



# The Hundred Parishes

## Circular Walks – number 123

Chrishall, Langley, Great & Little Chishill and Heydon: a countryside walk on high ground: 8.1 miles (13 kms)

*This clockwise, rural walk through four parishes is mostly on upland paths with extensive views over unspoilt countryside. The route is mostly on good clear paths and quiet lanes. In 2021 there were three pubs en route, The Pheasant at Great Chishill, King William IV at Heydon and the Red Cow at Chrishall (best to check opening times). There are no stiles.*

**Start and finish:** The walk starts from the car park beside Holy Trinity Church, Chrishall. The entrance is from Bury Lane, on the right about ¼ mile north of B1039. Walkers are welcome to use the car park and are encouraged to make a donation just inside the church porch. Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL451386 - Postcode: SG8 8QY.

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 car park, turn right up the gravel path towards the church. If it is open, you are encouraged to visit. In any case, please leave a donation in the porch. The church was mainly constructed between the 13th and 15th centuries and has been recognised for its architectural and historic value with a Grade I listing. This is the only Grade I listing we will encounter on this route although we will pass several more interesting churches.

From the church porch go straight ahead across the grass, with the Vicarage on the left, to leave through the gateway. Beyond the gate, keep straight ahead, along a grassy path to the bottom of the hill.

Cross a substantial footbridge to reach a road, the B1039. With care, cross and turn left. In 20 yards turn right onto a tarmac bridleway, the approach road to Chiswick Hall. This drive ascends gently for some distance. You may like to look back from time to time at the view of Chrishall Church.

A long stretch of fencing on the right comes to an end and we turn sharp right, leaving the drive. Cross a wooden bridge with handrail and immediately turn left to again follow fencing on the right. When the path meets a track, continue ahead, through a gate with a building on the left. Pass a dressage area on the right and follow the track round to the left. Chiswick Hall, built around 1600 AD, is only partly visible to the left.

Follow the track round to the right and continue in a southerly direction for about a mile, along a straight grassy path which is part of the long-distance Harcamlow Way.

Further along this path, on a clear day we can see a tall communication tower on the horizon in the distance to the right. This is at Barkway, around 5 miles distant. The tower is 348 feet (106 metres) tall and contributed to various military and civil aircraft tracking and navigation systems from WWII until 2011. As the circular walk progresses, the tower will seem to keep moving left.

Continue beside a thin strip of woodland on the right until the corner of the field. Go ahead into the wood, across a dip and follow the path half left through the wood. The path soon emerges onto a field. We have just crossed from Chrishall parish into Langley parish, at the same time passing the highest point in Essex, 482 feet or 147 metres above sea level.

Turn left and follow the field edge, keeping woodland on the left. Eventually, at the end of the field, we reach a crossroads of paths. Ahead, across a field, is Langley Church. It has 12th-century origins and a 14th-century tower. Today's route does not include the church which is usually open at weekends. If you wish to add half a mile to the journey go straight out and back on the path across the field. Make sure you come back this way!

Turn right at the crossroads, following a ditch on the right and with Langley Church over to the left. Keep straight ahead for about half a mile (ignoring paths off) until you reach a road at the hamlet of Killem's Green. Go straight ahead on the lane, climbing gently.

Pass through Gypsy Corner Farm. A little later there is no official welcome to Cambridgeshire but our departure from Essex is evident from its county sign. The county of Hertfordshire lies only half a mile to our left. At this point we also pass from Langley parish into the administrative parish of Great and Little Chishill.

After a fairly steep descent into the tiny hamlet of Little Chishill, a footpath to the left beckons to Little Chishill Church which is set back from the road. This is certainly worth a visit, with much dating from the 12th to the 14th century. From the churchyard you can see 16th-century Rectory Farmhouse to the left and also Little Chishill Manor, on the opposite side of the lane we have been walking.

Leave the churchyard and turn left to continue down the lane for a short distance before turning right onto a byway and passing a small postbox on the left. Pass a couple of buildings on the right and then keep to the left on the path. The path is stony and relatively narrow, climbing fairly steeply. The chalky base reminds us that we are in the long chalk hill range that includes the Chilterns further to the west.

When the gradient levels off and the view opens up, the white cap and sails of Great Chishill Windmill come into sight ahead and to the left. This post mill (meaning that most of the structure rotates on a central post) was built in 1819 and, after a major programme of restoration, was reopened in 2019 by celebrity singer Sam Smith who grew up in Chishill.

