



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 188

Wenden Lofts, etc - countryside walk – 6.3 miles (10 kms)

This is a rural walk through two parishes: mostly in Elmdon, Duddenhoe End & Wenden Lofts and also part of Littlebury. It passes few dwellings and is generally on higher ground with expansive views. It is mostly along good paths and bridleways with short stretches of road. In August / September, there are opportunities to pick blackberries, sloes and damsons. After 4 miles, the walk passes a tea room, The Mixing Shed, which in 2025 was closed on Mondays - <https://www.compasscourtyard.co.uk/mixing-shed-cafe> . It also passes the thatched Hamlet Church near the finish. Some parts of the route may be muddy at times so please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or don boot covers or plastic bags before entering the church or the tea room. There are occasional seats and one high stile.

Start and finish: The route description starts and finishes at a small informal parking area on the north side of the B1039, Royston Road, about 300 yards west of the junction with a lane called Cogmore. The parking area is just east of where a footpath crosses the B1039.

(Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL462378 - Postcode: CB11 4UP (a large area) –

What3words (approximately): starters.blotches.funnels

The circular route could be joined anywhere along the way, possibly starting from the car park at Compass Courtyard and using The Mixing Shed café before or after the walk. If you do park there, please email your vehicle registration to

mixingshed@compasscourtyard.co.uk and advise when you expect to drive away.

From there, start towards the bottom of page 4 of this route description.

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 parking area beside B1039, we should turn right and head west for a short distance, staying on this side of the road to face any oncoming traffic.

After about 70 yards, we leave the road, turning right onto a signposted Public Footpath. Almost immediately, we cross a concrete bridge over a ditch. The path heads gently uphill and for a considerable distance we walk beside a beech hedge on the left, with a good variety of trees on the right.

After about 250 yards, we bear left, still following the beech hedge.

After another 100 yards, when the beech hedge ends, we go straight ahead, immediately passing beneath a group of damson trees. Continuing ahead, we now have woodland on the right and a field on the left.

Just before the end of the woodland, we turn right into the wood, crossing a wooden footbridge with metal handrails (we do not go straight ahead over a bridge with no handrails). At the far side of the bridge, we immediately bear half left to cross a corner of the woodland. We leave the wood, bear left and climb over a high stile.

The grass path goes straight ahead, climbing steadily between robust paddock fencing on each side.

As we climb, a church tower comes into view on our right. This is 12th-century St Dunstan's which once served as the parish church of Wenden Lofts. Since the start of the walk, we have been in Wenden Lofts which was once a separate parish. In 1958 it merged with the parish of Elmdon. In 2022, the parish name was extended to include Duddenhoe End which had long been part of Elmdon parish. The administrative parish, with a total population of 600, now has the longest name within the Hundred Parishes: "Elmdon, Duddenhoe End & Wenden Lofts". Most of this walk is within it, with just a short foray later into Littlebury parish.

The church has long been derelict and sits now within the private property of Lofts Hall Stud.

Further up, we can enjoy the view behind us, looking south.

Our path crosses a chalky drive and we go straight ahead, still climbing gently between paddocks. There is an occasional view to the right of buildings within the Lofts Hall complex.

We walk beside a long beech hedge on the right and past several mature oak trees to the left.

At the top of the climb, we pass through a kissing gate into a cricket ground, the home of Elmdon Cricket Club which was founded in 1845. Just here, we also pass from Wenden Lofts into Elmdon. Go straight ahead, keeping to the right, beside the hedge. If a match is being played, please halt whenever a bowler is running up to bowl. There are seats if you would like to watch.

Just after the cricket ground, the path descends to a road where we will turn right after a brief pause.

Immediately opposite is Wilkes Barn. This has been considerably updated since it served the community as the Wilkes Arms, a pub named after the Wilkes family who owned Lofts Hall estate in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Immediately to our left is thatched Carpenters Cottage, dating from the 17th or 18th century. The centre of Elmdon village is also down the hill to our left. Our route turns right along the road for about 300 yards, initially climbing gently.

On the right, we pass the lodge house at the start of the drive to Lofts Hall.

On the left, largely hidden amongst the trees, is Pigots, a 16th-century former manor house that is still surrounded by a moat. The site around the house is protected as a Scheduled Monument.

