



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 142

Brent Pelham and Meesden – 5.6 miles (9 kms)

This rural route is almost entirely within the parish of Brent Pelham and Meesden, a mixture of quiet lanes and footpaths. It visits the quite different churches that served what were once two separate parishes. There are no stiles. The route passes the Black Horse pub soon after the start and again just before the finish.

Start and finish: The walk starts from a small parking area in Brent Pelham opposite the parish church and just a few yards north of the war memorial. If there is no space here, it should be safe to park along the B1038 road that runs southeast from the church.
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL434308 - Postcode: SG9 0HF.
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 parking area, cross the road with care and walk just around the corner to the entrance to St Mary's, Brent Pelham's 14th-century parish church. Note the ancient stocks and whipping post beside the gate. If the church is open you are encouraged to visit.

Inside you should be able to find the black marble tombstone of Piers Shonks, a dragon slayer of long ago whose final resting place is in the wall of the church, neither inside nor outside the church. He had asked to be buried there so as to thwart the Devil (a close friend of the slayed dragon) who had vowed to have Shonks's soul when he died, whether he be buried inside or outside the church.

On leaving the church, please take a look around before we retrace past our parked car. The busy green opposite includes an unusual irregular seat, carved from a tree branch, and a telephone kiosk that now houses a defibrillator. The village hall was erected in 1901. Looking back towards the church and stocks, to the left is the picturesque 16th or 17th-century Church Cottage with a fox and hare above the thatched roof.

Now retrace to the war memorial which stands on a group of Hertfordshire pudding stones. Beyond it is the entrance to Brent Pelham Hall which dates from the 16th or 17th century. It is listed at Grade I, along with the boundary wall and the entrance piers just beyond the war memorial.

Turn left and proceed gently downhill, passing the churchyard on the left. Next on the left we pass the entrance to The Bury, 16th century with tall chimneys, and two large 17th-century barns.

Further down the hill, pass the Black Horse public house, originally a range of three buildings from the 17th and 18th centuries. Almost opposite, on the left and partly hidden, is Bridge Cottage, 16th-century, with thatch and partly weatherboarded.

Set back on the right is another building with 17th-century origins: Old Forge Cottage, whose outbuildings were once used as a forge. Next on the right, Bythorne Cottage, also dates from the 17th century.

Soon turn left, signposted towards Anstey, passing another 17th-century house, Meesden Corner Cottage on the corner on the right. The lane soon becomes quite narrow and winding, climbing steadily.

After about 600 yards, just as the lane turns sharp right for the second time, note the raised ground on the right. A windmill once stood on this small mound which is now covered by trees. The mound is surrounded by a moat, suggesting there may have been a building here before the windmill. The site is protected as a Scheduled Monument.

Continue along the lane, passing beside many oak trees. The lane turns sharp left and in another quarter mile, shortly before a bend to the right, a public footpath crosses the road. We turn right here, onto Anstey Public Footpath 018. This path marks the parish boundary between Brent Pelham and Meesden on our right and Anstey on the left.

This is a well-defined tree-lined path and for a while we pass alongside new woodland on the left. At the end of the wood, keep straight ahead, now on a field-edge path with hedgerow on the right.

At the end of the field, follow the waymarked route to the right, across the ditch, and then immediately turn left to continue with the hedgerow and ditch on the left.

Keep straight ahead, crossing a ditch on a pair of railway sleepers, now with woodland on the left with the unusual name "Ladylike Grove". Ignore a footpaths to left and right, continuing straight ahead, still with hedgerow and ditch on the left. When the hedgerow ends, continue ahead, bearing slightly right and following the ditch on the left.

At the end of a field, we reach a T junction with a path going left and right – we go left, with a hedgerow and ditch on our right. Now we are definitely in the parish of Anstey, albeit only briefly.

At the next end of field, we turn right onto a bridleway with hedgerow and ditch on the left. In another 200 yards we reach a lane. Turn right, soon imperceptibly passing from Anstey back into Brent Pelham and Meesden parish. At the top of a rise, we pass a sign that welcomes us to Meesden.

The road soon turns left and then keeps turning right round a group of three cottages on the right. These cottages, together with the former pub The Beehive, on the left, constitute the hamlet of Lower Green.

Continue along the lane. Soon we reach houses as we come into Meesden village, firstly passing Elm Cottages on the left. Just afterwards, we come to Walkers on the right, somewhat hidden but with a steep thatched roof. This is one of the parish's oldest buildings, dating from the 15th century.

Note the interesting variety of trees as we walk through Meesden.

After a while we pass a listed mid-20th-century K6 telephone kiosk on the right, now repurposed to house a defibrillator. It stands beside the entrances to Puddles Barn and Home Farm, each dating from the 17th century.

The village hall on our left was erected in 1900. On the right, there are several houses which boldly display their date of origin as 1921. We pass a water tower on the left and then, about 20 yards later, turn left onto a wide public bridleway.

The bridleway descends, soon with woodland on the left. When the woodland ends, we bear slightly right, leaving the main track and continuing on a grass bridleway.

After about 200 yards, when woodland on the left ends, keep straight ahead on the grass bridleway. When woodland on the left ends, keep straight ahead with fields on either side and heading gently uphill.

When the field on the left ends, go straight ahead but in about 20 yards we veer right and then left, now on a narrower path, soon descending with hedgerow on our left.

At the bottom of the field, we keep to the left of houses and soon reach a road junction. Turn right on the lane, signposted towards Meesden and Brent Pelham.

After about 200 yards, the lane bends to the right and starts to climb. Soon, there is a gateway on the left at the start of the tree-lined drive to Meesden Church. Turn left up the drive. After a while the church comes into view.

The church, like all churches in the Pelhams, is dedicated to St Mary. It dates from the 12th century. Its unusual brick porch was added around 1530. As always, a visit inside is recommended if the church is open. There you will find an early 14th-century tiled floor in front of the altar.

Opposite the porch is the former rectory, built around 1710. There are fine views from the churchyard over the countryside to the North and East.

Retrace down the tree-lined drive to leave by the gateway onto the lane. Turn left onto the lane and climb gently uphill. Pass Rectory Farm on the left.

At the top of the hill, turn left at a small triangular green, onto a slightly wider road (heading in the only direction that is not signposted).

Pass a fairly young wood, Meesden Hall Wood, on the left. When the wood comes to an end, continue along the road as it turns right. We are now on the line of a former Roman road which ran between Roman settlements at Braughing to the southwest and Chesterford to the northeast. We will head towards Braughing for the next half mile or so.

Westley Farm, on the right, dates from the 16th century. Just after, take a look back to the relatively new folly.

Pass Black Hall on the left, also from the 16th century. Keep ahead on the road, soon passing a moated and wooded site on the right, known as Chamberlain's Moat. This site is protected as a Scheduled Monument. The moat surrounds an island on which there are two fishponds.

As we approach a 30mph sign and the Brent Pelham village sign, pause and look to the left. The unusual building clad in corrugated iron sheeting is a former smock windmill, erected in 1826 and re-purposed many years ago to support a water tank.

Continue on the road and, after a descent, follow the road round to the left, passing the road to Anstey on our right. From now on, we are retracing the first part of our route, past the Black Horse on the left and climbing the hill to where we parked opposite the church.

You can read more about Brent Pelham and Meesden on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 29 December 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.

