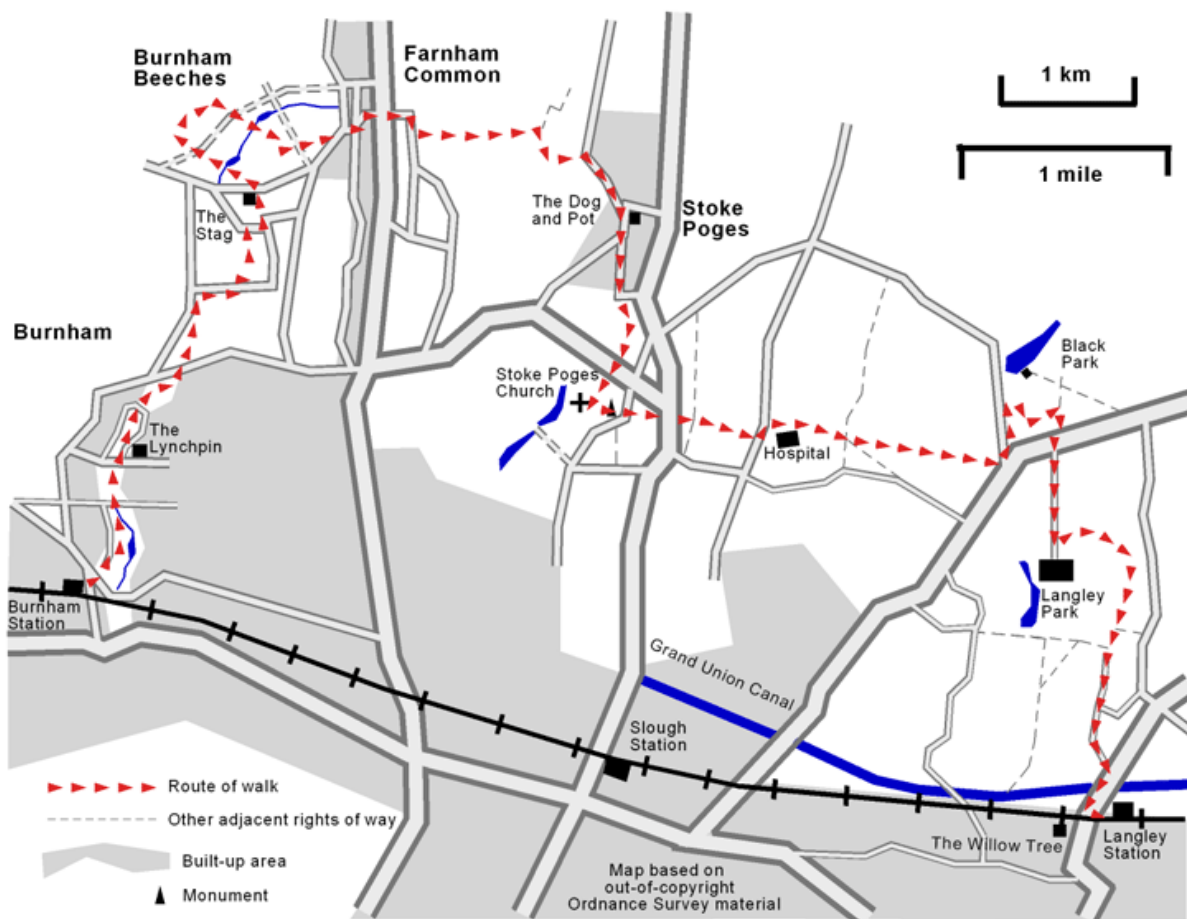


Burnham – Farnham Common – Langley

This walk takes in the ancient woodland of Burnham Beeches and visits Stoke Poges Church, immortalised in Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", Black Park woods and Langley Park arboretum. There is more road walking than we would ideally like, but we think it is worth it for the extensive and varied woodland. Although the walk begins and ends in Berks, most of it goes through the pleasant rural countryside of south Bucks (and 30 years ago would have been entirely within Bucks until the border was shifted north of Slough in 1974).

