



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 134

Little Dunmow, Barnston and Flitch Green 4.6 miles (7 kms)

This anticlockwise walk passes through the older parts of Little Dunmow and Barnston and skirts the edge of the youngest parish in the Hundred Parishes, Flitch Green. It is gently hilly at times. The route is mostly along good paths and quiet lanes. There are no stiles but there are several sets of steps. The route passes one restaurant near the start / finish in Little Dunmow, The Dunmow Flitch.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes in the village of Little Dunmow where there is usually ample parking space on the south side of the eastern end of The Street. This road turns off Station Road (between B1256 and Felsted), beside Little Dunmow's village sign, and is signposted to Little Dunmow Priory Church. Park on the opposite side to the fence / wall. Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL658214 - Postcode: CM6 3HS. The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Maps 195 and 183.

After parking in The Street, head West, using the pavement on the left. Soon pass the thatched *Kingsbarn House* and *Corner House* on the right and then *Ivy House* on the left displaying the date 1630. All three houses date from the 17th century and all feature amongst Little Dunmow's 45 listed buildings.

With care, cross the junction with Brook Street on the left and follow The Street round to the right, passing 16th-century *Rose Farm Cottage* and then the rather crooked but lovely *Rose Farm* which has stood here since around 1500 AD.

Cross Grange lane on the left and pass further interesting houses on either side before reaching the tall, ornate water pump, erected in 1887 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

A little further on, *The Flitch of Bacon* is a Michelin Star restaurant, one of only a few in Essex. Its name refers to the flitch, or quarter of a pig, that is awarded to the winners of a contest to find a married couple who have lived for a year without quarrelling. Such awards have been made, off and on, since the 12th century, firstly here in Little Dunmow and, since Victorian times, in Great Dunmow. The long-established pub / restaurant dates from the 17th century, possibly earlier, and is listed at Grade II. [Its website incorrectly proclaims a listing two notches higher at Grade I and also that it is the only Michelin Star restaurant in Essex!]

We will turn here and retrace about 100 yards to turn right into Grange Lane. On the right is 15th-century *Monks Hall*. Soon turn left along a gravel drive signposted to several houses including Priory Place. At the end of the lane, *Priory Place* is seen on the right, a large, partly hidden house that dates from the 14th century and has a central red-brick chimney stack.

Turn left through the gate into the churchyard and soon reach the door of the *Priory Church of St Mary the Virgin*, Little Dunmow's Grade I-listed parish church.

The church was once the Lady Chapel of an Augustinian priory that was founded here in 1106 AD. The rest of the priory was demolished following the 1536 dissolution of the monasteries. What survives is quite unusual and very special, some elements dating back to the 12th century. It certainly merits a visit; the keyholder lives just across the road. Amongst the treasures inside is the ancient tombstone of a lady who may, many years after her death, have been the inspiration for the fictional Maid Marian, a character who first featured in the tales of Robin Hood in the 16th century. Outside, beside the church door, the thin turret was added in the 1870s during a period of renovation.

Leaving the church door, turn left and immediately exit through a gate onto a road, *St Mary's Place*. Before we turn right, you may like to marvel at the giant buttresses that support what is now quite a modest-sized parish church.

Turn right towards the end of the cul-de-sac and keep right, heading towards the cemetery wall but almost immediately turn left onto a footpath with hedgerow on the left and metal railings on the right (signposted as the Saffron Trail). At the end of the railings, we face the somewhat hidden Priory Place, a building that may once have served as a guesthouse for visitors to the priory. Turn left onto the footpath, now with fences on the left and right.

The path soon emerges onto a recreation ground where we keep straight ahead with hedgerow on the right. As we enter the recreation ground, the hedgerow on each side is mainly greengage trees that can be thickly laden in Autumn.

Continue with the hedgerow on the right, soon passing more fruits in Autumn: sloes and blackberries. At the end of the recreation ground continue ahead and soon reach the junction with a major path – The Flich Way. This is a 15-mile bridleway that follows the route of a railway line that ran from Bishop's Stortford to Braintree for a hundred years until its closure in the 1970s.

Turn left along the Flich Way and in just 10 yards turn right onto a narrow footpath with fences on either side. The path soon emerges onto a lane where we turn right. We are still in the parish of Little Dunmow, now in the hamlet of Brookstreet. We soon pass colourful thatched cottages on the right, dating from around 1700 AD.

After about 200 yards, a drive forks to the left but we keep straight ahead on the footpath, neatly defined with hedgerow on either side. We occasionally get a glimpse through the hedge on the left of *Brick House*, a large three-storey, red-brick house built around 1700 AD. On our right, at least in 2020, we pass a field of Christmas trees.

At the end of the path there is a lovely view ahead. Bear right onto a grassy field-edge path, initially with a ditch on the left. Soon the path crosses a ditch and bears right, now with the ditch on the right. After about 40 yards, turn left with a ditch and hedgerow on the right and heading towards an arched, concrete footbridge.

Cross the concrete footbridge, climbing over a kind of low stile at each end. Beneath is the River Chelmer, heading from right to left towards Chelmsford and, eventually, the sea. The bridge takes us from Little Dunmow parish into Barnston parish.

Once over the bridge, go straight ahead towards a World War II concrete "pillbox". This is one of many that survive from a long line installed in 1940-41 between Chelmsford and Cambridge as an anti-tank defensive barrier along the banks of the rivers Chelmer and Cam.

Pass to the left of the pillbox and keep straight ahead on the path across a field. Should the field be impassable, it appears that an alternative would be to keep to the field edge round to the right.

