



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 164

Chrishall and Elmdon & Wenden Lofts – 4.5 miles (7 kms)

This walk explores parts of two adjacent parishes, mostly on good paths although some stretches can be muddy at times. There are several stiles. The route offers extensive views over unspoilt countryside. It passes two parish churches and a pub so please be prepared, before entering, to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. The route passes The Red Cow pub towards the end; if relying on it for refreshment, please check opening times. There are several seats beside the route as it passes through Elmdon.

Start and finish: The walk starts from the car park beside Holy Trinity Church, Chrishall. The entrance is from Bury Lane, on the right about ¼ mile north of B1039. Walkers are welcome to use the car park and are encouraged to make a donation just inside the church porch. Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL451386 - Postcode: SG8 8QY.

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 car park, our route turns right up the gravel path towards the church. If it is open, you are encouraged to visit. In any case, please leave a donation in the porch. The church was mainly constructed between the 13th and 15th centuries and has been recognised for its architectural and historic value with a Grade I listing.

From the church porch, we go straight ahead across the grass, with the Vicarage on the left, to leave through a small gateway. Beyond the gate, we turn left, passing the entrance to the Vicarage and joining a grass field-edge path with the Vicarage hedge on our left.

Fairly soon, follow the hedge round to the left. In another hundred yards, we turn right, away from the Vicarage, now on a field-edge path with Park Wood on our left. To our right, the fields slope down to the valley along which the B1039 road runs. On the far side of the valley, in woodland over to the right, is the highest point in Essex, around 450 feet above sea level, where the parish boundary of Chrishall, which is in Cambridgeshire, meets Langley in Essex.

About 300 yards along our path, we pass an entrance into the private wood on the left. Soon afterwards there is a hedge on the right that runs down to the valley. This division between fields marks the parish boundary: here we pass from Chrishall into the parish of Elmdon & Wenden Lofts. Wenden Lofts and Elmdon were two separate parishes until 1958 when they joined to ease administration. The combined parish has a population of around 600, similar to that of Chrishall. For the next mile, we will be in the Wenden Lofts area.

In another 100 yards, the wood on our left comes to an end. We keep straight on, still with hedgerow on the left. Behind the hedgerow, and soon also on the right, there are paddocks with horses.

At the end of the paddocks, we reach a junction with another path and here we turn right. We still have paddock fencing on our right and now there are trees on the left.

When the paddocks end, we keep straight ahead through the hedgerow, crossing a ditch on a wooden footbridge with no handrails. On the far side, we immediately turn left and cross another footbridge, this time with metal handrails, and bear half left.

After passing through a small patch of woodland, we cross a high stile and go straight ahead between more paddocks. The grass path climbs steadily between robust paddock fencing on each side.

As we climb, a church tower comes into view on our right. This is 12th-century St Dunstan's which once served as the parish church of Wenden Lofts. It has long been derelict and sits now within the private property of Lofts Hall Stud. Further up, we can enjoy the view behind us, looking south.

Our path crosses a chalky drive and we go straight ahead, still gently climbing between paddocks. There is an occasional view to the right of buildings within the Lofts Hall complex.

We walk beside a long beech hedge on the right before we reach the top of the climb. Here, we pass through a kissing gate into a cricket ground, the home of Elmdon Cricket Club. Just here, we also pass from Wenden Lofts into Elmdon. Go straight ahead, keeping to the right, beside the hedge. If a match is being played, please halt whenever a bowler is running up to bowl. There are seats if you would like to watch.

Just after the cricket ground, the path reaches a road where we will turn right after a brief pause.

Immediately opposite is Wilkes Barn. This has been considerably updated since it served the community as the Wilkes Arms, a pub named after the Wilkes family who were lords of the manor for around 200 years until the middle of the 20th century.

Immediately to our left is thatched Carpenters Cottage, dating from the 17th or 18th century. The centre of Elmdon village is also to our left, but we will come to that later. Now, we turn right along the road for about 300 yards, initially climbing gently.

On the right, we pass the lodge house at the start of the drive to Lofts Hall. On the left, largely hidden amongst the trees, is Pigots, a 16th-century former manor house that is still surrounded by a moat. The site around the house is protected as a Scheduled Monument.

