



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 155

Steeple Bumpstead & Birdbrook – 5.5 miles (9 kms)

The majority of this walk is in the most north-easterly parish of The Hundred Parishes, Steeple Bumpstead. It also ventures beyond The Hundred Parishes for about a mile into the parish of Birdbrook. The varied route is a mixture of roads and footpaths and passes through the Moyns Park estate. Some paths may be muddy. There are no stiles. The walk is mostly through countryside and concludes with a short exploration of the historic centre of Steeple Bumpstead. The route passes parish churches and pubs in both Birdbrook and Steeple Bumpstead. If you would like to visit any, please be prepared to remove muddy boots or to put on boot covers or plastic bags.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes at the small car park at the rear of Steeple Bumpstead Village Hall and recreation ground near the centre of the village. This car park is at the rear of the village hall and is most easily found by turning right off B1057 about 200 yards south-east of the Moot Hall (after passing the front entrance to the hall) into Bower Hall Drive. The rear car park is on the right after about 200 yards. Satnavs may bring you from the other end of Bower Hall Drive, in which case the car park is on the left.
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL680409 - Postcode: CB9 7EF.
The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 210.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

Exit the car park beside the play area, onto Bower Hall Drive, and turn left. Soon, pass Bendyshe Court on the left. We will come across the Bendyshe family towards the end of this walk. Follow the road round to the left, passing the entrance to Edith Cavell Way on the right.

This turning was named after Edith Cavell who served as a governess in the 1880s to Steeple Bumpstead's vicar. She subsequently became a nurse in Belgium where she tended wounded soldiers in the First World War. She also helped many escape, a crime for which she was executed in 1915 by the occupying German authorities.

When safe, cross to the right. Soon, reach the main road, Finchingfield Road, B1057. Just before the road junction, turn right on the pavement.

When the pavement ends, when safe, cross to the left side of the road and, very soon, turn left onto a footpath.

Follow the field-edge path with hedgerow on the left. After about a hundred yards, do not go straight ahead down steps but turn right. We are now on a clear path between fields, initially with a ditch on the left. This path climbs gently for about a quarter mile.

Do look back from time to time.

About half way up the path, at a waymark sign, looking back and to the right we can see large buildings on the horizon: these are about 2 miles away on the outskirts of Haverhill, a town of around 30,000 people. Looking back and to the left, we can see elements of Helions Bumpstead in the distance. Beyond, on the horizon, the tall radio mast is 4 miles away in Castle Camps.

Further up the hill, looking back we can see Steeple Bumpstead's church tower straight behind us.

At the top of the climb, we follow the path round to the left, now with hedgerow on our right. Very soon, after about 20 yards, we turn right to cross a footbridge with metal handrails and then, almost immediately, we turn left to cross a similar footbridge. Now, we go straight ahead on a field-edge path with hedgerow on the left.

At the end of the field, continue ahead for just 5 yards and then turn right into the hedgerow. After a few paces, emerge from the hedgerow in front of a high, metal kissing gate. If you have a dog, please ensure it is on a lead and under control, at least through the next field where there may be young horses. Only part of the field is visible from here.

Pass through the kissing gate and continue ahead to diagonally cross the field. Two paths cross this field – we want the left one.

At the far side of the field, pass through a gap into an extension of the field. Go straight ahead, now with wooden fencing and hedge on the right.

At the end of this field, pass through another metal kissing gate and continue ahead on a wide grass path lined with young oak trees. We are now on the Moyns Park Estate.

At the end of the grass path, go straight ahead on a tarmac drive. This is the drive for Moyns Park and we soon reach the 16th-century red-brick building itself. It was built by the Gent family who lived here for many generations until the late 19th century. The Grade I-listed building is still privately owned and we are privileged that the drive is a public right of way and passes so close. Part of the estate is now an equestrian stud farm.

Continue along the drive, altogether for about three-quarters of a mile, through extensive parkland with its many specimen trees, perhaps most notably the giant horse chestnuts.

We pass numbers 1 and 2 Half Mile Cottages and, about here, we imperceptibly leave Steeple Bumpstead parish and go into Birdbrook parish.

In due course, we reach some rather splendid gates at the end of the drive. Pass through the pedestrian gate to the right. Look back at the main wrought iron gates which display the initials MP, for Moyns Park. Continue past the lodge house on the right and soon reach a road. This is The Street and we are now in the pretty village of Birdbrook. When safe, cross the road and turn left. We will soon reach a pond.

