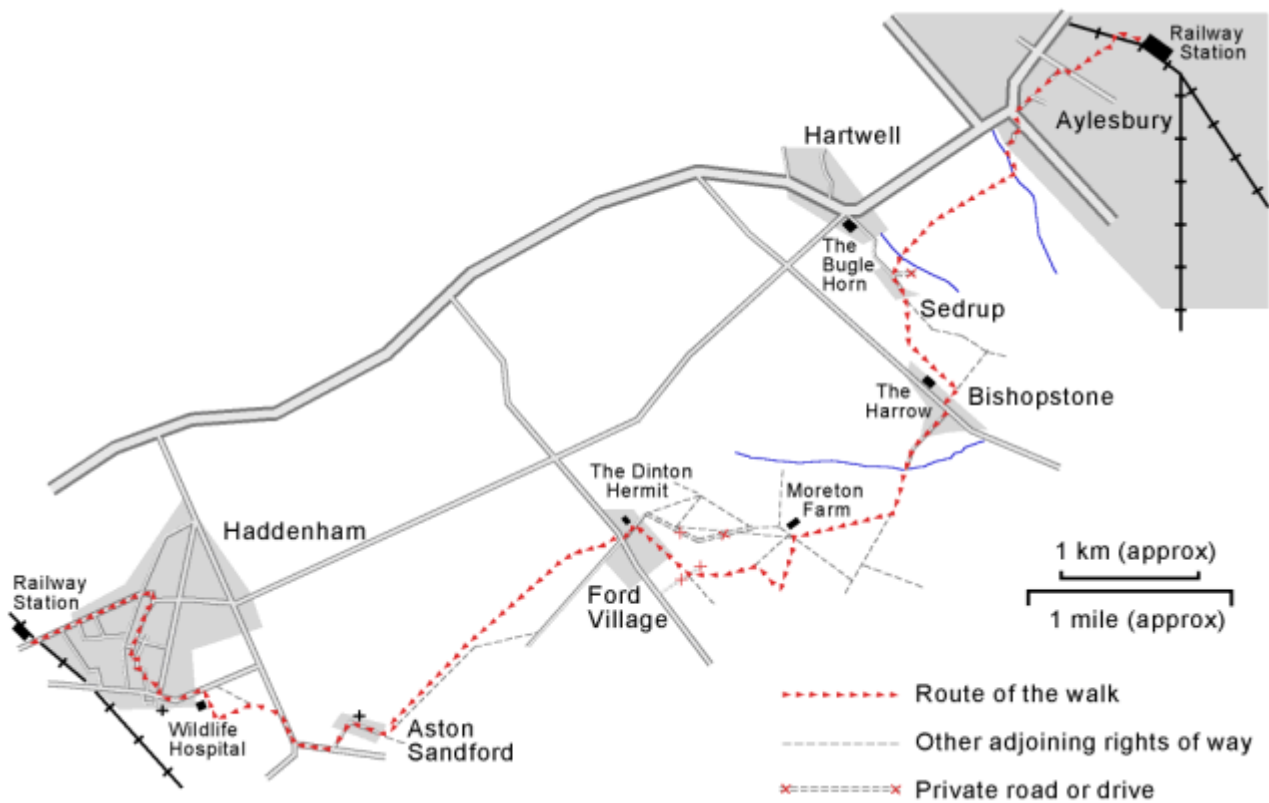


AYLESBURY - HADDENHAM

A walk across open and generally level country with distant views of the Chiltern Hills. As is often the case in the Vale of Aylesbury, there are a number of arable fields to cross, and in places you may find it quite hard going just before the hay is cut or when conditions are muddy. At other times, however, it is easy and relaxing walking, and it is always rewarding, with wonderfully open scenery, a number of largely unspoilt hamlets and a substantial area of newly planted community woodland. The walk ends at Haddenham, passing the idyllic setting of Church End Green and going between ancient witchert walls in the old village centre.

Minor amendments 2007



Distances

Aylesbury Station to Haddenham Station 8.5 miles (13.5 km)

No significant hills.

You can shorten the walk by a mile (1.5 km) by taking the bus from Haddenham Church End Green.

