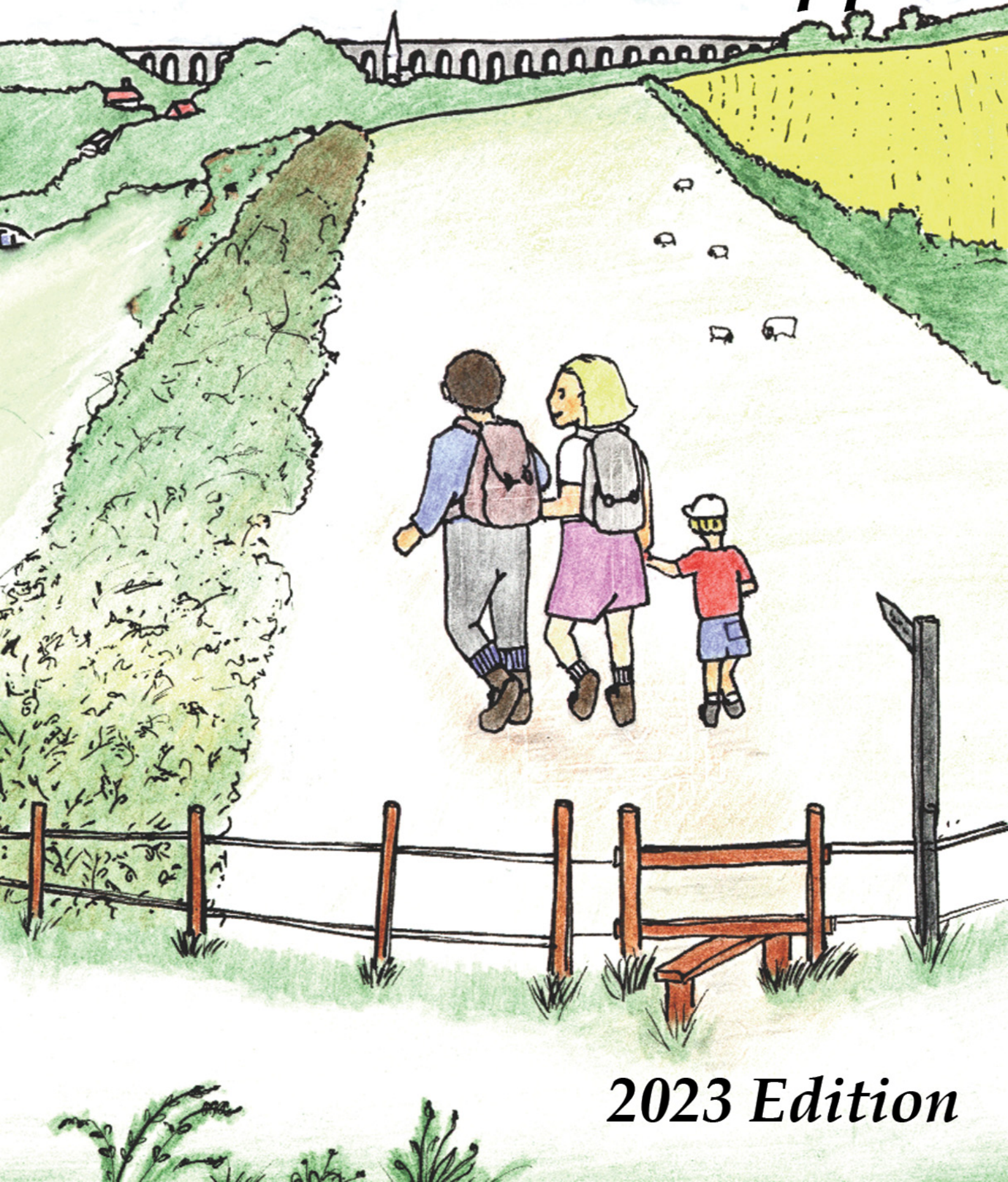


Walks In and Around Wakes Colne & Chappel



2023 Edition



About the Booklet

Three of the four walks outlined in this booklet were originally published at the time of Chappel and Wakes Colne Millennium celebrations. These walks have been checked and updated, as have the historical, nature and agricultural notes. Over the last 25 years, although the landscape itself has changed little, different crops are grown, some new dwellings have been built, stiles have often been changed into gates, and some steps with handrails built to replace steep slopes, enhancing accessibility. Two new footpaths have been created, both considerably improving walkers' safety. Whistle Walk, which runs inside a hedge alongside Bures Road, north from Station Approach, from where all the walks start, features in three of the four walks in this booklet. The other, a recently created right of way inside a hedge which runs up Tyburn Hill alongside the A1124, which enables the footpath network to be connected in safety, is the focus for the new fourth walk and the motivation for revising this booklet. We have included some general information about the area, which we hope will be of interest. The walks are of varying lengths to suit different abilities. We hope that they will enable residents and visitors to explore the area and enjoy its beauty.

Acknowledgments

The original publication of walks leaflets published at the Millennium was supported by the River Colne Countryside Project and Parish Paths Partnership, an initiative sponsored by Essex County Council. The following were initially involved in preparing the guide: Chappel and Wakes Colne Brownies, Peter Chillingworth, Johnathan Cordingley, Sarah Few, Parish Paths Partnership, David Green, Shirley Green who undertook the illustrations, Mike Hayes, Matt Hullis, River Colne Countryside Project Officer, Eunice and John Rees, and Bob Wilson. This revised booklet of walks, including the new Tyburn Hill walk, has been supported by Wakes Colne Parish Council.



The walks have been checked and added to by Kathy Brown, June Fisher, David and Shirley Green, Monica Taylor and Helen Wasteney. Julian Bowden revised Nature Notes and Peter Chillingworth the Agricultural Notes. With her kind permission, Shirley Green's original illustrations have been re-purposed in this booklet. The graphic design has been undertaken by Edward Sexton, and advice on printing has been given by Denise Stocker, with the project overseen to completion by June Fisher.

The Starting Point: The Station Buildings, Gainsborough Line and East Anglian Railway Museum

Until the 1960s, just north of Chappel and Wakes Colne station, there was a division of two lines: the Stour Valley Line (now the Gainsborough Line) to Sudbury, completed in 1849; and the Colne Valley Line, completed in 1863, which went west along the Colne Valley, passing through Earls Colne, Halstead and Yeldham, before rejoining the Stour Valley line at Haverhill and going through to Cambridge and Bury St Edmunds.

The original station of Chappel and Wakes Colne, built in 1847, was replaced at the end of the 19th century by the present, much grander station. The original station buildings are now a private dwelling, Station House, to the north of the main station. The current station buildings and operational Platform 1 remain largely unchanged from when they were built. The buildings on Platform 2 were demolished in the 1960s. Until then the connecting wooden bridge was covered by a canopy but was later replaced by the current metal bridge. At the end of Station Approach is what was originally the Sutherland Arms (1892-93), which became the Railway Tavern (1893-1945). As its name implies, it once slaked the thirsts of travellers and is now a private house.



The current Gainsborough Line, operated by Greater Anglia, runs between Marks Tey and Sudbury, via Chappel and Wakes Colne and Bures. Chappel and Wakes Colne station is the home of the East Anglian Railway Museum which showcases the Victorian station buildings and signal boxes, and on event days provides rides on restored steam engines and access to exhibitions and outbuildings. Platform 2 café has al fresco seating on the platform and in an old railway carriage. The station also has an active station adopter team who maintain the planters. Of the original 20 miles of the Colne Valley Line, only a mile now exists at Castle Hedingham, where the Colne Valley Railway, another steam preservation society, keeps the name alive.

The Essex & South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership (ESSCRP)

The ESSCRP was formed in 1998, with the aim of promoting and encouraging rail travel for residents and business users of the communities along our six branch lines, by way of regeneration, tourism, leisure and community development projects, to enable the communities to increase their economic, social and environmental welfare. The lines in the Partnership are: The Crouch Valley Line, The Mayflower Line, The Gainsborough Line, The Sunshine Coast Line, The Flitch Line and the Southend Line. For further information see www.esscrp.org.uk, Essex & South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership, or follow us on social media: www.facebook.com/esscrp, twitter.com/esscrp or Instagram @essexsuffolkrp.

Working with Greater Anglia (GA) one of our key objectives is social inclusion and community engagement. This has become very successful through GA's Station Adoption Initiative.

Would you like to improve the look of your local station? If you would like to volunteer, and if you have a spare hour or so a week and are keen to use your green fingers, please contact us: info@esscrp.org.uk.



How To Get Here

For visitors arriving by car, parking is available in Station Approach. This may become busy at weekends especially during the summer or when the East Anglian Railway Museum, located at the station, has an event.

