



The countryside charity  
Hertfordshire

## CPRE Hertfordshire Walk Wallington and Clothall

This is a circular walk of  $4\frac{3}{4}$  miles, starting in Wallington, which is located about three miles due east of Baldock in north Hertfordshire. The walk also visits Clothall. Both villages are very small, with populations of about 150. The villages have mediaeval churches with some interesting features, as well as other historic buildings.



Countryside near Clothall

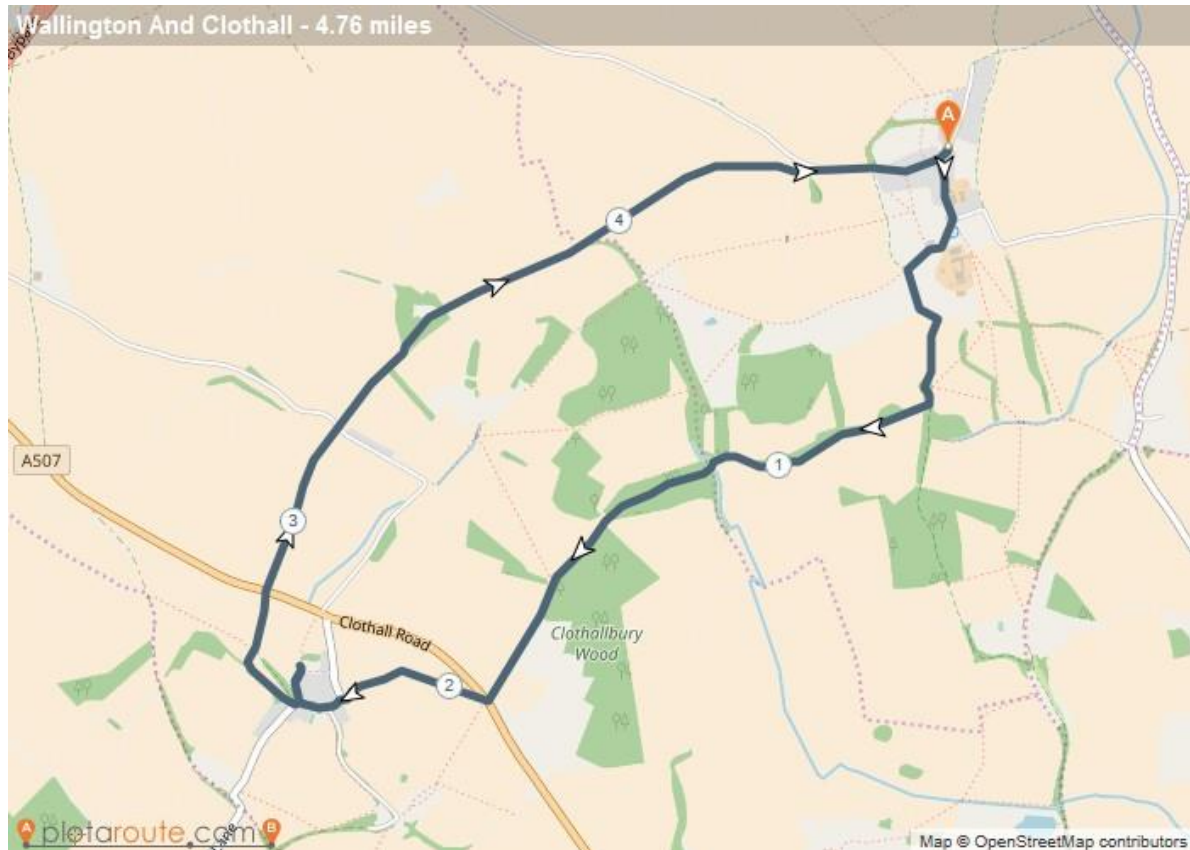
Wallington is also renowned as the home, for a few years only, of the author George Orwell, whose most famous novels, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, were in part inspired by events in the village.

The route to Clothall runs along part of the Hertfordshire Way, a 195-mile circular walk around the county. The return to Wallington is along a stretch of the Icknield Way Path, which runs altogether for 110 miles between Ivinghoe Beacon and Thetford. Most of the route of this walk is fairly flat although there is a short climb just beyond Clothall. There are no stiles.

