



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 135

Hempstead parish countryside and village 4.3 miles (7 kms)

This clockwise walk is mostly rural, passing through the older part of Hempstead village. It is gently hilly at times. The route is mostly along little-used grassy paths and quiet lanes. There is one cross-field path near the beginning that may be muddy. There are no stiles. Although the route passes a pub near the finish it was closed in 2020. If walking in Autumn, you may like to take a container for fruit that can be picked along the way.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes beside Hempstead's parish church, situated up Church Hill which leads East from the B1054 opposite the Bluebell Inn in the centre of the village. There is usually space for two or three cars to park on the lane beside the railings of the churchyard.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL635379 - Postcode: CB10 2PB.

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 195.

Before the walking boots get wet or muddy, you might like to visit St Andrew's Church. It dates from the 14th century with a tower that was rebuilt in 1933 after collapsing around 50 years before. The church crypt is the final resting place for around 50 members of the extended Harvey family, most of whom did not live in Hempstead. The crypt contains most of their coffins, but not that of the most famed member of the family, William Harvey (1578 to 1657). His body was moved in 1883 by the Royal College of Surgeons from the damp crypt into a rather grand marble sarcophagus inside the church. William Harvey is famed for changing the course of medical practice by his explanation of the circulation of blood.

The crypt, which is not open to the public, does still hold the remains of Admiral Sir Eliab Harvey (1758 – 1830) who commanded HMS Temeraire at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. The presence here of all these Harveys is due to William Harvey's brother, another Eliab, who lived in Hempstead. He funded an extension of the church and the creation of the family vault. The church contains many Harvey memorials and documents related to William.

Leave the church and retrace through the churchyard. To our left is a short obelisk memorial stone on which are recorded the names of several people whose cremated remains have been buried here.

Just before we leave the churchyard, the red-brick house on the right is The Miller's House, dating from the 17th century or earlier. It is a timber frame building but was encased in bricks in the 19th century. Until around 1900 AD, a windmill stood opposite the church, about 100 yards into the field on the South side of the lane.

Turn left along the lane, passing the churchyard on the left. The next buildings we reach also date from the 17th century: Old Quail Farm on the left with an original chimney stack and Pippins on the right with a crooked roof.

On the left we pass a long pond with farm buildings behind, and on the right thatched Church Farm Cottage from the 18th/19th century. Just afterwards, ignore the footpath on the right.

The next building on the left is Church Farmhouse. The part nearest the road dates from the 17th century and has an original tall chimney stack.

Pass thatched 18th-century Welltrees on the left and very soon afterwards turn right onto a footpath. This is a cross-field path of about 200 yards and may be muddy at times.

When the field on our left ends, go just beyond the hedgerow and turn left, keeping the hedgerow on our left. The path is signposted as the Turpin Trail. We are at the northern end of three linked, circular trails between Hempstead and Thaxted that were created by Uttlesford District Council around 2000 AD. Dick Turpin (1705 – 1739), a notorious highwayman, was born in Hempstead.

Stay on this clear path, with the hedgerow on the left, for about 200 yards. Towards the end of the field, shortly before the path descends towards a track, we turn right and keep a new hedgerow on our left.

Continue ahead on the field edge path of a long field, now heading South. After about 200 yards, ignore a path that leaves to the left over a footbridge. The ditch on our left is quite deep at times. After about 400 yards, our path bears right, continuing along the field edge and now heading West.

After another 200 yards we reach the corner of the field. Keep straight ahead on a wooden footbridge with metal handrails. At the far side, keep straight ahead, with hedgerow on the left. Very soon ignore a path that departs to the left over a footbridge.

Continue ahead beside another large field on the right and with hedgerow and ditch on the left. After another 150 yards we reach a track that comes in from the left. We turn right onto the track, keeping the large field on the right and now with a tree-lined hedgerow and Freshwell Brook on our left.

After about 200 yards we pass another footpath on the left, leading down steps to a footbridge. Continue ahead on the track with the ditch on our left for another 400 yards, soon passing another signposted Turpin Trail to our right.

