



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 125

Hatfield Broad Oak: a short stroll around the village: 1.7 miles (3 kms)

This walk is along pavements, quiet roads or surfaced paths. We pass both of Hatfield Broad Oak's pubs, while several seats along the way provide opportunities to pause. There are no stiles.

Start and finish: There is usually adequate space to park in the small parking area to the west of the church. Its approach road runs north from the sharp bend in B183 as it enters the village centre. The route starts from there.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL546166 - Postcode: CM22 7HD.

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 183.

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

Before leaving the parking area, enjoy the view from this high point, looking north up the Pincey Brook valley with Hatfield Forest on the horizon, a little over a mile away. Hatfield Broad Oak administrative parish is one of the largest, by area, in Essex and includes most of Hatfield Forest. Our walk is within the village of Hatfield Broad Oak which contains many of the parish's 95 listed buildings, some of which survive from when HBO, as it is now often abbreviated, flourished as a market town in the Middle Ages. We will pass many of these listed buildings but refer to only a selection.

Leave the parking area by the way you came in. 17th-century Eden End on the left served for many years as a cottage hospital. When you reach the junction with the main road, keep straight ahead for a short distance, passing the tall, red-brick Court House on the left. This is a former court house and dates from the 14th century. The brick front was added in the 18th century. Over to the right, on the opposite corner, is 16th-century The Priory.

At the corner, turn left into High Street, B183, passing a range of buildings including the Post Office and general store and one of HBO's two pubs, the Cock Inn. This group of listed buildings has a range of origins from the 15th to the 19th centuries.

The buildings on the right side of the road are nearly all listed and mostly date from the 17th century.

Further along, the 3-storey building on the right was known until recently as Great Chalks and is a former rectory, built in 1838 and now subdivided into at least two dwellings.

Just after 19th-century Bury House on the right, we turn sharp left towards the church, passing Oak House and Church Cottage, 1708, on the left.

The Church of St Mary the Virgin is predominantly 15th century and is Grade I listed. The tower has a clock with the date 1797. Its smart appearance probably owes much to recent refurbishment. The church was built on part of the site of a 12th-century Benedictine Priory. The priory was demolished following the Reformation and there is now no evidence above

ground of its existence. However, there may be historic remains below ground so a large area behind the church is now protected by its designation as a Scheduled Monument.

You are encouraged to visit the church which, amongst other items of interest, has box pews, some lovely carved wooden creatures and an ancient stone effigy of Sir Robert de Vere, 3rd Earl of Oxford. His family founded the priory and he was buried in the church in 1221 AD.

From the church porch go straight ahead to retrace our steps to the High Street.

Turn left onto the High Street, soon passing the village sign which displays the coats of arms of the Barrington and De Vere families.

A little further along, turn left through a gateway onto the village green. This is a very new village green, having been established only in the second decade of the 21st century. [The total distance of this walk includes a circuit of the green, but you may reduce the distance by about a quarter mile if you wish].

Follow the shingle path to the left and all the way around the green. At the far side, Barrington Hall is clearly visible. The mansion was built around 1735 by one of the Barrington family who had been major local landowners and lords of the manor for several generations. He died before construction was completed and the house was not occupied on a permanent basis for a century. It was remodelled in 1863. In 2019 it was offered for sale, with 40 acres, for £15 million.

Leave the village green and turn left to continue along High Street. Soon, when safe, cross to the pavement on the right and continue gently downhill.

On the right, the Roman Catholic church started life in 1868 as a Congregational Chapel.

Cross the entrance to Duke's Orchard and pass the Victorian postbox in the wall of the Duke's Head pub. The pub, first recorded in 1755, provides a second opportunity for refreshment.

At the corner, turn right around the pub onto Broad Street, signposted towards Needham Green and White Roding.

On the right, Little Bradwell, Bird Cottage and Easton Cottage date from the 17th century and were once a public house. The next group of three thatched cottages, Lockwood, Chiswell and Rose Cottages, date from the 17th century.

Soon afterwards, the main road turns to the left and becomes Hammonds Road. We also turn left, taking care at the junction. After about 200 yards, we pass 16th-century Morningside on the left and then the photogenic, thatched Parson's Cottage from the 17th century. Our route turns here and retraces towards the distant church.

Soon fork left. The pair of cottages on the left started life as a farmhouse in the 15th century. Soon turn left onto Broad Street Green and, when safe, cross to the right side.

Pass the entrance to Medlar's Mead on the right and, on the left, a series of thatched, 16th-century dwellings: Little Tudors and numbers 7 and 9. On the right, 15th-century Oak Cottage is described in its listing as a "very complete small house".

Just afterwards, the road takes a new name, Cannons Lane. This is a pleasant residential road, probably late 20th century, and is where the surgery may be found.

At the end of Cannons Lane, turn right onto Cage End. Soon on the left, New Bury Meadow is the access road to Broad Oak Farm, home of the famous Broad Oak Sausages for almost a century. On the corner is Hatfield Broad Oak Village Hall. For many years this was the focal point of an annual 10 kilometre run, "The Big O Road Race", which regularly attracts a thousand participants. It now finishes on the new village green.

Almost imperceptibly cross Mus Brook, beside a footpath on the right, and then the entrance to Cage End Close. We now enter an area of older, interesting buildings, most of which are listed for their architectural or historical value, so do take your time as we ascend this short hill.

The varied buildings on the right mostly date from the 17th century. After a hundred yards or so, Musbrook Cottage takes its name from the tiny brook we crossed at the foot of the hill. This street was called *Musbrook Street* from the 14th century, only changing to *Cage End* in relatively recent times to reflect the siting somewhere hereabouts of the village cage or lock-up which was in service until 1873.

Just after Musbrook Cottage, on the left, is Town Farm House. This dates from the late 14th century. It was once known as Hatfield Bury and is HBO's only survivor from ten medieval manor houses.

On the right, North Cottage and Hope Villa once formed a single 15th-century dwelling,

Opposite, on the left, numbers 26 and 26A date from the 16th century or earlier.

At the top of the hill, Cage End meets the High Street. With care, cross Cage End, via the early 19th century village pump, to Rundle House which was first built around 1400 AD.

Turn right, with Rundle House on the left, passing Sun Cottage (not long ago a branch of the County Library) and Saddlers (once a shop), both from the 16th century. Next on the left is a red brick wall outside The Priory.

The main road turns left and becomes Feathers Hill. We will not follow it round the corner, but will cross with care and go straight ahead up the lane to the parking area where we started.

Before driving away, please cast your mind back to who you may have met today – and consider who you may have encountered along the same route 400 or 500 years ago. It is wonderful that the layout of this once vibrant market town has remained intact and that so many buildings have survived, generally converted with sympathy for modern-day living.

You can read more about Hatfield Broad Oak on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 17 August 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 this route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

