



The Hundred Parishes

Circular walks – number 101

Saffron Walden country & town walk – 6.7 miles (11 kms)

Preview: *This walk starts and finishes in the town of Saffron Walden, but most is along paths through attractive, rolling countryside. It concludes with an introductory stroll around part of the historic centre of the town, the largest settlement within the Hundred Parishes. Within the town, keep watch for pudding stones, pargetting and a great variety of architectural styles.*

A more extensive town trail is available from the Tourist Information Centre in Market Square.

Start & Finish: Saffron Walden, Essex: Uttlesford District Council HQ car park (weekends only) in London Road (Grid Reference: TL536380, Postcode: CB11 4ZH) or nearby in Springhill Road (TL536377, CB11 4AH) or Summerhill Road (TL536375, CB11 4AJ). Parking restrictions may apply on these residential roads. *[Should parking here prove impossible, the main Saffron Walden car park is at Swan Meadow, which we pass at the 5th paragraph on page 4.]*

Public toilets in Hill Street (TL538384, CB10 1JZ). Many places to eat in Saffron Walden, but none for the first 5 miles of this route.

Approx 4 miles of paths and 2.5 miles of town roads, all gently undulating, with no stiles. The whole route is on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 195.

Either (a) from the car park, turn right into London Road and very soon, before the mini roundabout, cross the road with care and turn left into Borough Lane. When safe to do so, cross Borough Lane and continue uphill to turn right onto Springhill Road. At the end of this road, turn left into Summerhill Road . . .

Or (b) if you have parked in Springhill Road or the early part of Summerhill Road, head uphill to the junction of these two roads and then continue eastwards, slightly uphill, along Summerhill Road . . .

At the end of Summerhill Road turn left onto Debden Road. Soon, cross the road with care and turn right into The Avenue. The route now weaves through relatively modern developments.

Follow The Avenue round to the right through tree-lined private gardens, passing Pavilion Way and Tilia Court. When the path reaches a residential road (St Johns Close), bear slightly left, cross the road and continue uphill on the pavement. After 100 yards, turn right into a footpath to the left of house number 16 and beside a half-hidden lamppost.

This path becomes a road and when it reaches a T junction, turn left and almost immediately right into a footpath.

This path passes between houses and soon joins Reddings Close. Keep straight ahead and at the end of the close turn left (into Cromwell Road) and almost immediately cross the road to turn right into another footpath. Very soon this comes to another road (Long Horse Croft). Turn right and follow this road round to the left, past a community centre and play area on the right.

Turn right (into Ross Close), keeping the playground on the right. Cross the entrance to Plantation Close on the right and soon cross the road to follow a public footpath sign across a small green, keeping to the left of a block of flats. Pass between house numbers 65 and 46, heading towards a metal fence.

At the fence, turn right. Keep the fence on the left, turning left alongside it and then left again alongside it. At the end of this field, bear right between concrete bollards to emerge onto a narrow lane.

Keep left along the lane towards a farmhouse. At the house, Herberts, turn right, away from the house onto a field edge path with a hedge on the right. After 100 yards follow the path to the left and soon turn right, descending beside a line of trees on the left.

At the bottom of the descent, bear right and then turn right onto a road towards some red brick houses. Soon, near the houses and when safe, cross the road and continue in the same direction.

Soon, as the road turns to the right, turn left onto a path which runs beside a hedgerow. *[Another track runs parallel with this, slightly higher up the field – they meet again in the next paragraph.]* For some distance this relatively straight and level path runs beside Fulfen Slade, down to the left, a tributary of the River Cam. The hedgerow ends after a while. Around three-quarters of a mile after leaving the road, the path reaches a wood and at this point, a long-distance footpath, the Harcamlow Way, joins our route after crossing a footbridge from the left.

Bear to the right, keeping a thin wood on the left. After 200 yards, another path joins from the right *[the one referred to in italics in the previous paragraph]*. Keep ahead with the wood on the left.

After another 200 yards bear left and take the wooden footbridge over the stream. Immediately turn right along a narrow field, staying close to the line of trees on the left. At the end of the field, pass along a narrow copse, now with the stream close by on the right.

After a while, the path rises steeply to a busy road (Newport Road, B1052). Carefully cross the road to rejoin the path, which descends steeply through woodland with Fulfen Slade flowing immediately on the right. At the end of the woodland turn right across a footbridge and then left to continue along the Harcamlow Way with the stream now on the left.

The path emerges via a small car park onto a road. Cross carefully to enter the private road to Abbey Farm. Follow this private road, bearing right past St Mark's College and right again to climb gently up Village Street, through the hamlet of Audley End. Towards the end of the street, Audley End House may be seen through the trees straight ahead over its boundary wall.

The entrance to this splendid mansion, now run by English Heritage, is just round to the left, but our route turns right. At the end of the village street, bear right and cross the road to use the pavement on the opposite side.