All the walks start and finish at Chappel and Wakes Colne railway station. Greater Anglia runs a regular service from here to Sudbury and to Marks Tey, from where trains connect to the main Colchester - London line. A train trip across the viaduct to enjoy the views is recommended. For all train times and information visit Greater Anglia: www.greateranglia.co.uk/

First Bus and Heddingham and Chambers operate a regular bus service between Colchester and Halstead (Routes 88/88A/88C). The buses stop at Chappel Corner, the junction between the A1124 and Station Rd, which leads up to Station Approach, from where the walks commence.

Refreshments and Points of Contact

- Platform 2 Café, East Anglian Railway Museum, Chappel & Wakes Colne Station, Station Rd, Wakes Colne, CO6 2DS
- The Swan Inn, The Street, Chappel, CO6 2DD
- Wakes Colne Post Office and Grocery Store, Colchester Rd, Wakes Colne, CO6 2DF
- East Anglian Railway Museum: www.earm.co.uk/
- Colne Valley Railway: www.colnevalleyrailway.co.uk/
- Greater Anglia: www.greateranglia.co.uk/
- First Bus: www.firstbus.co.uk/
- Heddingham and Chambers: www.heddinghamandchambers.co.uk/



Disclaimer

Walkers do so at their own risk. Whilst Wakes Colne and Chappel Parish Councils do undertake regular maintenance of footpaths in their parishes, some tasks (e. g., signage, step and bridge maintenance) have to be undertaken by Essex County Council. Our footpaths are in a living landscape which is continually changing.

Please follow the Country Code:

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risk of fire
- Fasten all gates
- Keep to public paths across farmland
- Take your litter home
- Leave livestock, crops, and machinery alone
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges, and walls
- Help keep all water clean
- Protect all wildlife
- Take special care on country roads
- Make no unnecessary noise

Please report any deterioration to:

Wakes Colne Parish Clerk: parishclerk@wakescolne.org;

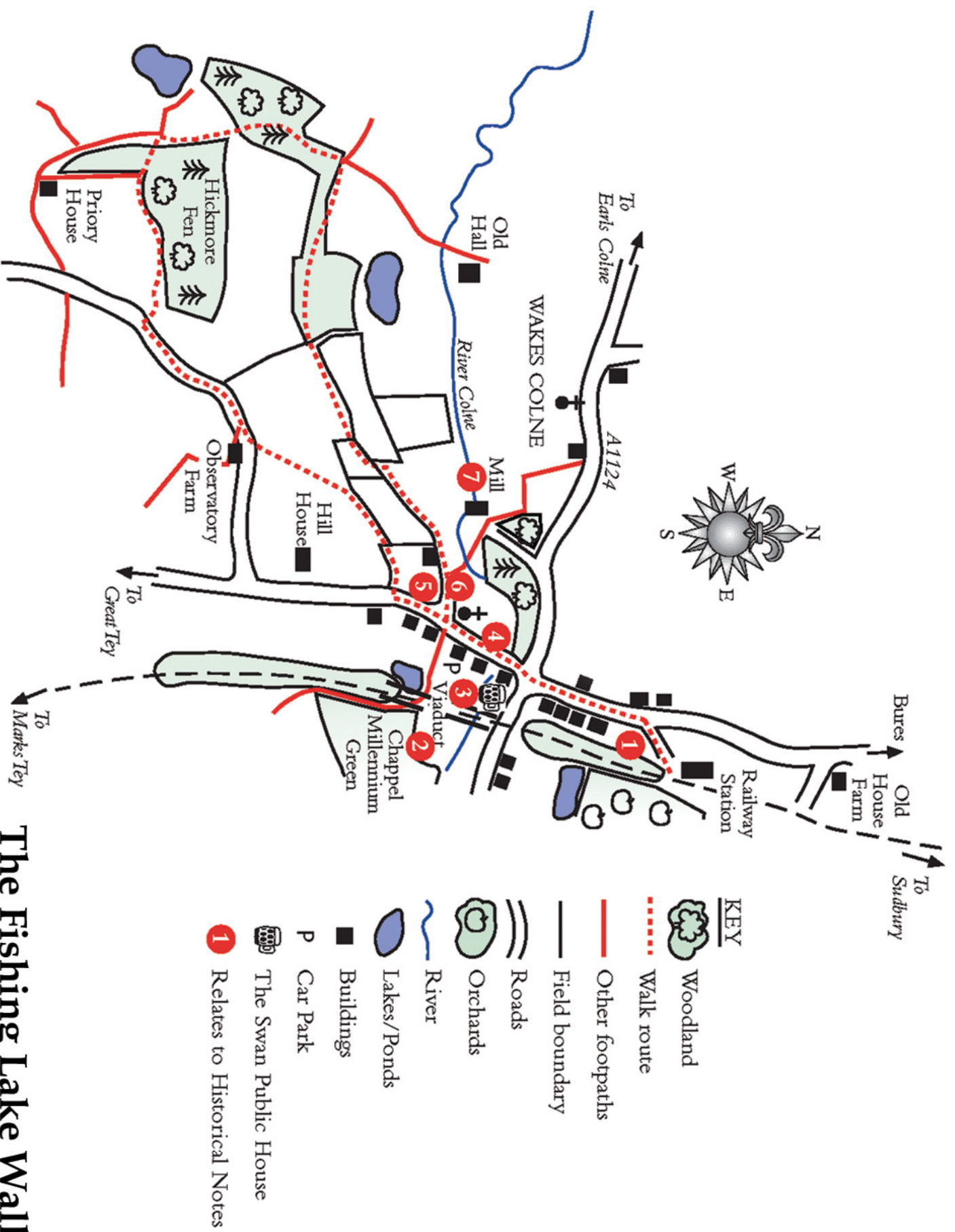
or

Chappel Parish Clerk: parishclerk@chappel.org;

or on the

Essex County Council website:

www.essexhighways.org/tell-us/public-rights-of-way-issues



The Fishing Lake Walk



The Fishing Lake Walk

(approx. 2.75mils, 4.4.km; numbers refer to Historical Notes)

On leaving Chappel and Wakes Colne station and the East Anglian Railway Museum, follow Station Approach until it joins Station Road at the T junction. Turn left and follow Station Road (past the previous site of a war time fuel dump (1), until it joins the main Colchester Road, A1124. Turn slightly left towards the Viaduct (2), taking care as you cross the road and then continue to the right-hand side of the Post Office, along The Street. After crossing the River Colne, and past The Swan Inn (3), continue until just past the school and take the lane to the right past Raynhams. Follow this lane, which is tarmacked at first and passes in front of St Barnabas Church (4), the old cricket pitch (5), and Viaduct Farm (6), before becoming a grassy and then a gravel footpath, with farm buildings on your left and the site of an old water mill (7) to your right.



The marker post indicates that the path continues ahead with the hedge on your left. Cross the dog-friendly stile and follow the waymarked route through two or three gates, the last of which leads into a field planted with willows which gives on to the fishing lake. Keeping this to your right, go through a gate onto a board walk and emerge onto a field along a log path. The footpath follows the edge of a field, often with sheep grazing under several large oak trees and is joined by a path from Old Hall Farm on the right which crosses at a right angle. At this point, turn left, through the gate and follow the path which is bounded by woodland to the left and fencing to the right.

