Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Amersham

Distance: 19 km=12 miles or 16 km=10 miles (if arriving by car) — easy walking

Region: Chilterns (Bucks) — Date written: 3-sep-2014

Author: Phegophilos — Last update: 25-sep-2026

Refreshments: Coleshill, Winchmore Hill, Amersham

Map: Explorer 172 (Chiltern Hills East) *but the map below should suffice*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Country town, fields, woodland, villages, views, Underground station

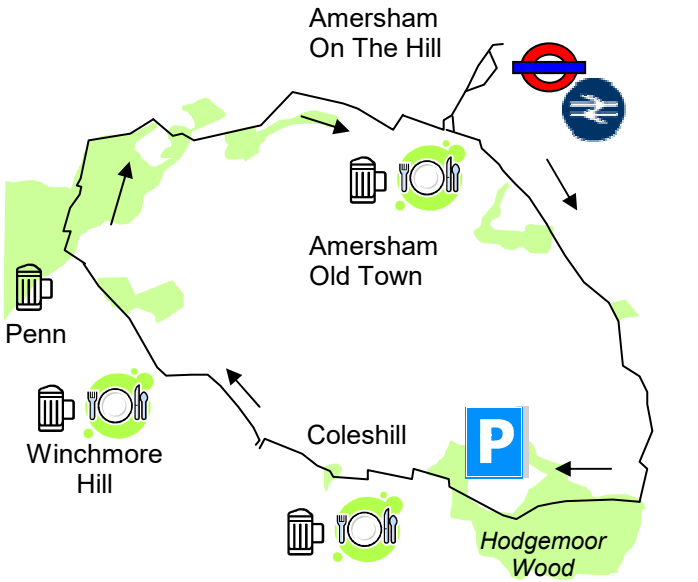
In Brief

A wonderful walk, far out in the rolling Buckinghamshire countryside, amidst the legendary Chiltern beechwoods, farms, sheep, small villages and their pubs, the extraordinary Old Town of Amersham with its bijou shops, all easily reached by car. But, most remarkably, accessible via Chiltern Railways or the *London Underground*. Hence easy to reach from Central London, especially for the select few who travel free.

There are one or two patches of nettles, especially the section leading into the town, but other walkers seemed comfortable in shorts. The going underfoot is comfortable without much mud or hard stones, so trainers or sensible walking shoes should be ok, although most walkers would wear boots for comfort. Your dog could certainly come with you on this adventure.

The walk begins in **Amersham Station** (by Chiltern Railways from Marylebone Station, also a terminus of the Underground Metropolitan Line, both within the Freedom Pass zone), giving you a rest break in one of the villages. If you are driving, start at **Hodgemoor Wood** car park, nearest postcode **HP7 0JX**, w3w:agenda.dishes.trio, giving you a wonderful mid-walk break in Old Amersham. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

Bird's Eye View



The Walk

Decision point. If you are starting the walk in the Hodgemoor Wood car park, skip forward to Leg 2.

*Amersham is in two quite distinct parts. The **Old Town**, with all the historic buildings, is down the hill and on your route. If you arrived by train or Underground, you are in **Amersham-on-the-Hill**, a much newer place which grew up around the railway (see later).*

Prelude: To The Old Town 1¼ km=¾ mile

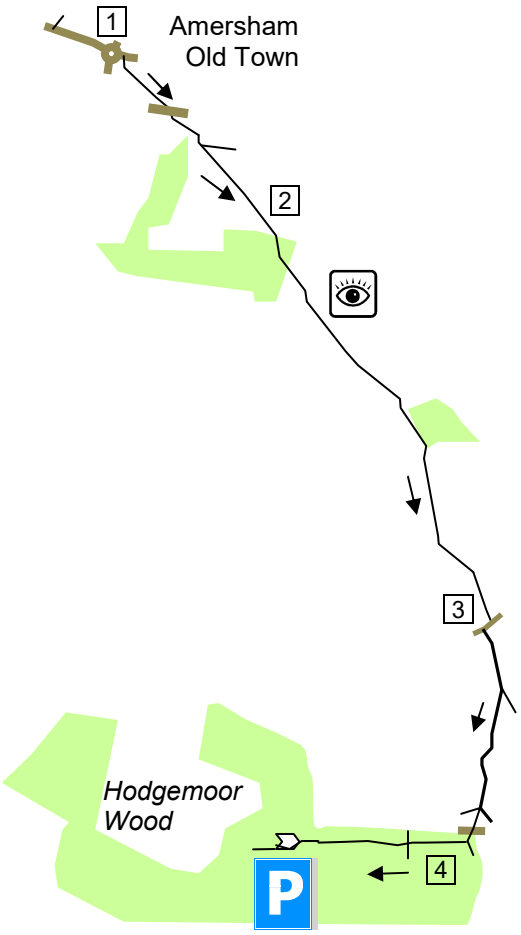
This section assumes that you arrived by train or Underground. If you arrived at Amersham Old Town by some other means, skip this section.

