



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 119

Great Dunmow and Stebbing - 9 miles (14 kms)

This clockwise walk passes through attractive countryside with explorations of parts of the town of Great Dunmow and village of Stebbing. A shorter walk, number 117 covering 2.8 miles, focuses just on Stebbing and covers some of this route in the opposite direction.

Caution: *about one mile of the route, approaching Merks Hall and Dunmow towards the end, is across fields that can be muddy or even ploughed.*

The walk is fairly flat. The first half is largely on well-surfaced tracks, and the second half mainly along paths including a long straight stretch of cross-field path that can be heavy going, especially after rain. There is one stile. There is a choice of eating places in Great Dunmow and a pub in Stebbing.

Start & Finish: Public Car Park, The Causeway, Great Dunmow, Essex
Grid Reference: TL628225 – Postcode CM6 2AA. Public toilets in 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.

Leave the car park beyond the toilets, through the gate on the left. Proceed with a hedge on the left towards a seat about 100 yards distant. Shortly before the seat, bear right along a straight tarmac path across a playing field towards the church.

The path becomes a roadway and soon meets Church Street (B1057). Turn right, passing the Angel and Harp pub, and soon, where the view is clear in both directions, cross the road with care. Continue in the same direction, past the former 1836 National School on the right. Keep straight ahead into Church Street and continue through the churchyard. St Mary's dates mainly from the 14th and 15th centuries.

The footpath goes straight ahead through a parking area and then runs alongside and to the left of the low cemetery wall. Pass through two gates and veer slightly right to cross a field. Take the footbridge over the River Chelmer. Cross a narrow field to emerge onto a lane. Turn left.

After about 400 yards, keep right on this lane, ignoring a concrete bridleway that goes off to the left.

The lane (frequently but incorrectly marked as "private road") climbs gently for about half a mile before passing the entrance to Bigods Hall on the right. This functioned as a Roman Catholic boys school from 1916 and during WWII as a home for orphaned boys who had lost their parents in the Blitz. In 2020, a telegraph pole beside the lane still displayed the description *Bigods Orphanage*.

Keep ahead on the main path, signed Bigods Hall Farm, passing Grange House on the left and several other houses and farm buildings to either side. The path continues to climb and can be muddy in places. Pass a metal gate and continue in the same direction along the edge of the field with hedgerow on the left.

About 600 yards beyond the farm buildings, bear left, following a hedgerow/spinney on the right along a grassy path. Keep to the right edge of the field, staying on the path as it bears left, heading for Bigods Wood in the distance.

On reaching the corner of the field, turn left for 10 yards and then right at the corner of the wood. Immediately after passing through the hedge, turn sharp right, keeping a hedge on the right.

At the end of this field continue straight ahead, still with the hedge on the right. Ignore the footpath that comes in from the right over a wooden footbridge, but 50 yards later fork right to follow the path through a narrow strip of woodland.

At the end of this tree-lined path, turn right along the field edge track with a line of oak trees on the left. After 200 yards, follow the track round to the left, at the same time imperceptibly passing from Great Dunmow parish into the parish of Lindsell.

Keep the hedgerow on the left for some distance until the path bears right towards a large barn.

Pass two large farm buildings on the left. Keep on the roadway round to the right but almost immediately leave this roadway to bear right along a field-edge path with hedgerow on the right. We have just passed Lashley Hall on the left, a building that dates back to the 15th century.

The path bears to the left and then to the right, heading gently downhill towards woodland. Before reaching a wood, turn left along the field edge, keeping the wood on the right. At the end of the wood, turn right, keeping the wood on the right and heading downhill for 200 yards.

At the end of this stretch of wood, turn left with the field edge on the right.

After 80 yards the path reaches a small copse. Turn right into the copse and follow the winding path through the trees. Just before a footbridge over a stream, turn right over another footbridge. We have now left Lindsell parish and passed into the parish of Stebbing.

Follow this path with a stream on the left. The path passes a house on the right and becomes a drive, passing Mill Race Barn immediately before reaching the B1057 road.

Cross the road with care and descend the steps beside the former Bran End Mill. At the bottom of the steps, bear slightly left and cross a stile. The path goes along a long, narrow field that is sometimes wet underfoot as this is the flood plain for Stebbing Brook. After 500 yards, the brook is channelled through a large metal pipe beneath the path. After crossing a second pipe, the path emerges into a field that can be boggy.