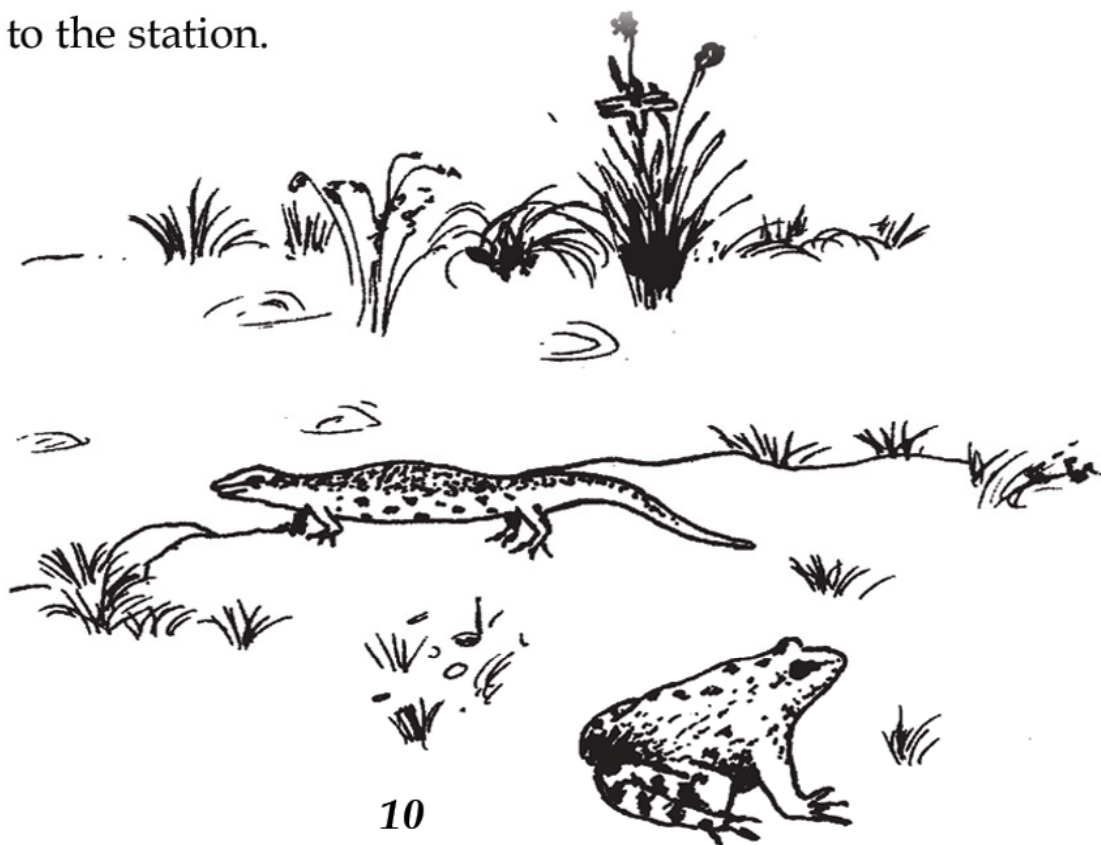
The path gradually starts to climb, whilst at the same time entering a mature wood. Eventually the woodland on the right gives way to a hedge of large trees with a field on the other side.



Shortly afterwards a path crosses from the field on the right and, at this point, turn left onto the path through the wood. Descend to cross a wooden bridge with handrail and ascend by a steep set of steps with handrail.

At the top emerge into a field. The route is straight ahead, with the wood on the left and an arable field to the right. At the end of the path, you reach a tarmacked lane, Oak Road. Turn left and follow the course of the lane just until you reach a large house and hedge on your right. Turn left through a gate following a footpath sign pointing across a field. Follow the direction of the sign, cross the field and walk downhill with a hedge straight ahead, turning right, until you reach a gate at the left of the field boundary facing the farm buildings. After passing through the gate turn right, keeping the hedge on your right, and follow the path to a stile.

After crossing the stile take care as you emerge onto a tarmacked road. Cross the road and turn left. Follow the course of the road, The Street, which brings you back to the main Colchester Road and Station Road ahead, leading to the station.





Historical Notes

1. The Site of a Fuel Dump

There was a WW2 fuel dump to the east of Station Road, replaced in the 1980s and 1990s by several houses with a footway. Aviation fuel was unloaded from railway tankers on the embankment to storage tanks below. At its height in 1943 it was the supply point for up to 30 airfields in the surrounding area and was dealing with around 100 fuel trains every quarter, equivalent to almost one a day. The station at Earls Colne provided the ammunition and bomb store for the same area and dealt with approximately 100,000 tons of bombs per quarter at its peak.

2. The Viaduct

Designed and built by Peter Bruff, the viaduct took two years to build and was completed in 1849. It cost £32,000 and is the second largest brick structure in Britain. The overall length is 1,000 feet and its 32 arches of 6 million bricks carry the railway 70 feet above the ground at its highest point. The viaduct and the railway line formed part of a Grade II listed Second World War defensive line which stretched from Tollesbury in the South to Kings Lynn in the North. Artillery pill boxes and concrete anti-tank obstructions, including spigot mortar gun emplacements, still stand around the river, under the viaduct and on either side of the Colchester Road (see on-site sign WW2 Defence noticeboard).

3. The Swan Inn and Raynhams

The Swan Inn, Grade II listed, dates from 1350 and Raynhams, which was a shop during the 1960s, would have originally been single storey; a second storey was added by extending the vertical timbers and raising the roof timbers. On the left between the school and Raynhams is the entrance to Chappel village green (see Poppy Trail noticeboard) which leads on to the Millennium Green, established in 2000, with 14 acres for leisure and wildlife.



4. St Barnabas Church, Chappel

This Anglican church, recorded in 1285 in the village of Pontisbright and consecrated in 1382, was originally a chapel in the Parish of Great Tey, from which it split in 1534, giving the name of Chappel to the village. It is a Grade I listed building.

5. The Site of The Old Cricket Pitch

Looking at the field today it is hard to believe that it once served as a cricket pitch. In fact, in its heyday the pitch was in little better condition. Due to the length of the grass scoring a four was virtually impossible, the home team, therefore, became adept at scoring sixes, a tradition which exists to this day with the annual award of the sixes cup given to the scorer of the most sixes in a season. The current Cricket Club is located at Inworth Lane, Wakes Colne.

6. Viaduct Farm

Previously home to Marjorie Allingham, the writer of crime novels. In the 1940s she wrote *The Oaken Heart* about a fictional village of Pontisbright (aka Chappel). The book took the form of a letter to Americans to tell them about life in wartime Britain.

7. The Old Water Mill

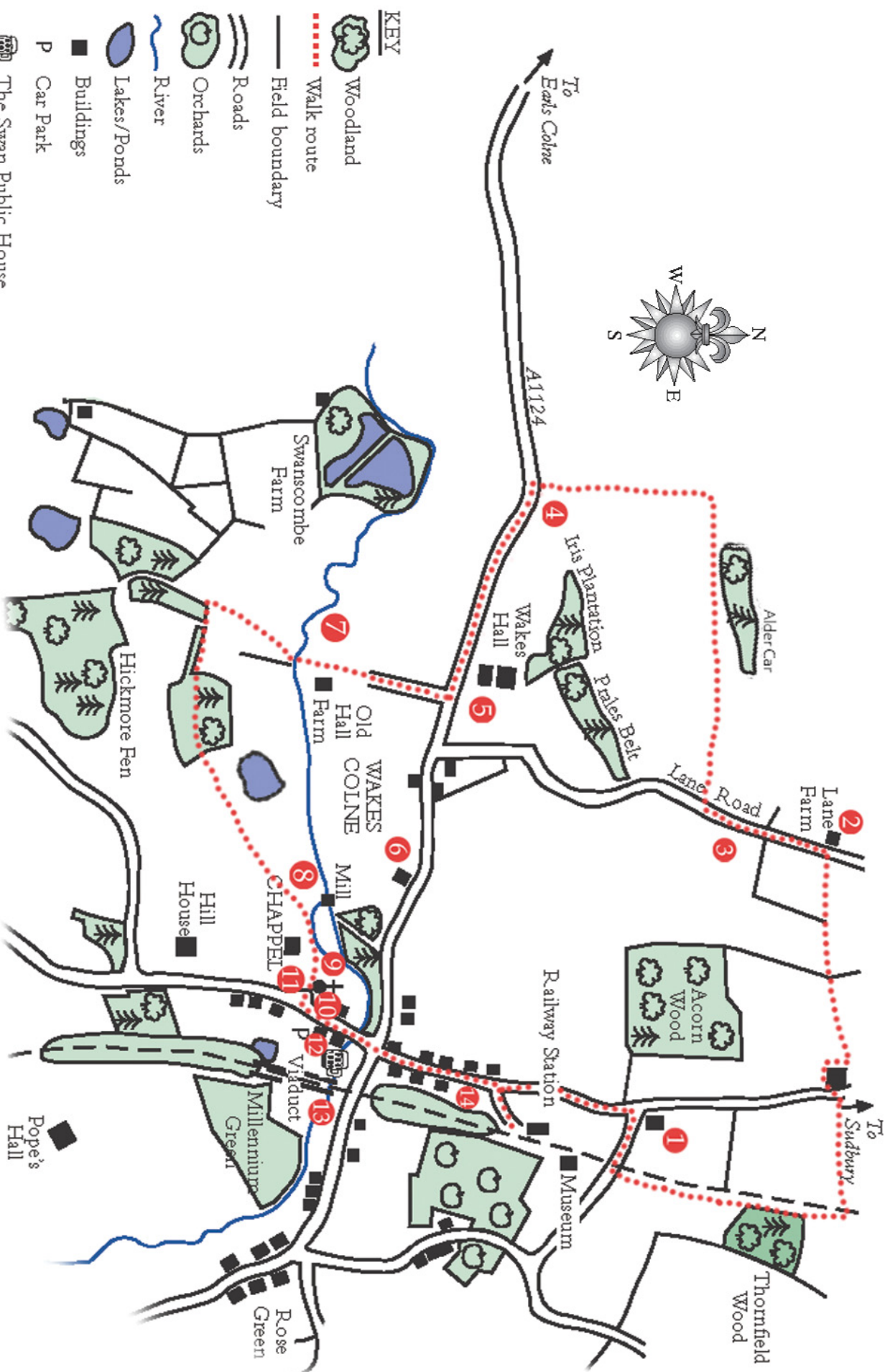
There has been a mill on this site since the 11th century and mention is made of one in the Domesday Book. The mill stands at the point of highest drop on the Colne. From the 16th century until 1719 it was used for fulling cloth, thereafter for oil crushing and from 1894 for corn grinding. The present mill building was constructed in 1850. The mill ceased functioning in 1974 but was also the site of a coal yard until the early years of the millennium.



