



# The Hundred Parishes

## Circular Walks – number 173

Ickleton – 1.3 miles (2 kms)

*This short walk explores the centre of Ickleton. This is designed to be an unhurried walk. The narrative gives some insight into the history of this Cambridgeshire parish and village. Much information has been drawn from “Welcome to Ickleton”, an excellent booklet published by Ickleton Parish Council and available to purchase in the church, and also from the website of the Ickleton Society - <http://ickleton.org.uk/wordpress/about-the-society/> The route is mainly along pavements. There are no stiles; there are a few seats along the way.*

**Start and finish:** The route starts and finishes at the bus stop in Frogge Street, beside the telephone kiosk and opposite the junction with Church Street. There is usually space to park in Church Street, not far beyond the village shop and on the opposite side of the road to the shop. Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL494437 - Postcode: CB10 1SL (this postcode covers quite a large area).

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 209.

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

From the bus shelter, we walk down the narrow lane that leads to the village hall.

Just before we reach the two-storey village hall we turn right towards the old wall, and just before we reach the wall we turn left. We soon pass a low gateway through the wall. This leads to the village pub, The Ickleton Lion, which we will see again later.

We continue ahead and then bear left around the village hall, passing the playground on the right. Now ahead is Ickleton’s extensive recreation ground. The recreation ground was once two separate fields, for football and cricket, separated by a hedge, but now it is one field with Ickleton Cricket Club’s various teams playing in summer on the “Ickleton Jubilee Oval”.

These excellent facilities are quite impressive for a parish whose population was just 709 at the time of the 2011 Census. There is more to Ickleton than meets the eye of those who speed along its 20mph village street!

We continue to turn left round the village hall and then retrace (past the village hall car park) along the lane by which we entered, now heading towards the church spire. We soon pass the former village school on our left. It was built in 1871, closed in 1961 and then served as the village hall until the new one was opened in 1999. It is now a private residence.

When we get back to Frogge Street, we turn right past the bus shelter and former telephone kiosk, now re-purposed to display information from The Ickleton Society. This is the village’s amenity group which has accumulated a wealth of photos and documents about the village and also pursues preservation and planning matters. We keep to the pavement on the right.

In 20 yards, we come to the exposed timber-framing of Hovells. It is probably the oldest house in Ickleton, although it is certainly not alone in having origins in the 15th century. The name comes from its 17th-century owners.

We continue ahead for about 20 yards beyond Hovells, and then pause to read the next paragraph. There will be several occasions on this stroll where we pause to read.

Further along Frogge Street, on the left, is Frogge Hall, dating from the 16th century or earlier and probably the source of this road's name. Further still, beyond the village's present buildings, is the site of a Roman villa. The site of the villa and a nearby public building (a 'basilica') was excavated in the 19th century and then covered over. The villa had 17 rooms and under-floor heating. It was undoubtedly associated with the Roman fort and town that pre-dated what is now Great Chesterford, less than a mile away and just over the county boundary in Essex.

So, here we will turn around, crossing the road with care and retracing on the opposite side. To our right, the field slopes down to the River Cam, also known as the River Granta. We get a fuller view of Hovells.

We pass three bungalows on the right. These are the Gertrude Homes, built in 1927 and funded by George and Gertrude Bowen who were residents of Ickleton. We will hear a little more about George later. The bungalows were renovated in 2008. The Bowen family crest was carved and added to the gable in 2015.

Soon after the bungalows, we turn right into Church Street, passing the village shop on the left.

When the pavement runs out, when safe, we should cross to the left and continue ahead. We soon come to Gurner House which dates from around 1500 AD and has been updated. The two sets of steps perhaps date back to when the property was once divided into two.

Next on the left we come to Mowbrays, prominent in front of the church and dating from the 15th century. It probably took its name from the surname of early Dukes of Norfolk who once owned the property. Clare College in Cambridge acquired the house in 1819 and is understood to still be the owner.

Behind Mowbrays, we can see the church spire with its external bell. This is a "sanctus bell" which traditionally was rung during a Catholic mass to tell those outside that an important element of the service had been reached. Today, this bell chimes the hours. It is unusual to find a sanctus bell on an Anglican church, yet there is one in the very next parish, on Hinxton's parish church.

Opposite Mowbrays, the small green is home to a number of interesting features including Ickleton's village sign, the war memorial and a horse chestnut tree that was planted in 1919 to mark the end of the First World War.

We continue past Mowbrays before turning left into the churchyard, perhaps pausing on the seat outside to read the next few paragraphs of introduction.

The church has a Grade I listing and most certainly merits a visit. If boots are muddy, please remove them or cover them with boot covers or plastic bags. Inside, it should be possible to purchase a copy of the booklet "Welcome to Ickleton" which goes into some detail about the church, as well as the rest of Ickleton.

