The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 140

Shalford and Wethersfield - 5.4 miles (9 kms)

This route explores the more inhabited areas of the rural parish of Shalford, straying occasionally into the parish of Wethersfield. About half of the route is along quiet lanes, about a quarter on the fairly quiet B1053 road and another quarter on footpaths. It is slightly hilly and the footpath section passes over several stiles. Shalford village has a pub and there is a general store / tea room near the start.

Start and finish: The walk starts and finishes from the small car park beside Shalford Village Hall and playing fields at Church End.
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL725282 - Postcode: CM7 5FB.
The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 195.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

Shalford's village hall was built in 1925 on land given by Major Guy Gilbey Gold (1877-1968) of Abbot's Hall, the estate that lies beyond the playing field. The clock tower was added as a memorial to Major Gold's son who was killed in the Second World War.

Leave the car park through the car exit and, when safe, cross the road towards Shalford Village Store. Turn right on the pavement. Stay on the pavement and follow the road round to the left, signposted towards Shalford. On the right is Shalford's village sign, featuring the coat of arms of Humphrey de Northwood, the parish's first lord of the manor in the early 14th century.

We have just joined the B1053 which has come from Braintree and is heading towards Finchingfield.

When the pavement ends, and when safe, cross the road to continue on the pavement on the right, passing a variety of houses. When the houses end, the road starts to descend and Shalford parish church comes into view. We cross Water Hall Lane on the right and pass Billericay & District Angling Club's private fishery.

The pavement on our side ends just as we reach a 30mph speed limit sign. Cross the road with care and continue along the pavement on the left on what is now called The Street.

Soon, we pass the entrance on the right to the church. We will return shortly.

On the left we pass Pages, dating from around 1590 AD but updated in the 20th century. Soon we pass Stores Cottages which retain their shopfronts. They were built in the 18th century as two attached houses, later functioned as a store and were later divided into four cottages.

Cross the entrance to Barryfields and soon reach thatched Keepers Cottage, dating from the 17th century or earlier. We are going to turn here so, when safe, cross the road and retrace past The George public house, built as a private house in the 16th century or even earlier.

Continue past Penthouse on the left and after a short climb turn left onto the driveway to the church.

Immediately on the right is a memorial to the crew of an American ‘Flying Fortress’ bomber that crashed in Shalford in fields behind the church in 1944. The plane was fully laden with bombs and had taken off from Ridgewell airfield about 10 miles to the north. Nine members of the crew made safe parachute landings but the tenth was killed. The explosion when the plane crashed weakened the walls of Shalford Hall, leading to its collapse and demolition in 1958. It stood to the right of the church.

Continue down the driveway and pass through the lychgate to the parish church, dedicated to St Andrew. This Grade I-listed building is mostly from the 14th century. If the church is open, you are encouraged to visit, but please remove your boots if they are muddy. Inside you will find examples of straw plaiting, a forgotten craft that flourished in this area in the 19th-century.

A brass war memorial inside the church includes the name of Eric Ravilious. Born in Sussex, he moved to nearby Great Bardfield and became one of the “Bardfield Artists” who were so influential in art and design before and after World War II. One of his woodcuts has been adopted as the logo of The Hundred Parishes Society. During the war he was an official war artist, sketching and painting war scenes. He died on active service when the plane in which he was travelling was lost at sea. We will see his final home later on this walk.

Leaving the church porch, turn right and right again beside the church and descend through the churchyard to a footpath just before a brook. Turn right and leave the churchyard, passing the entrance on the right to more lakes used by Billericay and District Angling Club

Follow this narrow footpath, with hedgerow and ditch on the left and fence and lakes on the right. At the end of the lakes, turn right, keeping the fence on our right. We now have the River Pant on our left.

Ahead and to the right is a tall red-brick garden wall of the former Shalford Hall. After about 50 yards, turn left to cross the River Pant on a concrete bridge with metal handrails. We have now left Shalford and will be in the parish of Wethersfield for the next half mile.

Go straight across a narrow field and then up a short, steep climb into a larger field. Go straight ahead on a well-walked cross-field grass path and then follow a fence on the right.

After another 40 yards, near the end of this field, turn right and cross a stile into another field which often has horses. Turn left and keep to the left side of the field. After about 130 yards, leave the field by going left, either through the gate or over the stile. Continue ahead, with a fence on the right, along a track that is well used by horses.

We are just coming into the Wethersfield hamlet of Rotten End. Pass a barn on the left, go over a stile, through a gate, and then along a concrete drive with the pink 16th-century Rotten End Farmhouse over to the left. Soon emerge onto Water Hall Lane.

Turn right onto the lane, immediately passing 16th-century Priest House on the right. Despite its name, its original purpose is not known.

After about 200 yards, the lane turns right, at the same time crossing the River Pant. Should the road be flooded, there is a much higher footbridge immediately to the right.

Almost immediately after the bend, turn left onto Footpath number 22, a wide field-edge path with the Pant on the left. We have now crossed back into Shalford, with Wethersfield on the left side of the river. Continue beside the river and its accompanying willow trees for a quarter mile.