From the main station frontage, turn **left** and **left** again under the railway. Immediately cross the road and turn **right** on a tarmac footpath that runs beside the railway. This path takes you quickly into Parsonage Wood. Go diagonally **left** up the highest part of this beechwood, gradually approaching a road, Rectory Hill, on your right, and join a wide path running parallel to the road. The path descends, finally passes a bench and comes out into a field. Go down the right-hand side of the field on a tarmac path with the Old Town of Amersham spread out below, with the 12th-century church especially prominent. At the end of the field you pass a cemetery on your left and reach a T-junction. Turn **left** and, in 30m, **right** over the Misbourne Stream, towards the church. Turn **left** before the church, across a green space, to reach the main High Street / Broadway of the Old Town. *This street is a delight which you will revisit at the end of the walk.* Turn **left** along this main shopping street.

Leg 1: Old Town to Hodgemoor Wood 5 km=3 miles

1 **See map overleaf.** You pass the Memorial Gardens on your left, beautiful at all times. Go nearly 300m to a roundabout and continue straight on, as for *Berkhamsted*, but for only 30m. Here, where the fence ends, go **right** by a small fingerpost onto a footpath leading into Bury Farm. Bear **left** on the shingle track which becomes a grassy path. Go past two redundant metal gates, one small, one large, and continue across a meadow. Your path curves right under the main A413 road. Go straight ahead along the right-hand side of a large green meadow, but for only 150m. Here, go **right** through a large open metal gate (beside a disused small metal one) and turn **left** again and take the diagonal rising path across the field. It depends on the crops (and any recent ploughing), whether you have a path through wheat or barley or a rather unclear path over the exposed earth. If the crops are wet or the route unclear, simply stay on the left-hand side of the field and turn right in the corner. Aim for the far left-hand side of a line of woodland visible far ahead. Your path goes through a gap in the edge of

the field and continues in exactly the same direction, on a very similar path, across the next field, still heading for a point near the left-hand side of the woodland ahead. These fields are perhaps the dullest part of this walk, although some people love the open air and views; the terrain will soon get much more interesting.



2 At the far side of the field, go up a bank into Rodger's Wood and follow a clear path through the wood. At the other side, go past a redundant wooden swing-gate and across the next field, on a path which should be easier to make out than the previous ones. The views are now at their best, with the Misbourne Valley strung out on your left. The path goes diagonally across the next field with the big barn of Quarrendon Farm on your right. At the far side, continue along the right-hand edge, follow a nice grassy path, towards a wood visible ahead. 50m before the wood, go **right** and **left** between posts, passing the wood (Day's Wood) on your left. At the far side of the field, turn **right** for 25m and then go diagonally **left** on a rather faint path across the next field. *To your right you can glimpse Coleshill Water Tower above the trees, built by German prisoners of war during WW1 to provide water to Amersham; now a smart dwelling.* At the other side, go through a small metal gate into a green meadow, a welcome change. Turn **right** and **left** round the corner and, at the far side, turn left and go down between fences to a small gate at the bottom near the farm, Upper Bottom House Farm.

3 Go through a small metal gate and then a further gate through the farmyard to a lane. Turn **right** on the lane and, in 50m, turn **left** on a track uphill. Just before a wood, your path forks. Take the **right** fork, still going uphill. At a junction by *Kiln Cottage*, keep straight ahead. Where the track curves left 80m later, leave it to go straight ahead through a metal swing-gate. Avoid a path on your right (part of the Chiltern Way) and go straight across the field, heading for the woods. *You are on part of the Chiltern Heritage Trail, a 82 km=51 mile circular route centred on Chesham.* Your path goes down a bank to a lane, Bottrells Lane. *The characterful house on your right is Maisie Cottage.* Cross straight over the lane on a path into Hodgemoor Woods.

