

Chesham Bois and the Beech Hangers

Summary

The Chilterns are well known for their beech woodlands. This 4 mile (6.4km) gentle walk takes you through the beech hangers on Chesham's doorstep enabling you to appreciate their beauty. There is an option to swap 'fields and views' for more beech woodland halfway round, but none of the paths are arduous. History hides away along the route. The remains of mills along the River Chess take one back to early times. Lord's Mill was a corn mill in Saxon times when they farmed the Chess Valley. Chesham harboured nonconformist Lollards and Thomas Harding, the 16th-century martyr, was arrested in Aldridge's Dell in 1532 and burnt at the stake as a heretic on White Hill, where there is a memorial stone.

Along the route there is a wide range of wildlife to be enjoyed. Look for egrets and herons on the Chess. On the Chess lakes there are wildfowl including unusual ducks, grebes, geese and swans. Look out in the woods for woodpeckers, nuthatches and, in the spring, a profusion of wildflowers including wild orchids. Autumn will bring out its crop of fungi amongst the beautiful leaf colours. You might even glimpse a deer in the woods or the blue dart of the kingfisher along the Chess.



History and points of interest

Chesham Bois: In the 13th century the du Bois family owned the mansion and the land in Chesham Bois and gave the area its name.

Beech hangers: In the past, strip woodland, roundalls or clumps known as beech hangers were either purposely planted or incorporated into the landscape and remain today on the hillsides in many parts of the Chiltern Hills. The reasons were probably the impracticality of using steep slopes for arable rather than landscape considerations but they provide attractive field margins to the fields and rim the slopes with woodland. The original Saxon use of woodland was for pig rearing but in latter times they have been used for game bird husbandry and timber plantations.

River Chess: The River Chess is a chalk stream - a rare habitat found only in southern England, northern France and New Zealand. The Chess has some of the purest water of any such streams as it emanates from the many groundwater springs along the chalk outcrop in the slopes of the 'dry valleys' that run down into Chesham. The Chess is also unusual in that it takes its name from the town.

A Meades Water Gardens: Originally the pond for Amy Mill; later adapted to watercress beds. Amy Mill on Amy Lane: First known as Amen Mill. Dismantled before 1900 when a new steam mill was built across the road. There are remnants of the mill foundations and a sluice below the garden boundary wall to No2 Amy Lane. The Miller's house was demolished in the 1970s after being damaged by a lorry, and made way for the roundabout and Friedrichsdorf Corner.



B Metropolitan Railway: The Metropolitan Railway came to Chesham on May 15th 1889. It was originally planned to extend the route to Tring. In the 1920s and '30s it was used to carry freight from Chesham including wooden goods and watercress. See *Chesham Shuttle* by Clive Foxell (privately published).

C Millfields watercress beds and allotments: Look for the spring which flows into the watercress bed to the south of the railway embankment alongside Millfields Road.

D Lord's Mill: Stood at the corner of Waterside and Bois Moor Road until 1988. Only the waterfalls and mill house remain. The principal manorial corn mill of Chesham since Saxon times. Last one was built in the 17th century and ceased milling in the 1950s.



E Canons' Mill: A Saxon corn mill, referred to in the Domesday Book, which got its name because it was owned by the canons of Missenden Abbey from the early 12th century. Last worked in 1937 and demolished around 1960.

F Chesham lakes: Old worked out gravel pits.

G Great Bois Wood and Hodds Wood: Ancient deciduous woodland owned by the Woodland Trust (see website). For the prolific wildlife see Chesham Bois website.

H Carved wooden seats: Part of the Chiltern District Council Millennium Project.

I Mayhall Lane: One of the old roads from Amersham Common to Chesham.

J Wey Lane allotments: The old workhouse gardens.

K Aldridge's Dell: An old quarry for chalk used in a lime kiln for local brick mortar. Thomas Harding was arrested in 1532 leaning on a stile in the adjacent Hodds Wood.



Historic photographs © from the collections of Buckinghamshire County Museum. The three mill photographs © Stanley Freese

How to get to Chesham

Chesham is an ideal location for ramblers, cyclists and outdoor enthusiasts. It is well served by public footpaths and has good connections with the extensive path network of the local Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Visit www.chilternsaonb.org and www.chesham.gov.uk.