Checked 2009



Distances

Burnham – Farnham Common	4 miles (7 km)
Farnham Common - Langley	6.5 miles (10 km)
Total (excluding detours)	10.5 miles (17 km)

Not flat, but no significant hills.

Travel

Burnham and Langley stations are on the Paddington - Ealing Broadway - Slough - Reading line, with approximately half-hourly services (hourly on Sundays).

The 74 bus route links High Wycombe, Beaconsfield, Farnham Common and Slough.

The 335 bus (no Sunday service) links Gerrards Cross, Wexham Park Hospital and Slough, and the 3 and the 8 link the hospital and Slough, but with only a limited service on Sundays.

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

Britwell - The Lynchpin

Burnham Beeches - The Stag

The visitor centre for Burnham Beeches, with café and toilets, is about 400 yards off the route.

Farnham Common - The Foresters bar/restaurant, The Stag and Hounds, The Victoria (no food), shops (Spar) and restaurants.

Stoke Poges - The Dog and Pot (no food at weekends).

The café at Black Park Lake is 500 yards off the route, and normally closes at 4.00 pm.

Langley - The Willow Tree ("No heavy boots or working clothes").

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 is on O.S. Explorer Map 172 *Chiltern Hills East*, except for the last few yards to Langley station.

Route

From the Burnham Station approach road, turn left at the lights and after 30 yards turn right to cross two roads, to a footpath opposite a bus shelter.

Go through to a residential estate, following the road 120 yards round to the left, turning right at a sign saying "No 155-177".

Go to the back of the car park area and through a gap in the fence into Haymill Valley Nature Reserve.

Haymill Valley is a wildlife trust reserve and heritage site managed by Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), one of several such sites which contain standing water habitat.

Follow the path to the left through woods, keeping parallel with fencing on your left. (If nettles are a problem on the first section of this path, return to the road for 350 yards and enter the wood by the next gate, just after the last house on the right.)

Pass three tall metal gates on the left and just after the third gate, the path bears slightly right to emerge onto Whittaker Road.

Cross over and go up a grassy slope opposite over the brow of the hill to cross Long Furlong Drive, with The Lynchpin pub on the right.

Go ahead on the left verge of Lynch Hill Lane, then just after the pub go through wooden bollards on the left and down a slope to join a footpath that continues along the base of a grassy bank on the right, to a T-junction of paths among trees.

Go ahead here (although no path is visible), in the direction of a lamp-post and a brown board that soon comes into view over the top of the bank ahead.

Go through the gap in the bank and cross what is still Lynch Hill Lane to enter Cocksherd Wood Nature Reserve, a small area of preserved ancient woodland.

Take the path ahead, and 50 yards after fencing on the left, bear slightly right into woodland to go up steps and continue parallel with a road on your left.

To the right of this path is an area known as the “Swallets”, which are ice age meltwater hollows more than 15,000 years old.

Keep left at any path forks and where the path emerges from the wood, turn left onto a tarmac path and cross Farnham Lane (watch out for traffic from the left) to go up a bridleway opposite (Crow Piece Lane).

At the top of the rise where the path joins Walton Lane, take the enclosed footpath on the right and follow this to the junction with Allerds Road (the Manor of Allerds once formed part of Burnham Beeches).

Turn right here (it is safer to stay on the footpath if at all possible, even if overgrown during the summer), and continue 200 yards to metal gates both sides of the road.

To the right at this point is the large estate of East Burnham Park, built by George Grote out of the profits of his “History of Greece”; he was often visited here by his friend Mendelssohn.

Go through the gate on the left and continue along a bridleway with the road on your right.

Keep on this track as it turns left away from the road, past fields full of buttercups in May, then left again to a gate on to the road at the far side of the fields (the bridleway originally went straight through the farm grounds).

On reaching the road, turn right (with glimpses of East Burnham House through trees on the left) and then left to continue on Thompkins Lane.

Where this turns right at Toad Hall, continue ahead up an enclosed path to emerge onto Hawthorn Lane, with The Stag pub on the left.

Cross over and cross the car park to the far left-hand corner, to enter Burnham Beeches National Nature Reserve at a marker post saying “Walkers Only”.

