

Houghton Conquest Circular Walk 3 to Wilstead

Introduction

The 4 mile walk uses footpaths to and from the neighbouring parish of Wilstead passing through Chapel End and Thickthorns. The walk gives splendid views of the Greensand Ridge to the south and crosses flat, open countryside. Houghton Conquest can be reached by road from the A6 (Bedford –Luton) or from the B530 (Bedford – Amphill) roads. There is no parking in Mill Lane. Parking is available in the Village Hall car park but may be limited if other functions or events are taking place there. On-street parking is available elsewhere in the village. Please park thoughtfully. There is an hourly bus service from Bedford (Route 42).

Start/Finish Point

This circular route can either be started from Mill Lane, Houghton Conquest (OS Grid TL047423 - OS Explorer Map 208) or from the village of Wilstead.

Access and General Information

Length 4 miles. **Time** 2 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.

Stile free

Refreshments: There are two pubs in Houghton Conquest - The Knife and Cleaver and The Anchor - and The Woolpack and Red Lion in Wilstead. There is a shop near to the village hall in Houghton Conquest and a shop and post office and take away restaurant in Wilstead.

Route Description

1. Starting from Mill Lane (1), take the footpath (f.p.) on the right (R) just before a bungalow near the end of the lane. Follow the hedge for a short length then turn left (L) and continue along behind the gardens. Pass the entrance to **Howard's Piece, a small woodland planted in 2000 as part of the Forest of Marston Vale** and then straight across the field to Chapel End Lane. Turn R into the lane and continue to f.p.sign on the L.
2. Follow the footpath through a hedge, over a small bridge and across a garden lawn between a bungalow and Chapel End Farm. At the tall conifers turn L then immediately R past the stock pens and continue along the field edge. Go through a hedgerow to a track, along the track by the edge of a field, then straight ahead across another field. At the far side of this field, cross a bridge and kissing gate and head across the meadow, keeping L of the barns and mast, to a waymark post (wmp) in a gap in the hedge and then across a smaller meadow to another wmp. Go through kissing gate and down steps to the A6 road. Turn L and walk along the verge to the layby.
3. Look for the marker post opposite to the layby. **TAKE GREAT CARE WHEN CROSSING THIS FAST, BUSY MAIN ROAD.** Cross the road and go up the steps and through a kissing gate. Turn L and follow the surfaced path through houses, alongside a road and past the 'Horse Hoe and Labourer' Statue. Continue on path through gap in fence and come out into Vicarage Lane.
4. Cross Vicarage Lane and take the footpath opposite to Wilstead Church, following it through the church yard and out of the gate into Church Road, where there are some very attractive old cottages. At the end of Church Road turn L into Bedford Road. where you have the choice of The Red Lion or The Woolpack for refreshment if required. Continue along Bedford Road, past Black Hat Close and The Square to a layby on the L opposite Duck End Lane.
5. Part way along the layby, turn L at the f.p. sign into a private drive. As the drive bends L go R through a gap in the conifer hedge, then L along the path between the hedge and a fence and through a kissing gate into a meadow. Turn left in the meadow heading towards the hedgerow and then turn right at the wmp following this hedge to a gate in a field gate onto the A6 main road. **ONCE AGAIN TAKE GREAT CARE CROSSING THE BUSY MAIN ROAD** heading for a finger post to your left.

6. Go through the kissing gate slightly to the L and follow the path alongside the hedge to the yellow-topped waymark post at the next gateway. Continuing in the same direction, go diagonally R across the field to a bridge in the corner, then diagonally L across the next field towards the waymark post about two thirds of the way along the hedge opposite. Cross a second bridge over a ditch and continue over the next field to a wmp L of a tree in the opposite hedge. Cross a third bridge in this hedge and continue along, keeping the hedgerow on your R, then straight across the field to small spinney ahead.

7. Carry on along the L side of the spinney and pond to a cross path waymark post in the field. The original Thickthorn Farm is a little way away on your R. At the waymark post go straight ahead and after 100 yards turn slightly L and head towards the right hand end of the hedgerow ahead of you. As you near this corner you will see the next waymark post. From the post, follow the hedgerow along past the old mill, which is on private land on the opposite side of the hedge. At the end of the hedge turn R into Mill Lane.