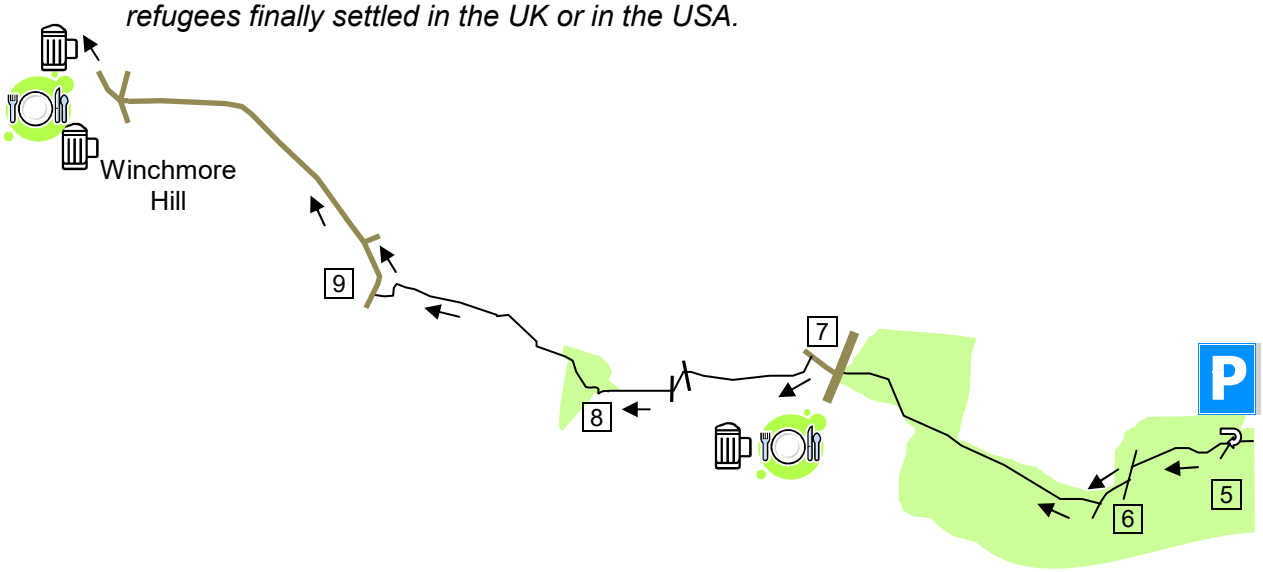
4 In 40m, you reach a 3-way junction: turn **right** here on a good path through the woods. (The *members only* notice does not apply to walkers – only riders: this is a Forestry Commission wood.) In 250m, you reach a junction of paths. Turn **left** and immediately **right** again, passing a *no riding* symbol (a horse-shoe with a line through it) and going past a wooden barrier. Follow this fairly straight wide path for over 400m to reach the Hodgemoor Wood car park in the centre of the forest, dense with oak trees.

If you began your walk here, the adventure is ended.

Leg 2: Hodgemoor Woods to Winchmore Hill 5 km=3 miles

5 The Hodgemoor Wood car park is shaped, appropriately, like a horseshoe. With the road on your right, go to the far **left**-hand section. At the end of this part of the car park you will find a large memorial tablet to the Polish camp that was here just after WW2.

Hodgemoor C*amp was used to house Polish soldiers with their families and refugees shipped from Russia following an amnesty. A village sprang up here, complete with church, school, shop, post office and entertainment hall. The refugees finally settled in the UK or in the USA.*



Care: do not stray! Avoid the yellow arrow and footpath on the left of the memorial and instead take a narrower path, passing the Memorial on your right and bearing **right**. Your route is indicated by a thin black-on-white arrow. Keep to the left-hand side of a clearing, following more black-on-white arrows. You reach an oblique T-junction with a small pond and a field ahead. Veer **left** here on a wide gravel path.

6 As the field on your right ends, you come to a triple fork in the path. Take the **centre** fork uphill, quickly passing a sign *Charcoal Burners*. Immediately after the sign, turn **right** on a path marked as for horses (as indicated by the black-on-white horseshoe). Your path runs along the edge of the wood, always close to a field on your right. After some fine beeches, you pass a large hollow area on your left. Where the fields on your right finally end, keep straight on through the centre of the wood. Soon you are walking beside another field, this time on your left. After another 50m, your path veers right away from the edge, goes down through beeches and is joined by another path coming from your right. Follow the path down through hollies as it winds its way towards a main road, audible in the distance. You pass a hollow on your right and come out to the main A355 road opposite the *Harte & Magpies*. Cross the road carefully, using a traffic island on your right. Your route is a tarmac lane on the **right** of the pub, but first you may want to enjoy a short break.

