



Hughenden and West Wycombe *Dizzy Heights and Hellfire Woods*

Distance: 16 km=10 miles or 12½ km=7½ miles easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Chilterns

Date written: 14-aug-2011

Author: Phegophilos

Date revised: 23-aug-2015

Refreshments: Hughenden Valley, W.Wycombe

Last update: 19-feb-2022

Map: 172 (Chiltern Hills East) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

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

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

Woodland, villages, views, historic houses

In Brief

This walk is crammed full of interest, not just because of its manors, churches and villages, but because of the historic personages that built them and lived in them. Apart from all that, it has some of the finest stretches of woodland. There are also many places of refreshment, so the walk may take longer than usual for its fairly modest length. [A shorter version is offered here, omitting West Wycombe.](#)



There are a several small patches of nettles, so shorts are not advisable.



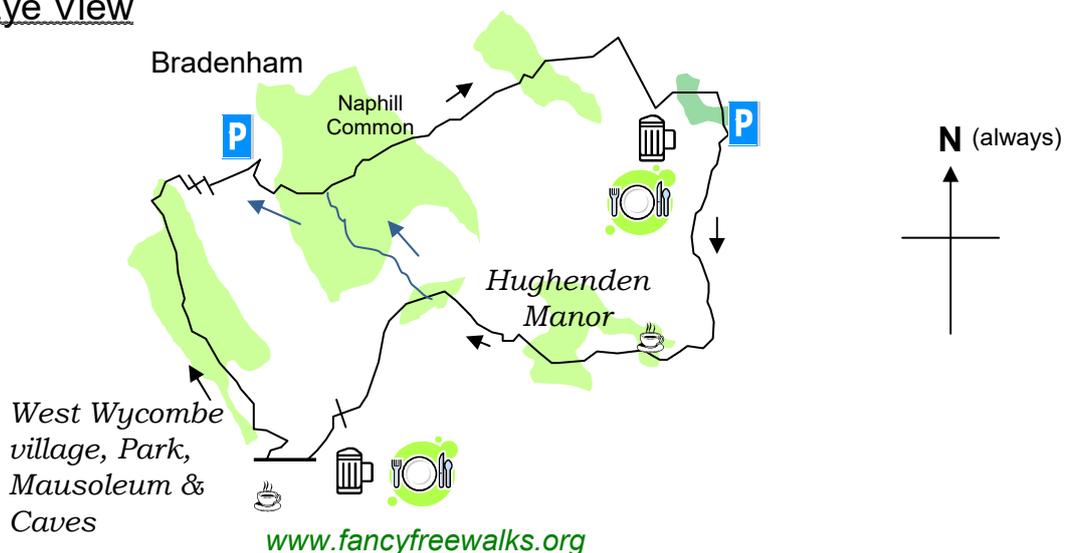
Any sensible shoes and clothing should be fine, but good boots are needed in winter or wet conditoons. Your dog could come too.



The walk begins at the village of **Bradenham, Bucks**, in the Wycombe area, just off the A4010 (www.w3w.co/turns.visa.circus, postcode **HP14 4HF**). Park off-road opposite the church where there is a gravel car parking area. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



