



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 103

Walk in the parishes of Finchingfield and Great Bardfield through attractive countryside – 4.5 miles (7 kms)

This is a mainly rural walk of varying terrain, fairly flat and generally away from busy roads. The route is anticlockwise, starting and finishing in Finchingfield and touching the northern edge of Great Bardfield. These are both pretty villages and each has many places of interest and a choice of establishments offering refreshment. You could easily spend more time exploring either village. Walk number 104 also visits these two parishes, mostly on different paths on a slightly longer walk. Each circular walk could be started from anywhere along the route.

Paths are generally well maintained but can be muddy in places. The route includes several stiles. If you hope to visit a church or a pub, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags.

Start and finish: Finchingfield at the small public car park in Stephen Marshall Avenue at the southern end of the village. (Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL683326 – Postcode: CM7 4LZ). There are public toilets in the car park.

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

We leave the car park through the entrance by the toilets and turn left to the end of the cul-de-sac. We keep to the right and follow the pavement, then path, between fences. Soon, just before reaching a bungalow named Asheton on the left, we follow the footpath round to the right and then left, joining another path coming from the right. The path continues, heading West, firstly between trees, later with a field on the right and then with fields on both sides.

The path, known as Winsey Chase, continues in a westerly direction for about half a mile, fairly straight for a long way before turning left and then right, merging with a track that comes in from the right (the track may not appear on older maps).

We follow the main track, soon ignoring a waymark pointing to the left of some trees, and later ignoring a footpath that crosses our route. The track is now heading SSW with a hedgerow on the right and expansive views to the left. Imperceptibly, we leave Finchingfield and cross into Great Bardfield parish.

After about ¼ mile, the path bends to the right and heads downhill towards buildings. At the end of the field, we turn left along the lane. On the right, we pass thatched Beslyn's Cottage, formerly a 17th-century granary. At a road junction, we keep straight ahead, signposted to Great Bardfield.

After about 200 yards, we reach a stile on the right, beside a large oak tree; at this point the spire of Great Bardfield church can be seen straight ahead to the right of the road. We cross the stile and follow the field-edge footpath as it descends with a hedgerow on the left.

At the bottom corner of the field, we turn left over a stile. We follow this path with the River Pant on the right, soon ignoring a footbridge that crosses the river.

We pass tiny Copford Hall Gauging Station on our left and a weir on the right, and then cross another stile to enter a field. We keep ahead, bearing left away from the river.

We ignore the footbridge to the right, continuing ahead and then uphill to reach a gateway. We cross another stile and turn right along the lane.

We pass Brooklands on the right and continue downhill.

The lane reaches a junction. Bridge Farm, on the left, dates from the 17th century or earlier. Here, we turn right.

We are now in Bridge End on the northern outskirts of Great Bardfield. When safe, we cross the road and continue in the same direction. Just before a bridge over the River Pant, we pass Fullbridge Cottage and Bradys on the right. This is a 15th-century house that has been extended more than once on each side and then divided into two dwellings.

We cross the River Pant, keeping to the 1977 wooden footbridge on the left. The adjacent narrow road bridge is some 200 years old. Immediately after the bridge, we are in Bridge Street. We may see yellow oxlips flowering in April or May in Piper's Meadow on the left. Oxlips are relatively rare but found in this area.

The main part of Great Bardfield, a lovely and interesting village that was home to the Bardfield Artists in the mid-20th century, and with several eating places, lies not far ahead, but our route soon leaves the road. [Route number 104, also between Great Bardfield and Finchingfield, includes a more thorough exploration of Great Bardfield.]

We turn left between two red brick terraces of houses, along the narrow passageway between numbers 1 and 10. We soon cross a wooden footbridge with metal handrails and immediately turn left along a field-edge path with a stream on the left.

After 50 yards, the path goes straight ahead, leaving the field, and then continues with a hedgerow on each side, heading gently uphill.

Great Bardfield's windmill, now a private house, can occasionally be seen to the right. It is a tower mill, built of brick around 1707 AD.

When the path reaches some buildings, we turn left to pass an 18th-century former mill house on the left and then the remains of the mill's rusted machinery. A 3-storey watermill with three grindstones once stood here, harnessing the power of the River Pant; sadly, the timber building was destroyed by fire in the 1980s.

