



Title: Castle Hedingham

Distance: about 10 miles

Time taken: 3.5 hours

Location: Starting at Wickham St Paul, 3.5 miles North of Halstead

Parking: In School Road, Wickham St Paul (adjacent to the village green)

OS Explorer Map: 195 Braintree & Saffron Walden

Grid Ref.: TL832362

Transport: Beestons (Constable) 11 & 13 Sudbury to Halstead

Refreshment:

Wickham St Paul: The Victory

Castle Hedingham: The Bell

Walk description

This is a 10 mile walk through the gently rolling countryside around Castle Hedingham. It starts in the quiet village of Wickham St Paul, with its beautiful duckpond, before taking you north on well used footpaths through open farmland, then west through the hills and valleys outside Gestingthorpe, before descending the long slow slopes into Castle Hedingham itself, where you can go to see the remains of the medieval castle. On the way back to the parking the walk is through fairly level open farmland, with good views all around and above, the wide, open skies of Essex. Along the route you will pass the premises of the Bulmer Brick and Tile Company. The circular kilns with their barkboard walls are wonderful. If you feel as though this is brickmaking as our forefathers would have seen it, you'd be right - the company is one of the leaders in restoration brickwork in the country.

Directions

- A. From the parking, cross the main road and head along Rectory Lane, to the left of the pub (1).
- B. Follow the lane as it turns left then right. As it turns left again under some trees, look for a footpath through the hedge on the right.
- C. You will see a trail across the grass leading to the opposite hedge, just to the right of a telegraph pole. Follow this and go through the down-wards sloping gap in the hedge.

D. Once in the next field, turn left along the field edge. After about 30 yards you will see a path heading across the field, past an electricity pole (2). Follow this to the footbridge on the opposite field edge. From the footbridge, aim for Butler's Hall Farm on the crest of the hill (3). The footpath enters the farmyard from the rear (easterly) side of the barn.

E. Turn left into the farmyard and follow the farm track straight ahead heading north to the B1058: turn left on the road and then right towards the Bulmer Brick and Tile Company. Take a look at the chimneys of some of the nearby houses!

F. Head through the brickworks (4) going northwest along the byway. After 250 yards, keep to the byway as it turns sharp right (ignore the footpath going straight on). Keep going until the point where the byway becomes a tree covered green lane (about 50 yards after a white house). Just before this point turn left onto a bridleway along a grassy strip between two fields. If you see the Green Man on the byway, you've gone too far (5)!

G. Follow the bridleway northwest for about half a mile taking in the extensive views across the countryside. Part way along, the bridleway turns sharply right then left and becomes concrete (6): the views here are nice. Later, the track passes the site of Gestingthorpe Roman Villa.

H. As the track slopes down towards Hill Farm there are two footpaths on the left. Take the second path, nearest to the large barn (7) and follow the clear footpath directions.

I. As it leaves Hill Farm, the footpath leads down into a valley, passing to the left (south) of a scattering of cottages, across a stream and up towards a patch of woodland (see the path on the far left of the photograph (8)).

J. At the start of the woodland there is a choice of paths. Take the path which forks to the right, skirting the north edge of the woodland with the trees on your left (9).

K. Once you reach a white cottage, the path goes between manicured hedges (10), then bears to the left, eventually following a grassy track between two fields. In the distance you can see St Mary's Church, Gestingthorpe.

L. After about 250 yards, look for an unsigned right turn. It takes you just to the left of the Church, along a field edge. The telegraph pole should be on your left (11).

M. As you emerge onto Church Street, look for the footpath almost directly opposite. This takes you alongside the walled garden of Hall Farm. Follow the wall as it turns to the right, then just before you reach a gate, turn left (12).

N. Walk along the line of newly planted trees which mark the footpath as it leads into the valley. You can see a wide track leading straight ahead out of the valley; follow this to Colliersley Wood.

O. Enter the woods via the footpath (13), heading through the woods towards the southwest. As you exit the woods continue straight on along FP12 towards the waymarker (to the right of

the small tree opposite), and carry straight on along a wide grassy track (14).

P. After 250 yards the track bears left heading south. Continue until you come to Great Lodge Farm, and keep to the track with the farm on your left. The grassy track takes you onto the farm track heading to Rosemary Lane.

Q. Follow the road for a few yards until it turns left, then go straight on through a patch of woodland (15) and back onto Rosemary Lane again. Turn hard right outside Keepers Cottage and head along the lane for about 100 yards until you see a beautiful tree-lined meadow on your left, heading down into Castle Hedingham (16).

R. Walk through the meadow and through the gate at the bottom. Follow the track until you come to the village, and turn left on Bayley Street. This takes you past the entrance to the castle.

S. Continue along Bayley Street to a T-junction and then turn left up St James Street (B1058). On the opposite side of the road, immediately behind a house, is a footpath up some steps (17). Follow this into a field.

T. Follow the field edge then turn left heading across the field towards a telegraph pole and an ancient oak tree. Straight ahead of you is a dodgy but usable stile (18: stile photo), cross this and head across the field towards a gate by Little Lodge Farm.

U. Although the official route goes to the left of the barn, through the farmyard and past the chicken sheds, it's clear that many people take the more scenic route heading right, up the field bank to the left of the farmhouse and then turning left to go behind the barns and back onto the official path some 50 yards later (19).

V. Follow the field edge with the hedge on your left. After about 200 yards go through a gap in the hedge in front of you, turn right then 25 yards later turn left heading northeast across the field (20). After another 200 yards this path joins a byway: continue straight on until you reach Gestingthorpe Road.

W. Cross the road and take the byway opposite. After 50 yards this byway turns sharply left and then runs alongside a small wood. As you emerge from the wood you will see a footbridge on your right (21). Follow this footpath along the side of the wood until you come to a field. The footpath takes you diagonally across the field to a waymarker under a small tree opposite: sometimes it is easier to follow the field edge to the right.

X. You are now heading to Gestingthorpe Road: follow the path to the roadside then turn left.

Y. Walk past Odewells and the duck pond (23), and take the footpath on the right. Walk along the north edge of some woodland to the road: turn right on the road and then left towards the timberyard, entering the field through the hedge on your left (23).

Z. The L-shaped path through this field is usually cleared but if it's not, head towards the

pylon until you come level with a footbridge on your left, then turn towards the footbridge. In the next field keep the hedge on your left until you come to another footbridge then turn right into the field (24) towards pylons south east.

AA. When you reach the track turn left (north east) and head back into Wickham St Paul.

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