The Harte and Magpies has had a facelift and is a highly popular pub with some good grub and ales (Rebellion Smuggler amongst them). A friendly sign says "dogs & wellies welcome!" There is a garden in the back.

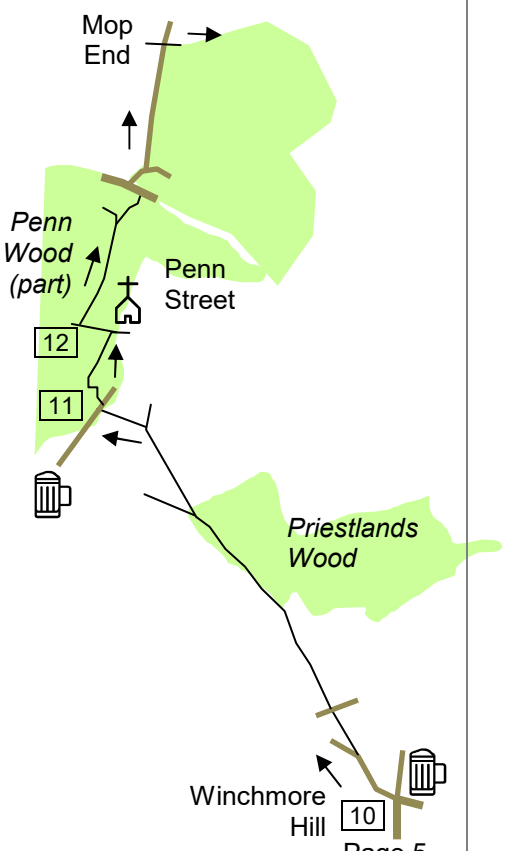
7 After possible refreshment, follow the lane for nearly 100m. Just before a welcome sign for *Coleshill*, turn **left** on a tarmac track. The track bends right uphill, now shingle. Avoid a private left fork into Hill Farm and avoid a signed

footpath on the right, continuing to follow the blue arrows. Go straight over a track coming from a farm on your left and take a narrow path, between wooden fences, across the grass leading you through a small metal gate. Here, cross a track and go along the right-hand side of a field, passing under power lines. Just as the edge of the field begins to curve left, go **right** at a post with a yellow arrow into woods. *Do not miss this turn!* Follow a narrow path through beautiful mixed Little Luckings Wood. When you come out into a field, keep along the right-hand side, avoiding a metal kissing-gate on the right in 15m.

8 Continue beside the field for a further 70m. Here, your path forks **right** through a (shaky) metal kissing-gate. You are now in a small pasture with the large house of Luckings Farm on your right. Walk the length of the pasture [Jun 2023: some temporary electric fencing you will need to lift using a hook - it's quite safe!] to go through a wooden swing-gate by a white arrow. Go a little **left** then **right** on a narrow path between fields, sheltered by trees on each side. The next section of path between hedges along a green carpet of grass one of the delights of this walk. You come out into a field with the large *Hertfordshire House* to your left. Turn **left** and continue uphill to the top left-hand corner of the field.

9 Immediately before a new wooden gate into a lane (Coleshill), turn **right** as directed by a fingerpost onto a footpath which runs parallel to the lane. After around 100m, turn **left** through a wooden gate and immediately **right** onto the lane to arrive shortly at a junction. Turn **left** on the major road, passing a welcome sign for Winchmore Hill. Continue on the quiet Coleshill Lane to reach the start of the village in about 500m. After more houses, you reach the village centre and its large green. On your right is the old *Plough* and, behind it, the village shop [Jun 2023 both now closed down]. The *Potters Arms* is only 50m to your left. *The Potters Arms is a Brakspear Pub with a large menu board and a motto "Eat Drink Laugh Sleep" (little time for the latter in this case).*

Leg 3: Winchmore Hill to Mop End 3 km=2 miles



10 After your break, avoid the road on the right beside the *Plough* and continue straight on following the sign to *Wycombe*, beside the green. Your route is also marked *Chiltern Way* and *Chiltern Heritage Trail*. Where the lane veers left, keep ahead on the grass along the right-hand side of the green. Cross a minor road and, at a 1-way fingerpost, opposite the bus shelter, take a narrow path between hedges. Your path takes you past a disused metal kissing-gate, straight across the centre of a field and past another disused, kissing gate into Priestlands Wood. The path runs straight ahead, keeping to the left-hand edge of the wood. Eventually, after a small bridge with a rail and an unneeded kissing-gate, you are once again out into a field with more than one possible path ahead. Take the path that is second from the right, the one which passes a fraction to the left of a electricity pole. At the far side, go straight on through a hedge onto a path in trees. Keep ahead on a wide residential track leading to a road in the hamlet of Penn Street. *If you would like refreshment at this time, the*

"Squirrel" pub is only 150m to your left. You will need to retrace your steps afterwards.

