

Amersham to Chalfont St Peter or Gerrards Cross (part of the South Bucks Way)

Some parts of the South Bucks Way have been included in a number of our described routes, but not this section, which is a pleasant, generally level walk through varied countryside, mostly pasture, along the Misbourne valley.

Checked 2009

Distance

5.5 miles (9 km) to Chalfont St Peter, and a further 1.5 miles (2.5 km) on to Gerrards Cross. Largely flat, except between Amersham station and Amersham Old Town.

Travel

Amersham is on the Chiltern Line from Marylebone via Harrow to Aylesbury, and on the Metropolitan line from Baker Street.

Gerrards Cross is on the Chiltern Line from Marylebone to High Wycombe and the Midlands, and can also be reached from Aylesbury via Princes Risborough.

Except on Sundays, there are buses about half-hourly from Chalfont St Peter on to Gerrards Cross, and about hourly back to Amersham.

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

Ordnance Survey Map

This walk is all on Ordnance Survey Explorer map number 172, *Chiltern Hills East*.

Refreshments

There are a number of possibilities for refreshments at Chalfont St Giles, at about the halfway point, as well as at either end of the walk.

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

Amersham station is at Grid Ref SU964981 and Gerrards Cross at TQ001887.

It is suggested you start from the Amersham end of the route, as from Amersham station you go down a fairly steep hill at the beginning of the walk, rather than up it at the end.

The southbound exit from Chalfont St Giles through an archway southwest of the churchyard, may not be obvious.

Just north of Chalfont St Peter the path goes from one side of the ditch/hedge at the stile practically on the 92 gridline, not further south as shown on the map.

If you continue on foot beyond Chalfont St Peter to Gerrards Cross, the direct road has a footway all the way, but is generally busy. The southern part of Lower Road (the old main road parallel to the A 413) has no footway, but is surprisingly quiet, and passes pleasant woodland.

Points of interest

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.

Most of Amersham Old Town is a Conservation Area, though you will need to detour to the right to see much of it. The buildings on either side of the High Street are from many periods, yet form an harmonious whole. Not far away is the Market Hall, given to the town by Sir William Drake of Shardeloes in 1682. The upper floor is still used for meetings, and market stalls are set up under the arches on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Note the parish pump of 1782, and behind it the old lock-up.

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*.

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 name "Chalfont" is variously claimed to be derived from “Chefunte” “chalk spring”, or “the spring of Ceadeles”, a common name in Celtic times, and is claimed to be one of the oldest place names in Buckinghamshire.

Chalfont St Giles church, dating from the 13th and 14th centuries but much restored in Victorian times, is approached through a curious lynch gate. Pevsner draws attention to wall paintings in the south aisle, and calls one of the stained glass windows “terrible”.

Milton’s Cottage, a quarter of a mile (400 metres) up the main street in Chalfont St Giles is open Tuesdays to Sundays 10 – 1 and 2 – 6 from March to October, and on the spring and summer bank holidays.

The mediaeval village of Chalfont St Peter was centred round the church and later became known as the village of seven pubs, which lined the High Street by the 16th century. The Church dates from 1714, when it was reconstructed following the collapse of the tower, but has been much altered, notably by the insertion of gothic windows. G.E. Street remodelled what he called “a very ugly little church” in 1852-4. According to Pevsner, his use of red and black bricks was an early example of the “constructional polychromy re-invented” by Butterfield a few years earlier.

In Chalfont St Peter, Grange Road, leads (though without public access) to the grounds of Holy Cross Convent School, formerly The Grange, originally an outlying farm belonging to Missenden Abbey and the site of its Ecclesiastical Court in the Middle Ages. Until the dissolution of the monasteries, Missenden Abbey owned most of the village. After the Reformation the estate passed to the Drury family (founder of Drury Lane in London), and later to Isaac Pennington, Lord Mayor of London. One of Pennington's children married William Penn who founded the Quaker colony in Pennsylvania. With the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660, the Quaker Penningtons were evicted and the estates given to the Jeffreys family, whose most notorious member was Judge Jeffreys who presided over the Bloody Assizes following the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth in 1685.