By train or bus

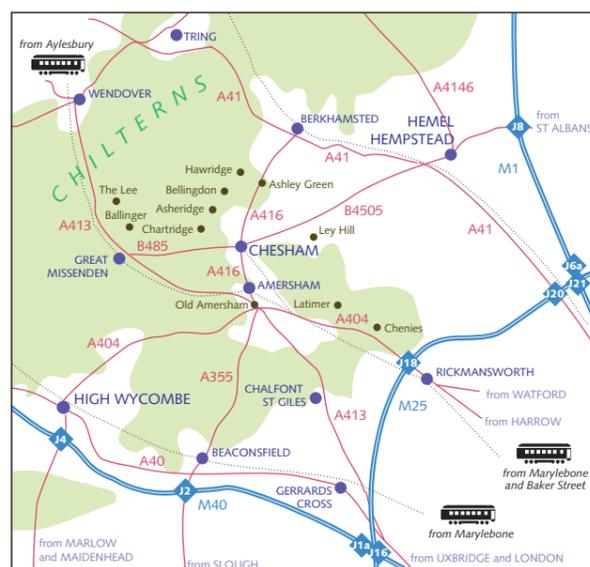
Chesham is only 55 minutes (approx.) from London – Baker Street (Metropolitan Line) and Marylebone (Chiltern Line). Change at Chalfont & Latimer for Chesham station, unless stated otherwise; see www.chilternrailways.co.uk or telephone 0845 748 4950 for more details and train times. Bus services are available and can be checked at www.buckscc.gov.uk/travelinfo or www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk or by telephone on 0870 608 2608.

By road

The town is less than 30 miles from Central London and easily accessible from the M1, M25 and M40 motorways, with scenic drives through countryside to the town.

Maps to accompany Walk 4

O/S Explorer Map Chiltern Hills East (172), O/S Explorer Map Chiltern Hills North (181), Chiltern Society Footpath Maps (6 & 17).



The Chesham Community Vision (tel. 01494 774842) has launched the following new walking routes in 2008:

- 1 The Chesham Heritage Trail (2 miles)
- 2 The Chesham Outer Ring (7.5 miles)
- 3 Tylers Hill, Ley Hill and the Chess (5 miles)
- 4 Chesham Bois and the Beech Hangers (3.5 miles)
- 5 Chartridge 'Vales and Bottoms' (8 miles)
- 6 Ashley Green 'Farms, Forts and Fighters' (8.5 miles)



