road with care and walk just around the corner to the entrance to St Mary's, Brent Pelham's 14th-century parish church. Note the ancient stocks and whipping post beside the gate.

The church is often open. Inside, you should be able to find the black marble tombstone of Piers Shonks, a dragon slayer who died long ago. His final resting place is in the wall of the church, neither inside nor outside the church. He had asked to be buried there so as to thwart the Devil (a close friend of the slayed dragon) who had vowed to have Shonks's soul when he died, whether he be buried inside or outside the church.

On leaving the church, take care as this road is classified B1038 and can sometimes be busy. Please take a look around before retracing past the parking area. The busy green opposite includes an unusual irregular seat, carved from a tree branch, and a telephone kiosk that now houses a defibrillator. The village hall was erected in 1901. Looking back towards the church and stocks, to the left is the picturesque 16th or 17th-century Church Cottage with a fox and hare above the thatched roof.

Now retrace to the war memorial which stands on a group of Hertfordshire pudding stones, one of which is exceptionally large. Beyond the memorial is the entrance to Brent Pelham Hall which dates from the 16th or 17th century. It is listed at Grade I, along with the boundary wall and the piers beside the entrance.

We turn left, signposted towards Meesden and Anstey. When safe, we should cross to the right before passing the small parking area on the right and the churchyard on the left. We proceed gently downhill.

Soon, we pass a public bridleway on the right, number 20. Once a year, this serves as the entrance to the showground for a major countryside event, the Herts and Essex Country Fair.

On the left we pass the entrance to The Bury, 16th century with tall chimneys, and two large 17th-century barns.

Further down the hill, we pass the Black Horse public house on the right. It was originally a range of three buildings from the 17th and 18th centuries. Almost opposite, on the left and partly hidden, is Bridge Cottage, 16th-century, with thatch and partly weatherboarded.

Set well back on the right is another building with 17th-century origins: Old Forge Cottage, whose outbuildings were once used as a forge. Next on the right, Bythorne Cottage with steps up to the door, also dates from the 17th century.

Soon, we turn left, signposted towards Anstey, passing another 17th-century house, part-thatched Meesden Corner Cottage on the corner on the right. The lane soon becomes quite narrow and winding, climbing steadily.

We pass the back of a sign welcoming oncoming traffic to Brent Pelham. Soon after, we ignore an entrance on the right and continue to climb.

About half a mile after the pub, just as the lane turns sharp right for the second time, note the raised ground on the right. A windmill once stood on this small mound which is now covered by trees. The mound is surrounded by a moat, suggesting there may have been a building here before the windmill. The site is protected as a Scheduled Monument.

We continue along the lane.

In another quarter of a mile, just where hedgerows mark the ends of fields on each side of the road, a public footpath – with numbers 018 and 019 – crosses the road. This path marks the parish boundary between Brent Pelham and Meesden, which we are leaving, and Anstey which we have now entered.

Soon, the lane bears right and then left.

We pass between a few properties in the rather remote hamlet of Puttock's End.

We continue for another half mile on flat, higher ground before we reach Anstey Bury on the left. This timber-framed house dates from around 1600 AD and has 19th-century red-brick facing.

We follow the lane round to the left, ignoring the turning on the right to Coltsfoot (there was no signage in 2024). On the corner on the left we pass a large 16th-century barn, associated with Anstey Bury.

Over to the right, about half a mile away, a row of white-painted houses contrasts with the woodland behind. We will walk beside them later when we come to Cheapside.

Further along, a sign advises that we have arrived in Anstey. Initially, we are in the hamlet called Daw's End, passing between two thatched buildings.

The house on the right, with dark weather-boarding, functioned as the Bell Inn until the 1950s. It dates from the 17th century. On the left, Bell Cottage is somewhat newer.

We pass a few more scattered buildings before we leave Daw's End including Dawes Cottages on the right, a pair of dwellings under one roof. Later, there are a few cottages off to the left, out of sight down a track and public footpath called Silver Street.

We then come into the hamlet of Snow End where we descend between a close-knit collection of ancient buildings. The first three were all built in the 16th century or earlier as open hall houses – basically a hall where day-to-day life was played out around an open fire whose smoke drifted out through vents in the thatched roof. Each subsequently had a chimney and floor installed to create two storeys.

This group starts with Essex Cottage on the right, closely followed by Little Orchard. Then, an entrance on the left leads to weatherboarded Windmill Cottage. That entrance also leads to the relatively-new Hill Farm which dates from the 17th century – by that time the fashion for open hall houses had ended. Hill Farm has also been altered and has a red tile roof.

The lane continues to descend to a road junction. Just before the corner, on the left, is yet another former hall house, Roding House. It dates from the 16th century or earlier but has been much altered over the last 400 years or so.

At the corner, the building facing us is Snow End House, dating from the 15th century.

We turn right, signposted towards Anstey and Meesden. We have been in the parish of Anstey for the last mile and a half, but we will soon reach the village itself.

In about 300 yards, we pass a small parking area on the left. This is marked **2** on the route diagram – a possible starting point for this walk route. Anstey Village Hall is behind the car park.

The lane climbs past Anstey First School on the left as Anstey's parish church comes into view, complete with its "Hertfordshire spike" on top of the tower. Before the lane turns right, we should cross to the left.

At the corner, we go straight ahead to enter the churchyard through the lychgate.

Just after the lychgate, we should turn and look back at it. The overall structure is believed to date from the 15th century. To the left of the gateway is a tiny lock-up or cage for the temporary confinement of minor criminals and drunkards. This element was created with brick and flintstone in 1831 but it may have succeeded an earlier lock-up structure. It continued to serve that purpose until the early 20th century.