As the road bears right, we should cross to the left when safe. Just before the national speed limit sign, we turn left onto a public bridleway which is actually a tarmac lane, Freewood Lane. The lane follows one of the strands of the ancient Icknield Way, a pre-historic hilltop route which ran from Wiltshire to Norfolk. We will not go that far today, following this lane for only about 200 yards.

At a metal gateway through the hedgerow on our left, we get our first sighting of Elmdon's parish church. We will be there in a little while. Very soon, we turn left off Freewood Lane

onto a bridleway, a field-edge path with hedgerow on the left. The path descends steadily for a quarter mile into Elmdon village.

On a clear day, we may just see the rotating wind turbines on the hilltop far to our right – they are over 10 miles distant at Wadlow Farm, close to the A11 and well beyond the Hundred Parishes.

At the end of the second field, we keep straight on, passing between hedges and continuing along a drive to reach a road.

Immediately on our right is Wheelwrights, a timber-framed and plastered house that dates from the 17th or 18th century. The road is Icknield Road, and we turn left on the pavement, heading towards Elmdon's parish church.

Most of Elmdon village is protected as a conservation area and a good number of the buildings are individually listed for their historic or architectural value.

A few doors along, set back on the left is thatched, 17th-century The Old Post House.

Just afterwards, on the right, is The Old School, built in 1844 and now a private house.

Also on the right is The Cottage, thatched and from the 17th-18th century.

Opposite, on the left, is 18th-century Pump Cottage, appropriately named as the old village pump still stands outside.

After a footpath on the left, we pass Violet's Cottage with unusual windows peeping from under the thatch 'eyebrows'.

On the right is a small green – with a seat – and set back, beyond a thatched lychgate, is 17th-18th-century Church Cottage with a fox finial on its thatched roof.

We continue, now with the church up to our right. Set back on the left is Church Farmhouse, built in 1625 AD.

Through gates on the left is Farthing Green, a house built sideways on to the road around 1600 AD. From here, when safe, we will cross the road and continue ahead.

We soon pass Old Vicarage Cottage, on our left, dating from the 18th or 19th century, and then The Old Vicarage, of similar vintage.

We turn right up the drive towards the church. Note the entrance on the left to Crawley House, a former grammar school. We will get a better view shortly.

The parish church, dedicated to St Nicholas, was mostly rebuilt in the 19th century, probably on its original foundations and preserving some 16th-century features inside. The tower has survived since the 15th century. If open, you are encouraged to visit – but please remove or cover boots if they are dirty. Just inside the door is a lovely illustrated map of the village.

From the church porch, we turn right to retrace to the road, and then turn right towards Chrishall, but we will pause here to take in the scene.

Just below us, there is a small triangular green with war memorial, bus shelter and fingerpost sign that was made at Maldon Iron Works in Essex, probably in the 1930s. Across the road, to our right is a building that served as the village's last pub: The King's Head closed in 1998, reopened a few years later as the Elmdon Dial, and closed again in 2013. To our left is another former pub, The Carrier Inn, 18th-century, thatched and a private residence since 1972, still displaying its pub sign. Between the former pubs, behind a tree, is Elmdon's village hall.

Now, let's turn right for just a few yards. When we reach the 'main' road, and when safe, we cross to the far side and turn left. Looking back over the green, we can now see Crawley House. This was built around 1600 AD. The chimney stack dates from that time, but the rest of the building, like all we have seen today, has benefited from updating and modernisation. The building was acquired by a Thomas Crawley who endowed it as a grammar school. It served that purpose for about 300 years.

We continue downhill along the pavement, passing the village hall and then The Carrier. Not only has the present owner retained the pub sign but also the Greene King Brewery plaque on the wall. Apparently, this used to be the 'spit and sawdust' pub while the King's Head was more upmarket.

We continue on the pavement, now on the High Street.

On our right is Old Bakery, 18th century. Next is T Meadow (a strange name), dating from around 1600 AD. Next comes The Old Stores, dating from the 19th century and retaining its shop front. This community was clearly quite self-sufficient, not so long ago, before nearly every household acquired a car.

Opposite The Old Stores is a 16th-century house, Bangles.

We cross the entrance to Kings Lane and continue ahead, now climbing.

On the right, a flight of steps leads up to the front door of The Old Forge which dates from the early 19th century. Opposite are barns of Hill Farm. The farmhouse, behind the barns, possibly dates from the 15th century.