Burnham Beeches is a relic of the great primeval forest that once covered much of Buckinghamshire. In 1879 the woodland was acquired from Sir Henry Peeks by the Corporation of the City of London, to save it from development and preserve it for public use. Most of Epping Forest was also acquired at the same time, using the newly-passed City of London (Open Spaces) Act of 1878.

Burnham Beeches has long been the rendezvous of artists, poets and country-lovers; Thomas Gray, Sheridan and Mendelssohn are known to have visited the forest frequently.

Follow a broad path 400 yards through the woods to Middle Pond.

The area where you enter the woods is classified as “secondary woodland”, which is mainly birch or pine. Though of lower conservation interest than beech or oak woodland, it is still of value and adds diversity to the site. (*This and other comments about the habitats are taken from the Burnham Beeches National Nature Reserve Management Plan Summary.*)

200 yards downstream from Middle Pond through attractive mature beechwood is the site of the “Nodding Beech” referred to in Gray’s “Elegy written in a Country Churchyard”.

After crossing the dammed end of the pond take the left fork. In 200 yards fork right across a grassy clearing to a road (Lord Mayor’s Drive).

This area is “old wood pasture”, which will largely be left alone to allow it to be as natural as possible. The majority of the management will be to remove invasive non-native species such as rhododendrons (which stops native species growing) and Japanese knotweed.

Just before the road, in a small enclosure on the right, is the famous Druid’s Oak, the largest tree in the woodland: its girth two feet from the ground is well over 30 feet.

A plaque on the far side suggests that the Druid’s Oak may date from the mid-17th century, though some believe that it is considerably older.

(From here, our recommended route crosses the road, bearing slightly left and then loops round to the right to cross back over this road again 450 yards to your right. However, when this area is being grazed (mainly in summer) temporary fences may be erected and/ or gates may be locked. If you find you cannot follow the route ahead as described below, come back to this point and go along the road past the Druid’s Oak for 300 yards. Just before a “disabled” parking space on the left, take the footpath to the right parallel with the road for 150 yards, then fork right to go down to the Jenny Lind tree and Upper Pond – see below, about 25 lines down. Note that our route through Burnham Beeches is not on public rights of way, so there is no legal obligation on the landowners to keep the paths open, but with the possible exception of this section you are unlikely to have to make any detours.)

Cross Lord Mayor’s Drive into an area of ditches and banks.

This is Sevenways Plain, a Scheduled Ancient Monument believed to have been an Iron Age fort.

The area to your right is “restored/new wood pasture”.

Take the left fork here for 250 yards to a T-junction.

Turn right and continue 150 yards to go through a gate in a fence, where you turn right.

Just before the exit gate the ancient earthworks are visible to your left.

Just beyond the exit gate, also to the left, is a large gnarled tree showing the effect of pollarding. This process involved cutting branches ca 2.5 metres above the ground. This was done every 10-20 years and helped to prolong the lives of the trees which might otherwise have been blown over in storms when they grew too high. The method was devised in the Middle Ages to provide a regular crop of timber without killing the trees.

Pollarded trees are an important feature of Burnham Beeches and (as at Epping Forest) the Corporation of London has been reintroducing the technique after a period of more that 150 years when no pollarding was done. Some trees are now being cut again, as the branches have become heavy and the trees may fall over

or collapse. The ground round the pollards has been cleared of other trees and bushes so they have the light and water needed for growth. Some younger trees are also being pollarded.

The steep hillside to your left is known as Mendelssohn's Slope.

Having turned right at the gate, continue 600 yards (parallel with the fence on your right and keeping right after 200 yards), looking out for similar pollarded trees on either side, to where the path goes very slightly downhill for 50 yards to a junction with a steep path joining from the left. (There are two very old trees immediately to the right of the junction and another one 10 yards further to the right.)

Continue ahead on the level path for 35 yards, then turn very sharp right to go through a gate and follow the path for nearly 200 yards, cross back over Lord Mayor's Drive and continue ahead down towards Upper Pond.

