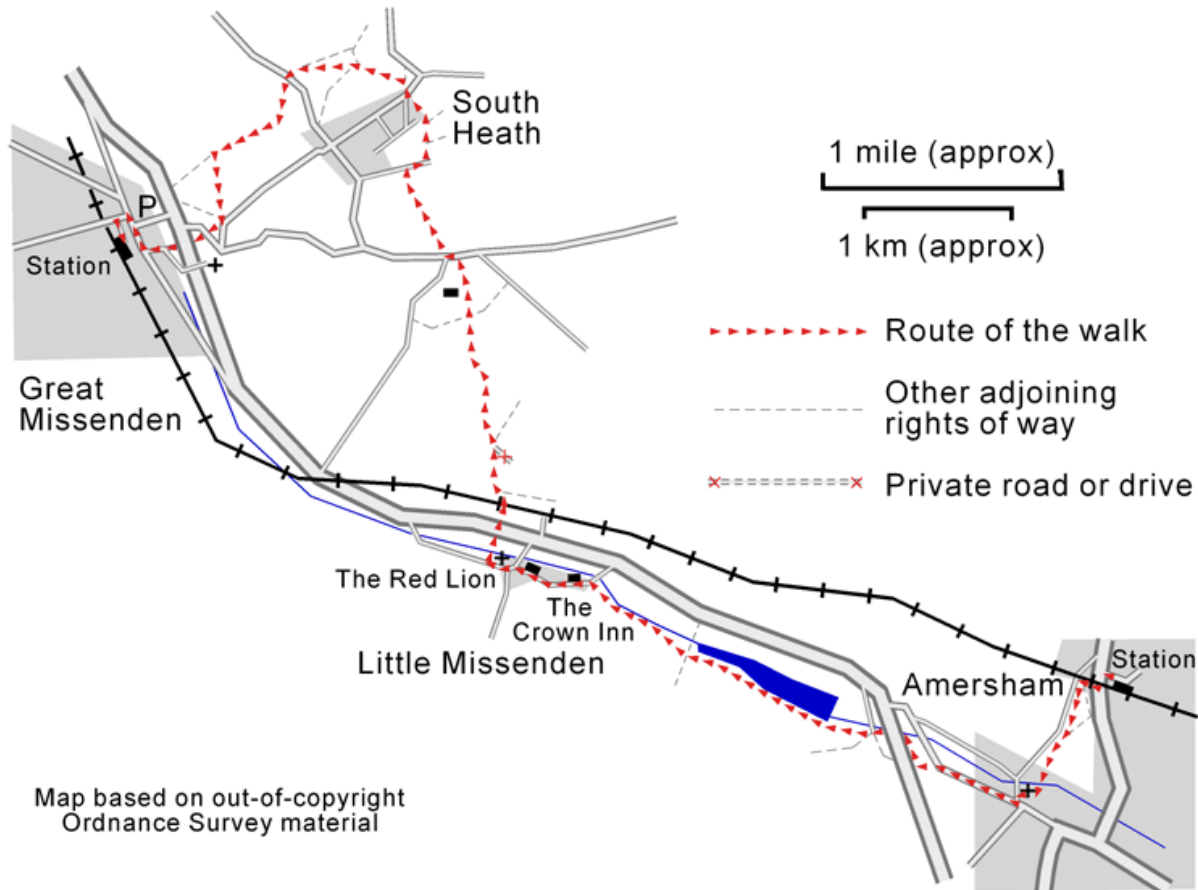


AMERSHAM TO GREAT MISSENDEN

A pleasant and varied walk, taking in Amersham Old Town, with its wealth of ancient and attractive buildings, the upper Misbourne Valley, secluded Little Missenden and a sampling of the Chilterns plateau, before descending to the valley again at Great Missenden.

Checked 2009



Distance

8 miles (13 km)

One steady climb of 200 feet (60 metres).

Travel

Amersham and Great Missenden are served by a frequent train service on the Chiltern Line between Marylebone and Aylesbury.

Amersham also has regular buses from Chesham, Hemel Hempstead and High Wycombe. Buses also run from Watford, Slough, Beaconsfield and Berkhamstead but there is no Sunday service on these routes.

There is a bus service between Great Missenden and High Wycombe.

There is a convenient car park (pay except on Sundays) in Links Road near the finish in Great Missenden.

Detailed travel information for the whole of this area is available from the Traveline South East website www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk or telephone 0871 200 22 33

Refreshments

There is a good choice of restaurants, cafes and pubs in Amersham-on-the-Hill and Old Amersham. Little Missenden has two pubs, The Crown Inn and the Red Lion (“no muddy boots, thank you”), and Great Missenden a number of pubs, cafes and restaurants.

There is a village shop in Little Missenden.

Please always be considerate about muddy boots in pubs etc; either take them off, or cover them up. Never eat or drink your own provisions on pub premises (including the garden, if there is one).