Notes



- KEY**
- Woodland
 - Walk route
 - Field boundary
 - Roads
 - Orchards
 - River
 - Lakes/Ponds
 - Buildings
 - Car Park
 - The Swan Public House
 - 1 Relates to Historical Notes



The Tyburn Hill Walk



Tyburn Hill Walk

(approx. 4mils, 6.45km; numbers refer to Historical Notes)

On leaving Chappel and Wakes Colne station at the junction of Station Road and Station Approach head north on the footpath signed Whistle Walk. Continue up the path with the hedge and road on your left and a fence on your right for approximately 200 yards. At the junction with Spring Gardens Road and with Old House Farm (1) opposite, turn right and walk along the road for about 50 yards. Cross the railway bridge, from which there is a good view of the station and countryside beyond.

Turn left onto the footpath and down several steps. Proceed straight ahead with the hedge and railway line to your left and two arable fields on the right. Continue to Thornfield Wood ahead, and at its entrance follow the board walk through the wood to the junction. Turn left and cross the railway line, taking care to look right and left for trains which pass every half hour. The path then descends and by a boardwalk crosses a ditch and goes up to an arable field. Walk across this in a westerly direction and emerge down a slope at the side of Bures Rd.

Cross the road with care and turn slightly left to take the footpath as signed around two sides of a house and garden. Turn left at the field and continue westwards down the track. At the right-hand side of the waymark take the narrow grassy path between the fence and the hedge. At the end, turn right and follow the path marked public footpath straight across the arable field in the direction of the electricity pole, with one oak tree on your right. Continue across the next field to Lane Rd.

Turn left at Lane Rd and follow the road past Lane Farm (2) south for approximately 250 yards over a humpback bridge (3) and along the road to a public footpath sign on the right.



Take the footpath west across the arable field for approximately 250 yards towards Alder Car, a stretch of wood on your right. Keep left on the footpath and continue downhill, passing holiday lodges on your right. Cross the narrow, tarmacked road to the lodges to the grass footpath opposite and proceed south along this path, ignoring the old stile to your left in about 50 yards.

Before the metal gate leading to the A1124 turn left onto a wide grassy footpath between the fence and the hedge up Tyburn Hill (4), east for approximately 150 yards. Just before the wrought iron gate leading into Wakes Hall Park (private) turn right and pass through the gap in the hedge to exit onto the footway just north of the Wakes Colne sign abutting the A1124. Turn left and proceed for approximately 75 yards along the footway next to the A1124 passing in front of ('new') Wakes Hall (5).

At the bus stop cross the busy A1124 to a broad track opposite, noting the view of Wakes Colne Church (6) and follow this south for 100 yards to Old House Farm (7). Keep to the right of the farmhouse and pass through the metal gate(s), following a concrete track. Cross the boarded bridge over the River Colne and bear right across the field, taking care to respect livestock, to a small metal gate. In approximately 25 yards cross a narrow concrete bridge over a ditch and walk straight ahead towards the wood, then bear left to keep on the footpath keeping the fishing lake on your left. Walk on the wooden planks to the metal gate.

Proceed eastwards across the wooden boardwalk keeping the lake on your left. Continue on the footpath through the field planted with willow trees to a gate. Keeping the hedge on your left, proceed through another field then bear left at the gate. With a view of Wakes Colne Mill (8) on your left, continue across the field to a gate and the dog-friendly stile. Walk past a barn on your right straight ahead to where the path reaches a gravel drive with a laurel hedge on your left belonging to Viaduct Farm (9).



Continue past St Barnabas Church (10) and the site of the old cricket pitch (11) to Raynhams (12) at the junction with The Street, noting the view of the viaduct ahead (13), near the Millennium Green.

Cross the road with care at the corner to the short footway opposite (with information about the Poppy Trail) and proceed north along The Street, past The Swan Inn on your right (with information about WW2 trail at the back near the viaduct). At Chappel Corner, with Wakes Colne Post Office and store on your right, cross the very busy A1124 at the crossing and proceed with care around the corner off the footway, up Station Road, past the site of the old fuel dump (14), and back up to Station Approach, where the walk ends in the car park of Chappel and Wakes Colne station, which is also home to the East Anglian Railway Museum, with Platform 2 Café open on certain days.

Historical Notes

1. Old House Farm

One of many fine timber framed buildings in the area. Constructed mainly of oak, and unusually also containing some elm, in the 14th century.

2. Lane Farm

Another of the area's fine medieval timber framed buildings. It was once the home of the Lay family, several of whom are buried at Wakes Colne Church.

3. Bridge Number Two

The humpback bridge in Lane Road was built to carry traffic over the Colne Valley Railway. Bridge Number One in Bures Road can be seen to the east.



4. Tyburn Hill

This new right of way, opened in 2022, offers safe passage within the side of the hedge abutting the busy A1124, and lovely views of the surrounding landscape. To the south of the road, the fields show evidence of strip farming. The western view looks towards White Colne where a tombstone in White Colne Church bears witness to a bizarre accident which occurred in the 19th century when an elephant trod on the man leading it, whilst a travelling circus was passing through the village.

5. 'New' Wakes Hall

Completed around 1838 by Henry Skingley, a maltster and brewer. Its notable owners include Charles Page-Wood, whose sister was mistress to the Irish nationalist Charles Stewart Parnell. A later occupant, Sir Evelyn Wood, won a Victoria Cross during the Indian mutiny and was a close friend of Lord Baden Powell. The latter visited the Hall and used its grounds to demonstrate how it was possible for cavalry to cross open ground without commands being given. This equine link continued with the renting of the Hall to Colonel Sir Mike Ansell, who despite being blind, designed the Horse of the Year Show. In 1947 the house was purchased by Joe Percival who had been farm foreman since 1913. In 1962 it was sold to the Stars Organisation for Spastics and became a care home for residents with physical and learning disabilities. In 2016 it was purchased by Nicholas Percival, grandson of Joe Percival. Since then, several leisure and recreational lodges have been built and there has been a refurbishment of the Hall and development of 22 properties in landscaped grounds.

6. All Saints Church, Wakes Colne

The present church dates from the 12th century, however, there are records of tithes being paid as early as 1085, so there was presumably an earlier church on the site. The bells, re-hung in 1787, include one cast at Aldgate in London in 1440.



7. The Site of 'Old' Wakes Hall

Built in approximately 1350, by 1730 it was recorded as being in a partly burned state and was finally demolished in 1825. The Wake family, who gave their name to the village, could trace their ancestry back to the Saxon rebel Hereward the Wake. One illustrious member of the family was the Fair Maid of Kent, who in 1380 took the Black Prince as her second husband, but there are no records of them visiting the parish.

8. The Old Water Mill

There has been a mill on this site since the 11th century and mention is made of one in the Domesday Book. The mill stands at the point of highest drop on the Colne. From the 16th century until 1719 it was used for fulling cloth, thereafter for oil crushing and from 1894 for corn grinding. The present mill building was constructed in 1850. The mill ceased functioning in 1974 but was also the site of a coal yard until the early years of the millennium.

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This Anglican church, recorded in 1285 in the village of Pontisbright and consecrated in 1382, was originally a chapel in the Parish of Great Tey, from which it split in 1534, giving the name of Chappel to the village. It is a Grade I listed building.

11. The Site of The Old Cricket Pitch

Looking at the field today it is hard to believe that it once served as a cricket pitch. In fact, in its heyday the pitch was in little better condition.



Due to the length of the grass scoring a four was virtually impossible, the home team, therefore, became adept at scoring sixes, a tradition which exists to this day with the annual award of the sixes cup given to the scorer of the most sixes in a season. The current Cricket Club is located at Inworth Lane, Wakes Colne.

