

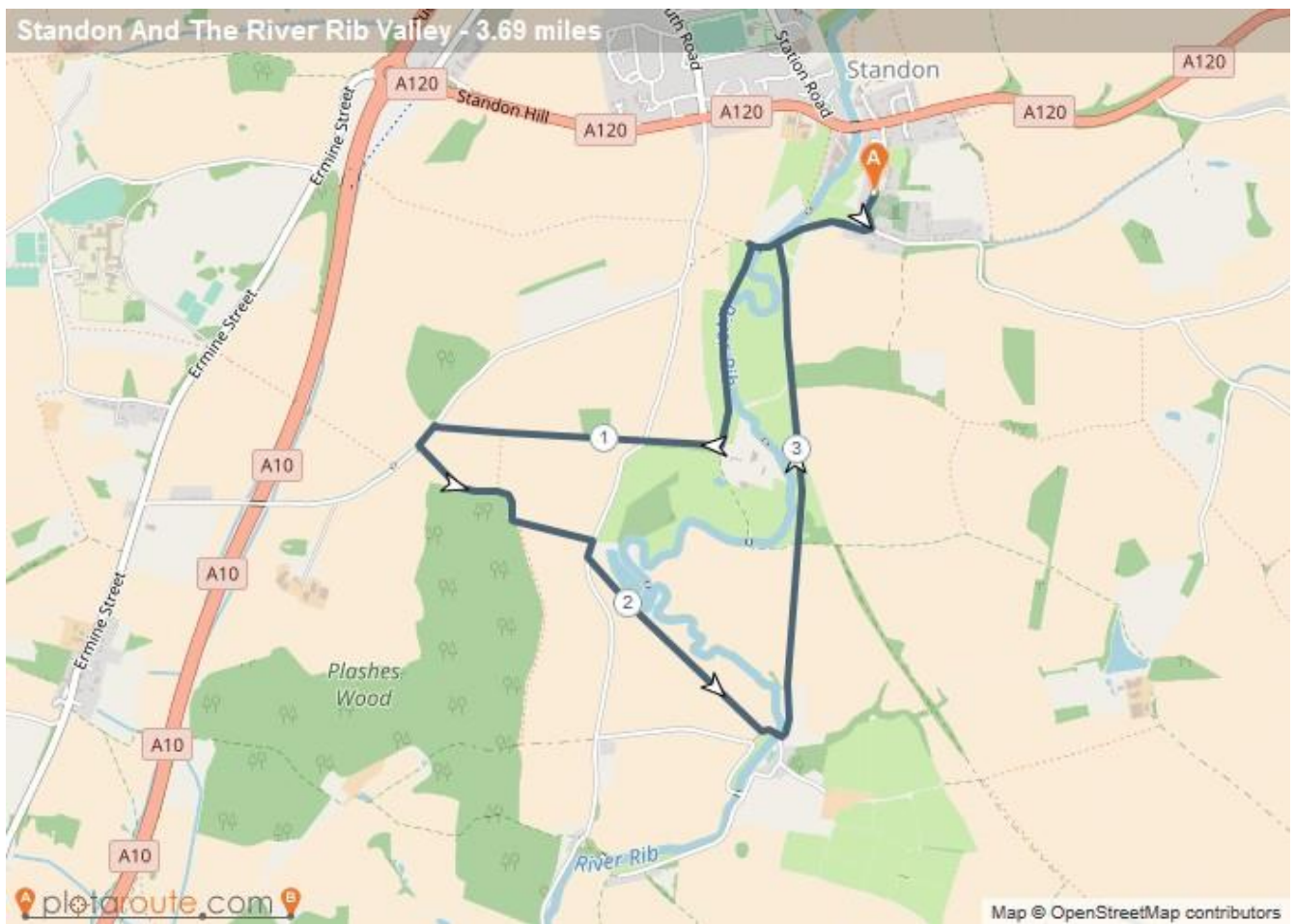
2019 Spring Walk Standon and the River Rib Valley

This year our walks will explore more of Hertfordshire's beautiful countryside and diverse landscapes. The 2019 Spring Walk is a circular route of just over 3½ miles, starting in Standon, which explores the peaceful valley of the River Rib to the south of the village. The area has links to several historical figures, while in the village the church and a number of buildings are of interest (see photo below).