As the road bears right, we should cross to the left when safe. Just before the national speed limit sign, we turn left onto a public bridleway which is actually a tarmac lane, Freewood

Lane. Almost immediately on the left is a small informal parking area, a possible alternative start for this walk.

Freewood Lane follows one of the strands of the ancient Icknield Way, a pre-historic hilltop route which ran from Wiltshire to Norfolk. We will not go quite that far today, but we will follow the lane and then continue in this direction, heading east for a total of nearly two miles.

After about a hundred yards, the hedgerow on the right ends and we get a wide view, looking south and east. On a clear day, way in the distance, beyond the electricity pylons, we may be able to see the tall microwave radio mast at Debden, rising above the horizon almost 10 miles away.

After another hundred yards, a gateway on the left provides a view of Elmdon's parish church. Just after the gateway, a bridleway goes off to the left and the opening in the hedgerow offers distant views to the north and east into Cambridgeshire. We continue ahead along Freewood Lane.

Quite soon, just as the lane starts to bear right, we pass a wooded mound on the right. It was once the site of a windmill but may have earlier origins. The site is protected as a Scheduled Monument.

We continue along the tarmac lane for some distance, passing more oak trees.

About half a mile after turning left onto Freewood Lane, the tarmac ends and we keep straight ahead across an uneven concrete farmyard, passing between rather old buildings of Freewood Farm.

At the end of the farmyard we continue straight ahead. Our bridleway is now on a rougher track with Free Wood immediately on the left. This path may be muddy at times.

Over to the right, a mile or so away to the south, a large area of woodland spreads up the hillside to the horizon. This is Rockell's Wood – we will walk beside it, on its far side, later on this walk.

After some distance, towards the end of Free Wood, we walk through just a short stretch of woodland on both sides of our path and then come out into the open, continuing straight ahead. As we leave the wood, we cross the parish boundary into Littlebury. We will be in Littlebury for the next mile.

We continue in a straight line with hedgerow immediately on the left for about half a mile. Then we follow the wide bridleway round to the right. In only about 40 yards we follow the main track round to the left to resume the direction of travel, heading southeast and again with hedgerow on our left.

The field now on our right appears to no longer be cultivated (at least in 2025).

At the end of this long narrow field, we pass through woodland where the branches of the coppiced lime trees form a kind of ceremonial arch over the bridleway.

After the woodland, we pass beside a few houses as we come into the hamlet of Littlebury Green. On the left, The Old Rose was formerly the Rose Inn. It appears to have dovecotes. And on the right we pass the grounds of 17th-century The Hoops, also a former pub. Each house is now a private dwelling.

We reach a road – with a seat just to the left. When safe, we go straight across the road onto a public bridleway. For a few yards, this is also the driveway to The Granary which we pass on the left as we follow the concrete roadway round to the right.

We leave the houses behind and continue along the concrete bridleway, passing woodland immediately on our right.

Suddenly, the concrete track comes to an end and a splendid wide view opens up in front of us. Ahead, the group of buildings down in the valley includes the Mixing Shed Café which we will pass in half a mile or so. Having taken in the view, we turn right, keeping the woodland on our right.

In about 50 yards, we turn left to head downhill on a field-edge path with hedgerow on our right. As we start the descent, we leave Littlebury parish and return to Elmdon, Duddenhoe End & Wenden Lofts.

At the bottom of the descent, we follow the hedgerow as it curves to the left, soon reaching a road. This is Royston Road, the B1039, about a mile and a half east of where we started this walk.

We turn right onto the road, but only for a few yards. We immediately cross over a ditch with railings. Just afterwards, when safe, we should cross the road and go into the field, turning right along the permissive path with hedgerow and the road just to our right. [If the permissive path is closed because of farming activity, we should continue along the road for about 300 yards before crossing and turning left onto the bridleway just before the entrance to Compass Courtyard].

After about 300 yards, at the end of the field, we keep round to the left and then turn left onto the public bridleway. In just a few yards, we may wish to turn right to **The Mixing Shed Café**.

From the café, we should return to the bridleway and turn right to continue uphill.