12. Raynhams and The Swan Inn

Raynhams, which was a shop during the 1960s (like The Swan Inn, Grade II listed, which dates from 1350), would have originally been single storey; a second storey was added by extending the vertical timbers and raising the roof timbers. Opposite Raynhams is the entrance to Chappel village green (see Poppy Trail noticeboard) which leads on to the Millennium Green, established in 2000, with 14 acres for leisure and wildlife.

13. The Viaduct

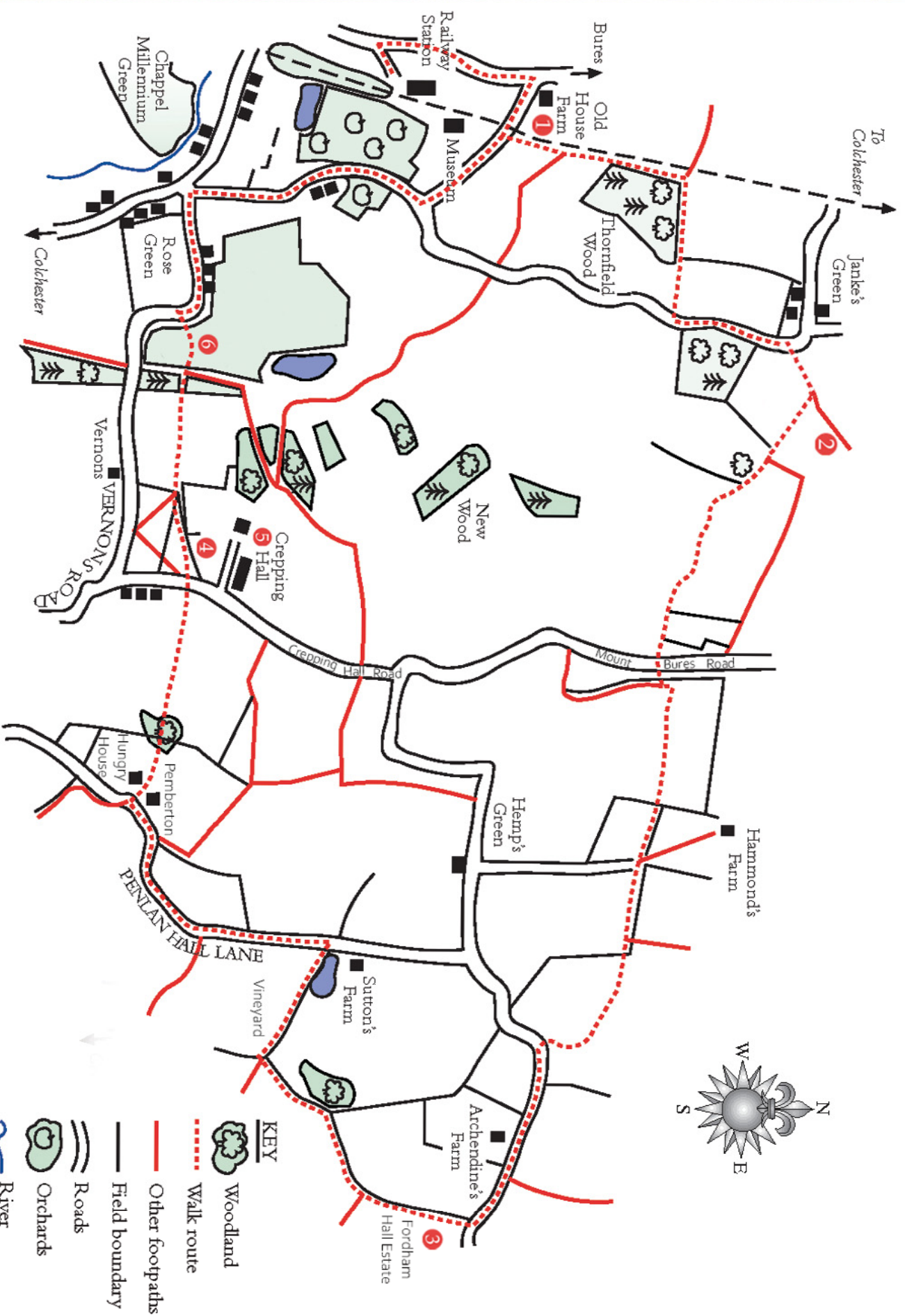
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14. The Site of a Fuel Dump

There was a WW2 fuel dump to the east of Station Road, replaced in the 1980s and 1990s by several houses with a footway. Aviation fuel was unloaded from railway tankers on the embankment to storage tanks below. At its height in 1943 it was the supply point for up to 30 airfields in the surrounding area and was dealing with around 100 fuel trains every quarter, equivalent to almost one a day. The station at Earls Colne provided the ammunition and bomb store for the same area and dealt with approximately 100,000 tons of bombs per quarter at its peak.





The 'Liberty Belle' Walk



The 'Liberty Belle' Walk

(approx. 5.5mls, 8.9km; numbers refer to Historical Notes)

Leave Chappel and Wakes Colne station and at the end of Station Approach turn right onto the marked footpath Whistle Walk. Walk this for about 200 yards until it meets Spring Gardens Road, opposite Old House Farm (1) and turn right. Cross the railway bridge and then turn immediately left down steps with handrail to follow a path alongside a hedge next to the railway track and by the side of two arable fields.

When you have reached Thornfield Wood straight ahead, the path is boarded at first as you go forward. At the far end of the wood, where there is a crossing with the railway line, turn right and continue along the path just inside the edge of the wood. Follow this through to the end, emerging on a grassy path, through a gate and on to Boarded Barn Road. Turn left, past the wood on your right, follow the road and, as the road bears to the left, turn to your right onto an arable field. Head towards the adjacent corner by taking the footpath around the field to reach that corner. You may notice ahead of you in the distance the small, round, white observatory (2). Once you reach the corner of the field, follow the track straight to the road.

On reaching the road, go straight across and over a stile into a narrow paddock. Go straight ahead, over another stile and planked bridge across the ditch. Turn left for a few yards along the field edge. Then turn right at the field corner and continue to follow the field edge with the hedge and ditch on your left.

On your left, you will reach another planked bridge. Cross this and go through a kissing gate and continue along the field edge with the hedge on your right to the end of the field and pass through another kissing gate to reach the roadway. Turn right, over an old cattle-grid and then turn immediately left.



Continue in the same general direction with the hedge on the left until the path comes down to a stream. Cross the stream and proceed diagonally across the arable field in front of you – the path is a narrow track heading slightly right towards a small, hedged, gas enclosure, which does not come into view immediately.

On reaching the road, turn left. Follow the road, passing 'Archendines Farm' on the right for approx. 400 yards. Turn right through a gate onto Fordham Hall Estate (3). Ahead of you, the grass path forks – take the left wide, grassy path and follow for half a mile. You will see a small bridge on the right and then a gate, ignore both. Walk on a little further, passing a large nesting box, to a gap on the right by a seat.

Take this right turn and continue across a planked bridge. The vineyard will be on your left and Suttons Farm will be on your right. Continue to the road and turn left into Penlan Hall Lane. Follow the road for about 400 yards and take the footpath on the right which is situated between 'Pemberton' and 'Hungry House'.

Follow the path and it will open-up to a large field. Continue straight ahead. On reaching the road, go straight across and through a gate into a grazing field. On your right, is the Saxon site of Crepinia (4) and in the far distance, Crepping Hall (5). Continue across the field and aim for where the field tapers to a point; here you go through a gate. Keep the line of conifers to your right. When the line of trees end, proceed on downhill.

At the bottom of the hill, enter a small wood. Cross the stream on a plank bridge. Go straight ahead, along the edge of the field to the gate. This is the site of the 'Liberty Belle' (6). Go through the gate onto Vernons Road. Turn right and follow Vernons Road ahead and then turn right into Spring Gardens Road.



Follow the road and at the T junction, turn left to bring you back to the railway bridge you crossed near the start of the walk, go over it and, at the T junction, turn left onto Whistle Walk, following it to end where it merges on to Station Approach.

Historical Notes

1. Old House Farm

One of the many fine timber framed buildings in the area. Constructed mainly of oak and unusually also containing some elm, in the 14th century.

2. The Munday-Sayer Observatory

This working observatory is used by the North Essex Astronomical Society.

3. Fordham Hall Estate

A gift from an anonymous donor, the Fordham Hall Estate boasts a network of 19km (12 miles) of unsurfaced paths allowing visitors to explore the estate. It is eastern England's largest woodland creation site.