Ordnance Survey Map

This walk starts on the Ordnance Survey Explorer map 172, *Chiltern Hills East*, and one mile after Little Missenden goes on to map 181, *Chiltern Hills North*.

Route

Amersham-on-the-Hill grew up around the station on the Metropolitan Railway, opened in 1892, and was very much part of “Metro-land”.

The last edition of the book of that name, published by the railway company in 1932, advertises the new Weller Estate of 78 acres adjoining the station, “beautifully situated 500 feet above sea level”.

Houses ready for occupation were for sale at £875 with £25 deposit.

From Amersham Station, turn left and left again under the railway, cross the road by the traffic island, and take the enclosed path beside the railway embankment leading through a typical Chiltern beechwood to a road.

At the road turn left and after 20 yards take a path on the left which continues parallel with the road 500 yards downhill through the wood until you come to a tarmac path.

Go down the path, fork left at the bottom and turn right over, then alongside, the River Misbourne towards the church.

The Misbourne is a chalk stream that may dry up in periods of low rainfall, and this happened increasingly often as the twentieth century progressed, as the result of over abstraction of the high quality ground water. In 1990 it was declared one of the 20 worst affected rivers nationally and in 1997 a new pipeline was opened from the Colne Valley to Amersham pumping station, bringing water for the public supply from environmentally sustainable sources. Abstraction was then reduced at pumping stations in the Misbourne Valley, allowing groundwater levels to recover. We hope that you are now walking beside a living river.

The exterior of the parish church is Victorian - the result of the restoration of 1890. The interior is light and airy. Its chief glory is in the monuments, most of which are in the Drake Chapel - not normally open to the public.

Go diagonally across the churchyard along a paved path, with the church immediately on your right, to a road, turn left, then right at a T-junction, towards the Market Hall and then along the High Street.

You are now in Amersham Old Town. Most of it is a Conservation Area, and no wonder!

The buildings on either side of the High Street are from many periods, yet form an harmonious whole. The only jarring note is the inevitable large number of parked cars. The Market Hall was given to the town by Sir William Drake of Shardeloes (which we shall see later) in 1682. Note the parish pump of 1782, and behind it the old lock-up. The upper floor is still used for meetings, and market stalls are set up under the arches on Fridays and Saturdays.

Amersham was an important post for stagecoaches and several of the inns had courtyards and stabling. Much more recently, two of them - the Crown (opposite the Market Hall) and the half-timbered King's Arms (a little further along), both featured in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

At no. 49 is the Amersham Museum, with a range of displays on the history and life of the town, and in particular local crafts and industries such as lace, chair and brick making. There is a copy of the original charter granted to the town by King John in 1201 for a fair, which is still held annually in the High Street. The building itself, part of a medieval hall house of c1450, is typical of many of the houses in the old town, with interiors much older than the facades. *Open from Easter to the end of October on Saturdays, Sundays, and bank holiday Mondays, and on Wednesdays and Thursdays in May to September, 2.00 pm to 4.30 pm.*

Across the road is Elmodesham House, the largest house in Amersham Old Town, and so called after the name given by Domesday Book to the town.

Further along, no. 129 is the smallest house in Amersham.

On the other side of the road are the Drake Almshouses, built in 1657 by the then squire to house six poor women of the parish.

A little further, at the junction with Mill Lane, is the 17th century Town Mill.

Nearly opposite is Little Shardeloes, dating back to Tudor times.

Continue past the last house on the left, following the tarmac path ahead which eventually leads away from the road to the bypass. Turn right alongside the bypass for 100 yards, then go through an underpass to arrive at the gates to Shardeloes House.

Go through the gates and follow the South Bucks Way sign to the right, cross two cricket fields, passing just to the left of the pavilion, to a gate into a fenced path. (If a match is in progress, you may feel it tactful and safer to follow the boundary and pass to the right of the pavilion.)

Go straight ahead, still keeping on the South Bucks Way. On the right you will soon see Shardeloes Lake with its numerous water birds, although in recent summers it has sometimes dried up.

At the top of the hill opposite is Shardeloes House, built in 1758/66 for William Drake, replacing an earlier house which burnt down. The original architect was Stiff Leadbetter, but Richard Adam subsequently took over, and it is now considered his earliest complete country house.

As you will have gathered, the Drakes were the squires of Amersham. A Francis Drake married into the family which owned the Amersham estate in 1637, and came to live at Shardeloes. The Drakes subsequently occupied the house until the present century. It is now divided into flats.

The grounds were laid out by Humphrey Repton, but have gently declined into agricultural land.

Towards the end of the lake the path veers slightly to the left to a gate. Go through this and continue straight ahead. At the end of the field go through a gate, cross a bridle path and go over a stile.

Our route, and the South Bucks Way, follows the Misbourne for the next mile (1.6 km) to Little Missenden, joining a track on the way, which then joins the road through the village. Continue through the village to the road junctions in the village centre.

