



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 179

Wethersfield – 5 miles (8 kms)

This walk, entirely within the parish of Wethersfield and mostly rural, passes through some delightful hamlets on a mixture of paths and lanes. It concludes with about half a mile along the B1053 and then a review of some of the many listed buildings in the centre of Wethersfield village. Some paths can be muddy at times. There are no opportunities for refreshment along the route. The walk passes Wethersfield Church. If you hope to visit it, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. There are no stiles.

Start and finish: The route starts and finishes at the car park for Wethersfield's recreation ground and tennis court. This is on the right of High Street, the road towards Sible Hedingham, about 300 yards east of the centre of Wethersfield. Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL714313. Postcode: CM7 4BZ.
The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 195.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

We leave the car park, passing an entrance to Wethersfield pre-school, and turn right onto the road, keeping to the pavement on the right. Immediately opposite the car park exit is a row of four almshouses and to their right is Briar Cottage which dates from the 17th century.

After passing the pre-school, the pavement runs out. We will stay on the right, facing any oncoming traffic.

We pass an entrance on the right to Parsonage Farm and are now in the countryside.

We ignore a footpath that goes up steps on the left and keep on the road, gently climbing.

We pass commercial premises on the right and then Ramsey Cottage on the left. Immediately afterwards, we reach a minor crossroads with Gray's Lane on the left. We turn right onto what is called Widleybrook Lane. Gray's Lane leads to the perimeter of Wethersfield Airfield about half a mile north. The airfield (mostly in the adjacent parish of Finchingfield) was built in the 1940s, ceased to be operational in 1970 and is now a Ministry Of Defence Police training base.

We will follow our winding byway for about a mile, initially passing one or two houses.

After climbing for a while, looking back and to the right, we can sometimes see the rather squat spire of Wethersfield's parish church.

After about half a mile, we reach a junction of tracks where we turn left, staying on the byway.

In another 60 yards, the byway turns right, but we bear slightly left, still on Widleybrook Lane. To our left, the large farm buildings are at Pouches Hall.

After about 250 yards, we ignore a bridleway that turns off to the right and soon afterwards ignore another that goes to the left. Our track soon becomes a tarmac lane and after another 200 yards we reach a road junction.

When safe, we cross the road and turn left. In about 100 yards, we turn right, passing single-storey, thatched School Green Cottage on the corner. Immediately after the cottage, a driveway leads to a thatched house called Georgeanne House.

We continue along this lane and after a while ignore a footpath signposted to the right. We come into the little hamlet of Brick Kiln Green which has a good number of attractive and ancient dwellings.

On the right, we pass the entrance to Little Acres, a house that dates from 1570 AD and which has a Grade II* (two star) listing as it has "an unusually complete range of internal features" which include original floorboards. It is timber-framed and plastered with a red tile roof. We will soon view it from a different angle.

On the left, we pass Old Cottage with red-tiled roof and two chimney stacks. This house has been dated to around 1590 AD.

Next on the left is Brickkiln Cottage, thatched and dating from the 18th century.

We are going to turn right just here, but first you might like to go ahead just a few yards to look at the next house, Little Thatch. This was built in the 17th century and extended in the 18th or 19th century to the right (the north side), with the thatch being extended over the extension to form what is called a "catslide" roof.

Now, we will turn down the public byway opposite Brickkiln Cottage. Immediately on the right there is an unusual water pump.

On the right, we soon go past Little Acres.

We continue ahead, ignoring a byway that turns left beside a pond.

We pass Rosemary Cottage on the left and then Old Timbers which has been considerably updated since being built in the 16th century.

We continue ahead with a small green on our left. We are now in Lower Green and the track becomes a tarmac lane. On the far side of the green is a distinctive round house, thatched and with a round chimney, appropriately called The Round House. It dates from the 18th or 19th century.

Immediately after the green, we pass thatched Kembles and a pond on our left, followed by Wright's Farmhouse, with red-tiled roof, which dates mainly from the 16th century with 14th-century origins. Its Grade II* listing describes the house as "an exceptionally well-preserved early medieval hall house".

Further along, 16th-century Lealands Barn is followed by Lealands Farm, some of which also dates from the 16th century. Each has a red-tiled roof. We are now in the hamlet of Blackmore End.

The thatched house on the right is Barbery Green. Soon afterwards, the lane divides and we fork to the left of the green. On our right is white weather-boarded The Smithy which dates from the 18th century. The weather boarding and weather vane with anvil are 21st-century enhancements.