In winter ideally the walk should be completed on a clear and bright day, to enjoy the high ridge between Clothall and Wallington which is quite exposed and has far-reaching views to the north. By contrast the first half of the walk runs through woods and past high hedges and is more sheltered. Expect at least some mud at most times of the year. The route description includes a suggestion for a shorter walk, of just over three miles, which misses out Clothall.

**Parking** The walk starts and finishes at point A on the map, in a small parking area (see photo right) adjacent to The Street in Wallington, opposite the village hall. This section of The Street is a no-through road which runs northwards from the centre of the village.

The village is signposted off the A505 east of Baldock.



To begin the walk head up The Street with the phone box on the right, pausing almost immediately to see the house once lived in by George Orwell and his wife Eileen, which is located just around the corner to the right in Kit's Lane (see photo right). Orwell, an old Etonian whose real name was Eric Blair, came here in 1936 to escape London and try to become a full-time writer.



The plaque on the cottage wall says that Orwell lived here until 1940, but within a year of his arrival he went to Spain to fight in the civil war. He suffered all his life from chest complaints and after returning from Spain spent time in hospital and abroad. Now a neat thatch, in Orwell's time the cottage was primitive, not unusual for that time, with a corrugated iron roof, and was known as The Stores. Orwell and his wife reopened the shop in the house, but it was never a commercial success.



Continue to walk up The Street passing on the right the cottage called Les Arbres (see photo left) and on the left the black barn which is part of Manor Farm (see photo right). The farm in Animal Farm has the same name.





Just past Manor Farm bear right onto the no-through road after passing a pond on your right. Keep going uphill then go up the steps on the right into the churchyard. St Mary's church dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although parts have been rebuilt more recently (see photo right). Orwell married his wife Eileen here in June 1936. Inside, the pews are 15<sup>th</sup> century and bring to mind the generations of churchgoers who have sat here. The north aisle roof is also original, with carved angels on the beam ends.



Leave the churchyard through the gate in the south-western corner (see photo left), then turn right onto the lane. This is the route of the Hertfordshire Way which the walk follows to Clothall. Look out for the roundels (see photo right) which waymark the Way. Make sure you follow white arrows on a



green background (the reverse roundels mark the route of the Way in the opposite direction).

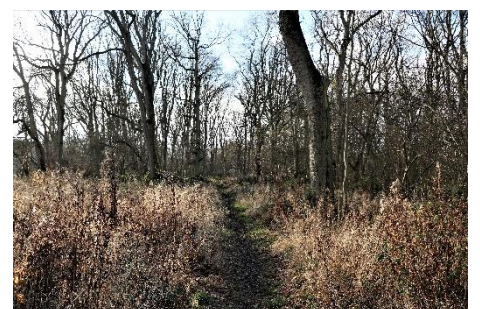
Follow the lane as it turns left and becomes a muddy track. You will begin to see, behind you, views stretching away to the north and north-west. After about 150 yards the track bears slightly left, then after another 75 yards turn right onto the green lane between overgrown hedges (see photo right).



Further on the green lane makes a dogleg, then at the start of a straight section (see photo left) look for a small footbridge on the right. Cross over: beyond the bridge the route has a field to the left and trees to the right (see photo right).



Continue along the edge of the field with trees and woodland to the right. Eventually the path goes down to cross a footbridge and into woodland beyond (see photo left). The path turns left, then right, and continues through the wood, called Bush Spring (see photo right). Old coppiced woods like this were



often given the name 'Spring', since the stems 'sprang' back from the cut coppice stumps.



The path emerges from the wood by a large multi-stemmed tree, then continues with a tall hedge and woodland to the left and a field to the right (see photo right).



**Shorter route:** At the far end of the field, just before the path passes through the gap in the hedge ahead, there is an option to take a shorter route back to Wallington. Turn right and take the footpath diagonally across the field (see photo right). Head for the left-hand side of the buildings in the distance, then at the far side of the field turn right onto the track, keeping straight ahead back to Wallington. **Note that this shorter route has not been tested and walkers are recommended to carry an Ordnance Survey map with them.**



The walk so far has run to the south and east of the crest of the chalk escarpment, which here reaches to just under 150 metres (490 feet) above sea level. On this high plateau between the headwaters of several rivers there are small irregular-sided fields, scattered woods, numerous greens or small commons, and winding lanes, many 'green' or unsurfaced. This landscape was at least in part created from former hilltop common grazing land or 'waste' in the 12th and 13th centuries, as population increases promoted piecemeal enclosures towards the edges of parishes throughout this part of Hertfordshire. Typically new farms clustered around a preserved piece of common land or green, as at Shaw Green south of Wallington. This process was perhaps at its height 800 years ago when King John was forced to submit to the Magna Carta in 1215 to fend off open rebellion by the English Barons.