Just before you come to the pond, there is a large plaque a few yards to your right commemorating Jenny Lind, a famous opera singer known as the Swedish Nightingale, born in Stockholm in 1820. She often visited George Grote and his Swedish wife in East Burnham and would come to Burnham Beeches and sit under a tree at this spot to practice her singing.

Continue to the pond and follow the path along its right-hand edge, then up through an area of pine trees (secondary woodland). Ignore a (possibly indistinct) left fork, and continue along the line of a low bank with a shallow ditch to the left of it.

Note the 'habitat pile' of logs on the right, deliberately built to provide a habitat for insects, small animals and fungi).

After the pine trees you enter an area classified as "dry heath".

Continue ahead to a carved log bench on the left, then in 80 yards turn left at a T-junction footpath.

(To see new plantings and some newly pollarded trees, go right here for 100 yards, where there are several small plaques in woods on the left dated 1966 and one on the right, commemorating the centenary of Burnham Beeches in July 1980. Note the size of trees of those ages. Retrace your steps to the T-junction).

After turning left at the T-junction, go diagonally left across a grassy area to a narrow road (Sir Henry Peeks Drive) and take the path opposite.

The area to the left of this path is "wet heath/mire" and a habitat of regional and national importance. The grazing regime for these habitats will prevent scrub taking over and encourage a greater variety of plants (not just grass). Many rare plants have already reappeared since restoration work began. Boardwalks are provided for visitors; please keep strictly to them in this area.

(After 130 yards there is a path crossing. Our route continues ahead, but you can detour left on to a boardwalk to look at the mire. Continuing on the boardwalk, then up through a small strip of woodland and then left across a grassy area will take you to the visitor centre, with café and toilets, about 400 yards from the path crossing.)

Continue along the path, to leave the wood by a gate leading to a large display board that gives details of Burnham Beeches. Cross over the road to Hawthorn Lane and at the end turn left into Green Lane, then right into Kingsway.

Keep to the pavement on the left, coming shortly to the A355 (Beaconsfield Road) at Farnham Common. The Foresters bar/restaurant is opposite and to the left are the Stag and Hounds, shops and restaurants. Bus stops are a short way to the right.

The name Farnham derives from the old English 'fearn-ham' meaning 'fern-homestead' – there used to be extensive heathland here. The Domesday Book records the manor as being held by Baron de Furnival of the Verdon family, who gave the service of providing a glove for the king's right hand on coronation day and helping him hold the sceptre (a feudal service known as 'serjeanty'). Farnham was passed down the family to the Talbots, the Earls of Shrewsbury, and thence to Henry VIII. The manor stayed in the direct ownership of the crown until Charles I who sold it to the Coke family.

Farnham Common itself is at the north end of the town while Farnham Royal is to the south.

Cross over the A355 and go ahead on Victoria Road, passing The Victoria pub (no food) on the left, then right into Parsonage Lane.

After 60 yards take the enclosed path to the left.

Follow this as it enters mature woodland, down to cross a stream then up the opposite slope 400 yards to join a drive to the left of a house.

At a junction follow the tarmac drive to the right (with views of Brockhurst Park to your right), then round a bend to the left downhill then up again, to a road.

Follow the road to the right 600 yards to a T-junction, with the Dog and Pot pub (no food at weekends) opposite.

Turn right, and where the main road bears right continue ahead a further 400 yards along Rogers Lane to where the road bends left.

At the bend there are two kissing gates; take the second one, to follow a path half left across the field behind houses (and in one case, through the end of a garden). This and the next few fields are full of wild flowers in summer.

Go over a plank bridge and through a kissing gate, then go half right across the next field (not straight ahead) to a kissing gate leading to another field with a stream through the middle.

After the stream go through another kissing gate and follow the right-hand edge of the field to a kissing gate, with The Clock House on your right.

The Clock House was originally an almshouse founded by Lord Edward Hastings of Loughborough, son of the first Earl of Huntingdon, in 1557; four poor men and two poor women from the parish were housed and clothed. The men could be 'sole or married' but the women were to be 'sole and unmarried'. The first building was demolished and re-built ca. 1765 on its present site. It remained in use until 1947 when it was sold because it was in a bad state of repair and is now a private residence. The sculptured arms of Lord Hastings can be seen over the entrance door to the Hastings Chapel at St. Giles' Church.