Features on the Route

WILSTEAD CHURCH

Originally built in 1235. The tower collapsed in 1742 and was rebuilt out of wood and subsequently replaced during Victorian restoration (1851). The nave roof, of 15th C. origin, contains carvings of angels.

CHAPEL END

There are several theories as to how Chapel End got its name. Some say it was named after a church warden, Mr Chappell, who lived in a homestead there; or did the monks of Chicksands Priory set up an occasional open-air place of worship there? Or was it the site of a private chapel to one of the long since disappeared manors which made up the parish? Whatever its history, Chapel End is today a quiet, secluded spot with a couple of fine farm houses at Chapel End Farm and Hill Farm.

THE RED LION

This public house was built in 1935 on the old village green. The original Red Lion is a cottage behind the present one. This cottage is probably the oldest house in Wilstead and dates back to the 16th C. This inn was previously "The Bell" and then "The Compasses". At one time the Assizes and local lock-up were here.

THE WOOLPACK

This is also an old coaching inn, both being on the old Bedford to London road. The Woolpack had a sheep and cattle pen where travellers could house their animals overnight.

THE WINDMILL

In the 1830s, this mill was built to replace an earlier wooden mill. Originally 35ft (11m) high, it was topped by a cap with a ball and finial and would have been an outstanding and imposing feature visible for many miles. In 1877 a gale removed the cap but, repaired and modernised, the mill worked for a further 33 years. In 1920 it finally ceased production and eventually the sails were removed to Cranfield Mill.

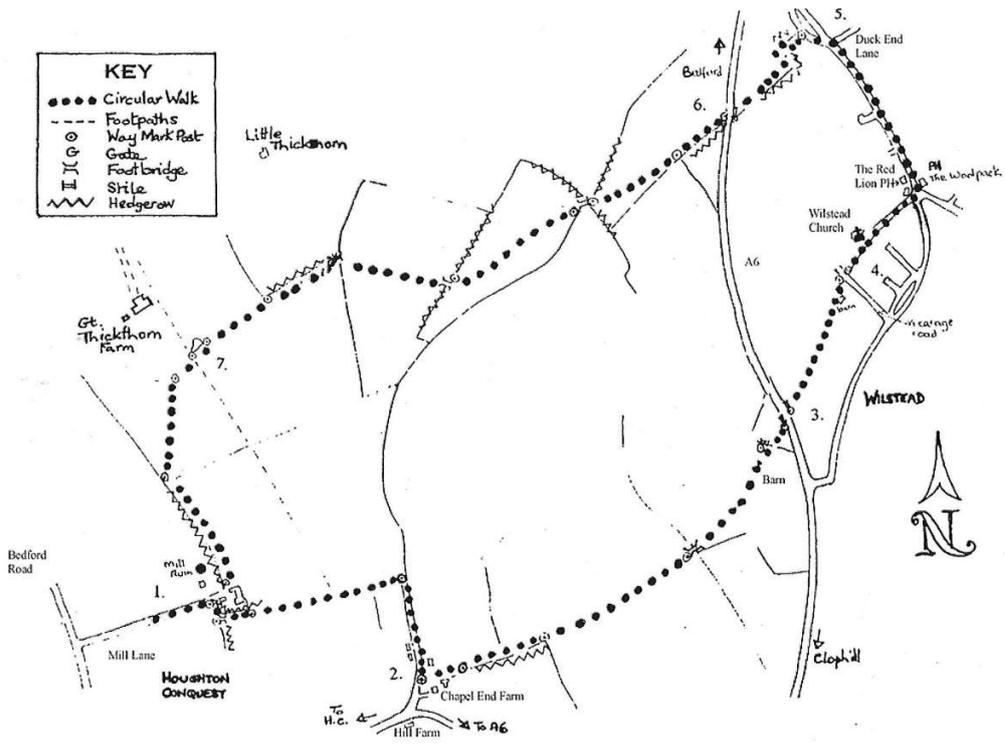
THICKTHORNS

Early maps show that there was a medieval settlement here. An area of small closes (fields) in an expanse of ridge and furrow.

Acknowledgements

The original leaflet was produced by members of the Houghton Conquest Parish Paths Partnership Group. Updated in May 2020.

Comments on this walk would be appreciated. Please email them to letsgo@marstonvale.org



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Details of Points 2 and 5

