

Woodoaks Farm

With **Andrew Clark**

This varied walk starts from a historic farm, enjoys sweeping views and looks at some important local history. You can finish the walk with some of the best cake in the area.

DISTANCE: 5 miles/8km

START: Woodoaks Farm, Denham Way, Maple Cross, Rickmansworth WD3 9XQ.

Grid ref: TQ 035931 (free parking)

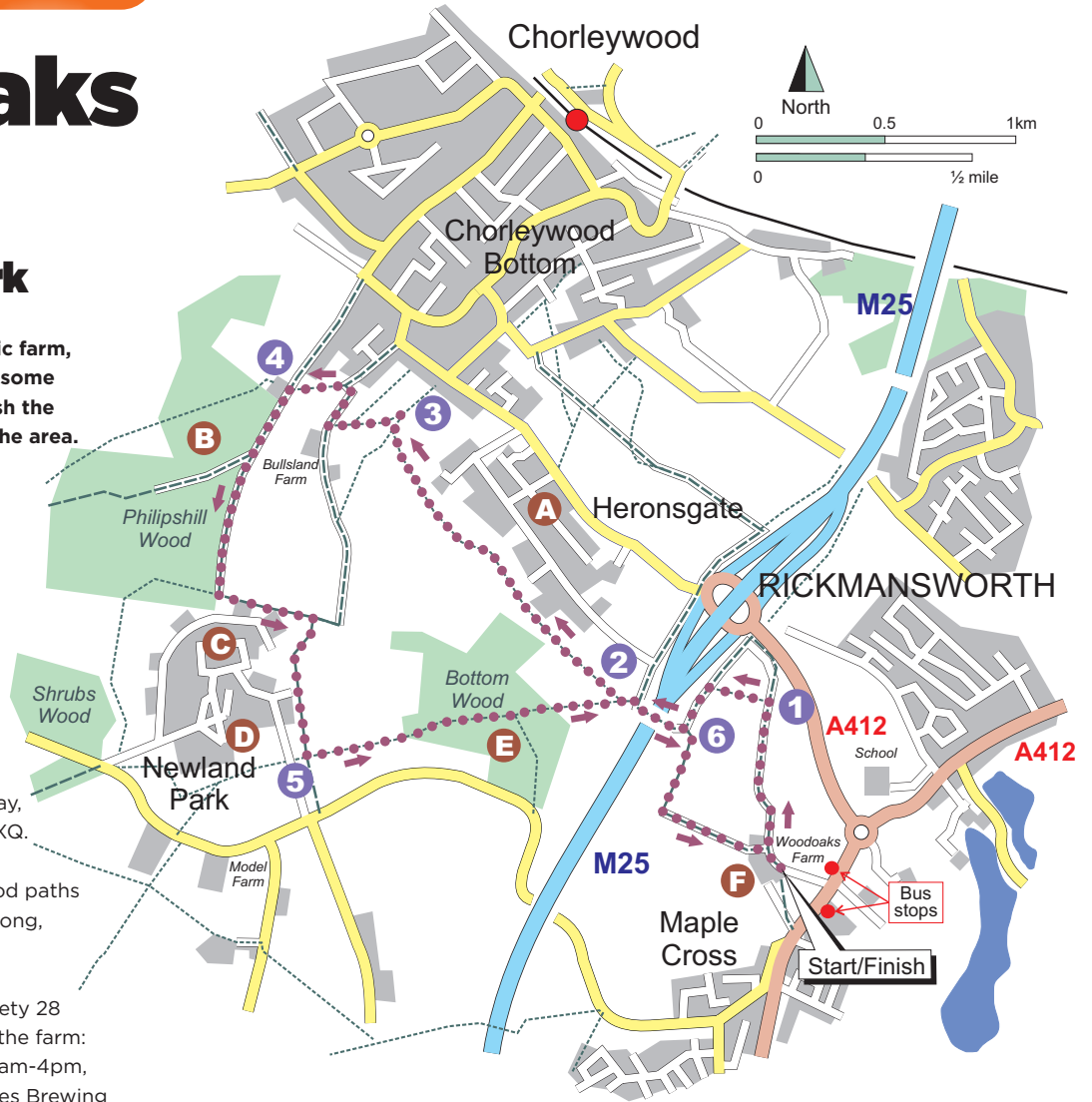
TERRAIN: A stile-free walk along good paths with a number of gates. There's one long, slow climb and two short ones.

Total ascent 475ft/145m

MAPS: OS Explorer 172, Chiltern Society 28

REFRESHMENTS: None on route. At the farm: The Tea Shack (Wednesday-Friday 11am-4pm, weekends 10-5pm) and Creative Juices Brewing Company (Wednesday-Friday 4-8pm, Saturday noon-8pm and Sunday noon-6pm)

LOCAL TRANSPORT: Travel to either Rickmansworth or Uxbridge Stations and transfer to local bus services. Please check www.traveline.info for further information.