Ahead in the distance is the former home of Eric Ravilious. The 16th-century timber-framed house has its timbers on show. The building has long been known as Iron Bridge Farm but today is apparently called Ewen Bridge Farmhouse

At the end of the field, climb a stile and turn right. Immediately to our left is a footbridge that appears to no longer be used. Continue ahead for a few more yards. [*If you would like a closer look at Iron Bridge Farm, keep straight ahead on the footpath for about 100 yards and then return to this spot*]. Turn left and descend to a wide concrete bridge over the River Pant. Cross this bridge. To our left is the abandoned footbridge, shown on maps as Iron Bridge. The name appears to be a corruption of *Ewen Bridge* or bridge for ewes.

At the far side of the concrete bridge, pass through a wooden gate and keep straight ahead.

In about 100 yards, ignore a stile and gateway on the right and continue ahead on a grassy field-edge path. Keep to the right of the field, following the wire fence as it meanders, passing along an avenue of fairly young oak trees.

When the field ends, follow the fence sharp right, leaving the field and the oak trees. At this point, look back the way we have come to see Iron Bridge Farm.

Having turned right, the path gets narrower and uneven. Take care as the grassy path has been subjected to burrowing, perhaps by rabbits.

Cross a stile and soon pass beside a gate to come into a tiny hamlet known as Lone's Hole. There are just three cottages here, the first two being thatched and dating from the 18th century. Continue along their drive, passing through a wooden gate onto a lane.

When the lane reaches a road, turn right. The parish boundary between Shalford and Wethersfield follows a tortuous route in this area and for the next 300 yards we will be in Wethersfield.

Descend for a short distance and soon approach the tall Codham Mill. We will turn sharp right just beyond the mill, so it is suggested that before the building we walk on the left. Pass Codham Mill on the right and, just around the corner, pause to view the front of the building.

The water mill and its adjoining mill house, on the right, date from the 18th century. The mill operated until the 20th century. It retains an exceptional amount of its original workings. It was sadly neglected for many years but has now been renovated and converted into a residential property.

Immediately after Cobham Mill, we cross the mill race that once powered the mill and in another 100 yards we cross the main stream of the River Pant. This stretch of road sometimes floods, so there is a higher footbridge on the left in case of need. At this point we leave Wethersfield and return to the parish of Shalford for the remainder of our walk.

The lane climbs gently and soon reaches a junction with the B1053. To the right stands the curiously-named *Ancells in the Hole* which seems to be incorrectly recorded on Ordnance Survey maps as Tan Office Farm. This large house dates from the 16th century and retains several ancient features including an internal wall painting of a lady in Elizabethan costume.

We turn left here, signposted towards Braintree, and almost immediately fork left onto a grass field-edge path. Pause and look back at the ancient Ancells in the Hole.

The field-edge path runs beside the road, generally separated from it by a hedge. Stay on this path for a quarter mile, initially gently uphill. After a while, across the valley to our left, in Wethersfield parish, we can see Great Codham Hall, a fine mansion dating from the 14th century. Standing in front of it is an 18th-century red-brick dovecot.

On our right, in Shalford, we occasionally get a glimpse of Abbot's Hall, built in the 19th century of cream-coloured gault brick. This is another grand residence, complete with ballroom!

At the bottom end of the field, turn right to the road and, when safe, cross to the other side and turn left to continue down the hill. Very soon turn right, opposite Cut Hedge Cottage on our left, a thatched 17th-century house. We are now in Water Lane and will continue along it for three-quarters of a mile, gently climbing.

We occasionally pass attractive cottages, including Sleepy Hollow which was built originally around 1570 AD.

Ignore an entrance on the right to Killhogs Farm. In due course, take the turning on the right into Jasper's Green, a small hamlet of Shalford parish.

In about 300 yards we reach a road junction. Immediately opposite is Forge Cottage. To our right, just before the junction, is appropriately-named The Old Place, dating from about 1600 AD.

Turn right and pass more houses with character including April Cottage which dates from the 16th century or earlier.

Turn right at the next junction, just before reaching another hamlet, Shalford Green. We are now in Garretts Lane and we soon pass Garretts, with tall chimneys and dating from around 1600. Continue past Parsonage Farm on the right and then ignore the lane on the left.

At the T junction, turn right onto a slightly busier road, passing Hubbard's Farm on the left.

Fox House, on the right, stands on the site of The Fox, a Ridley's pub that was demolished in the 1990s. Just beyond it are Fox Cottages.

We come into the hamlet of Church End. When safe, cross to the pavement on the left.

We pass several attractive thatched cottages on the right, generally from the 18th century, and Shalford Primary School, built in 1874.

Soon afterwards, there is a stretch of narrow road with no pavement. On the right, Coachman's Cottage has a London Assurance fire mark, provided by its one-time insurer.

We soon reach the green and playing field on the right. Turn right through the gateway and left along the pathway to the car park where we started this walk.

You can read more about Shalford and Wethersfield on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 24 October 2020, 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 below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