The Church of St Mary Magdalene dates from around 1100 AD and its early Norman interior was commended by the renowned architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner as having few

equals in England. Pevsner was writing in 1954, before an arsonist set fire to the church in 1979. During subsequent restoration work, builders discovered extensive wall paintings that had been hidden beneath whitewash. The whitewash had probably been applied to hide them from either Henry VIII's vandals or Oliver Cromwell's. The extensive range of wall paintings is believed to date from the 12th century, while the "Doom" painting (depicting the day of judgement) above the chancel arch is considered to be from the 14th century.

There are many other fascinating elements inside the church, not least the 14th-century rood screen, restored wood carvings on medieval pews, including St Michael weighing souls, and the extensive array of kneelers that were embroidered in the 1960s to record notable people, places and events in the history of Ickleton.

Many elements of the church have been conserved or restored over the centuries and a new appeal was launched in 2021 to raise funds so that the wall paintings could be professionally conserved.

After completing our inspection of the inside of the church, we will exit through the main, 14th-century, south porch and turn right to enjoy a complete circumnavigation of the church. Soon, we will pass the church's west door, set in a fine Norman archway.

In the cemetery, further round on the north side, there is an unusual and elaborate grave surround for the Jonas family. We continue our circumnavigation until we return to the main entrance.

From the church porch, we retrace our steps, through the gate to Church Street. Looking ahead, the house on the far side of the green and to the left of the war memorial is 17th-century Wellington House. It was once The Duke of Wellington, one of at least six public houses that served the village in the 20th century.

To the left of the green is 18th-century Mill House Cottage. Beyond it, out of sight, there was once a water mill beside the River Cam. The last miller was killed in 1927 when his clothing became caught in the mill machinery. In the Domesday Book of 1086, it was recorded that Ickleton had two water mills.

Now, we turn left on the pavement alongside the churchyard wall and with a good view of the church.

After turning the corner, we come to Norman Hall on the right. This is another house from the 15th century. The wisteria that covers the front wall is a picture when in bloom. The building was used as a hospital during World War I. The nearby war memorial records the names of 16 men from Ickleton who died in that conflict.

We continue ahead past Norman Hall. Flint walls are very much in evidence in this area. The one on our right becomes the wall of Ickleton Social Club, a venue that offers members a choice of darts, bingo, indoor bowls and snooker. The club stands on the corner of Mill Lane. Our route does not go down Mill Lane which ends at a pedestrian crossing over the railway line. When the line between London and Cambridge opened in 1845 there was a small station building at what was then a road level crossing.

We continue along Church Street, passing a row of listed buildings on the right. Red-brick Druid Cottage dates from around 1800 AD. This is followed immediately by Nook and

Cranny Cottage which started life in the 15th century as an open hall house. Appearances can be deceptive! A chimney stack was installed in the 16th century and in the 19th century the building was divided into two dwellings. It now seems to be one again.

Next on the right, number 3 is the first of a pair of early 19th-century cottages that stand on the corner, faced in flint and gault brick. This yellowish brick became popular in the 18th and 19th centuries and many examples are to be found around Ickleton.

We turn left into Butcher's Hill. We will keep to the pavement on the right, initially climbing gently. We soon reach Durhams Farmhouse on the right, set back just a little behind a low flint wall. The house dates from the 16th century and takes its name from Dereham in Norfolk, whose monastery was given the farm by King John in 1199 AD. The monastery owned the farm until Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries in the mid-16th century.

We continue, now beside a long, high flint wall, ignoring a gate on the right which leads to a footpath.

After a while, on the left, we come to the unusual entrance to Mowbray's Yard. The gravel driveway passes through a barn. The area beyond was once part of Mowbray's Farm (it is situated behind Mowbrays which we passed earlier, standing in front of the church). This area is private and now provides access to former barns, two dating from the 16th century, that were converted to dwellings in the 1980s.

We continue along Butcher's Hill, now descending. To the left, over the wall, there is a tall converted barn with a distinctive circular chimney, and then a weather vane in the shape of a whale. When we reach another entrance on the left, we find that the tall barn is called Craftsman Barn – but there is no clue to the significance of the whale! Through the gateway, there is another glimpse of the church spire.

We ignore the footpath that leads off to the left and continue down the hill. Next on the left is number 8, March Cottage, displaying the inscription "AHP 1777", and then number 6 which dates from the 16th century.

At the foot of the hill, Butchers Hill (now without an apostrophe) meets Ickleton's main road and we keep straight ahead along the pavement on the right. We are now in Abbey Street.

Note the interesting curved roof at the beginning of the terrace of houses on our left.

On our right is the entrance to Caldrees Manor. This private house will be slightly more visible when we retrace on the opposite pavement. This large house dates from the 16th or 17th century and was subsequently extended and updated. It takes its name from the Abbey of Calders in Cumbria which once owned it. The house was extended by a 19th-century owner, Sir Robert Herbert (1831 – 1905).