The route runs alongside the river before a climb out of the valley to the west is rewarded with far-reaching views. Returning to the river bank the route continues south to the hamlet of Latchford, then returns to Standon on the opposite bank of the river. There is a further short climb just after leaving Latchford. There are no stiles. The route description includes a suggestion for a shorter walk, of about 2 miles, which misses out the climb up the valley side and does not visit Latchford.

Parking The walk starts and finishes at point A on the map. Standon is situated on the A120 around 6 miles north of Ware, 6 miles west of Bishop's Stortford and 1 mile east of the A10. Turn south into the High Street off the A120 just to the east of the bridge over the river. Park on the High Street near the church. There are two pubs close by.



Standon High Street offers clues to its history. The wide central section once accommodated a market, established in the 13th century by the local and powerful de Clare family. For a while the market thrived and Standon became one of the county's larger towns, until eventually losing trade to nearby Puckeridge and more distant Buntingford. By the early 16th century Standon had been left behind as a centre for trade, although its May Day Fair remains a popular event. Many village houses conceal medieval structures behind exteriors of more recent brick or decorative plasterwork pargetting.

To begin the walk, head south on the High Street (with the church on your left). Where the road bends to the left turn right into Paper Mill Lane. You will pass a small green where there is a large piece of puddingstone - The Standon Puddingstone - with an explanatory plaque.

Passing Paper Mill House, the path continues by the former mill pond. Once a corn mill, the mill later made high quality paper for bibles as well as more mundane brown paper bags. Cross the footbridge over the River Rib (see photo right), then turn left onto the public footpath which leaves the lane just beyond the bridge.



You will now be walking through a grass field beside the river (see photo right). The river rises high on the chalk hills between Therfield and Reed, and flows for 19 miles down the chalk dip slope to join the Lea to the east of Hertford. Its tributary, the Quin, flows into the Rib near Braughing. Below Standon the Rib meanders across the floor of its wide flood plain, where in places the steep river cliffs suggest that the valley once carried larger volumes of water.



The route continues south on the path close to the river, then bears slightly right away from the river to climb a small hill, before going through a gate. Beyond the gate the path reaches a tarmac road. To the left is the house called The Lordship (see photo right). The de Clare family established a deer park here in the 13th century, later owned by Henry VIII. In the 16th century the property was acquired by Ralph Sadleir, who built a house here. He served three monarchs as diplomat and courtier and died aged 80 in 1587. Sadleir was said to be the wealthiest commoner of his day, benefitting from the dissolution of the monasteries.



A shorter route of approximately two miles returns to Standon from here. To follow this route, go straight over the road and through the gate ahead, following Public Bridleway 19 signposted to Latchford (see photo right). This crosses the river then meets another bridleway running south to north between Latchford and Standon. Turn left here to return to Standon.



Note that this section has not been test-walked and walkers are recommended to carry an Ordnance Survey map with them.



To follow the route described, turn right and follow Public Bridleway 19 signposted 'Gore Lane ½'. This leads uphill (see photo left). Cross over the road at the top of this part of the hill and go straight ahead on the bridleway, passing a wood on the right (see photo right).



You eventually reach a ridgetop road, with the buildings of St Edmund's College (England's oldest Catholic school) across the A10 to the west. Turn left and walk along the road, passing a seat (see photo right) from which there are fine views back across the Rib valley to the east.



In a short distance turn left across the footbridge to follow Public Footpath 59 signposted 'Latchford 1' (see photo left). The route across the field may not be clearly defined on the ground. Go very slightly left from the footbridge towards the lower edge of the wood ahead (see photo right).