We continue up the path to the church which merits a visit if open. It dates from the 12th century and is listed at Grade I. Of particular note inside is the 12th-century font which is decorated with mermen, the male equivalent of mermaids, one of only two known examples of such font decoration (the other being in St Peter's, Cambridge). The walls and pillars have been decorated over centuries by graffiti 'artists'.

We leave the church through the ancient porch and retrace along the path to exit through the lychgate.

We turn left along the short slip road, passing a seat and Anstey's war memorial before rejoining the lane.

When safe, we should cross to the right to face any oncoming traffic.

Next on the left is the rather grand Anstey Hall, a manor house dating from the 17th century.

We pass Rose Cottage on the left which is adorned with a vintage AA sign. Of particular relevance today is the distance to Meesden – we will be there in another 1 ¾ miles.

In another hundred yards, we pass Anstey's pub. It was once called The Chequers, but now it takes its name, The Blind Fiddler, from a legendary Anstey resident.

George was a blind fiddler or violinist who, for a wager and accompanied by his dog, entered a nearby tunnel that was said to lead to a distant castle mound. The sound of his fiddle gradually became fainter until, suddenly, there was a terrible scream. After a while, the dog emerged, badly singed, but George was never seen again.

Please don't let this tale put you off visiting the pub if refreshment is required – their food was good in 2024.

Continuing, with the pub on the right, we soon pass 17th-century Red Stack on the left and then thatched 17th-century Well Cottage.

Immediately after Well Cottage, we come to a small crowded green. It has an old cast iron wellhead mechanism, a post box, notice board, seat and fingerpost sign. The sign tells us to keep straight ahead towards Meesden and Brent Pelham. Just afterwards, the telephone kiosk was still in service in 2024.

We soon pass a small chapel on the right, erected in 1902.

We should cross to the left to negotiate the blind bend to the right. On the left we pass another small green cum traffic island. The fingerpost confirms that we should bear right to head towards Meesden. We are now in an area called Cheapside.

On the left, we pass two attractive cottages that date from the 17th century: Little Thatch, then Chappells Cottage, sideways to the road.

We pass two terraces of houses on the left – we saw them earlier from a distance. Each terrace is topped with a “B” monogram on the central gable and each individual house has a front porch.

We pass public footpath 13 on the left and then another 17th-century house, Meadow View (previously called 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.

A red-brick farmhouse on the left is followed by Low Hall – a black weather-boarded house that dates from the 16th century when it was built as an open hall house.

The lane climbs a little and for a while is shaded by mature trees.

On the right, a gateway leads to the out-of-sight Old Rectory.

Just afterwards, we walk beside 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.

Further along, we pass the back of a sign that tells anyone coming from the opposite direction that they have reached Anstey.

Around a quarter of a mile later, we imperceptibly cross the parish boundary, passing from Anstey back into Brent Pelham and Meesden.

At the top of a rise, we pass a sign that welcomes us to Meesden.

The road soon turns left and then keeps bearing right round a group of three cottages on the right. These cottages, together with the former pub The Beehive, on the left, constitute the hamlet of Lower Green.

We reach houses as we come into Meesden village, firstly passing 20th-century Elm Cottages on the left. Just afterwards, we come to Walkers on the right, somewhat hidden by tree foliage in summer. It has a steep thatched roof. This is one of the parish’s oldest buildings, dating from the 15th century, albeit rebuilt in the 18th.

The village street passes beside a series of greens, with houses often set well back from the road. There is an interesting variety of trees.

After a while we pass a listed mid-20th-century K6 telephone kiosk on the right, now re-purposed to house a defibrillator. It stands beside the entrances to Puddles Barn and Home Farm, each dating from the 17th century.

The village hall on our left was erected in 1900.

On the right, there are several houses which each boldly display their date of origin as 1921.

Just as we leave Meesden village, we pass a tall concrete water tower on the left, behind trees.

After the village, it is another quarter of a mile, with countryside views to the left, until we reach a small triangular green where another lane (from Langley) joins us from the left. Here, we keep right, heading in the only direction that is not signposted.

We walk beside a fairly young wood, Meesden Hall Wood, on the left. Meesden Hall – and Meesden Church – are located two to three hundred yards beyond the wood, out of sight.

When the wood comes to an end, our lane turns right. We are now following the line of a former Roman road which ran between Roman settlements at Braughing to the southwest and Chesterford to the northeast. We will head towards Braughing for the next half mile or so.

After a while, we pass 16th-century Westley Farm on the right.

Black Hall, set back on the left and with exposed timbers, also dates from the 16th century.

We soon pass a moated and wooded site on the right, behind the hedge. It is known as Chamberlain's Moat. The site is protected as a Scheduled Monument. The moat surrounds an island on which there are two fishponds.

On the left, we pass a footpath sign, pointing across a field that has jumps and is clearly used for equestrian activities.

Further on, a sign alerts us to bends and the imminent approach of Brent Pelham village.

Soon after, we should get occasional glimpses to the left of an unusual building clad in corrugated iron sheeting. It is a former smock windmill, erected in 1826 and re-purposed many years ago to support a water tank.

The narrow lane descends quite steeply, with a rare formal Passing Place on the left.

At the bottom of the hill, we follow the road round to the left, passing the road to Anstey on our right (the road we used near the start of this walk).

From now on, we retrace the first part of our route, past the Black Horse pub on the left and climbing the hill to where this route description started, opposite Brent Pelham church. If you didn't visit the church at the start of the walk, you might like to try now – there is a brief description at the top of page 2.

[If you started somewhere else along the route, please rejoin the route description from the bottom of page 1 ]

This route description, last updated 28 September 2024, was downloaded from [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk) There, you can read more about the parishes of Anstey and Brent Pelham & Meesden 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.