Continue uphill with the long, high 17th century boundary wall of Audley End House on the left. After a quarter mile, turn left through a gateway into Audley End Estate. Follow the path straight ahead. Cross a gravel estate road with care and note in the distance to the right the red brick water tower near where we started. Keep ahead, beneath a line of trees.

To the right may be seen the red and cream brick building that was originally Saffron Walden Hospital and is now Uttlesford District Council's offices, where this walk began. As the path starts to descend, in winter months parts of the roof of Audley End House can be glimpsed back to the left. In the distance to the left, the obelisk, designed by Robert Adam, was erected in 1783 by the owner of Audley End House (Sir John Griffin Griffin, later to become the first Lord Braybrooke) in memory of his aunt, Elizabeth, Countess of Portsmouth, who had left him the estate.

Towards the end of the descent, the spire of the parish church of St Mary's comes into view. Pass through the iron gate to exit Audley End Estate.

Continue ahead on Abbey Lane. In 100 yards, pass the beginning of the Repell Ditch on the right. We will return to this point later.

Continue along Abbey Lane, passing almshouses on the left, to the traffic lights at the junction with Saffron Walden High Street.

The route so far has been about 5 miles. The final 1.5 miles of this route meanders through older parts of town past many places of interest and a variety of opportunities to eat or drink. The following description refers briefly to only a few of Saffron Walden's treasures.

Turn right up the High Street and just before the phone box use the traffic island to cross the road. Continue uphill for a short way before turning left into Gold Street. Follow the road round to the left and carefully cross the road to enjoy the view of St Mary's Church, one of the largest in Essex. At the bottom of Gold Street, carefully cross Hill Street into Cross Street. [Public toilets are just a few yards from the bottom of Gold Street – turn right along Hill Street].

Soon, Cross Street bears right, but keep straight ahead on the pedestrian route and then turn right into King Street. This soon leads to Market Square. The market is held on Tuesdays and Saturdays. The Town Hall and Tourist Information Centre are on the right. The T.I.C. has much information about Saffron Walden and the wider area, including a free Town Trail.

On reaching Market Square, turn left past the Library and ascend Market Hill to the cross roads with Church Street. The four buildings at this cross roads date from the 14th and 15th centuries. [The road straight ahead leads to the museum and castle ruins]. Turn left into Church Street, immediately passing a heavily pargetted building on the left which was once the Sun Inn. Carefully cross the road for a better view of the pargeting, especially the two figures who possibly represent Thomas Hickathrift, a legendary folk hero, and the Wisbech giant who he killed.

Continue down Church Street for a further 50 yards before turning right onto Church Path, passing almshouses on the left and the church on the right. Keep straight ahead into an alley. Beware of the step at the end of the alley, where we turn left into Castle Street. Carefully cross the road and soon turn right under an archway marked "Bridge End Garden".

Pass Fry Art Gallery, which specializes in local artists, and enter Bridge End Gardens. Note the eagles above a gateway on the right which leads into the restored Dutch garden.

The gardens have great variety yet are quite compact. You are encouraged to explore and return to the eagles.

After exploring, with the eagles and Dutch garden behind you, turn left and then, before another archway, turn right and follow a stream on the left to leave Bridge End Gardens.

Exit the gardens onto the main road, Bridge Street. Turn left and, soon after the Eight Bells pub, cross the road with care to turn right into Freshwell Street. At the end of the street keep straight ahead with the high wall on the left, passing the duck pond on the right. When the path reaches a road, Park Lane, cross to the pavement and turn left.

At the King Edward VI Almshouses, turn right and pass beneath the archway. Keep ahead on the footpath until it reaches a road (Abbey Lane) and here turn right. Pass the almshouses on the right. We are now retracing a short part of our earlier route.

At the end of the long wall on the left, turn left onto a footpath with a deep ditch on the right. This is part of the "Repell Ditches", a substantial defensive earthwork that is believed to date from Saxon times. Climb gently with the ditch on the right for about 200 yards.

At the end of a fence, turn left along the path, ascending some steps and climbing steadily beside the ditch until the path reaches a road, Gibson Gardens. Turn right. At the end of this cul-de-sac keep ahead on a footpath. Very soon, reach Uttlesford District Council Office car park on the right.

If you have parked here you can pass through a gap in the wall into the car park. If you have parked in Springhill Road or Summerhill Road continue to the end of the path and turn right when it reaches the busy London Road. Cross with care and soon turn left into Borough Lane. Continue uphill to turn right into Springhill Road and, if appropriate, continue to Summerhill Road.

This has been just a brief, cursory introduction to Saffron Walden. Please consider a return visit, perhaps to explore more thoroughly with the aid of a Town Trail or other guide, available from the Tourist Information Centre.

Two diagrams, one covering the whole route and the other the final town section, are shown on the next pages. They are published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

This route description, last updated 24 July 2020, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk. Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to hundredparishes@btinternet.com.



