

Wheathampstead to Brocket Hall

With **Andrew Clark**

A longer than usual walk that includes much local history, rolling countryside, the upper reaches of the River Lea and two lovely pubs.

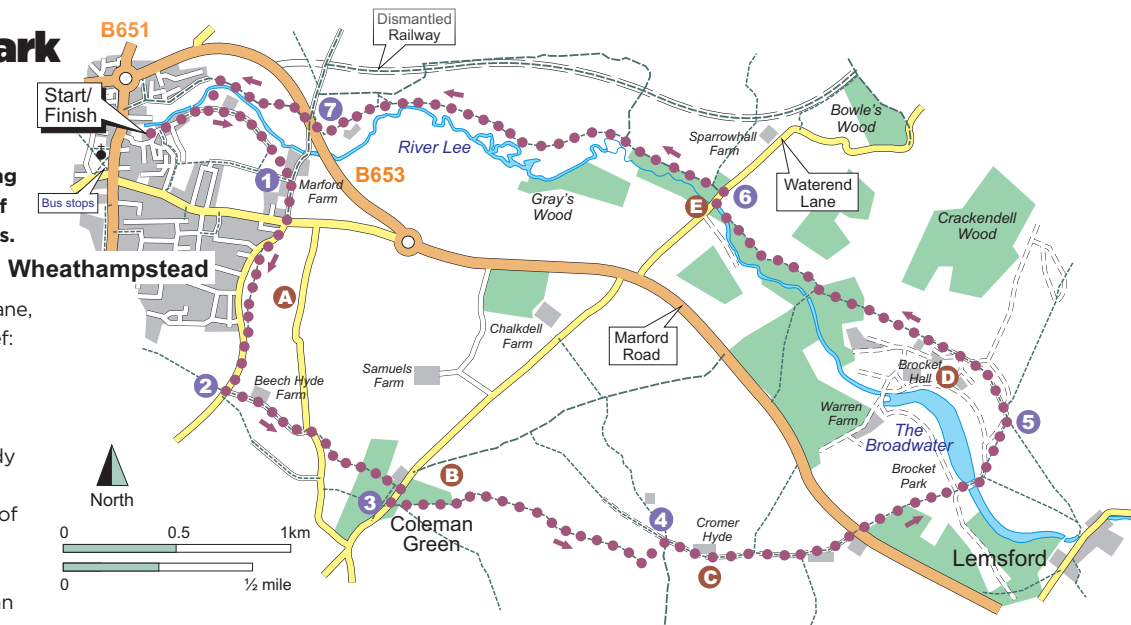
DISTANCE: 6.5 miles/10.4km

START: East Lane car park, East Lane, Wheathampstead AL4 8SB. Grid ref: TL178140

TERRAIN: A moderate stile-free walk along good paths, with a number of gates. There's one steady climb from Devil's Dyke up to near Coleman Green and a total ascent of 330ft/100m

MAPS: OS Explorer 182

REFRESHMENTS: The John Bunyan in Coleman Green, The Crooked Chimney near Cromer Hyde, pubs and cafés in Wheathampstead



LOCAL TRANSPORT: For local bus services please check www.traveline.info

Map: Glyn Kuhn
Photos: Colin Drake

The route

Turn left out of the car park along East Lane into Meads Lane and follow it into the park. Keep straight ahead following the hedgerow on the right and, where that ends, continue onwards through a series of gates. The path then turns right up to a path junction. Turn left and continue to a lane (Sheepcote Lane).

1. Turn right uphill to a road junction, cross into Dyke Lane and walk along for 130m to the entrance to Devil's Dyke on the left. Go through the ornate gate, walk along the sunken path for 350m and turn right up the steps to rejoin Dyke Lane. Turn left along it for 300m and take the footpath on the left at the entrance to Beech Hyde Farm.
2. Follow the path through the farm and bear right away from the buildings along a wide track to the next lane (Beech Hyde Lane). Continue to the right-hand bend, go straight on past the barrier and through the gate into a field. Follow the path uphill and through the next gate into a wood. Continue ahead onto a gravel driveway and follow it round to the left past The John Bunyan pub to visit John Bunyan's Chimney, a little further along the lane to the right. Walk back along the lane for 160m and take the path on the left.
3. Continue ahead past the barrier into the field. Turn immediately left along the field edge and keep straight ahead through a gap in the hedgerow into the next field. Carry on in the same direction and follow the hedgerow round to the right into another field. Walk gently uphill for 50m, bear left over the field to the other side and turn right to follow the path for 200m to a wide crossing track. Cross it and stay in the same direction to the left of the wood. Where that ends, continue for a further 200m and turn left through a gap in the hedgerow into a field. Follow the path across the field to a lane (Cromer Hyde Lane).
4. Turn right along the lane for 900m to the junction with the B653

Marford Road. On the right is The Crooked Chimney pub. Cross the main road to a pavement, turn right for a few metres and take the footpath on the left into a field. Go straight ahead, follow the path down beside the golf course to a lake and go over the bridge. The path now runs uphill on the grass next to a driveway. Where the hedgerow on the left ends, follow it round to the left away from the driveway onto a path.