Pass a grain store and two silos on the right, go past a gate and bear right to reach a road. This is the B1055. Turn right, keeping to the right.

After a while, pass 18th/19th-century Shepherd's Cottage. Note the two hares on the thatched roof.

We will turn left in about 200 yards so, when safe, cross to the left before the road bears right. On the bend, turn left onto a public footpath / drive, signposted to Moss's Farm.

Just before Moss's Farm, note the ancient railway wagons on the far side of the field to the right. Just after the buildings bear left up a grassy bank and immediately turn right onto a clear grass field-edge path with woodland on the right.

After about 400 yards, towards the top of the climb, turn right onto a clear track between the trees. Keep to the right, ignoring a path that goes left. In about 50 yards the track comes out into the open and we keep straight ahead along a straight, wide track. Ahead and to the right, Hempstead Church can now be seen.

After about 400 yards we pass another wooden railway wagon just before the farm buildings. We reach a cart shed on the right and, before we finish passing it, turn left with a hedgerow on the left. Pass older farm buildings on the right and then turn right. Pass former pig styes on the right and soon reach a road.

The road is the B1054. Cross with care and go straight ahead on the lane signposted as Wincelow Hall Road. The tall communication tower that can be seen ahead in the distance is at Castle Camps. It stands about 300 feet tall and is 2 miles away.

About 500 yards along this lane we pass an entrance on the right which leads to a small cottage that sits inside a moated area. The cottage dates from the 16th or 17th century and is all that remains on the site after Wincelow Hall was destroyed by fire in the 19th century. The former house had belonged to the Harvey family and was apparently the home of William Harvey in 1630. The moated site is protected as a scheduled Ancient Monument.

Continue along the lane which has damsons, blackberries and sloes in September / October. About 500 yards after the moated site and shortly after passing two tall poplar trees, we want to turn right before reaching a group of buildings on the right. Look out for a metal kissing gate in the hedgerow. Turn right through the gate and continue on a footpath with a stable complex on our left. Also to the left is the new Wincelow Hall.

We pass some more recycled railway wagons and, after about 300 yards, we go through a metal gate to reach a thatched cottage from the 17th/18th century, Coach Road Cottage. Coach Road is immediately beyond the cottage but we turn right almost opposite the cottage onto a field-edge footpath with hedgerow on the left

In about 300 yards the path bears left and in 40 yards bears right, continuing along the field edge. Ignore a footbridge to the left and continue ahead towards a line of houses. When we reach the gardens of those houses, the path leaves the field and keeps left, now with a wooden fence on the left. At the end of the first property, the path turns sharp left with fences on either side, crosses a gravel drive and reaches a road, the B1054.

Turn right, keeping to the pavement on the right. We are now back in the village of Hempstead. Continue ahead to the Bluebell Inn on the right.

This inn was called The Bell in 1705 when Dick Turpin was born. His father was the inn's proprietor. In more recent years it was known as the Rose and Crown and then the Bluebell Inn before its closure in 2020. Dick Turpin entered a life of crime, most infamously as a highwayman. He evaded capture for his brutal crimes by fleeing to York and adopting a new identity. He was held in York for a local offence and wrote to his family in Hempstead. His handwriting was recognised by his former teacher and his true identity was revealed. He was tried and executed in York.

Continue past a few houses on the right before crossing and turning to retrace past the thatched Dick Turpin's Cottage (with a thatcher's hare on the roof). Whilst the cottage existed at the time Dick Turpin was born, it acquired its present name only in the 20th century so any direct connection is purely speculative.

Continue ahead past the 1994 village sign. This bears plaques commemorating Hempstead's recognition as a Best Kept Village in 2005 and 2007. Pass the war memorial and turn right into Church Hill.

Soon cross the road, with care, to the village pump, probably from the early 19th century. There is a good view from here of The Bluebell Inn.

Continue up the lane past the former Primitive Methodist Chapel, 1853, which has been in use as a private house for many years.

After a short, sharp climb we reach the church on the left where we started our walk.

You can read more about Hempstead and Dick Turpin on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 12 October 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.