To continue to Clothall go straight on through the gap in the hedge (see photo left) and along the edge of the next field, then between high hedges, emerging onto a wide track close to buildings to the left. Go straight on to meet the busy A507 road. Cross with care and on the far side turn right on the verge and walk alongside the road for 75 metres (still on the route of the Hertfordshire Way and signposted as the Highway verge link path).



Go through the gap in the hedge, then cross the field heading for the right-hand end of the distant line of telegraph poles (see photo left), following the direction of the Hertfordshire Way arrow. When you reach the fence turn left and then go down the flight of steps (see photo right) to reach the



village street in Clothall. Turn left to walk through the village. If, as in the left-hand photo, the footpath route across the field has not been reinstated, you might prefer to turn right and go anti-clockwise around the edge of the field to reach the steps.



If you would like to visit the church, go past the post box and a noticeboard, turn right at the sign for Public Footpath 7, then go across the small field and through the gate into the churchyard.



Much of the church is 14<sup>th</sup> century, including the tower which incorporates the porch, a relatively unusual arrangement (see photo left). The font in Purbeck marble is 12<sup>th</sup> century. A delightful east window depicts leaves and birds, many local species but some distinctly exotic: the glass is 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century and



possibly unique to England (see photo right). The south door and its iron hinges are also 14<sup>th</sup> century.



Return to the road, turn right and right again onto Public Bridleway 5, still on the route of the Hertfordshire Way. Go down the hill and through the metal gate (see photo left), then after a short distance bear right and go through a second metal gate in the fence ahead (see photo right).



The route leaves the Hertfordshire Way here and follows the Icknield Way Trail back to Wallington. Turn right and keep to the left of the hedge (see photo left). There is a view of the tower of Baldock church down the valley. Cross the road and head uphill on the Icknield Way (see photo right).



The landscape ahead is very different from the one encountered on the first half of the walk. Much of it is almost treeless and hedgeless, with far-reaching views (on a clear day) over the rooftops of Baldock to the north and north-west (see photo right). In both Clothall and Wallington parishes and some neighbouring areas, the mediaeval open fields, once managed in strips, were never formally enclosed (as they were, by Act of Parliament, in most places). Instead the strips were gradually amalgamated, resulting in the huge and largely featureless fields you see here today.



A trained eye can spot the marks left by some of the features of the mediaeval field system. In the area there are also strip lynchets - sudden steep changes of level, sometimes with scrub or trees on them, which may date back to the Bronze Age. These have been created by centuries of ploughing pushing soil downhill, or perhaps a deliberate attempt to create more level fields.

George Orwell loved the countryside and its wildlife. He undoubtedly walked the paths and tracks around Wallington when he wasn't occupied with writing, looking after the shop, tending to his goats and hens, and cultivating fruit and vegetables in the garden. Later in his life, living back in London and working for Tribune magazine, he often wrote about the countryside and wildlife in his column 'As I Please'. He died from TB in January 1950, aged just 46.



Cross over the minor road and keep going along the Icknield Way with a hedge on the right and the large field falling away over the steep scarp to the left (see photo left). Further on the route passes through a small wood (see photo right).



Cross a track and keep going straight ahead. Sheep were traditionally folded onto arable fields after harvest, just as they were in January when this walk was photographed (see photo left). Further on the route passes through a gap in a hedge (see photo right).



Just over 1½ miles after joining the Icknield Way the route starts to descend towards the road on the outskirts of Wallington (see photo right). Join the road and continue along it back into the village. Keep straight on along Kit's Lane to pass the house where Orwell once lived, before returning to the car park.



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](http://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 January 2022.

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 CPRE - The countryside charity (previously known as the Campaign to Protect Rural England).