At the end of the green, we meet another road. When safe, we cross the new road to Mission Cottage, a thatched building with thatched porch. The building dates from the 17th century. The right half was a hall, open from ground to roof, until the 1970s when the floor was inserted. Here we turn left, with the Mission Hall on our right.

The pavement soon ends and the narrow lane climbs gently, passing close to thatched Brook Cottage on the right.

In another 50 yards, we turn right, signposted as a public footpath and heading towards Owls Hall Farm. We immediately pass 17th-century Hill House on the right, and then Owls Hall Cottage. We continue ahead on the concrete farm driveway.

In another 100 yards, an ornate brick gateway marks an entrance to a drive that forks right to 16th-century Owls Hall. We keep ahead, passing between Owls Hall on the right and a 16th-century barn on the left, and then along the marked path between other commercial buildings and storage tanks.

After the commercial area, we keep straight ahead on a field-edge path with hedgerow on our right. The hedgerow is quite mixed, including blackberries and sloes in autumn.

We keep ahead until the far corner of the field and then turn left on a short stretch of path between fields. This soon brings us to a lane where we turn right.

We will stay on this quiet lane for nearly a mile, initially with hedgerow on both sides.

After a while, we ignore a bridleway that comes in from the right beside a house. Soon afterwards, the view opens up to our left – over Wethersfield countryside - and then our lane is joined by another that comes if from the left. (The lane comes from Rotten End, another Wethersfield hamlet).

After a descent, Danes Vale Barn on the right is the first of several buildings around Danes Vale Farm. The farmhouse and one of the barns date from the 16th century. On the left we pass thatched Barley Fen.

In about 300 yards, the lane turns left towards Shalford but we keep straight ahead on a slightly narrower lane. On our right at this junction is the entrance to Tinkers Cross. About 20 yards after the junction, we can look back to this house, yet another Wethersfield property that started life in the 16th century.

In another 300 yards, we pass The Nook on the left and then Woodlands Cottage at the corner of a busier road, Braintree Road, the B1053. Here, we turn right, signposted towards Wethersfield, keeping on the pavement.

We soon pass 17th-century Fir Cottage and then Sandhills Cottages, a red-brick terrace of 5 houses, probably built in the 19th century.

The pavement stops at the end of Sandhill Cottages, so from here we must be extra cautious on this sometimes-busy road.

After a while, when safe, we can cross to the left and use a pavement. This goes past a row of cottages that have been modified in different ways since their 16th-century to 18th-century origins.

Shortly afterwards on the left is Goldens Barn and then Goldens Farm. We can just about see the latter over the high wall – of particular note for those tall enough to see is the pargetting which depicts a series of wildlife and farm implements.

We continue on the left where there is a reasonably-wide grass verge, passing a gatehouse on the right to the out-of-sight Wethersfield Manor.

A sign advises that we are entering Wethersfield village. When the pavement or grass verge ends totally, we should probably remain on the left for a while, rather than cross to the right where we are approaching a blind bend.

On the left, we pass The Old Vicarage, which doesn't look so old, and then Parkside before crossing safely back to the right.

Substantial Wethersfield Place, on the left, has accumulated many additional chimneys since its foundation in the 18th century.

We pass 17th-century Stable Cottage on the left and, almost opposite, we should pause beside Brook Farm on the right. This large house dates from around 1300 AD and was extended in the 16th century. The first part we come to is probably the oldest section. Brook Farm was the home of the Clerke family for several hundred years. Two former residents merit a mention . . .

Dr John Clerke was born here in 1582 and went on to become president of the Royal College of Physicians.

Charles Clerke was born at Brook Farm in 1741. He left home at the age of 13 to attend the Royal Navy Academy at Portsmouth. He went on to circumnavigate the globe as a young man and then to serve on Captain James Cook's three great voyages of discovery between 1768 and 1779 in the southern and northern hemispheres, when coastlines of Australia and New Zealand were charted for the first time. Charles would return home between voyages but would usually be away for three years at a time.

When Captain Cook was killed in 1779, Captain Clerke took command of the expedition but he died a few months later in Russia while seeking a northern sea route between the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans, the so-called Northwest Passage. He died of tuberculosis, a disease he had contracted before his final voyage while in a London debtors' prison, having been guarantor for a large debt incurred by an older brother.

While the perils of 18th-century travel may seem far away, we should nonetheless be cautious as we continue to navigate the road into Wethersfield. Once again, we should cross when safe before continuing along the pavement, now on the left.