Map: Glyn Kuhn
Photos: Colin Drake

The route

From the entrance to The Tea Shack, turn right onto the farm track, go past the end of the large barn and continue straight ahead, gently uphill between the fields.

1. After 200m, turn left uphill up to a T-junction. The M25 is directly ahead. Turn left along the track for 200m, turn right past the mobile phone mast and cross the bridge over the M25. Turn right and immediately left through a gate on a path signposted to 'Old Shire Lane'.
2. Continue straight ahead and follow the hedgerow to a gate at the top of the field. Go through it and stay on the path for over 1km to a crossing path at the top of the hill.
3. Turn left through the gate into the field and bear slightly right towards the buildings directly ahead. Drop down through a gate and climb up through the next one onto a lane. In front of you is Bullsland Farm. Turn right along the lane, go round the left-hand bend, take the path directly ahead for a few metres and turn left on a path signposted to 'Old Shire Lane'. This path can be very muddy

at times. Carry on to meet a rough lane, Old Shire Lane, and turn left along it.

4. The route will now follow The Chiltern Way and Chiltern Heritage Trail for nearly 1km. Continue along the track and down to the bottom of the hill. Follow the main track round to the left, walk along for 350m and turn right uphill. Stay on this track for 550m to a crossing path immediately after the buildings on the left.
5. Turn left through the gate and keep straight ahead to the right of the hedgerow. Go through the next gate, across the farm track and through the gate opposite. Stay in the same direction and, soon after passing under the overhead cables, go through the gate on the left into a wood. Follow the main path along and down through the wood to pass through the next gate into a field. Bear right uphill and turn right along the top of the field. Go through the gate and turn right to recross the M25.
6. At the T-junction, turn right and follow the track down past the old barn to return to the farm and the end of the walk.

Continued overleaf



Bullsland Farm



View near Nathan's Farm



Approaching Woodoaks Farm



Points of interest

Woodoaks Farm has over 300 acres of arable and pastureland, and about 75 acres of semi-natural woodland. It has a rich history dating back nearly 1,000 years. It was originally called Woodwick and its owners have included knights, lords, parliamentarians, royalists, lawyers and a mayor of London. The farm has been in the Findlay family since the 1920s. In November 2020 Sally Findlay bequeathed Woodoaks to the Soil Association Land Trust to ensure it will be farmed sustainably into the future, producing good food, improving wildlife and continuing to welcome people. There are currently many activities taking place, including themed nature walks and opportunities for volunteers to be involved in the many projects. Also on site are a number of businesses including a tea shack, a brewery company, an artist's studio and a carpentry workshop. The farm featured in *Chiltern 242*. For further information about the farm go to <https://woodoaksfarm.com/>.

A. Heronsgate was founded by The Chartist Cooperative Land Society in 1846, with the charitable aim of resettling industrial workers from the northern cities on smallholdings, making them independent of factory employers and potentially qualifying them for the vote. Thirty-five plots (and a beerhouse) were purchased and allocated by ballot. The roads were given names like Halifax, Stockport and Bradford. It's now a very desirable area to live, with house prices to match.

B. Shire Lane and Philipshill Wood: Shire Lane forms the boundary between Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire. It's also believed to have been the boundary between the old kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex. Philipshill Wood is ancient woodland managed by the Woodland Trust. It's well known for bluebells, yellow archangel and several types of orchid.

C. Chiltern Open Air Museum: The walk passes the boundary of the museum. It was founded by volunteers in the 1970s and opened to the public in 1981. It rescues threatened historic buildings, which would otherwise be demolished, rebuilding and preserving them in a traditional Chilterns landscape. These buildings include a toll house, farm buildings, a prefab and a chapel. For opening times go to <https://coam.org.uk>.

D. Newland Park: On the right up the hill towards Waypoint 5 are the grounds of the Park. In the early 13th century it was owned by Missenden Abbey and later by Abraham Newlands, who became Chief Cashier at the Bank of England. Subsequent owners include Sir Henry Gott and Sir Thomas Allen. It later became the site of Buckinghamshire New University, who sold it to Cromer Homes Group in 2016. The site has been used as a location for many films, the latest being Steven Spielberg's and Tom Hanks' *Masters of the Air*.

E. No Dragon Wood: Its real name is Bottom Wood. On leaving the wood there's a gate, gifted under the Society's Donate-a-Gate scheme, which carries a plaque saying, 'No dragon related incidents since 1415', courtesy of a family who enjoyed many trips to the wood. Their story featured in *Chiltern 239*.

F. Woodoaks Farm Barn is Grade II listed. It was probably built in the 16th century and is currently being restored. Once complete the Soil Association plan to use it for events. It's open to the public so it's worth going to look at the cathedral-like structure.

Our special thanks to Rose Lewis of the Soil Association and Woodoaks Farm.