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Chesham Walks
4

4 miles



Chesham Bois and the Beech Hangers

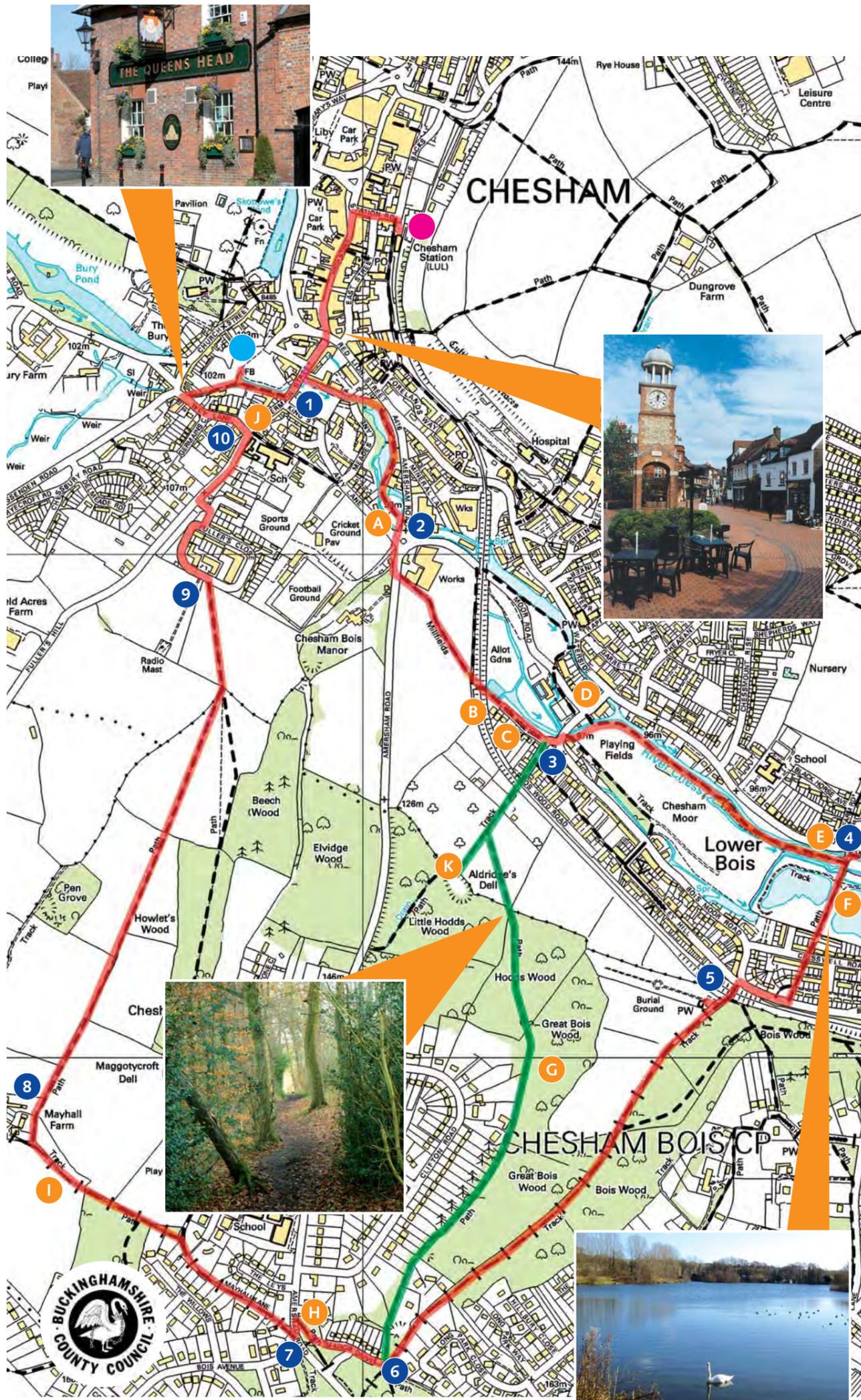
Chesham Walks

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Starting points

● **From the Underground Station:** Walk down Station Road and turn left into the High Street. At the far end take the pedestrian crossing to Germain Street. Keeping to the left hand side continue ahead and just before the bridge turn left down Duck Alley.

● **From the Water Meadow Car Park:** Exit at the rear of the Car Park to a footpath. Turn left and follow the river along Water Lane to Germain Street. Turn left and immediately after crossing the river at the Town Bridge turn right down Duck Alley, signposted for Chess Valley Walk and Chiltern Heritage Trail.



Route description

- Go down Duck Alley and into Meades Water Gardens. Keeping the river on the right continue along the path to emerge through a gap in the wall at Friedrichsdorf Corner on the A416 Amersham Road.
 - Turn right, cross over Amy Lane, the entrance to Chesham United Football Club and the A416 to reach the far side of the roundabout. Turn right, follow the pavement uphill and within a few steps go left on a path between a factory estate and a field. At the end fork right and follow the track under the railway line passing old watercress beds and allotments onto an unmade lane, Millfields.
 - At the end turn left, and in front of the bridge cross Bois Moor Road onto Chesham Moor. On the left is a small stream; follow that until it meets the River Chess and then walk along its right hand bank for about a kilometre to reach a waterfall.
 - This is the remains of Canon's Mill and ahead to the left is a notice board giving a short history of the site. At the waterfall turn right along the Heritage Trail between two lakes to Cresswell Road. Cross and take the footpath ahead up to meet Bois Moor Road. Turn right and follow the pavement downhill to the bend and junction with Woodley Hill.
 - Here, with great care, cross the road and take the bridleway under the railway bridge, signposted to Chesham Bois Common. Pass a small chapel and burial ground on the right and continue steadily uphill on a wide path in Bois Wood. After about 1½ kilometres emerge onto a lane by Great Bois Wood House and continue uphill to a footpath signpost on the left near where the houses end. *(Optional route starts here).*
 - Turn right up an unmarked slope to join a stony lane (Manor Drive) and walk along it in front of the row of houses. Where the road veers left, keep straight on to a crossing path. Turn right, then bear left and head towards a post box on the other side of the A416, emerging at the bus stop and carved wooden seats.
 - Taking extreme care cross the A416 at the bus stop layby over to Mayhall Lane. Follow this public bridleway all the way to Mayhall Farm and take the path to the right just before the farm.
 - Go through two kissing gates then keep left along the field edge hedgerow to a third kissing gate. Continue straight on with the hedge now to the right. The path descends giving good views of Chesham. Where the hedge ends, follow the footpath across the field and through a further gate, down some steps and across the field down to the hedge corner. Bear left, through another gate and then straight ahead to exit the field in front of the 'Scope' buildings in Fullers Close.
 - Turn left on the pavement, follow the road round to the right and then left onto Fuller's Hill. Turn right and take the pavement down to its junction with Wey Lane.
 - Cross to the railings of the allotments, turn left along the pavement and then right down a footpath just in front of the Queen's Head pub.
- **For the Water Meadow Car Park:** Turn left off this path.
- **For the Underground Station:** Continue along this path, then Water Lane and onto Germain Street. Turn left, cross over the river at the Town Bridge and continue ahead to the pedestrian crossing. Cross into the Market Square and proceed along the High Street. Turn right up Station Road.

Option: more woodland on return

To return via Great Bois Wood then Hodds Wood, after passing Great Bois Wood House, continue uphill and take a footpath that makes a sharp turn up a bank to the right just past two new houses (just before the footpath sign at route point 6). This is on the Chiltern Heritage Trail. Stay on this wide track for about ½ km to join a track from the right just after the houses end. Shortly after where the path divides, fork right. Continue downhill to go through a kissing gate into a field. Bear left across the field and through another kissing gate, (Aldridge's Dell is up to the left), then turn right gently downhill and under the railway bridge to Hodds Wood Road. Walk a short distance down this road and turn left into Millfields. From here retrace the route back into Chesham.