Travel

Aylesbury is on the Chiltern Line from Marylebone via Amersham or High Wycombe, and Haddenham & Thame Parkway station is on the line from Marylebone and High Wycombe to Banbury and Birmingham.

The 280 bus service between Oxford, Thame, Haddenham, and Aylesbury is half-hourly on weekdays and hourly on Sundays. Bus passengers can get off the bus immediately after the traffic lights on the western approach to Aylesbury, walk back to the crossroads, take Churchill Avenue, and join the route at Hartwell End on the right.

Rail travellers may like to take a return ticket either to Haddenham & Thame Parkway, and take the Aylesbury bus from there to the start, or to Aylesbury, and take the bus from Haddenham back there after completing the walk.

Travel information for Buckinghamshire is available on www.buckscc.gov.uk/travelinfo or by telephoning 0871 200 22 33.

Map

The whole of this walk is on the Ordnance Survey Explorer map 181 Chiltern Hills North.

Refreshments

The Harrow at Bishopstone is closed at lunchtime on Mondays (and no food Monday evenings).

The Dinton Hermit at Ford does not serve food on Sunday evenings.

At Haddenham there are several pubs, a chip shop, and Indian and Chinese restaurants, as well as a number of shops.

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).

Route

On leaving the station keep left, and go over the footbridge across the railway and along a path a short distance to a footbridge over a stream.

Turn right and almost immediately left, on to a footpath and cycle track.

You will see that this is curiously named *Thame Road*. The embankment briefly visible behind the hedge on the right is all that remains of the proposed Aylesbury South West Road (which was to be called *Thame Road*) which would have taken the pressure off the A418, planned in the 1930s, started after the Second World War, then abandoned.

Follow Thame Road past the entrance to the Chiltern Railways maintenance works and school playing fields on your right, to the end (at Churchill Avenue).

Cross, and turn right for a few yards, to Hartwell End on the left.

Go along Hartwell End to the end of the road, take the cycleway/footpath slightly left, then continue ahead along a road to a roundabout.

At the roundabout, go left along Ellen Road for 100 yards, to Roberts Way on the right.

Go along Roberts Way as it curves left then right, to where it ends at a hedge and stream.

Turn left and go parallel with the stream, at first on grass then on a tarmac path, a little further than the next pylon, to a concrete bridge.

Go over the bridge and cross the field slightly left to a bridge and gate in a gap in the hedge.

Go through the gap beside the gate and up the right-hand side of the field to a stile by a gate.

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Follow the track ahead to another gate and stile at a cross track.

Take the stile opposite and continue slightly left, passing under telephone wires, down to a stile. Continue ahead to a plank bridge and stile.

The large trees on your right at the plank bridge are black poplars. The black poplar is our tallest native tree and also one of the rarest. Some authorities mention it as occurring mainly in Cheshire, but there are in fact a significant number in the Vale of Aylesbury. They were once valued for their shock- and fire-resistant timber, used in wagon-bottoms, brake-blocks, floorboards and around fireplaces, clogs and fencing. The curved branches, which sweep down and then up again, were split for use as the cruck frames of medieval buildings. Note the deeply fissured bark.

Bear very slightly left diagonally across the next field to a squeeze gap into a copse.

Bear right through the copse to the lane ahead.

The lane forms part of the North Bucks Way long distance path, 35 miles from Chequers Knap on the Ridgeway to Wolverton.

Ignore the drive to Sedrup Farmhouse on your left, and bear left through the hamlet of Sedrup, an attractive cluster of mostly thatched cottages, to a small green.

Bear right to follow the track, which shortly leads to an arable field.

Here leave the North Bucks Way and go half right across the field.

On reaching the far corner bear left to continue with the hedge on your right to the end of the next field.

Cross the stile by a metal gate ahead, and continue in the same direction along the field edge until you rejoin the North Bucks Way at a wide cross track between hedges.

Here turn right and in 200 yards emerge on to the road at Bishopstone. (The Harrow public house is 100 yards to the right.)

Our route turns left along the road with the North Bucks Way and very soon, opposite the war memorial, turns right down Moreton Lane (passing more black poplars on the left just before the farm) for 500 yards, to a gate across the lane.