When the byway reaches a lane, turn right onto May Street and climb steadily towards the village of Great Chishill. Pass White Horse Cottage on the left, a former inn dating from the 17th century. Another 17th-century building, Hill Farm House, stands on the left just before we reach a crossroads with the B1039. Great Chishill boasts the highest point in Cambridgeshire (480 feet, 146 metres, above sea level) about half a mile East of this crossroads.

Our route goes straight ahead, with care, into Heydon Road, passing the war memorial and village sign. When safe, cross to the pavement on the left. The parish church of St Swithun on the left is, of course, worth visiting. It dates from the 13th century and survived a fire in 1789 that destroyed most of Great Chishill.

About 100 yards after the church, pause at the entrance to Rectory Farmhouse to enjoy the view into the far distance. The Pheasant public house on the right offers food and drink.

Cross New Road on the left. About 50 yards later, on the right, is the old village lock-up, erected in the late 19th century.

On the left, an attractive pair of cottages, numbers 57 and 59, date from the early 18th century, possibly late 17th.

Continue along the lane, leaving Great Chishill and entering the parish of Heydon. Soon, on the right, Wood Green Animal Shelter has an unofficial 'blue plaque' commemorating a former resident, Arthur the cat who found fame in Kattomeat adverts in the 1980s.

On the right, the King William IV pub and restaurant offers food and drink. Its website claims 17th-century origins and explains that it was named after the monarch in whose reign the Beerhouse Act of 1830 abolished the tax on beer and extended the opening hours of licensed public houses. The pub's website does not explain the fascinating pargetting that is displayed inside.

Continue along the lane with the pub on the right. When safe, cross to the pavement on the left.

Pass The Old School House on the left, dated 1846. Holy Trinity Church, on the right dates from the 15th century but much was rebuilt in the 20th century following WWII bomb damage that caused the tower to collapse into the nave.

At the road junction, turn right, passing a green on the left and then The Old Post Office which dates from the 17th century. Keep to the pavement on the left, beside a red brick wall, until you reach a pond with waterlilies and fish. Here, cross the road with care and turn right onto a track which is signposted as Icknield Way. The Icknield Way is an ancient trackway that follows chalk escarpments between Wiltshire and Norfolk – we are heading towards Norfolk.

The wide, stony track meanders, after a while turning left and then right. It passes between fields for 100 yards or so and then bears slightly left, away from woodland on the right, and now heading fairly straight between two fields towards houses in the distance. On a clear day, in the distance way over to the left, you might be able to discern the giant aircraft hangar at Duxford Airfield, 5 miles away, and perhaps even the 220-foot chimneys at Addenbrookes Hospital about 10 miles distant in Cambridge.

On reaching a hedgerow, turn left and in about 30 yards turn right across a wooden footbridge with handrails. Go straight ahead with a fence on the right. The footpath becomes a gravel drive, passing Springfields on the right before emerging onto a lane. Turn left and in just a few yards turn right onto Palmer's Lane.

Pass a school on the right and soon reach a road junction where the Chrishall village sign stands on a small triangular green. Keep to the right, passing the tiny Old Post Office on the left and, on the right, a Stanton Ironworks fingerpost sign, manufactured in Derbyshire. Keep right, signposted to "Great Chishall" which seems to be a mistaken spelling of Great Chishill.

Pass a war memorial on the left and continue ahead on High Street. Pass the Red Cow pub on the left, complete with thatched cow on the roof. As the lane descends gently, pass a series of lovely cottages, some thatched and mostly dating from the 17th or 18th centuries.

As we leave the village, just past the national speed limit sign, turn left into a lane, opposite the *Hollow Road* sign. Pass Chalky Lane Cottage on the right and a water pump on the left. Cross over the Harcamlow Way path and continue on the lane. At a T junction, turn right onto another lane. Again ignore the Harcamlow Way footpath to the left and soon reach the lane on the left that heads up to the church. On the right, opposite the junction, is the 16th or 17th century, timber-framed and plastered Glebe Farmhouse with a thatched shed.

Turn left towards the church, passing 17th-century Church Cottage, to return to the car park. If you didn't visit the church or leave a parking donation when you arrived a few hours ago, please consider doing so now.

You can read more about each of today's parishes on [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk).

This route description, last updated 16 July 2021, was downloaded from [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk). Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to [hundredparishes@btinternet.com](mailto:hundredparishes@btinternet.com).

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

