

# Houghton Conquest Circular Walk 2

## Introduction

This short circular walk takes you to one of the parish's "ends" - How End. It passes Glebe Meadows and can be extended to pass "The Chequers" public house.

## Start/Finish Point

This walk starts from the Parish Church in the village.

## Access and General Information

**Length:** 2.5 miles (4km) **Time:** 1.5 hours

**Surface Types:** The walk goes across varied surfaces ranging from a hard, firm surface to grass or uncultivated earth paths. Please note that this route can become very muddy in winter or in wet weather.

**Refreshments:** There are two pubs in Houghton Conquest - The Knife and Cleaver and The Anchor. There is a shop near to the village hall.

## Route Description

1. From the Parish Church (1) follow the road out of the village towards Ampthill to Kissing Gate Comer. The footpath continues straight ahead into How End Road.
  2. For the shorter walk turn left here (south) and go to the end of the road and continue along the driveway entrance to Field Farm.
  3. Ahead of you is a gate into a paddock with a large barn to the left. Go through the paddock and follow the footpath along the field edge with the ditch on your left. Pass through the hedge gap by a waymark post into a large open field.
  4. The route now turns left (E) and follows the hedge to the next waymark post. Here, turn left, cross the bridge (through the hedge) and immediately right and continue with the hedge on your right to Kings Wood.
- Follow the footpath along the edge off the wood and around the Glebe meadow to Rectory Land and back to the Village Centre. At (5) and (6) there are entrances to Kings Wood and Glebe Meadows Nature Reserve.

### *Extended Circular Route*

2. On reaching How End Road, turn right and then left following the footpath through How End Farm keeping to the right of the driveway and passing along a narrow alley between hedges before emerging into a stable area.
7. At the next waymark post two paths cross (a left turn here will bring you to the end of How End Road and Field Farm).  
Straight ahead, cross field, to the waymark post and through a 5-bar gate onto the Ampthill-Bedford road. Turn left and very shortly you will reach "The Chequers". Continue along the road to the lay-by at Reddings Wood, at the far end you will see a footpath signed to the left alongside Reddings Wood.
8. At the end of the wood the path turns right across a bridge onto a playing field and immediately left. The footpath now follows the hedge to the waymark post at (4) where you re-join the route back to the village.

## Features on the Route

### HOW END ROAD

This is a very ancient lane and was originally part of the road from Ampthill to Bedford with a junction at Road Farm leading off to the village. At its southern end lies Field Farm with a well-restored timber barn.

### REDDINGS WOOD

Reading Abbey owned the manor (i.e. large parcels of land and property) in this part of the Parish in the C13th and the wood takes its name from this connection. Manor Farm also stands on part of the Abbey's holding. Recent thinning and re-planting in the wood has been undertaken to provide a wider range of habitats for wildlife.

### THE CHEQUERS

The name is sometimes attributed to a connection with the wild service tree, also known as the "chequer tree", which was one of various plants used to flavour beer before the widespread use of hops for that purpose.

### THE VANISHED AVENUE

The route you are following twice crosses the line of a double avenue of wych-elms, which, in the C17th & C18th stretched from Houghton House to a point north of the road into the village. Absolutely no trace of it exists today although it must have been an impressive and dominant feature before its demise, possibly as a result of early C19th enclosure awards.

### KINGSWOOD WOOD DITCH

Take a small detour into Kings Wood to see the remains of a wood-ditch which can be traced along the whole of the western edge of the wood. Originally built to protect economically valuable woodland from damage caused by straying cattle and deer, the wood-ditches took the form of a steep-sided ditch and earth embankment topped by either a pallisade fence or a thick hedge.

### ALL SAINTS CHURCH

Reportedly one of the largest village parish churches in the county. Built mainly of ironstone with Tottenhoe Stone used for window tracery and other details. The Nave dates from 1340 and contains unusual mediaeval wall-paintings.

### THE GROVE

The extremely sharp double bends on the western approach of the village are the result of the road skirting around the boundary of a former substantial and important house known in the C17th as "The Grove", the one-time home of Francis Clarke who bequeathed an almshouse to the village. There are no known pictures of the old house and, apart from giving its name to the road leading into the village, "The Grove" is now marked only by a large clump of bushes set in the middle of a field. The site of Clarke's delightful Jacobean almshouse is now occupied by the Village Hall

## Acknowledgements

The original leaflet was produced by members of the Houghton Conquest Parish Paths Partnership Group.