Keep straight ahead with a fence and willow plantation on the right. Cross a wooden footbridge and then go ahead, uphill, towards a pink house. Pass to the right of the house and leave the field through a kissing gate.

Immediately cross a drive and continue on a narrow footpath with a fence on the right and a line of trees on the left. Take care to avoid the many rabbit holes along this path. Where the line of trees on the left ends, a wooded mound comes into view beyond the fence on the right. This is known as Stebbing Mount and is the site of a former moated Norman castle.

Keep straight ahead until the path emerges onto a cricket field. Head uphill towards the large tree diagonally across the field (avoiding the wicket area). Keep to the right of the tree and pass a small cemetery on the left. Turn left onto a lane, passing a former church on the left, now converted into a terrace of houses. On the right is Stebbing Village Hall. We are now in the heart of the village of Stebbing.

Continue up Mill Lane to the High Street. The White Hart public house on the left has an 18th-century façade, but mainly dates from the 16th or 17th century. It is the only survivor of 5 inns and 2 beer houses that served Stebbing in the 19th century, and is a suitable place for refreshment (the village shop is about 100 yards further along on the left).

Turn right out of the pub, crossing Mill Lane and passing the bowling green on the right. Continue along the High Street past many interesting buildings, including the 1674 Stebbing Memorial Hall on the right, a former Quaker meeting house.

After a descent and as the road starts to rise again, turn left up a path and soon pass through a gate into the churchyard and uphill to the church. The outstanding feature of the Church of St Mary the Virgin is its stone rood screen which fills the whole of the arch between the nave and the chancel. It is believed that only two similar screens exist – one at Trondheim Cathedral in Norway and the other at nearby Great Bardfield. The screen dates from around 1350 AD, as does the rest of the church.

From the church porch, turn right onto the road. Pass 16th-century Church Farm on the left and the war memorial on the right. Keep straight ahead, signposted towards Felsted and Dunmow. After some farm buildings, pass the splendid Prior's Hall (also known as Parsonage Farmhouse). This dates mainly from the 16th century although part that is not visible from the road is 14th century. The building benefited from major restoration in the 20th century.

Follow the road round to the left, downhill and over Stebbing Brook. 100 yards later, where the road turns left, turn right onto a footpath. After 100 yards, turn left and proceed uphill with a hedge and ditch on the left. Do check the view back towards the church and Prior's Hall.

The route follows this path for about half a mile, fairly straight in a West South Westerly direction. After 500 yards, the path bears right and in another 80 yards turns sharp left to cross a wooden bridge before continuing uphill on the far side of the ditch, now with the hedge on the right and passing a solar farm in the field to the right. We have now left Stebbing and are in the parish of Great Dunmow.

At the corner of this field, go straight ahead and cross the next field, heading just to the right of some farm buildings. Continue in this direction for more than half a mile, keeping to the right of the farm buildings and then crossing several flat fields and several plank bridges over ditches. This section across fields can be muddy, so take special care on the bridges.

Soon after passing under a power transmission line, the path follows a field edge, with the hedge on the right.

Upon reaching a wire fence at the corner of the field, turn right and proceed downhill with the fence and then buildings on the left. Pass between Merks Hall on the left and Farmhouse Cottage, Orchard House and Merk's Hill House on the right. Stay on this drive for a further half a mile until it meets a road. We are now back in Great Dunmow.

Carefully cross this road to the pavement and turn left. Cross Brick Kiln Drive on the right and pass the former windmill on the left. Pass two more turnings on the right before turning right into Windmill Close.

At the end of this close, turn sharp left into a narrow alley, and soon turn right, keeping the fence on the right. Bear right to follow the tarmac path across a green and cross the footbridge over the River Chelmer.

On the far side of the river, bear slightly right to take the middle path and soon pass houses on the left. Keep straight ahead and then cross a road into Knight's Way. Continue along Knight's Way through the residential estate, ignoring turnings off, eventually passing through a wall onto North Street (B184).

Cross the road with care and turn right. Pass the former town lock-up and then Doctor's Pond. Lionel Lukin invented the self-righting lifeboat in 1784 and tested it on this pond. Immediately after the pond, turn left and soon bear right across the green to meet a road.

Cross the road with care to the pavement and turn right, downhill to the mini roundabout. Turn left and immediately cross the road via the traffic island. On the far side turn left and soon turn right into the car park where the walk started.

You can read more about Great Dunmow, Stebbing and Lindsell on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 05 September 2020, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk. Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to hundredparishes@btinternet.com.

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