We soon pass 17th-century, thatched Brookside Cottage, then 16th-century Russells Farm. Next on the left is Simm's Farmhouse, 16th century with a massive and distinctive stack of

chimneys. Just afterwards, we need to cross the road yet again to continue along the pavement on the right.

The pavement rises above the roadway and we walk beside a high brick wall. As we come into Wethersfield village, the chimney over to the left is a relic of a former brewery. The first building on the left, of red brick, served until recent years as a pub, The Brewery Tavern.

When the pavement reaches road level, with care we cross to the pavement on the left and continue, soon with the village green on the right.

On the left, Hillfoot House is the former home of the Raven family who owned the brewery and maltings. The brewery closed in 1915. A few years later, the surviving member of the family, Edith Maberly of Hillfoot House, gave the maltings building to the village as a meeting place, particularly for the young men who had returned from the First World War. That building is the next one we come to; it has been the village hall since 1921. Behind the hall, another part of the former maltings is now a social club and part-time shop, the only remaining shop in the whole parish.

Next on the left is 3-storey Millchase House which dates from the 16th century but has been much altered. It operated as Dickens Restaurant for many years until around 2004.

We follow the pavement round to the left, beside yet another 16th-century building, Jasmine House. We will go only a few yards round the corner until we can see traffic from both directions and then, when safe, cross to the other side of the road – where the pavement has just started – and turn to the right. We are now on High Street.

Immediately on our left, Castle House was for many years the Castle pub – 16th century, of course.

In a few more yards we pass the entrance to the United Reformed Church which displays the information that it was “REBUILT 1822”.

The next building on the left, The Manse, is from the 16th century and has many interesting features including elaborate railings and a very neat front garden.

As we continue uphill, with The Green on our right, almost every building on this side of the High Street is listed, but we will mention just a few.

On the far side of The Green, the house with four dormer windows and some exposed timber framing is Ivanhoe House, built mostly in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Wethersfield's village sign is positioned at the top of The Green.

Immediately beyond The Green, on the left, is St George's House which dates from around 1600 AD. What is most notable about this building is one of its former occupants, a young curate by the name of Patrick Bronte who lived here for just two years from 1806 to 1808. He later settled at Haworth in West Yorkshire where his children, Emily, Anne, Charlotte and Bramwell wielded their respective pens to such good effect that their home is now a very popular visitor attraction.

We continue for a short distance until we reach Church Hill House which dates from around 1500 AD and now offers bed and breakfast. From here, when safe, we will cross the road

and enter the churchyard. The rather rare “Sanctus” bell on the outside of the spire is now used as a clock bell.

The porch is straight ahead. If the church is open, we are encouraged to visit, first covering or removing our boots if they are muddy – which they probably are by now!

Wethersfield’s Grade I-listed parish church, dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, dates from the 12th century when the tower was built. The northwest corner of the nave may be even older, possibly pre-Norman. The rest of the building dates from 12th to early 15th centuries. The church stood derelict for some time in the 19th century until it was extensively restored in the 1870s.

Fragments of stained glass from the 14th and 15th century have been reset into windows in the nave.

The tower houses 8 bells. The oldest was cast in 1623 and the newest in 1980.

There are several interesting memorials, not least one on the nave wall to the adventurous Clerke family from Brook Farm. It commemorates Joseph who died at the age of 81 in 1790, his wife who died in 1747 giving birth to their 12th child, the aforementioned Captain Charles Clerke who died in Russia and two of his brothers who died in India, long before the death of their father.

In the chancel, there is a notable memorial of recumbent alabaster effigies, thought to be of Henry Wentworth and his wife, residents of Codham Hall in the south of the parish who died around 500 years ago. The effigies are still beautiful despite being covered in graffiti, much of which is believed to have been carved in the 17th century.

On leaving the church, we retrace our steps, straight ahead from the porch through the churchyard, to return to High Street.

We turn right, alongside red-brick, 19th-century Post Office Cottages. All properties along this road are interesting in one way or another but we will restrict comments to the properties on the opposite side, which tend to be older. Straightaway, we pass more 16th-century buildings: The Hoods, The Old Bakery and Burleigh Cottage.

Next on the left is the relatively modern Chase House, built in the early 19th century. This was The Dog Inn for more than 100 years until around 2010. The narrow lane beside it is called Dog Chase.

Next is yet another 16th-century building, Virginia House, part of which was once a shop.

Next, Virginia Cottage / Blenheim House, is our final 16th-century property for today.

We soon reach the entrance on the right to the car park where we started this walk.

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

This route description, last updated 22 November 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 of this route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