The route then enters another field for a short cross-field path of around 50 yards. This path heads towards a gap between trees and a waymark sign on a post. Cross over a ditch and turn left onto a narrow bridleway with field on the right and quite a deep ditch and hedgerow on the left. Over to the right is another pillbox beside the meandering River Chelmer.

The grassy path widens and then becomes a gravel track, later passing a play area and then housing on the right.

The track reaches a road, the busy B1008. To our right, mostly out of sight, is the more modern element of Barnston, but we will turn left to view the historic, and little known, part of the parish.

Stay on the pavement, passing *Brook Farm* which dates from the 16th century, and then turn left into Parsonage Lane. We will keep on this lane for about a quarter mile.

After a gradual climb, we pass the entrance to *Barnston Hall Lodge* and *Barnston Hall Stud*, soon followed by the entrance to 16th-century *Barnston Hall*.

Next, we come to Barnston's small Norman parish church, dedicated to St Andrew, the Apostle. Do venture inside if it is open. The nave and the entrance porch date from the 12th century. There are some very ancient fittings, not least the rare double piscina. A piscina is a small sink for washing communion vessels; here a second bowl allows the priest to wash his hands.

In the cemetery, to the right of the church, are the *Livermore tombs*, a line of matching tombs, each with its own verse, of four sisters who died young. They are joined by tombs of other members of the Livermore family who lived at *Barnston Hall* in the 19th century.

From the churchyard, turn left and continue along Parsonage Lane.

After the rather more modern *Capes* we come to *Barnston Lodge* which is sometimes used as a venue for weddings. It was built in the late 18th century with *gault* bricks. Their cream colouring was popular at that time while red brick was temporarily out of fashion.

Beyond *Barnston Lodge*, the roofs of Flich Green come into view. Slightly further round to the right, the more distant tower of Felsted Church can be seen.

We pass lovely 17th-century *Barnston Old Rectory* and soon afterwards we come to *Parsonage Barn* which probably dates from the 18th century.

Immediately afterwards, we turn left onto a driveway. After a while, the tarmac ends abruptly and we follow a stony track that bears to the right. After about 100 yards we reach an unusual, tall gateway. The footpath turns sharp right, through a very fancy kissing gate with flintstone walls, and then goes sharp left to pass round the back of the gateway.

Continue on a field-edge path with a fence immediately on the left and a driveway running just the other side of the fence.

Approaching the end of the field, we turn left to cross the driveway and then a metal bridge with handrails. Keep straight ahead, now on a field-edge path with the driveway on our right, heading gently downhill towards the houses of Flitch Green. Soon, we pass entrances on the right to a house and farm.

We continue to follow the field edge, keeping farm buildings on the right. When we reach the end of a pond on our right, we turn right on a metal footbridge with handrails. Straight ahead, across the valley, is the village of Felsted. Turn immediately left to continue along the path with a ditch on our left and then a line of trees.

At the bottom of the hill, bear left and cross a substantial bridge (with kissing gates and steps at either end) over the River Chelmer. Please pause on the bridge.

Flitch Green lies just ahead. It is a rather unusual parish, having been created only in 2009. Prior to that, the area was part of Little Dunmow. In 1926, Felsted Sugar Beet Factory was constructed here to process sugar beet into sugar. The factory closed in 1981; it was demolished in 1999 and over the next several years a large residential estate was built on the site. Its residents wanted to control their own destiny and approval was given for the creation of a new parish which was named Flitch Green. It is the newest parish in the Hundred Parishes and also the smallest by area although its population, a little over 2,000 in the 2011 census, made it the 15th most populous. In 2020, the parish had neither parish church, pub or website.

As we cross the bridge, we pass from Barnston parish into Flitch Green parish.

On the far side of the bridge, bear right along a gravel path. After about 50 yards, ignore a footpath that turns sharp right and continue ahead for another 20 yards on the gravel path. Now turn right onto a tarmac path with fencing on both sides. We will venture just a short distance into the parish.

The tarmac path soon reaches a road, Tyler Avenue. Turn left, passing *Marlyn House* on the left. When safe cross to the right as there is no pavement. Pass a turning on the right. Soon, after number 39 on the left, when Tyler Avenue turns right, we go left onto a tarmac path and leave the residential area. Soon bear left and then turn right to cross a wooden footbridge with handrail. On the far side of the bridge, turn right and follow the field-edge path.

After about 200 yards, at the end of the field, follow the field edge sharply to the left and here leave Flitch Green and return to Little Dunmow parish. After 70 yards the path bears right and is tree-lined for about 100 yards.

At the end of the trees, turn right and very soon turn left onto a field-edge path with hedgerow on the left. Very soon the path veers left into woodland; this is again a clear, tree-lined path.

After another 200 yards, we reach a gravel track. Straight ahead is a bridge over the Flitch Way – we will use it by the end of this paragraph. Turn left on the gravel track for about 30 yards and then turn right onto a lane. In another 50 yards we pass over the bridge above the Flitch Way.

Continue along the lane, soon passing on the left an access point to the Flich Way. Pass an entrance on the left to Little Dunmow's recreation ground which we crossed near the beginning of this walk.

On the left we pass St Mary's Place and Little Dunmow's parish church.

Soon, we approach a house on the right with a splendid chimney stack – this is *Ivy House*, 1630. At the road junction, turn right and very soon return to where we started.

You can read more about Little Dunmow, Barnston and Flich Green on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 24 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 this route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