5. The path rejoins the driveway near Bocket House. Turn left along it to shortly bear right over the grass, keep straight ahead past the buildings and across the golf course into the wood. Follow the path down to a junction of tracks and continue directly ahead for 600m to reach Waterend Lane. To the left is Waterend Ford.
6. Turn right up the lane for 50m to Waterend House and take the path on the left signposted to Wheathampstead. The route now follows the River Lea for 2km through a series of gates and then on to one just before the main road. Go through it, turn right and, at the first corner, drop down the steps to a brideway.
7. Turn left under the main road and immediately right up the steps to a path. Turn right and go through the gate onto a wide track. Follow it for 500m and bear left down towards a bridge over the river. Cross it and turn right to leave the park. Go straight ahead along the lane for 130m and take the path on the right past the barrier to return to the car park

Continued overleaf



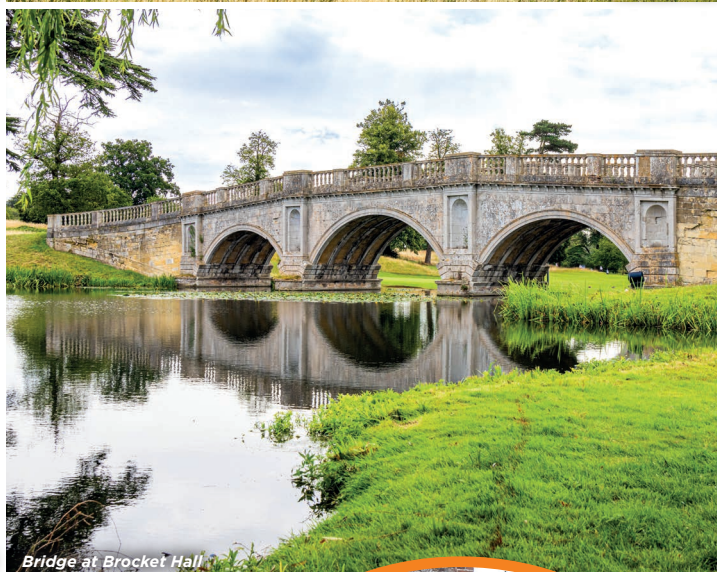
Entrance to Devil's Dyke



Brocket Hall



The Crooked Chimney pub



Bridge at Brocket Hall

Points of interest

Wheathampstead: The walk starts from the car park, then passes through an open area called 'The Meades', where you'll find play and picnic areas, a community orchard, The Dell (a local wildlife site) and the River Lea. The river rises in Luton and flows 42 miles to the Thames at Bow Creek. Its upper sections are classified as a chalk stream. These support a wide range of wildlife, including otters, water voles, kingfishers and many species of coarse fish. The spring 2021 issue of *Chiltern* included a feature by Bob Stuart about Wheathampstead railway station. It's well worth a visit.

A. Devil's Dyke is the remains of a prehistoric defensive ditch to an Iron Age settlement and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It's suggested that it was the site where Julius Caesar defeated the resistance led by the local Catuvellauni tribe under Cassivellaunus.

B. John Bunyan's Chimney: John Bunyan was a Puritan preacher and the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which became one of the most published books in the English language. The chimney stack is all that remains of one of the cottages where he's believed to have stayed and preached.

C. Cromer Hyde is a hamlet just off the main Wheathampstead to Lemsford road (B653). It's divided into three - Lower, Middle and Upper Cromer Hyde - and contains some attractive cottages. Further along the lane is The Crooked Chimney pub, formerly called The Chequers. The building can be traced back to the 1600s when it was a farmhouse. It became an ale house c1756. Note the highly distinctive Z-shaped chimney.

D. Brocket Hall: The first mansion on this site was built in 1279. The current house is Grade I listed, was designed by the architect Sir James Paine and dates from c1760.

The Hall has been used as a location for many film and television productions including *Pride and Prejudice* with Colin Firth. The classical bridge over the River Lea was built of Portland stone, also to Paine's design.

E. Waterend House is a large Jacobean house built by Sir John Jennings in 1610 and is Grade II listed. His granddaughter Sarah Jennings became the First Duchess of Marlborough. The exterior of the house was used in the filming of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. The ford on the River Lea was a crossing point for the Roman Road from St Albans to Braughing.



John Bunyan's Chimney