We cross the early-19th-century brick bridge over the millstream and pass through a gate. We bear right and soon left to cross a long footbridge with a 'stile' at its entrance. We then turn right, following the stream on the right.

At the far corner of the field, we turn right over a wooden footbridge with a 'stile' and metal handrails. We keep straight ahead and pass through a small patch of woodland on a narrow path. Very soon, we cross another footbridge, with two 'stiles', and follow the path which bears slightly to the right. By crossing the footbridge, over Finchingfield Brook, we have left Great Bardfield and returned to Finchingfield parish.

We pass an old farm building on the right and, soon, the path bears left, crossing the drive to Champions on the right, a farmhouse dating from the 17th century or earlier. The grassy path then climbs uphill with fences on either side. At the top, we pass through a gateway and immediately turn right. The view back includes Great Bardfield windmill. We continue with the fence (and a view of the Pant valley) on the right.

At the end of the field, the path wiggles right and then left through the hedge and over a low fence, continuing ahead towards a communication tower. The path joins a surfaced roadway before passing the tower. Ahead, the white water tower is a mile or so distant, near the perimeter of Wethersfield airfield, most of which is in the parish of Finchingfield. We ignore footpaths to left and right, descending on the concrete path until we reach a lane (Mill Road). We turn left onto this lane.

The lane climbs gently and we pass Dynes Cottage on the right, a house that claims to date from 1630 and which has recently been renovated with several attractive new features.

We pass tiny 18th-century Mill Cottage on the left, and behind it the larger Mill House. This is the site of one of seven mills that once stood in Finchingfield. Now we descend gently into Finchingfield village.

We pass the extensive Old Vicarage on the left – now converted into several properties – and the red-brick Victorian primary school on the right with Dutch gables and tall bell tower.

Just after the school, the two adjacent cottages, sharing 4 dormer windows, date from the 17th century or earlier.

We leave the road as it bears to the right, going straight ahead to join a footpath that bears left through the churchyard.

Finchingfield's parish church, dedicated to St John the Baptist, dates mostly from the 12th to 14th centuries. It has a Grade I listing and you are encouraged to visit, but first please remove muddy boots or don plastic bags or boot covers. The church has many fine architectural features including a notable rood screen, separating the nave and chancel, 14th-century stone corbels depicting heads of monarchs and saints, and many memorials to the Ruggles-Brise family of nearby Spains Hall.

On leaving the church, we turn right from the porch, soon passing the church's 12th-century west doorway with distinctive Norman decoration.

At the end of the churchyard, we reach another Grade I listed building, the former Guildhall, built around 1500 AD and now housing Finchingfield's small museum (which is worth a visit). We pass through the archway beneath the building – beware of the steps at the far side as they descend directly onto the road, the B1057. Immediately opposite is the Finchingfield Lion, one of Finchingfield's several pubs. It was originally built as a house in the 16th century.

We turn left and keep to the left as we descend the steep hill towards the village pond. We pass just four buildings on the left: firstly, The Finch Inn which was an inn until 1996 and previously called The Green Man. This is followed by a timber frame and plaster building from the 16th century or earlier.

We cross a narrow lane, The Pightle [meaning a small field or enclosure], to reach Brick House, an 18th-century property of red brick with fine railings and an array of 7 upstairs windows. This is followed by Bridge House which dates from around 1600 AD.

The village green and surrounding buildings are a magnet for visitors, especially cyclists and motor cyclists. There are numerous photo opportunities and several dining options. There is much to see and enjoy here, including the lane to the right heading towards the windmill.

Our route keeps to the left of the pond, crossing a footbridge over a stream. We keep to the left of the green and then bear left onto the road. To the right, beyond the green and behind a hedge, are the five gables of Finchingfield House which dates from the 16th century.

We keep round to the left. Soon, near the post office, we cross the road with care and turn right into Stephen Marshall Avenue. Stephen Marshall was the parish vicar in the 17th century, an influential Puritan preacher who addressed the House of Commons several times.

The memorial bench on the green commemorates Colonel Sir E.A. Ruggles-Brise. Many generations of his family have occupied nearby Spains Hall and are noted for their service to the community.

We follow Stephen Marshall Avenue uphill and to the right, soon reaching the car park and toilets where this walk began.

This route description, last updated 05 December, 2021, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk where you can read more about Finchingfield and Great Bardfield under the parish introductions.

Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to hundredparishes@btinternet.com.

A diagram of the anti-clockwise route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

