



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 147

Hormead and Buntingford – 6.7 miles (11 kms)

This countryside walk explores the parish of Hormead, visiting each of its three principal settlements: Great Hormead, Little Hormead and Hare Street. Around 2 miles of the route passes through the rural eastern side of the parish of Buntingford. Much of the route is on higher ground, a mixture of footpaths, bridleways and roads. There is much variety in the landscape through which it passes and the settlements are rich in ancient buildings. Some paths can be muddy at times. There are no stiles. There is a pub and a tea room close to the start in Hare Street and another pub in Great Hormead. There may be an opportunity to visit one of the parish churches. Please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or to slip on boot covers or plastic bags. There are several seats along the route.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes in the hamlet of Hare Street, on the B1368 around a quarter mile south of the staggered cross roads with B1038. There is usually space to park considerably along the B1368. The walk starts from opposite The Well House, a little south of The Old Swan.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL390294 - Postcode: SG9 0EQ.

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194.

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

Assuming we have parked on the southbound side of the road, cross to the pavement on the northbound side. Pass the Well House on the left and soon, just before The Old Swan, turn left into Swan Lane which is designated as Hormead Public Restricted Byway 014. The path is also signposted as "GMT", a walking route of almost 400 miles that loosely follows the Greenwich Meridian from the South coast to the coast in East Yorkshire. But that's for another day!

The path soon leaves behind the houses of Hare Street, climbing steadily along a sunken, tree-lined lane. After about 400 yards, the gradient starts to level off and the view becomes more open. Continue fairly straight ahead, heading West, along the main path with fields on each side. After another 400 yards, the path reaches the top of the hill, about 125 metres or 400 feet above sea level. There is a simple small seat here, where our path turns right, leaving the parish of Hormead and entering the parish of Buntingford.

Continue along the path towards the corner of a wood, Alswickhall Wood. On reaching the wood, follow the path round to the left, keeping the wood immediately on the right. The wood has bluebells in springtime. At the end of the wood, follow the wood round to the right, but only for about 20 yards, and then turn left to continue downhill, now with a young wood on the right.

After only about 100 yards, turn right through a large gateway, following the GMT signposted route, and soon reach a field that has recently been planted with trees and daffodils to extend the gardens of Alswick Hall.

Turn half left and follow the pathway that crosses the field diagonally to the far corner. Ahead and to the left is a tennis court and to the right are outbuildings and then Alswick Hall itself. The gardens of the Hall are usually opened to the public once or twice a year.

At the far corner of the field, bear right, pass through a gate and soon turn right onto a clear bridleway. After about 100 yards of grassy path, pause for a good view to the right of Alswick Hall. It dates from the 17th century but was largely rebuilt after a fire in the 1950s. To the left of the drive to the Hall is a long red-brick wall which disguises a 17th-century barn immediately behind it.

Continue straight ahead, now on a tarmac drive, soon passing a large pond on the right. Pass houses on the right and climb gently to the end of the drive where it meets the B1038. With care, cross to the far side and continue straight ahead on public bridleway 14, signposted towards Layston.

From this path, looking half left (to about 10 o'clock) you may be able to discern the outline of Layston Church amongst the trees. Walk number 113 passes the church which has now been converted into a house.

When the path reaches the end of the fields on each side, turn right, following the main track which is signposted as a public restricted byway.

After about 400 yards, we pass a large area of hardstanding and just afterwards we turn left onto a wide track with ditch and occasional hedgerow on the left.

After about 600 yards, pause where a path comes in from the left. Looking along the line of that path, St Bartholomew's Church at Layston is now clearly visible about half a mile away.

Ignore this path to the left and, in another 30 yards, stay on the main track as it turns right. After a gentle climb, we pass a seat from which there is an expansive view back along our route.

Continue past a wood on the left. After the wood, there is a clear view to the left towards the tall chimneys of distant 17th-century Beauchamps in the adjacent parish of Wyddial.

When the gravel track turns left towards Beauchamps, we go straight ahead, now descending on a grassy path and returning imperceptibly to the parish of Hormead.

After a while, we pass beneath an electricity transmission line. Two sets of transmission lines will accompany us for the next mile or so as they head towards Pelham Transformer Station. [Walk number 143 passes close to the Pelham installation].

On the left we pass Silkmead Farm, an extensive equestrian centre. When our path reaches a road, the B1368, we turn right. Stay on the right, facing traffic, and be prepared to walk in single file. In about 100 yards, cross the road with care and turn left onto a bridleway.

Ignore the entrance on the left and keep straight ahead, at first following fencing and then a ditch on the left. The ditch, often dry, is actually the River Quin. It is heading in our direction and eventually discharges into the River Rib, then the Lea and then the Thames.

After following the Quin for a hundred yards or so, turn left to cross the river on a concrete bridge. Continue ahead, gently uphill with hedgerow on the right.

When the path reaches a lane (Anderson's Lane), with care go straight across onto another lane, signposted towards Brick House Farm. Pause at this point and look back the way we have come: you may be able to retrace our route – initially between the two rows of pylons, uphill and then left along the top of the ridge, about a mile distant. Layston Church lies beyond that ridge.

Continue up the lane towards Brick House Farm, but long before we reach the farm we turn right just before a pylon on our right. This is a well-defined public footpath, heading south and signposted as Hertfordshire Way. We have just joined this long-distance path and will follow it for the next half mile.