Continue ahead to a kissing gate at Park Road, cross the road (can be quite busy) to another kissing gate leading into Gray's Field, with the Gray Monument visible ahead.

Continue ahead, along the right-hand field edge, with glimpses of the Manor House through trees to the right. (A short cut half left directly to the Gray monument misses out a number of points of interest.)

There is a reference to the Manor of Stoke in the Domesday Book survey of 1086 when it was held by William Fitz Ansculf. The family held Stoke for nearly 300 years, changing their name to de Stoke, and by 1291 Amicia de Stoke married Robert Poges from Normandy, giving rise to the present name of Stoke Poges. In the 15th century, marriage brought the lands to the Hastings family who became Earls of Huntingdon and held the house for over 500 years. Sir Edward Landseer the artist had his studio here where he is reputed to have painted Monarch of the Glen and designed the lions for the foot of Nelson's Column. The house is currently owned by South Buckinghamshire District Council and leased on a commercial basis.

Go along the edge of the field to a kissing gate in the corner leading into the churchyard.

The churchyard was immortalised by Thomas Gray in his “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”. His tomb is immediately below the east window of the Hastings Chapel; his mother Dorothy Gray and her sister Mary Antrobus are buried in the same tomb.

St. Giles Church dates from Saxon times with remains still existing in part of the chancel wall and windows, while other parts date back to the Norman (1086), Early Gothic (1220) and Tudor (1558) periods. The church and churchyard were formerly enclosed within the grounds of Stoke Park, 200 yards away from the old Manor House; hence their remoteness from the village.

The Hastings Chapel is of red brick with stone mullioned windows, and was built by Lord Hastings in 1558 to serve as an oratory for the almshouse (the Clock House), as well as a burial-place for himself and other members of the Hastings family.

A gate in the high brick wall opposite the church door leads into the Memorial Gardens. The Gardens were designed as non-denominational memorial grounds by Edward White, a leading landscape architect, and completed in 1937. After 50 yards turn right and in 100 yards you can go down to the lake. From here can be seen Stoke Park House (white, to the left, now a golf club), the Coke Monument (ahead, may be difficult to see among the trees) and the Manor (to the right, red brick).

Stoke Park was created in 1331 when Sir John de Molyns received a royal licence to enclose three woods.

When John Penn, the grandson of William Penn, returned after 28 years in America, he built the present mansion between 1792 and 1808. James Wyatt was the architect (and he also designed the monuments to Thomas Gray and Sir Edward Coke, Lord Chief Justice of England, that can be seen in the park).

The historic parkland was laid out by two outstanding landscape designers of the 18th century: 'Capability' Brown, who designed the grounds and lake in 1750, and Humphry Repton, who improved the landscape and built the Repton bridge. Red deer had existed in the park since Norman times and Sir Edward Landseer was a regular visitor, using the deer as models for his paintings.

In the early 20th century, the mansion and half the land was leased to Stoke Poges Golf Club while the other half was sold for development. The deer departed to other parks and the Scottish Highlands. In 1928 the mansion and golf course came into the ownership of Sir Noel Mobbs, founder of Slough Trading Estate; he also subsequently acquired the old Manor House.

In 1964 Stoke Park House appeared in the James Bond film Goldfinger, providing the background for a tense game of golf. Afterwards in the car park, Goldfinger's henchman, Oddjob, decapitates a statue with his steel-rimmed bowler hat before crumbling a golf ball into dust with his bare hands.

Return to the kissing gate by which you entered the churchyard and turn right along the field edge to the monument.

Note the ha-ha, a boundary ditch with a vertical side or sunken fence, designed to keep stock out without impeding the view. The hedge on top is presumably a later addition.

The monument to Thomas Gray (1716 - 1771) has panels with some stanzas of his "Elegy ..." and was erected by James Wyatt in 1799 for the then owner of Stoke Park, John Penn.