Penn Street is one of the hamlets of Penn village and also an ecclesiastical parish formed in 1850 out of the civil parishes of Penn and Little Missenden. The name "Penn" is probably from the old Celtic language of Britain, meaning "hill".

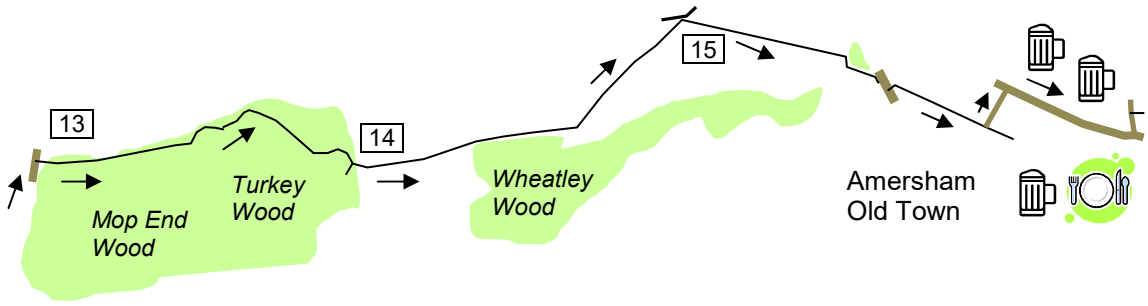
11 Turn **right** on the road and, in only 20m, turn **left** across the grass with a pond on your left where there is a bench seat if you would like a pause. Keep straight on into trees and turn **right** on a dark wide woodland path running just inside the wood. Go straight across a gravel parking area to reach the church of the Holy Trinity.

Penn Street Holy Trinity church was built in 1849 by that Gothic Revival architect Benjamin Ferrey (see the walk "Wickham, Boxford, River Lambourn" in West Berkshire). Most remarkably, inside there is a 15th-century Doom painting (a kind of warning to sinners) and a monument to the six grandsons of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania. Because of these treasures, the church is usually closed.

Turn **left** into Penn Wood, passing on your right the large cemetery of the church. *Penn Wood is a huge ancient piece of commonland, now managed by the Woodland Trust*.

12 Immediately after the cemetery, turn **right** on another path. After around 250m, where the main path curves left at a totem pole, leave it by keeping straight on, on a narrower path through the woods. Your path leads to a small wooden gate beside a large one and the main A404 road. Cross the road carefully, turn **left** and, in 20m, turn **right** on a side road signposted *Mop End*. In 50m, turn **left** on a lane, passing *Beechlea House*. In 400m, you reach the hamlet with the comical name of *Mop End*, origin unknown.

Leg 4: Mop End to Old Town 4 km=2½ miles



13 Just as you go under an overhead cable there are footpaths on both sides. Turn **right** here into Mop End Wood. Keep to the left-hand edge of the wood at all times, through an area which in late spring is ablaze with blue-bells. At a fingerpost, veer **left**, going past a large pylon. Continue on the left-hand edge of the wood, going under more power lines. As your path curves right, now quite narrow, in Turkey Wood, avoid all side paths, soon passing an environmentally-friendly outfall from the National Grid centre near here. *This location is also a field study centre, as you can see from signs marking protected areas.* You pass two more outfalls and finally your path curves right down to a redundant stile by an open meadow.

14 Ignoring the woodland path uphill, turn **left** into the meadow. Keep straight ahead on a path across the centre which then runs along its right-hand side. When you meet a track at the far end, keep ahead and when the

track quickly curves left uphill, keep straight ahead on a wide path with, on your right, the very unusual Wheatley Wood characterised by its pines, ferns and sycamore. Where the track bends right, keep straight ahead on a narrower path across the grass. You are in a long wide green valley, between sloping crop fields, dotted with beeches and horse jumps. Finally you approach a large house *Lower Park House*.