We continue up the hill, along the pavement, heading towards thatched Carpenters Cottage (we saw it earlier from the opposite direction). We reach a second access to Kings Lane and here we turn sharp right, immediately passing thatched 17th-18th-century Elm House on our left and the unlisted Pilgrims on our right with its large (and accurate) clock.

A little further along, we pass Kings Cottage on the right, dating from the 15th or 16th century. We follow the lane round to the right, beside Kings Cottage, and then pass through a gateway to continue ahead on a grassy path with trees on our left and fences on the right.

We pass through another gate and continue on a tarmac lane for a short distance.

We soon reach thatched Shepherds Hay on our left, a 17th-18th century cottage, and immediately afterwards we turn left beside the cottage onto a footpath. We pass through yet another gate and immediately turn right (ignoring a footpath that goes off to the left), following a field-edge path with hedgerow and trees on our right.

At the end of the field, we keep straight ahead, crossing a stile and then a wooden footbridge with metal handrails. After a short grassy path, we cross another stile and pass along the right side of a small arboretum, a collection of specimen trees. Soon, we go down a steep slope with a metal handrail to reach a road. With care, join the road and turn left. We are now in Heydon Lane. We should cross to the right to face any oncoming traffic.

After about 100 yards we leave the village of Elmdon. Soon afterwards, when safe, we should cross to the left. When the road turns right, we go straight ahead onto a well-surfaced byway. After a while, the byway passes through a wood called Cane's Walks.

On reaching a crossroads of paths, we turn right on the byway, now with Cane's Walks on our right. Over to our left, we can see the village of Chrishall, about half a mile away.

After about 200 yards, shortly before reaching the end of the wood, we turn left through the hedgerow and go straight ahead on a public footpath, part of the Icknield Way "walkers' route". This is a clear grass path between fields. The houses to our right are in Crawley End, part of Chrishall parish.

When we reach the first tree, if we look back over the right shoulder, there is confirmation that we are high up, more than 400 feet above sea level compared with around 100 feet (or 30 metres) in the lowlands of Cambridgeshire around 4 miles to the north.

We keep straight ahead on this path for about half a mile altogether until we pass between fences to arrive in Chrishall. We come into a residential close where we turn left. This is Loveday Close and we soon come to a road with The Green and war memorial opposite. To the right, we can see Chrishall's village sign.

When safe, cross to the green, pass the war memorial, and continue across the green to High Street. Keep to the left along High Street, along a grass verge. Very soon, we fork left, immediately passing the Red Cow pub on our left. The pub dates from the 15th century but has been modernised. The adjacent barn is also thatched and its ridge features a straw finial, naturally, of a cow.

[Should we stop for refreshment, on leaving the pub we must turn immediately left into the narrow lane.]

We are now in Hogs Lane, part of the Harcamlow Way. We pass a few modern houses and then a pair of flint cottages on our left, numbers 1 and 2, and allotments on the right.

We enter a field – and ahead we see Chrishall Church where we started. As we enter the field, we turn left. We follow the field edge with hedgerow on the left and after about 50 yards we follow the field edge to the right.

The path descends gently, passing between fields, and then drops down to a lane. We are going to turn left, but note the water pump and then Chalky Lane Cottage to our right. We turn left along Chalky Lane.

Soon, at a T junction, we turn right onto another lane, Bury Lane.

After about 100 yards, we turn left to cross a footbridge with metal handrails, keeping left, and in 20 yards crossing another footbridge with metal handrails. We pass through a kissing gate and continue ahead beneath an avenue of trees.

At the top of the field, before a second kissing gate, to the right we see 16th or 17th-century Glebe Farmhouse. Soon, as we drive away, we will get a clearer view of this distinctive thatched building with exposed beams and a thatched shed.

We pass through this second kissing gate and come into Chrishall churchyard. To the right is the parking area where we started and, just beyond, 17th-century Church Cottage. If you didn't visit the church or leave a parking donation when you arrived a few hours ago, please consider doing so now.

You can read more about the parishes of Chrishall and Elmdon & Wenden Lofts on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

If you enjoyed this walk and feel you would like a longer one, Hundred Parishes walk number 123 starts from the same spot and covers 8 miles with only a tiny overlap of this route.

This route description, last updated 02 August 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 on the next page. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