The bridleway climbs steadily with hedgerow on the right, passing the café and then farm buildings on the right.

At the end of the field, we turn right, and then go straight ahead on the bridleway, now on a gravel track with hedgerow on the left.

Within a hundred yards, we follow the track to the left and, in another hundred yards follow it round to the right. We now head northwest for about 300 yards, climbing steadily and heading towards the right corner of a wood. This is Rockell's Wood that we saw earlier from the other side of the valley.

For a while we pass alongside a thin line of trees on our left before we reach the wood proper. The track becomes quite chalky and uneven. At the top of the climb, looking back, we may see traffic moving along the M11 motorway. Beyond it, on the horizon, we may be able to see the rotating radar scanner at Debden, around 7 miles distant.

Just after our track starts to descend, and immediately before Rockell's Wood, we turn left onto the public bridleway with the wood immediately on our right. We will walk beside the wood for more than half a mile, with more views to our left.

After a good while, we reach a corner of the wood. From here, the official right of way goes diagonally across the field for a short distance but the route that is used continues adjacent to the wood, turning right and in 50 yards turning left.

In another 50 yards the path turns right again, still with the wood on the right. Just afterwards we cross the route of a Roman roadway that went between Roman settlements at Braughing (about 9 miles to our left) and Great Chesterford (about 4 miles to our right). [This route is the subject of a book by Christopher Hadley, "The Road".]

At the bottom of a long descent, we reach the extreme southwest corner of Rockell's Wood. PLEASE BEWARE of the metal trip hazard that protrudes from the path just before the concrete bridge. We cross over the ditch on the concrete bridge.

Immediately after crossing the bridge, we turn right onto a footpath with hedgerow on our right. Also on the right is the ditch, actually Wicken Water which is often little more than a trickle.

We stay on this path for about 300 yards, keeping fairly straight and going through two metal gates. We pass a thatched house on the right just before emerging onto a lane called Bridge Green Road. For the next few yards we will be in the tiny hamlet of Bridge Green.

We turn right, immediately crossing over Wicken Water. Immediately afterwards, we find that the thatched property on the right is called The Old House. It dates from the 18th-century when it was built as a terrace of several small cottages. We turn left, opposite The Old House, into Knole Lane (there is no signpost).

We immediately pass Bridge Green Farm on the right.

After about 200 yards, we pass Adams Field, set back on the right - it dates from around 1700 AD. Next we pass Arboric on the right, a 17th-century thatched house with a number of outbuildings.

100 yards later, we reach a road junction where we turn left onto another narrow lane. There is no road sign, but this is called School Lane.

After about 200 yards, we pass a seat on the right, placed here in 2012 to mark Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee.

Within another hundred yards we reach a thatched building on the left – The Hamlet Church. Continue along the lane just past the church and then turn left through a wooden gate. Through the gate are The Hamlet Church to our left and 17th-century Lantern Thatch straight ahead. If the church is open, we should pay a visit, taking the diagonal path across the lawn.

The church was once an ancient tithe barn. It was converted into a church in 1859 by “the Squire Parson, Rev Robert Wilkes of Lofts Hall”. It is the only active thatched church in the Hundred Parishes, although inactive St Helen's in Wicken Bonhunt is also thatched. They are probably the only thatched churches in Essex, although there are a good number in Suffolk and Norfolk.

From the church, retrace to the road and turn right to retrace a hundred yards, passing a cemetery on the left.

After a hundred yards, we return to the seat and just afterwards we turn left onto a footpath. The footpath has hedgerow on the left and descends steadily towards the road where we parked and started this walk.

Halfway down the hill, we bear left off the field edge to continue along the path as it descends beneath an avenue of mature horse chestnut trees.

We reach the road, the B1039, and turn right, keeping to the right to face any oncoming traffic. Take care when crossing the road.

EITHER:

Within a hundred yards we reach the layby where this walk description started.

OR:

If you started the walk elsewhere, take only a few paces along the road before turning left onto a footpath. Then go to page 1 to continue the description of this circular route, starting from the second paragraph.

This route description, last updated 01 September 2025, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk where you can read more about the parish of Elmdon, Duddenhoe End & Wenden Lofts and also the parish of Littlebury, as well as find many more walks to download.

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.