15 Do not go through the metal gate by the house but turn immediately **right** and head gently uphill, keeping the copse ahead and to your right. As you reach the brow of the field, head slightly **left** to pass between two wooden posts, waymarked on the reverse side, and reach a tarmac path. Cross this path to continue to a stile visible ahead at the field boundary *(don't miss!)*, to reach the main A413 road. Turn **right** for 20m, crossing the road carefully, and go **left** over a stile and down steps. *(Careful – they may be slippery when wet or icy!)* Your path runs through woods and then passes between wooden barriers (at a fingerpost) and alongside back gardens. Finally, after 300m or so, you reach a tarmac crossing lane. Turn **left** here, quickly reaching the beautiful High Street of Amersham Old Town. Turn **right**. On the same side is the *Swan*, now mainly a restaurant. On the other side is the *Eagle*, a traditional pub recommended by townsfolk because it has a large garden and welcomes walkers. It is also good for ales, with Timothy Taylor and Lock Keepers, plus Addlestones cider. Further along, there is the *Elephant and Castle*, followed on the other side by the magnificent *Kings Arms* and the *Crown*. Gilbey's Restaurant is in the Old Grammar School (1624) and, for lighter bites, there are two *Grocer* coffee shops. You pass the ancient Market Hall and soon reach Church Street.

Amersham was known to the Romans before the arrival of Saxon chief Egmond (it's name is derived from "Egmond's farmstead"). If the Saxons had lost the bloody skirmish that took place on the hill just south of the town, it might well have become Danish. North of the town was a huge area of woodland known as "The Common" and this is where New Amersham or "Amersham-on-the-Hill" has stood since the coming of the railway (see below). You will notice the large number of pubs still operating in the Old Town from the time when the old coach road ran through here. Until the 1832 reforms, they regularly witnessed huge fun and frolics when Amersham returned its two candidates for parliament (two more than it should logically have had). It was the custom for the eligible females of the parish to wait at the pubs and rush to kiss the returning new MPs (a practice that was later extended to the young men of the town). Apart from the inns, two buildings stand out. One is the Market Hall, a gift of the local Drake family in 1682. The other is St Mary's church dating from around 1140 which, apart from being fascinating to view inside, saw some fervent religious debate from early reformers, seven of whom became the "Amersham Martyrs" in the early 1500s.

Decision point. If you began the walk at Amersham Station, do the Back To The Station section below. If you began the walk at Hodgemoor Wood car park re-wind to Leg 1. Otherwise, the adventure is finished.

Postlude: Back To The Station 1½ km=1 mile

This section is only required if you are returning from the station.

Use same mini-map as at start. Turn **right** on Church Street, pass the church (which is well worth visiting) and turn **right** on a tarmac path beside it. The remainder of the walk is similar to your outward journey, with a variation. At the end, go over a bridge and turn **left** at a T-junction with another path. In 40m, turn **right** by a brick wall on a tarmac path that runs beside the cemetery and up the left-hand side of a field, soon entering Parsonage Wood. You can now retrace your outward walk, along the left-hand side of the wood, or you can take this different route. Immediately fork **right** in the wood and keep to the main path uphill. Your path goes over two crossing paths, always uphill. Paths join you from the left and right. Keep to the right-hand edge of the wood and, at a marker post, go straight over a crossing path. When you see a path going downhill straight ahead to a road, fork **left** on a level path. At the end, turn **right** on a narrow enclosed path to the road. Turn **left** under the bridge and **right**, arriving at the station where the walk began.

*The Metropolitan Railway, opened in 1863, was the world's first underground railway, running from Paddington to Farringdon. The owners had vastly grand ideas of pushing the line north and then south to the coast and on to Paris, via a **channel tunnel** (remember this was the 1860s!). They had not counted on the landowners of what was then open country. By the time the railway eventually reached Amersham in 1892 the line had to cross the hills above the town rather than the valley which is why the New Town exists today.*

Getting there

By car: the best way to get to the Hodgemoor Wood car park is from the M40 at Beaconsfield. Come off at exit 2 and go **north** on the A355, signposted *Beaconsfield*. In ½ mile, at a large roundabout, turn **left**, signposted *Beaconsfield, Amersham*. In a short distance, at a smaller roundabout, take the **third** exit, signposted A355 *Amersham*. Follow the A355 for 2½ miles until you pass a pub called the *Harte and Magpies*. After about 100 yds, take a side road on the **right**, opposite a brown sign indicating a picnic spot in “500 yards”. Almost immediately, turn **right** again on Bottrells Lane. The Hodgemoor Woods car park is ⅔ mile on your right.

By train: Half-hourly by Chiltern Railways from Marylebone, including Sundays; or by **London Underground** service from Baker Street etc.

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