Opposite, is the thatched Birdbrook Community House. This was a gift to the community in 1958 from Mr & Mrs Bryce who then owned Moyns Park. They established the stud and bred many successful race horses, including winners of several classics. Continue ahead.

Cross the road with care towards the 18th-century, thatched Plough inn. Continue with the Plough on the left and then some splendid topiary outside Yew Tree Cottage which dates from around 1800 AD.

Immediately after Yew Tree Cottage, bear left and pass through a gate into the churchyard of the parish church, dedicated to St Augustine. You may like to visit this interesting church which dates from the 11th or 12th century, first removing or covering boots if they are dirty.

If you visit the church, come out through the porch and turn right. At the end of the church building, continue straight ahead through the cemetery with hedgerow on the right.

At the end of the churchyard, pass beneath the yew tree and exit through the metal gate. Go half right on a cross-field path across a fairly narrow field.

At the corner of the field, turn half left and continue on a grass path with a tall hedgerow and ditch on the right.

After about 200 yards, around halfway along the field, when the trees on our right end, we turn right through an opening in the hedgerow. The footpath descends gently with hedgerow on our right. Ahead and to our left, on the horizon, we can see the white roofs of Haverhill.

The field-edge path descends for about 400 yards. Then follow the field edge round to the left, keeping the hedge on our right.

After about 100 yards we turn right, immediately before a wood. Continue with the wood, Moyn's Wood, on our left. We soon, imperceptibly, leave the parish of Birdbrook and return to Steeple Bumpstead.

When Moyn's Wood ends, turn left to continue with the wood on our left and now heading West.

In about 200 yards, just before the field on our right ends, turn right to leave Moyn's Wood behind as we descend with ditch and hedgerow on our left. The hillside ahead of us is in the county of Suffolk, less than a mile away.

At the end of the descent, we reach a road, the B1054, where we turn right. We will stay on this road for about 300 yards. Keep to the right facing any oncoming traffic. Soon we pass Rylands Cottage on the left.

Approaching a bend to the right, we should cross with care to the left. Just as the road stops turning right, about 50 yards before two national speed limit signs, we turn left, off the road and onto a footpath. Almost immediately, bear right on a meandering, grassy path with the edge of a conifer wood on our right.

After about 100 yards, turn left onto a metal footbridge with metal handrails over Bumpstead Brook, a tributary of the River Stour into which it flows around a mile to our right.

From the footbridge, go straight ahead and very soon enter a wooded area, following the path round to the left, over a wooden footbridge with no handrails, to emerge onto a field.

Turn left, keeping hedgerow and ditch on our left.

Keep straight ahead, after a while ignoring a path that heads uphill to our right. Our path then passes between fields and crosses a wooden footbridge with metal handrails. On the other side, bear half-left on a cross-field path, soon passing beneath telegraph wires.

At the far side of the field, pass through the hedgerow, just left of a telegraph pole, and turn left onto a lane. Soon, the lane turns sharp right.

This narrow lane is usually fairly quiet and we will stay on it for about a mile, heading West and back into Steeple Bumpstead village.

The lane climbs gently for a while, passing Yew Tree Farm on the right.

Later, we reach a lane on our left. For many years, the buildings at this corner were derelict and the area was filled with a large number of scrap motor cars. In May 2021, the cars had gone and just the derelict buildings remained, now subject to a planning application for development.

Do not turn left but continue straight ahead, soon passing Barleycroft on the left.

We pass Lower House Farm on the right, dating from the 15th and 16th centuries.

As we come into Steeple Bumpstead, we pass a terrace of houses on our left.

Further along on the right, sadly mostly hidden, is Brick House. Much of the house dates from the 16th century. It is notable for its herringbone brickwork.

We should keep to the right as we approach a junction on the right. With care, cross the two arms of the junction (the B1057) and keep straight ahead, now on pavement.

Cross the entrance to North Crescent and then go just past the junction on the left with the B1054. We need to cross the road immediately after the junction. Our pavement runs out just as visibility opens up for traffic coming from our right. Cross with great care and then pause.

Look back at the building we did not quite reach when the pavement ran out – it was once The British School. On the other corner of the junction is a World War II pillbox. Now, let's head up the B1054, Claywall Bridge, in the direction of Finchingfield, very soon going over Bumpstead Brook which we also crossed about two miles ago. We will now amble around the historic centre of Steeple Bumpstead, with occasional quotations from the details of some of its listed buildings.