The path climbs gently and then descends towards buildings at Hormead Hall. The Hall dates from the 16th century but is hidden behind farm buildings. Ignore tracks that go to right and then left and keep ahead to a gateway. Immediately before the gateway, turn right through a kissing gate and keep ahead, passing close to two large trees. In about 100 yards, leave this field through another gateway at the corner of the field.

Turn left and follow a hedgerow on the left. In 100 yards, the path soon turns sharp left and meets the drive to Great Hormead Hall which is now to our left. Turn right along the lane.

When the lane reaches a road, turn right onto the B1038. We are now in Great Hormead which is extremely rich in listed ancient buildings. Almost the whole of Great Hormead village is designated as a Conservation Area. You are encouraged to keep to the right of the road and to take your time.

On the left, Shambles dates from the 17th century and Hall House dates from the 16th.

On the right, The Old Rectory dates from about 1500 AD and has a superb set of chimneys.

Milburns on the left also dates from around 1500 AD.

On the right, the substantial barn with an old corrugated iron roof dates from the 17th century; it was once thatched.

On the left is Judds, dating from around 1500 AD and renovated in 1724.

On the right is 16th-century Home Cottage, standing sideways to the road.

On the right, St Anne's Cottage dates from the 17th century and stands on the corner of Andersons Lane which we crossed earlier. Now, with care, cross it again.

Here, you may like to cross the main road, with care, to visit The Three Tuns public house. It has served as a hostelry since at least 1730 AD when it was converted from a house.

[If you do not wish to visit the pub, soon cross the road with care and continue to the corner with Horseshoe Hill on the left.]

From the pub return to the main road and turn left for a few yards to Horseshoe Hill.

There is a seat on the corner opposite (and we will pass another at the top of Horseshoe Hill). Turn left into Horseshoe Hill, signposted to Little Hornead, etc. This is a short, steep climb, initially passing the pub on our left and then The Barn on the right. Further up, on the right, there was once a pub called the Three Horseshoes, demolished in 1970 and now replaced by houses.

At the top of the climb, with thatched 17th-century Bakers on the right, we turn left just before the war memorial, into Jubilee Cottages, passing another seat. The road soon comes into Willow Close and almost immediately we fork left onto a path which is signposted as Public Highway.

After a little while, the Hertfordshire Way comes in from our left. We follow the track round to the right, now on a Public Byway, passing the backs of houses on our right.

After the end of the houses, continue straight ahead to a crossroads of paths. To the right, we can see the tower of a church across the field. This is Great Hornead Church which we will come to later. For now, we keep straight ahead with a hedgerow on the right.

At the end of the field, the path turns left, following the field edge. In only about 30 yards, turn right into a new field and keep the hedgerow on the left.

When the hedge on the left comes to an end, keep straight ahead, now with hedgerow on the right. The path soon passes a large house on the right – 18th-century Glebe House, a former rectory - and then reaches a fence round another property. Follow the fence to the left and soon round to the right, passing the thatched, converted 16th-century barn on our right. This was once the tithe barn, used to store the tithes, or taxes, paid in kind to the rector who lived at Glebe House.

When the path reaches a lane, opposite Bulls Farm, we turn right. We are now in the hamlet of Little Hornead. Soon pass a large pond on the right in front of Glebe House.

Continue along the lane past a variety of dwellings, none of which is listed. As the hamlet comes to an end, we pass Balons Farm with its large barn that dates from the 16th century.

A little further along, we reach Little Hornead Church on our left. This is listed as Grade I. It dates from the 11th century and has an inner door dating from the 12th century. The church is in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust and is not usually open. Opposite the church is Little Hornead Bury, a 17th-century former manor house.

Continue down the lane to a road junction where we turn right, onto Horseshoe Lane, signposted towards Great Hormead.

On reaching Great Hormead churchyard on the left, turn left through the small gate. Soon, bear right to the church porch. You are encouraged to visit this 13th-century church if it is open.

On leaving the church porch, turn right to continue with the church and then a church extension on the right. Turn right round the church room and then bear left with most of the churchyard on the right, to exit through a small gateway.

Go straight ahead, passing a large gate on the left. This is an entrance to Great Hormead Bury, a manor house dating from the 17th century or earlier. Continue straight ahead along the footpath between fence and hedge. Pass through a kissing gate and turn left onto parkland, with hedge on the left. We now head fairly straight, in a westerly direction, for half a mile.

Keep fairly close to the hedge on the left and then cross the drive which leads to Great Hormead Bury on the left. Continue ahead, keeping the fence on the left.

Pass through another kissing gate and keep straight ahead, gently descending, now with fields on each side.

At the end of the descent, go straight ahead on a concrete footbridge over the River Quin. On the far side we enter a large playing field. Go straight across, heading slightly right.

Leave the playing field beside an orange bin and continue ahead, following the path uphill through a small meadow towards houses. Keep to the right of the meadow and leave it on a tree-lined path.

The path passes between houses and soon reaches a road, the B1368, and we are back in Hare Street where we started. Our route turns left (but should you need refreshment the Beehive pub is only about 300 yards to the right).

Pass Oak Cottage on the left, a 15th-century open hall house that proclaims its origin as circa 1480. The Old Swan, on the right, was also built as an open hall house and is of similar vintage. It now offers accommodation.

We soon reach where we parked at the start of the walk.

You can read more about the parishes of Hormead and Buntingford on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 26 April 2021, 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.