Around a quarter of a million trees have been planted alongside the meandering River Colne on what was once arable farmland. Alongside young woodland there are also flower-rich meadows, which are awash with colour during the summer months. With such varied habitats, it's not surprising that Fordham Hall Estate is brimming with a diverse range of wildlife.

For more information, visit woodlandtrust.org.uk

4. Crepinia

This is the site of a now vanished Saxon village which was recorded as existing in 1066 in the Domesday Book. The reason for its abandonment is not known.

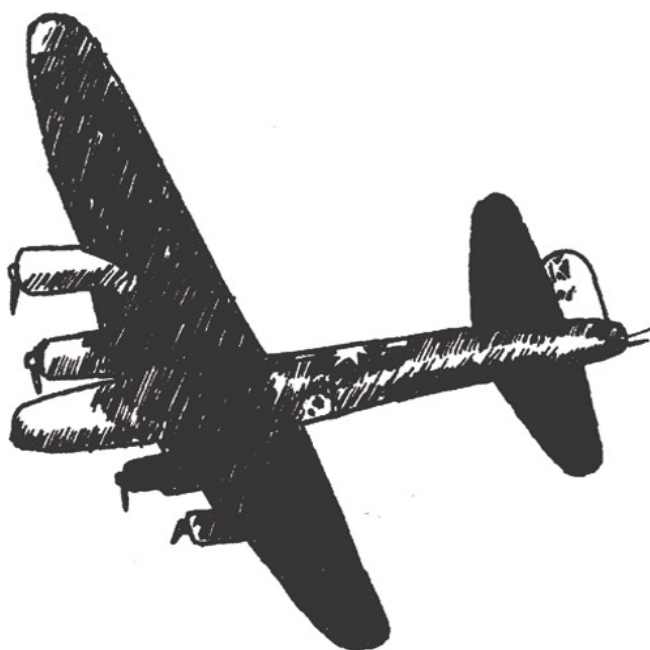


5. Crepping Hall

This is one of three moated houses in Wakes Colne. Parts of the house date back to medieval times although the origins of the site were probably at the time of the Norman Conquest. The manor of Crepping, and its moated hall, were given to Alberic de Vere, husband of William the Conqueror's half-sister. The de Vere family later obtained the title of Earls of Oxford and were closely associated with nearby Earls Colne Priory and Castle Hedingham.

6. The Site of the 'Liberty Belle'

The place where a USAF B17 Flying Fortress, the 'Liberty Belle' crashed in 1943.

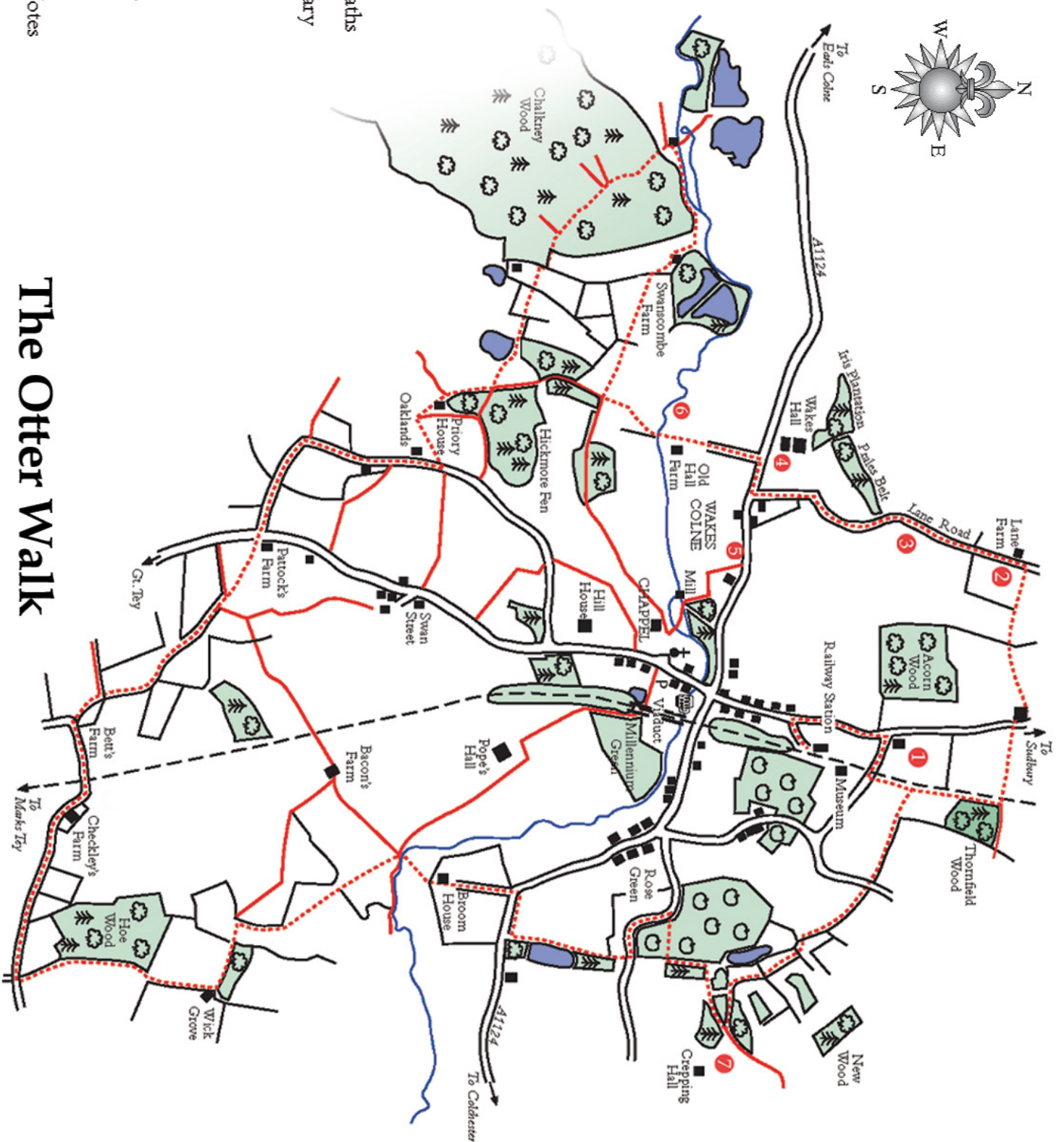




Notes



- KEY**
- Woodland
 - Walk route
 - Other footpaths
 - Field boundary
 - Roads
 - Orchards
 - River
 - Lakes/Ponds
 - Buildings
 - Relates to Historical Notes



The Otter Walk



The Otter Walk

(approx. 9mils, 15.3km; numbers refer to Historical Notes)

Leave Chappel and Wakes Colne station and at the end of Station Approach turn right onto Whistle Walk footpath. After about 200 yards at the end of the path, opposite Old House Farm (1), turn right into Spring Gardens Road. Cross the railway bridge and turn left down the steps and proceed straight ahead along a grassy path with the railway track to your left and an arable field to your right. When you reach Thornfield Wood, follow a boardwalk through the wood.

At the far end of the wood turn left, taking care to cross the railway track between Sudbury and Marks Tey to descend some steps and cross a small stream by a planked bridge. Emerge up into a large arable field and head straight ahead across the field and descend towards Bures Road with a cottage opposite. Cross the road and follow the signed path around the outside of two sides of a garden. Then turn left, at a waymark, and go along the field edge.

At the right-hand side of the waymark take the narrow grassy path between the fence and the hedge. At the end, turn right and follow the path marked public footpath straight across the arable field in the direction of the electricity pole, with one oak tree on your right. Continue across the next field to Lane Rd.

Turn left to follow Lane Road, past Lane Farm (2) and over the humpback bridge (3) to the main Colchester Road (A1124). Turn right along the pavement for about 100 yards. In front of the 'new' Wakes Hall (4) cross the road and follow a broad track down towards Old Hall Farm, with a view of Wakes Colne Church to your left (5).



Pass through the farmyard with the modern farmhouse and buildings on your left. The fields around here were the site of the 'old' Wakes Hall (6).

Cross over the River Colne and bear slightly right through the meadows, passing through a pedestrian gate and crossing a bridge, heading towards the corner of a hedge and copse, passing mature oaks. At the hedge corner you come to a gate. Do not go through it but turn sharp right and follow a very faint path across the grass to a waymark by a field gate in a fence. Continue ahead in the same general direction - aiming to the left of some oak trees to reach a gate in a hedge under an oak tree. Turn right for a few yards and then left in front of the garden of Swanscombe Farm to follow a path that takes you along the northern edge of Chalkney Wood.