Cross the stile by the gate and follow a short rough track, which crosses a bridge to enter a field.

Follow the right hand hedge and go through a gate at the end of the field.

Here leave the North Bucks Way again, to strike out half right across a large field, heading 100 yards to the left of a house on the skyline, converted from a barn which was all that was left of Moreton Farm. (If the way across the field is particularly hard going in muddy conditions, there is also a right of way to the left, round two sides of this field.)

At the other side of the field, go through a gate with a Swan's Way waymark.

Swan's Way is a long distance bridle route, which runs 65 miles from Salcey Forest, on the Northamptonshire border, to Goring on the River Thames. The largest trees in the clump beyond the house to your right are black poplars.

Go through the pedestrian gate in the deer-proof fence, to enter the young woodland ahead.

This is the M.R. Roads Community Woodland, planted in the winter of 2001-2, and known as Michael's Peace, in memory of Michael Roads, whose generosity led to the creation of this woodland. In summer it is full of skylarks.

The public footpath bears right here, but our route bears slightly left to go up the wide grassy ride to a trig point.

There is a memorial stone let into the ground near the trig point. The six main wide rides radiating from here point to local churches. (Visibility varies according to the direction of the sun.) The nearest and probably most visible is Dinton to your right. Then clockwise is Stone, then Aylesbury (dwarfed by the Bucks Council offices and electricity pylons) then a narrower ride on a ridge not pointing to anything particular, then Ellesborough, then Princes Risborough, then, largely hidden by a hedge, Long Crendon (with Haddenham Business Park in front of it).

Turn right from your previous direction and take the ride pointing towards Dinton church for 400 yards (100 yards short of its end), to a smaller crossing ride (with a bench), which is a public footpath.

Turn left to leave the woodland at a pedestrian gate, then turn right and immediately left to cross a footbridge between stiles.

Go half right to a stile in the field corner then, heading for houses, to a stile by a water trough.

Cross the stile and the drive, and four more stiles close together, then go ahead across a field to a stile under an arch into two gardens.

Follow the public footpath straight through the two gardens.

Go slightly left over the next field to join a lane, and turn left into the hamlet of Ford, passing the Dinton Hermit pub.

The pub is named after John Biggs, Secretary to Simon Mayne (one of those who signed Charles I's death warrant) and, it was rumoured, possibly one of the masked executioners of the king. After the death of his patron, he lapsed into melancholy and remorse. He lived for 36 years in an old hut at nearby Dinton, without ever changing his clothes, and living on what local people gave him.

At a road junction, turn right, then almost immediately left over a stile at a footpath sign.

Go ahead, parallel with the cottages on the other side of the hedge (more black poplars on your left). After a footbridge with stiles, head to the right of the buildings ahead (a recent residential conversion from barns) across the horse pastures to go through a kissing gate and over a stile in the hedge ahead.

Cross a track and follow the post-and-rail fence ahead 150 yards to a gate in a hedge. (From here, your route is practically a straight line all the way to Aston Sandford.)

Once through the gate, follow the left hand hedge for two fields to cross a footbridge (more black poplars to your right).

Continue in the same direction between electric fences across the next field to the right of a clump of willow trees and cross another footbridge.

Continue ahead with the hedge on your left, for the next five fields (the first two stiles are 30-50 yards out from the hedge) until you cross a footbridge and stile into the field immediately before the buildings of Aston Sandford ahead. (From a gateway on your left after the fourth field, there is a parallel bridleway the other side of the hedge, which may be easier going.)

Turn into the field on your left, then right, to pass a house on your right.

After the house bear right to go over a stile by metal gate in the field corner and follow the road through Aston Sandford.

It has been suggested that the long low building on your left may have been a rope walk.

The church was drastically rebuilt and restored in 1877, but retains a small green and yellow stained glass figure of Christ in the east window. *A note in the porch says where the key may be obtained.*

Just beyond, and best seen from the road after you turn left then right, is the Manor House, one of the few domestic buildings designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott - “The greatest architect of the Gothic revival”, and architect of St Pancras Station and the Albert Memorial. His grandfather, Thomas Scott, had been Rector here and was famous in his own right for his biblical *Commentary*, described by a contemporary as “the greatest theological performance of our age and country”.