Walk round to the far side of the monument and then go to the right down a short path to Church Lane. Cross over (care – blind corner) and, at the entrance to a driveway opposite, turn left through a kissing gate to an enclosed path that runs in front of houses, at first parallel with the road.

Go through two more kissing gates to a drive (Duffield Park) and at the end, cross over Grays Park Road and turn right, then first left up the Snitterfield House drive.

At a footpath crossing, go over a stile by a gate slightly to the right, and continue across the field in the same direction to another stile and small footbridge (this area may be very muddy in wet weather).

Go ahead through the next field with the fence on your right, cross a stile and continue straight ahead to a small gap in the raised bank on the far side.

Cross a stile and turn left along Wexham Road (or for buses, turn right and then left into the hospital grounds) then, just after the entrance to Wexham Park Hospital on the right, cross over and go up a driveway towards metal gates. There is a "Private Driveway" notice, but it is a public footpath, with a stile to the right of the gate.

Go ahead, passing on your left a helicopter pad, Wexham Park Golf Course and Bell Farmhouse, and continue ahead on a grassy path (where the drive goes right) to stiles at a bridleway crossing.

Go straight ahead in the next field on the Rowley Farm Trail, with fencing on your left (do not take the footpath going half right across the field).

At the fence corner, cross a stile and continue 250 yards in the same direction across the next field to a metal gate in the left-hand hedge. (The route across this arable field should be clearly marked; go round the field edge only if the correct route is not possible.)

Cross a stile to the right of the gate, then turn right across the field to stiles with a small bridge over a stream.

Cross the stream and continue straight ahead, over the brow of a low rise and on to a stile at the corner of fencing and woods.

Go over the stile and follow the track to the busy Uxbridge Road (A412): Langley Park is opposite but the entrance is some way to the left and the following is a quieter (and safer) way to reach it.

Turn left onto a pavement and then cross Black Park Road to a stile 20 yards to the left.

Go over the stile into Black Park woods (this is still the Rowley Farm Trail) and follow the edge of the woods north to a small clearing (where there is a way into the woods from the road; Rowley Farm is in view ahead and to the left).

Turn right here into the woods (ignore the Rowley Farm Trail waymark arrow which points ahead) and follow a clear path to a mass of holly and rhododendron bushes on the left and ahead.

Continue across a wide ditch and on emerging from the rhododendrons turn right at a footpath junction for 70 yards, to another smaller ditch.

Go left here along the line of the ditch to a track, with houses through the trees ahead.

Turn left to a track junction.

(To go to the Black Park lake and café turn left, follow the track as it bears right, and at the next cross track left again; returning here afterwards. Otherwise:)

Continue ahead and follow this track in a loop to the right (the wood is full of bluebells here in May) to a T-junction and then turn right along a track that leads out of Black Park to the A412.

To cross, go to the right along the road verge, to where you can see round the bend, then cross this dual carriageway, very carefully.

Opposite is the main entrance to Langley Park. Follow the drive as far as the wrought iron gates which mark the entrance to Langley Park House.

The house was built by the 3rd Duke of Marlborough in 1755/58 as a hunting lodge, and includes a range of interesting outbuildings.

The park is owned by the County Council and is freely open all the year round. It includes a lovely lake, an arboretum, an area of azaleas and rhododendrons, and extensive open space and woodland.

At the end of the drive, turn sharp left onto a footpath to join the track leading to the left of the estate houses.

After 50 yards, bear right into the arboretum. Go ahead through the arboretum with a high brick wall on your right, until just after the wall turns right.

Turn left, to leave the arboretum by a gap next to a gate.

Follow the track around to the right, until a large cream house (Treal Farm) comes into view ahead.

Turn right onto a sandy bridleway, then keep ahead to the right of a large house, then pass an octagonal gatehouse on your right, to join Love Hill Lane.

Go ahead along the lane, continue past a turning on the left to reach Langley Park Road (the B470); turn right here, and cross the canal bridge.

The station is 100 yards on the left. The Willow Tree pub is just beyond the station, under the bridge on the right.

Alan Sheppard