Go through an open yard at Chalkney Mill. Now turn left and, with the kennels on your right, enter Chalkney Wood. Follow the uphill woodland track and bear left at a junction of your track with two broad tracks from the right. Continue on a broad track ignoring paths to left and right. Leave the wood and go right and immediately left down a narrow sunken path to a bridge and gate. Ascend towards a gate in the hedge at the top of the field. Continue ahead with an irrigation reservoir on your right.

At the far side of the field enter an old green lane and turn right past Priory House and through the side of their garden. The green lane becomes a tarmacked track which you follow to its junction with Oak Road. Turn right to follow Oak Road to Chappel Road. Go across and then straight ahead along a tarmacked track with Pattocks Farm on your left. The tarmacked track becomes a broad track and then a green lane.



Leave the lane by turning into a field and continue ahead with a hedge on your left until you reach Checkley's Lane. Turn left and follow this road for half a mile to reach a T junction. Turn left on a cart-track towards Hoe Wood. On reaching Hoe Wood, you have a choice of routes.

You can either continue to follow the footpath with the wood on your left or enter the wood and follow a path roughly parallel to the wood edge, turning right at a T junction to rejoin the footpath.

At this point you have another choice. Either follow the definitive path, as illustrated on the map, and go straight ahead along a wide track, past Wick Farm and turn left at the corner of a small wood; or follow a permissive path along the north side of the wood and then right to the ditch and wood to regain the path. Then, in each case, go down to a ditch and up to a field corner. Now go right with a hedge on your left, to another field corner then diagonally across the field. Look out for a gap on your left. Descend a steep bank to a bridge to enter a large grass field. Go straight ahead. When you reach the brow of the hill you will see the bridge over the River Colne that you need to aim for.

Go through a gate and cross the bridge and then turn right through a gate into the adjoining paddock. Turn left and proceed to a gate. Go through it and up the drive of Broom House to the main road. Take great care as you cross the A1124 to go into the field opposite by a stile. Turn right and at the field corner turn left and walk out to Vernons Road.

Turn left, follow the road, then, when the road goes left, turn right through a pedestrian gate to head downhill on a grassy path. At the bottom of the hill by a stream turn left until you reach a footbridge. Cross the bridge to enter the parkland at the rear of Crepping Hall (7).



Go uphill with a plantation on your left and right. At the top of the left-hand plantation, turn left and go downhill with the same plantation on your left and another to your right. Continue down the slope to the bottom. Turn right and proceed with a hedge of mainly hawthorn on your right and horse paddocks on your left. Turn left to leave these water meadows by a footbridge and double stile. Turn right to reach Boarded Barn Road. Cross the road to follow a field edge path.

At the far side of the field turn left to rejoin the path beside the railway you started on. At the end climb the steps and turn right over the railway bridge. Continue along Spring Gardens Road to the end and turn left onto Whistle Walk to retrace your steps to Station Approach.

Historical Notes

1. Old House Farm

One of many fine timber framed buildings in the area. Constructed mainly of oak, and unusually also containing some elm, in the 14th century.

2. Lane Farm

Another of the area's fine medieval timber framed buildings. It was once the home of the Lay family, several of whom are buried at Wakes Colne Church.

3. Bridge Number Two

The humpback bridge in Lane Road was built to carry traffic over the Colne Valley Railway. Bridge Number One in Bures Road can be seen to the east.



4. 'New' Wakes Hall

Completed around 1838 by Henry Skingley, a maltster and brewer. Its notable owners include Charles Page-Wood, whose sister was mistress to the Irish nationalist Charles Stewart Parnell. A later occupant, Sir Evelyn Wood, won a Victoria Cross during the Indian mutiny and was a close friend of Lord Baden Powell. The latter visited the Hall and used its grounds to demonstrate how it was possible for cavalry to cross open ground without commands being given. This equine link continued with the renting of the Hall to Colonel Sir Mike Ansell, who despite being blind, designed the Horse of the Year Show. In 1947 the house was purchased by Joe Percival who had been farm foreman since 1913. In 1962 it was sold to the Stars Organisation for Spastics and became a care home for residents with physical and learning disabilities. In 2016 it was purchased by Nicholas Percival, grandson of Joe Percival. Since then, several leisure and recreational lodges have been built and there has been a refurbishment of the Hall and development of 22 properties in landscaped grounds.

5. All Saints Church, Wakes Colne

The present church dates from the 12th century, however, there are records of tithes being paid as early as 1085, so there was presumably an earlier church on the site. The bells, re-hung in 1787, include one cast at Aldgate in London in 1440.

6. The Site of 'Old' Wakes Hall

Built in approximately 1350, by 1730 it was recorded as being in a partly burned state and was finally demolished in 1825. The Wake family, who gave their name to the village, could trace their ancestry back to the Saxon rebel Hereward the Wake. One illustrious member of the family was the Fair Maid of Kent, who in 1380 took the Black Prince as her second husband, but there are no records of them visiting the parish.



7. Crepping Hall

This is one of three moated houses in Wakes Colne. Parts of the house date back to medieval times although the origins of the site were probably at the time of the Norman Conquest. The manor of Crepping, and its moated hall, were given to Alberic de Vere, husband of William the Conqueror's half-sister. The de Vere family later obtained the title of Earls of Oxford and were closely associated with nearby Earls Colne Priory and Castle Hedingham.





Notes



Agricultural Notes

The Colne Valley landscape, through which the walks pass, is influenced by the settlement pattern and farming, both of which have evolved over the centuries. The type of agriculture practised has developed for many reasons. The main one being the interaction of climate and the soils found in the area. Superimposed on these are the human factors, such as ownership and farming policy, which is changing. Following Brexit, the acreage payment system that supported agriculture is being phased out and new national schemes providing payment for environmental benefits is being introduced. In time this may change the landscape with more trees and features that encourage wildlife.

However, the crops which can be successfully grown are still dependent on climate and soil. The east of England has, on average, a low rainfall compared with most of the country. Wakes Colne and Chappel receive on average about 18 ins p.a. Climate change has seen weather patterns become more extreme with longer hot, dry periods and with spells of heavy rain during autumn and winter. Familiar crops may change to suit these conditions.

The soils have evolved over thousands of years since the last ice age, when the area was covered by the southern extremity of the ice sheet which spread over most of northern Europe. As the ice melted valleys were formed. The Colne and Stour Valleys and the smaller side valleys are the result of this process and have dissected the clay plateau left behind by the sheet. The clay soils are, therefore, mainly found on the plateau between the valleys, whose sides are eroded to expose outcrops of older sands, gravels and clays. The recently deposited material on the higher land is known as boulder clay and the most fertile and easily worked soils contain chalky deposits brought down by the ice from the chalk hills to the northwest.



In the valley bottoms are alluvial deposits of fine loamy soils moved downwards from the valley sides over many years by water erosion. In some areas where drainage has been difficult a few pockets of peaty soil have developed.

Woodland has tended to be established on poorer land, where farming over the years has proved difficult. However, wealthier farmers will have at times established plantations on better land for sporting and amenity reasons.

Livestock and mixed farming are found in the valley, based mainly on the water meadows beside the river. However, the steeper parts of the valley have favoured smaller fields and, together with the gravely soils, have encouraged more grassland than on the clay uplands. Dairy herds were once seen, but have been replaced with sheep and beef cattle. There are few examples of intensive livestock left in the valley, although free-range chickens can be found at Freechooks Farm, Wakes Colne, and pigs and turkeys at Pattocks Farm, Chappel. Sheep are kept at Bacons Farm Chappel. Commercial orchards and soft fruit have now gone, replaced by arable crops. Horses and livery stables are now a common sight in the area. In plantations along the river, willows are grown for cricket bats.

On the boulder clays above the valley are the larger arable farms, such as Pattocks Farm, Chappel, Wakes Hall Farm and Suttons Farm, Fordham. These now grow mainly cereals, winter wheat and barley. Some of the better wheat may go for bread making, but most for animal feeds. Some barley will go to the maltster for beer making. Oilseed rape, with its brilliant display of yellow, flowers in May, and linseed, which appears like sheets of light blue water, flowers in June. These crops are grown for oil, which is used for cooking and industrial processes.



Winter beans are common, their blossom sweetening the air in June. Field beans are mainly used for animal feed, the peas grown on some farms are mainly for human consumption. Since the closure of Felsted sugar beet factory, less of this crop is found locally, although some still goes to Ipswich or Bury St Edmunds. Potatoes are grown for chip-making at nearby Fairfield's Farm, Wormingford, where a bio-digestion plant is fed by locally grown maize and rye.