Keep to the right and bear right, passing 17th-century Claywall House with its 4 rather grand inter-linked chimneys. We are now in Chapel Street. Cross the entrance to Lion Meadow.

Opposite the junction with Home Close, we pass Rose Cottage on our right, built in the 16th century as part of a hall house.

On the left we pass Sucklings Yard and immediately after it, rather set back, is Ancient House, a 15th-century hall house. Opposite it, on our right, is the Methodist Chapel, built in the 19th century as a Congregational Chapel.

On the left is Portobello Cottage, with raven straw finials decorating the thatched roof. The cottage dates from the 17th century and has been well maintained in recent times.

Next on the left is Portobello House, also from the 17th century. It may have looked similar to Portobello Cottage before the walls were heightened by 5 feet in the 18th century to make a full second storey.

Straight ahead is the Fox and Hounds public house and restaurant. The pub dates from the 17th and 18th centuries. You may wish to pause awhile before completing the final half mile or so of this amble around Steeple Bumpstead's conservation area.

Next comes the Moot Hall, built in the 16th century as a market hall with most of the ground floor being open sided. Walls were added in the 18th century and the building used as a school. Today it functions as a library and parish council meeting room.

Pass clockwise around the Moot Hall and cross the road to the war memorial. Here are recorded the names of more than 40 men who perished in the two World Wars, of whom eight were named Clayden.

With the war memorial on our left, we will continue along Church Street. Just after the war memorial is the entrance to Parsonage Farm. We will get a better view of this building later.

Soon on the left is another former school, the National School, erected in 1848 and now housing a pottery and gallery. Opposite is 16th-century Victoria Cottage and then 17th/18th-century Red Lion public house.

Next on the right, after the listed telephone kiosk, is a former shop and post office. It is part of The Manor House, from the 17th century or earlier – with another fine set of chimneys.

On the left we have been passing the perimeter wall of the churchyard. At the end of this wall is a former lock-up, constructed of brick in about 1800 AD.

On the right, set back and heavily covered with wisteria, is Schoolings, dating from the 16th century.

Set back on the left is 16th-century Broadgate House.

Turn right into The Crescent, a narrow pathway beside a crescent of houses built in 1849. Cross over Bumpstead Brook and soon reach a main road. Opposite is 17th-century Freezes Farm. We turn left here and soon turn left again, back into Church Street. We cross Old Ford Bridge over Bumpstead Brook. The road bridge was constructed in 2014 and replaced a ford which had a habit of becoming impassable in wet weather.

Retrace back up Church Street, past The Crescent and The Manor House with its tall chimneys, to the Red Lion. Here we turn right into the churchyard of the Grade I-listed parish church. The churchyard is particularly colourful when the cherry trees are in bloom in the Spring.

St Mary's dates from the 11th century and is well worth a visit – but please remove or cover boots if they are dirty. Monuments inside include a grand one of Sir Henry Bendyshe who died in 1717. He lived at Bower Hall, long-since demolished but close to where we started this walk near Bendyshe Court. Sir Henry was the last of his family line, having been pre-deceased by his only son who is included within the memorial.

From the church porch, turn right, pass an unusual memorial on the left to John Willett, and then turn left. Just before leaving the churchyard, we pass a memorial on the right to George Gent who died in 1870. He was one of the last members of the Gent family to live at Moyns Park, home of his family for 300 years.

Leave through the gate onto a playing field.

Over to the left is Parsonage Farm, which was once known as The Gun House. You might like to look a little closer. This was originally built as a hall house in the 15th century or possibly earlier. Larger houses of that time were often built as a hall house, meaning that they had a central hall which extended up to the roof. Smoke from an open fire in the centre of the hall would rise and leave the building through openings at either end of the roof. Additional rooms, sometimes two-storey, may have been added to one or more ends of the hall. Fireplaces and chimneys were added later, sometimes at the same time as inserting a floor to convert the open hall into two storeys. Parsonage Farm seems to fit much of this general explanation of hall houses.

From Parsonage Farm, continue up the recreation ground but take a look at the two weather vanes on Parsonage Farm. Each features a gun and a house.

On the left, we pass the rather splendid village hall, built in 1994 to replace an earlier hall. We soon reach the car park where we started this walk.

You can read more about the parish of Steeple Bumpstead on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 07 June 2021, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to hundredparishes@btinternet.com.