Sir Robert was a resident of Ickleton for most of his life, excluding an eventful period in Australia. He qualified as a lawyer and travelled to Australia as the private secretary of Sir George Bowen who had been appointed the first Governor of the newly-designated colony of Queensland, recently separated from New South Wales. Sir Robert stood for the legislative assembly and was returned unopposed. He was then chosen as the first Premier of Queensland, aged just 28 and the youngest person ever to be elected as premier of an

Australian state. He served in that capacity from 1860 to 1866 before returning to the UK where he then served as Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies for 21 years.

Sir Robert Herbert died at Caldrees Manor in 1905. One of his executors was George William Howard Bowen, the son of Queensland's first Governor Sir George Bowen and a frequent visitor to Caldrees Manor. George and his wife Gertrude endowed the bungalows we passed near the start of the walk.

The extensive gardens of Caldrees Manor are occasionally opened for public viewing.

On the left, we soon come to The Ickleton Lion, the village's single remaining pub which dates from around 1700 AD. Not long ago it was called The Red Lion – perhaps its name change was motivated by the need to distinguish it from another Red Lion, only a mile or so away in Hinxton.

We continue along Abbey Street past a good variety of houses in flint, brick and plaster, many dating from the 19th century.

Number 26, the curiously-named Headless Duck Cottage, was once The Jolly Butchers public house. It dates from around 1700 AD. One wonders which came first, the cottage's current name or the stone headless duck that stands outside.

Number 30 dates from the 17th century and is now faced in gault brick.

On our left, number 43, Harlequin House, with very tall chimneys, also dates from around 1700 AD.

On the right, we pass a long low, thatched building dating from the 17th century: numbers 42 and 44.

On the left, number 49, Priory House was built in the early 16th century. It is a timber-frame and plaster building whose roadside wall was faced in gault brick in the 19th century.

Back on the right, the single-storey thatched cottages are joined to two-storey number 46. Just afterwards, numbers 48 and 50 (Padcot) date from around 1500 AD. Numbers 42 to 50 were once all charity cottages.

On the left, number 53, thatched Old Farm Cottage, is another timber-framed and plastered building, this time from the 17th century or earlier, that has been given a facing of brick.

On the right, number 58, Orchard Cottage, dates from around 1700 AD and was thatched until the 20th century.

Opposite Orchard Cottage, The Old Mill is faced with flintstones and gault brick.

On the left, number 63 dates from the 16th century; part served as a butcher's shop until 1980, an outlet for nearby Priory Farm.

On the left, number 71, Old White Horse, dates from around 1700 AD and was once The White Horse Inn. Immediately opposite, on the right, is the former Methodist Chapel, built in 1852 and now a private house.

We go past one more bungalow on the right and then pause beside a field. We are going to turn here but first let's look across the field. The house we see, largely hidden behind trees, is Abbey Farmhouse. It was built in 1692 but part of its core possibly dates from the 13th century. Inside, it has a 17th-century staircase. Beyond Abbey Farmhouse, out of sight, is a long barn that dates from around 1300 AD and is now used as offices. This area was once part of a priory that was the home of Benedictine nuns until it closed during Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in 1536.

When safe, we will cross the road to retrace on the other pavement, getting a somewhat different perspective of some buildings. We will mention just a few.

After Shepherd's Cottage, we ignore the alley that goes to our right and continue ahead towards the church spire.

After a while, on the left, number 24, The Old Carpenter's Shop, is perhaps more noticeable from this side because of its large windows.

Next on the left, number 22, Chestnuts dates from the 19th century, perhaps earlier, and its gault brick is probably the original construction. The roof tiles are in two shades of red and arranged in a diamond-shaped diaper pattern. (Americans adopted the word *diaper* as an alternative to nappy).

Opposite Chestnuts, on the right, number 25 is set back from the road and has an unusual lychgate approach for pedestrians. Appropriately, the house is called Lychgate.

Just before the entrance to The Ickleton Lion car park, the ground floor of number 14 opposite belies the fact that this was the village store until the 1990s when entry was through a central doorway between two large shop windows. The original external doorstep has survived.

We pass The Ickleton Lion and then, as we go by the terrace of houses on the right, we get a fuller view of Caldrees Manor, behind the gate on the left, and we can see that this building is also faced in gault brick.

At the end of the terrace, we follow the pavement round to the right, passing Butchers Hill on the left. We are now back in Frogge Street.

On the left, we soon pass Frogge End, a house that dates from around 1500 AD, although it was largely rebuilt in the 17th century using ancient timbers. Its tiled roof is decorated with a fish scale pattern. Over the years it has served many purposes including ironmongers and antique shop. Like so many villages, Ickleton was once almost self-sufficient with shops and other small businesses.

Church Street turns off to the left; on our right is the former school and then the bus stop where we started this walk. With care, cross Frogge Street to return to the car in Church Street.

You can read more about the parish of Ickleton on [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk). Another Hundred Parishes walk, number 14, passes through Ickleton on its 5-mile route between Great Chesterford Station and Whittlesford Station.