The ownership and tenure of farms has changed significantly over the years. During WW2 much of the farming in Chappel and Wakes Colne was in the hands of one family who farmed over 2000 acres (800 hectares). Now much of this has been split up, to be added to other farms. Some land that has changed hands is managed on contract by farmers from outside the immediate area. Agriculture has had many ups and downs in prosperity over the years. When times were good, for example in the early 19th century and after WW2, houses and buildings were improved. At other times, for example in the 1930s, depressed conditions meant belt tightening and changes in ownership. Many new farm buildings were erected as farming became more mechanised and grants were available in the 1960s and 1970s. However, some traditional, black-boarded barns still survive.

With dry summers, farm reservoirs have been constructed to irrigate crops and fruit. These are normally licensed to extract water from neighbouring streams during the winter for summer use but are often designed to provide an income from fishing and provide habitat for wildlife as well.

The valley is very beautiful in its gentle way and is a fine example of a well-farmed lowland landscape, much appreciated by both residents and visitors. Much of the attraction is because of the centuries of farming and the livelihood that this has provided for generations of farming people.



Nature Notes

The two Parishes lie in the Colne Valley halfway between Colchester and Halstead. The Valley is broad bottomed with the river flowing through it on a general west-east course. There are gentle slopes up to the plateau between the Stour (to the north) and the Roman River (to the south). Maximum heights reach 70 metres on both sides of the Valley. There are some interesting side valleys. These add to the area's character and make any walk more undulating than you might expect. Ground conditions vary - there are damp meadows, boggy areas, dry gravelly slopes and areas of heavy clay. All this makes for a range of habitats to support and provide shelter for a wide variety of plants, animals, birds and insects.

The four walks go through or pass several woods which occupy this part of the Valley. The largest is Chalkney Wood, which along with Thornfield and Hoe Woods, have recently re-introduced coppicing. There are some other small plantations and copses, including Hickmore Fen, Acorn Wood, Prales Belt and Wolfney Wood, which was formerly much larger and extended to Oak Road.

Coppicing consists of cutting down trees to a 'stool', more or less at ground level. The resultant re-growth can be used for a variety of purposes (fencing, furniture, charcoal and firewood). The trees are cut in blocks or 'coupes' throughout the wood on a regular cycle. In each coupe, some trees are left as 'standards' to provide a supply of mature timber. Coppicing is a very ancient way of managing woods, probably dating back to the Stone Age. The practice has declined over the last 50-100 years as the demand for woodland products has reduced. However, it is now making a limited comeback as it is of great benefit to many plants and animals that have become dependent on the cycle of cutting.



Red Campion is often one of the first to re-appear. On the walks in springtime you will also see Primroses, Violets, Bluebells and Wood Anemones, and maybe hear Nightingales.

Chalkney Wood is particularly famed for its Bluebells. It is well worth diverting off the Otter Walk route along other tracks to see the great drifts of blue in May.

A bank and ditch often define the boundary of these woods. Traditionally, these banks would have had hurdles placed on top to keep livestock from eating coppice re-growth. Pollarded trees are also common and often defined ancient boundaries. Pollarding is another way of managing trees. They are cut at 6-15 feet above ground level, leaving a permanent trunk which sprouts in the same way as a coppice stool. The re-growth would be out of the reach of browsing animals. Look out for pollards on the walks, they still often define boundaries between parishes or old estates.

On the walks you will pass alongside some fine hedgerows. These, too, could have been managed by coppicing, pollarding or layering. The latter was a means of creating a stockproof fence by partly cutting through hedgerow plants and then laying them at an angle to the ground. Vertical stakes would be used to reinforce the whole effect.

The hedgerows you pass will be of a varying age. You can get an approximate age by counting the number of woody species in any 30-yard length; excluding plants such as Bramble and Ivy. The hedge will be about 100 years old for each species you count. In other words, if there are three species the hedge is about 300 years old. Like all such 'rules', it does not provide a definitive answer and needs to be supported by further research. It is, however, fun to do and opens our eyes to the different species we pass and the great age and variety of countryside features we can take for granted.



In the woodlands and hedgerows there are a great variety of trees and shrubs. Hawthorn is common in the hedgerows, with its white flowers and heady scent in April and May. It was considered unlucky to cut Hawthorn down or to bring its blossom indoors. You will also find Blackthorn, Hazel, Elder, Dogwood, Field Maple, Elm (usually dying back once it reaches a certain size). Scrambling through the taller hedgerow trees will be Ivy and Travellers' Joy (or Old Man's Beard) with its fluffy seed heads and thick stems. There are also Hops to be found.

Ash and Oak are common in both woods and hedgerows. Sweet Chestnut is found in Thornfield, Hoe and Chalkney Woods, and is often coppiced - examples are found in all three woods. You will also come across Holly and Sycamore. Alongside the River Colne or its tributary streams there is Alder and Willow, much of which is grown in plantations for the production of cricket bats, which are exported all over the world.

The Valley has a good range of wildlife. Badgers and Foxes are fairly common, while Otters and Water Voles have reappeared but are much harder to see. Rabbits and Grey Squirrels are very common, hares much scarcer. Deer, whilst secretive, are likely to be seen at dusk, and Muntjac are getting more common and bolder, frequently coming into gardens.

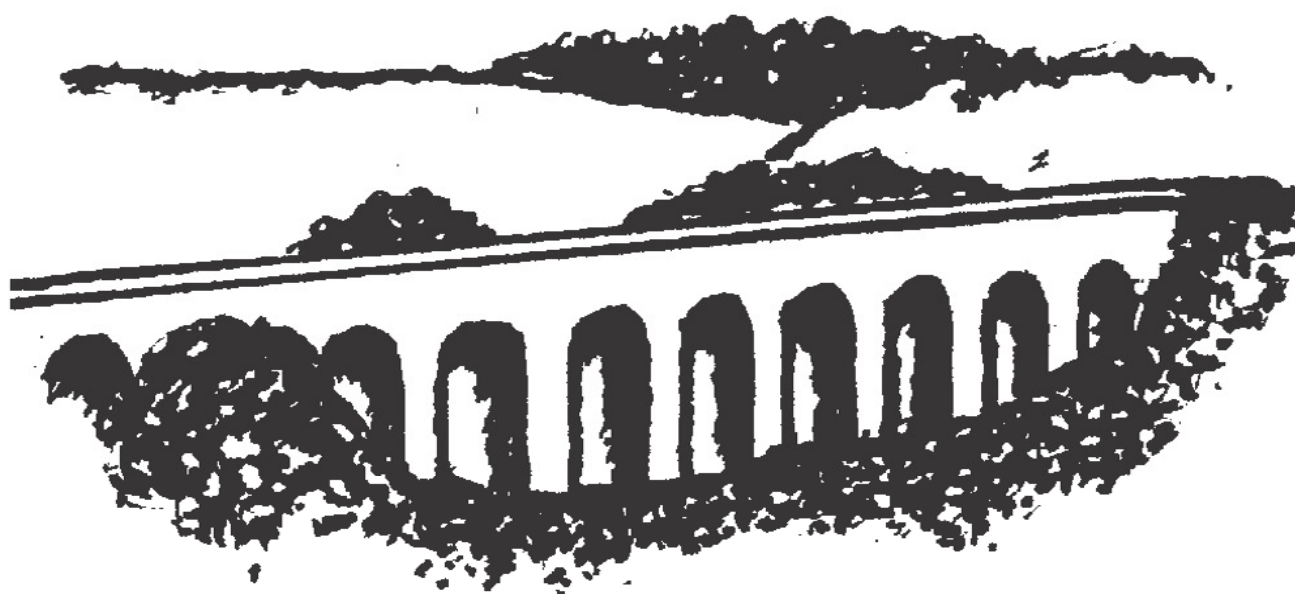
Birds are present in good numbers, encouraged by the range of habitats. Over 70 species have been seen through the seasons. Breeding birds include Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, and a good number of Warblers, such as Blackcap and Whitethroat. Watch out by the river and you may see the blue and orange flash of a Kingfisher. Cuckoos are still regular in the summer, while Turtle Doves are following the national decline and getting much rarer.



Some birds are increasing locally and nationally; you should see Buzzards over the woods, Little Egret along the river, and Red Kites are becoming more frequent overhead. Dusk along the water meadows are the best time and place to see Barn Owls.

Butterflies are well represented, with over 25 species around in summer. Among the less common species are White Admirals and Purple Hairstreaks, which, though hard to see may be spied in the Oaks of Chalkney Wood from late June.

Though much has changed in the last 50 years, our two Parishes retain much pleasure for resident and visitor alike. Strolling along on a bright sunny day with the call of the Skylark above you or the Yellowhammer sitting on a wire, crying 'A little bit of bread and no cheese' as you pass by, we are sure you, too, will be glad to be here.





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