Note the unusual signpost at the first junction.

On the right is the manor house, built in the 16th and 17th centuries, and soon afterwards the charming village church, a substantial part of which dates from Saxon times. From the outside, an unusual feature is the dormer window. Inside, it is renowned for its medieval wall paintings. The most striking is one of St Christopher carrying the infant Christ across a river, in which fish may be seen swimming. The nave and chancel arch are Anglo-Saxon or early Norman, and there is a fine Norman font.

To the right of the paintings is a replica of a medieval statue of St Catherine (the original was stolen), a touching memorial to Olivia Dahl, who died at the age of eight, the eldest daughter of Roald Dahl, the best selling children's author and his film actress wife, Patricia Neal. Olivia's grave is in the small cemetery beyond the village school. Roald Dahl lived at Gypsy House in Whitefield Lane, Great Missenden until his death in 1990.

Continue ahead, and immediately after the church, take a footpath on the right, cross the course of the infant River Misbourne, cross the very busy A413 with extreme care, walk up the footpath opposite and cross the railway bridge.

Turn left into the wood and climb steadily until you come to a track coming from the farm on your right.

Turn left here, follow the track downhill as it bears slightly to the right, leaves the wood and crosses a delightful dry valley (very much a feature of these chalk uplands), to the left hand edge of the wood opposite.

Follow the track up and round the edge of the wood, bearing right, left and right again, enjoying the fine views down into the Misbourne Valley, to the wood corner.

Follow the track as it turns left and crosses the field to another wood.

Follow the edge of this round to the right 300 yards, and near the end of the wood by a waymark post, where the track turns right, climb a stile on the left and follow the path just inside the wood to rejoin and cross the track further on.

Climb the stile opposite and carry on in more or less the same direction, diagonally across a field to a stile on the other side, aiming some way to the right of a large white house (The Hyde) which comes into view as you cross.

Cross the stile and turn left along the edge of a smaller field with a fence on your left, and cross another stile onto an enclosed path.

This leads into the drive of The Hyde, which in turn will take you to the B485.

Turn left, and in 50 yards, at Hyde Lane, cross the road carefully, and follow the Great Missenden Circular Walk (which you will do for most of the rest of this walk) across the field opposite, over a stile and across the next field, keeping to the same line.

Cross another stile and go straight ahead along the right-hand edge of the next field, cross a stile and walk between hedges, cross a road with traffic humps, continue along another enclosed path between gardens, eventually continuing in the same direction along an unmade road (Marriots Avenue) until you come to a road with white lines down the middle, at the end of South Heath.

Cross the road and the stile opposite, and cross the field, (which may be subdivided) , diagonally to the stile in the far right hand corner next to the house.

Once over the stile, turn left diagonally across the corner of the field to two stiles.

From here continue in the same direction (following the Great Missenden Circular Walk) between fences then cross a stile and continue with a fence on your right to a stile at the end of the field.

Ramblers' Association: Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area

Climb this stile, turn left and follow the field edge to the corner of the wood.

Cross the stile, take the path ahead through the wood, and cross the stile at the other end into a long field.

Make for gates at the far end.

Go over the stile by the gate on to the road, cross the road and follow the “public footpath” and waymark signs to a stile at the other side of the field.

Climb the stile and cross the wood.

This is Jenkins Wood, and the earthworks around the perimeter mark the site of a medieval homestead enclosure.

As you emerge, continue ahead, again following the waymark signs, and walk along the right hand side of a wire fence.

After about 400 yards go through a kissing gate in the fence. Go straight ahead and down the valley, keeping to the left of a small wood and going through a gate, then between fences to another stile at the bottom corner of the field.

Once over this, immediately cross another stile to the left, and follow the waymarked path up through the wood keeping straight ahead at the waymark sign where the path forks left after about 60 yards. (If this is very muddy, one of the unofficial paths to the right may be better.)

At the far corner of the wood the path continues alongside a small paddock, a riding area and stables, then joins a drive.

40 yards along the drive, turn right immediately after the buildings of Frith Hill Stables.

Follow the fairly steep path down through two underpasses to a small green.

To visit the church, turn left at the far end of the green, otherwise continue ahead along Church Street.

The church of St Peter and St Paul dates from the 14th century, with later alterations and additions.

The font is similar to that in Little Missenden; both belong to the “Aylesbury Group” of fonts, all thought to be the work of a group of masons working in the 12th century.

On the left a little way along Church Street is the Abbey Farmhouse, based on the original gatehouse of the Abbey. Missenden Abbey was founded in 1133, and after its dissolution in 1538 was converted into a private house.

In a few hundred yards you will reach the High Street. The signpost opposite says “Amersham 4½”, but tell yourself that you came the pretty way!

To find the station turn right along the attractive High Street, take the first road on the left (Station Approach), then left again shortly.