At the church follow the road round to the left, and at the road junction turn right for 300 yards, being very careful of the traffic.

At the next road junction, turn right. (Beyond the bridge there is a permissive path on the other side of the hedge, though there does not appear to be official access to it from the road.) Walk for a further 250 yards to a kissing gate and a footpath signpost in the left-hand hedge.

Go through the kissing gate, and bear right across the field in the direction shown by the sign.

The route has now picked up the Church Farm Trail which we will follow to Haddenham. This is a County Council initiative intended “to give an insight into how farming, wildlife and recreation can live together in harmony”.

Do not go through the kissing gate next to the metal gate, but turn left in front of it and follow the hedge to the corner of the field.

Go through a copse, cross a small field, follow round a small pond and go over a footbridge to the right.

Bear slightly left to another stile into a paddock and go ahead, with Tiggywinkles wildlife hospital on your left and farm buildings on your right.

Tiggywinkles takes its name from the specialist hedgehog treatment unit opened in 1985. The present building, opened in 1991, is the world’s first wildlife teaching hospital, dealing with some 15,000 animal and bird casualties a year. It is open to paying visitors from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm (but closed on Saturdays and Sundays between October and Easter) and has refreshments on sale.

Continue ahead to the road, and turn left into Haddenham, being careful of the traffic, reaching Church End Green in 500 yards.

The large pond which dominates Church End would, in past times, have been swarming with white Aylesbury ducks, for duck breeding was a big cottage industry in Haddenham.

The parish church of St Mary is largely 13th century. The Norman font is of the “Aylesbury” type found in 22 churches, including (as well as Aylesbury), Bledlow, Great Kimble and Great and Little Missenden. This one is carved with monsters. The other buildings around the green are of different periods, but blend harmoniously together. The oldest is probably the 15th century Church Farm House, to the left of the church.

Haddenham experienced extensive growth in the post-war years, but the core of the village remains little changed. The next half mile of this walk gives you a taste of that old village centre, with its alleyways, a High Street with no shops and little traffic which starts from a “dead-end”, a variety of cottages of various styles and periods, and particularly its witchert walls.

Though we recommend that you walk through old Haddenham, you could take the bus from Churchway (to the right of the Green, opposite the pond). Note that buses in both directions go from the same stop.

Walk up Churchway to just past the Green Dragon, and turn into the narrow alleyway on the left, with the delightful name of Dragon Tail.

Notice the witchert walks on either side, with their characteristic tiled roofs. Witchert is a stiff, yellowish clay-like substance found locally. It is mixed with chopped straw and water and layered onto a foundation of stone or brick. There are many surviving examples of witchert barns, houses and boundary walls in the area, particularly in Haddenham, and its use has not entirely died out; a number of witchert walls have been reconstructed in recent years. Witchert structures are characterised by irregular rounded corners. To prevent the rain washing away the soluble witchert, you will see that the walls are now topped with tiles, rather than the original thatch. On some of the walls you can see the bare witchert, though it was often rendered with lime mortar and nowadays it is more usual to plaster the surface. A number of modern walls in the village have been finished in a similar style, though constructed of standard building materials.

Go along Dragon Tail to the tiny Skittles Green.

Look for buildings with the uneven rounded corners typical of witchert construction under the plaster or roughcast exterior.

Turn right, then left at a T-junction into The Croft.

After the road bends right and opposite no. 8A, take a walled alleyway on the left (no name, but with a “No Cycling” sign).

This leads to the King’s Head at the bottom of the High Street.

In the High Street, note the Methodist Church (Wesleyan Chapel), now restored after the spectacular collapse of one of its witchert walls.

Next to the church is the Haddenham Museum, open on Tuesdays 10 – 12 and Sundays 2 – 4.30.

Walk all the way up the High Street to emerge at the main road through the village at Fort End.

Buses for Oxford stop here; those for Aylesbury on the other side, a little to the left.

Haddenham & Thame Parkway Station is half a mile to the left along the main road (which becomes Thame Road).