When you reach the wood turn left to follow the edge of the wood, then go around the corner at the end, passing a footpath marker post indicating a footpath (with yellow arrows) joining from the left. A short distance further on the paths diverge and the route required goes straight downhill, towards the trees bordering the lake in the valley (see photo right).



Turn right when you reach the road, then almost immediately go left onto Public Footpath 59 signposted 'Latchford ½'. Despite the signs on the gate, if the public footpath has not been reinstated across the ploughed field (see photo right), or the next field, it is more practical to keep on the grassy track alongside the lake and then close to the river bank. Please keep dogs on leads alongside the fishing lake.



From this part of the route the buildings of The Lordship are visible (see photo right, looking back upstream towards Standon).

Monarchs, nobility and gentry built houses in Hertfordshire from the early Middle Ages onwards, attracted by its proximity to London and benign climate. Ralph Sadleir's was built in brick in around 1546 and once rivalled Hatfield in size and status. It was large enough to host Elizabeth's royal progress on two occasions, and later Ralph's son Thomas provided hospitality to James I. The Sadleir family ran out of male heirs later in the 17th century, and by the early 1800s the house was in ruins. Subsequently it was acquired and restored by the Duke of Wellington, although he never lived here. Little of the original Tudor building remains. There were also elaborate Tudor gardens now marked only by earthworks.



Approaching Latchford the white hand rails of the footbridge across the River Rib come into view. The official route of the public footpath reaches the far end of the field just to the right of the photo (right).



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Cross the footbridge by the ford (see photo left) and turn left. You will now follow Public Bridleway 30 more or less in a straight line back to Standon. This passes to the right of the storage shed and climbs a hill (see photo right).



As you climb there are views across the river (see photo left) and a little later a view down the valley to the south (see photo right).





The route continues over the brow of the hill and as the path begins to descend Standon comes into view (see photo left). At the foot of the hill the route of the shorter walk option described above joins from the left. Keep going straight ahead, passing through the metal gate (see photo right).



In the next field the walk joins the route of the former Buntingford branch railway for a short distance. The line served the area from 1870 to 1964, until closed by Beeching. From this point there are more views across the valley (see photo right).



As you approach Standon go through the metal gate and turn right (see photo left): you are now on Paper Mill Lane again.

As you return towards the High Street a pleasing combination of barn and church buildings comes into view (see photo right).



The large brick and timber building opposite the top of Paper Mill Lane is of interest (see photo right). It is thought that a hospice built by the Knights of St John of Jerusalem occupied this site. Later there was a guildhall and then a school. The bricks, infilled in a herringbone pattern, were probably placed there during a Victorian restoration of the 16th century timber frame.



The church, St Mary's, is also of interest. It was built, on ground which rises to the east, by the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, who owned land and buildings in the parish. Its unusual west porch makes it a processional church, and flights of steps to accommodate the slope lead from the nave to the chancel and again to the altar. It also had the only free-standing church tower in Hertfordshire, until it was connected to the rest of St Mary's church in the 19th century by an organ loft (see photo right).



Parts of the church date from the 13th century and the tower is 15th century. Fine brasses depict John Field (who died in 1474) and members of his family. Field was a wool merchant in Calais, clearly successful since he could afford to donate £2,000 (the equivalent of millions of pounds today) to Henry VI to provide for the defence of that town. Also in the church are monuments to Ralph and Thomas Sadleir and a 13th century font. The church was restored in the 19th century when the nave was widened.

If you have enjoyed this walk, please consider supporting CPRE Hertfordshire in our efforts to protect and celebrate the Hertfordshire countryside for everyone to enjoy.

Our website www.cpreherts.org.uk contains more information about our work and how you can donate and perhaps volunteer.

This route was last walked by CPRE in April 2019.

Note: all walkers do so at their own risk. Suitable footwear and clothing are recommended.

CPRE Hertfordshire is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered charity no. 1162419, address: 31a Church Street, Welwyn, AL6 9LW, tel: 01438 717587.

We are the county branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.