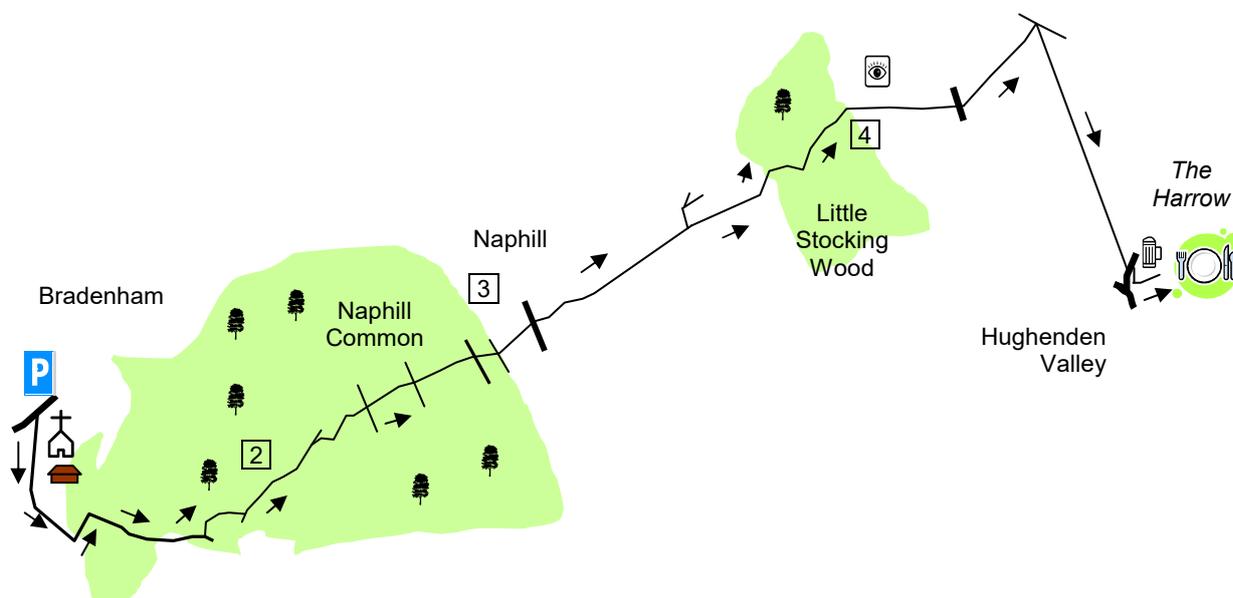
Bird's Eye View



The Walk

Bradenham is sited in a wide valley, hence the name “broad settlement”. The whole village is lined up along the green, with the Church and the Manor standing at the head. The village belongs to the National Trust. The Manor is now used as a venue and for high-class entertaining. The Disraeli family rented a house in Bradenham when Benjamin (or “Dizzy”), whom you are soon to meet, was young.

Leg 1: Bradenham to Hughenden Valley 4½ km=2¾ miles



- 1 Cross the road and walk across the green in front of St Botolph's Church which is unusual and must be visited. Continue past the entrance and wall of the Manor. Finally you reach a track from where you can turn round to take a glance as the village across the green. Turn **left** onto a track and continue beside the wall uphill. At the top, turn **left** again, staying beside the wall, ignoring a narrow footpath and a track on the right. In 50m, stay on the track as it curves **right**. The track goes up through mixed woodland and passes a flint house on the right. **Care! this section and the next are tricky.** Just before the shingle track bends right, leave it by forking **left** on an unsigned path across the grass through an opening in the trees, **ignoring** a path straight ahead by a blue arrow [Feb 2022: grounded]. In 30m the path enters a clearing and forks. Ignore the left fork, a narrow path that veers off left towards trees, and keep ahead on a grassy path through the clearing amidst bracken.
- 2 Your path winds through woodland for 120m where it is joined by a smaller path from the right where there is a noticeboard about Naphill Common. The path runs beneath wires for 150m until they meet a small crossing path and curve away to the left. Veer **left** and immediately **right** on a wide path through trees, thus leaving the wires and keeping your original direction. In 120m, you see two white arrows on a beech tree, one marked *BW* and one *FP*. 10m after the tree, fork **right**, thus choosing the footpath (*don't miss this turn!*). Rigidly follow the direction of the *FP* arrow as there is no visible footpath (2018). Maintain your direction through much debris from the forestry works. In about 300m you will see the rooftops of the first houses of Naphill. Press on until you reach a wide track at a post with yellow arrows. Your delightful stroll through Naphill Common finally crosses a forestry track [Feb 2022: if still waterlogged, sorry! – there is no easy option to



[cross it](#)]. 50m after the forestry track you reach a residential track by the houses. *If you are ready for refreshments, 200m left along the track is the “Black Lion”, an open-air pub with a fine patio and vast wooden billboard of fare.*

3

Go straight over on a marked footpath between a house and a hedge. Cross a main road to a metal kissing-gate and keep ahead through a small meadow. Veer right across the centre to a metal gate and go over a stile beside it. Keep straight ahead on a path across a crop field. (If the path is unclear, aim for the largest tree straight ahead.) At the other side, you meet a post with many yellow arrows. Keep straight ahead, ignoring all crossing paths, and continue along the left-hand side of the next field. Just before the end of the field, slip through a metal kissing gate and follow a path down a slope into Little Stocking Wood. Keep **straight ahead** on a narrow path, as directed by a marker post with a yellow arrow, ignoring paths left and right. About 150m into the wood, at another yellow arrow by a large white arrow on a tree, veer **left** uphill as directed. This narrow path winds its way over tree roots, passing another yellow arrow. After 200m it passes a new, final, yellow arrow and almost immediately leads you over a stile into an open meadow. In the valley below is the hamlet of Lower North Dean while up on the hill to the left is Pigott’s Wood.

4

Go diagonally **right** across the meadow towards a stile visible in the hedgerow. *(The author met a herd of gentle heifers with ample space to skirt round them.)* Go down a bank and diagonally across the next meadow aiming for a gap in the hedgerow. Go over a stile there, cross the road, passing to the left of (usually padlocked) metal gates. Continue ahead uphill along the left-hand side of a maize field. In 300m, opposite a kissing gate on your left, you see two paths on the right across the field. Take the right-hand path, the sharper **right** turn. This long path, a favourite dog walk, arrives through an old kissing-gate at the road by the *Harrow* pub in the village of Hughenden Valley. *“The Harrow” is a foody pub, crowded at lunchtime especially in bright weather when all the tables on the lawn may be taken. One speciality is national cuisines. Beer is Fullers plus a guest. It is open from 12 noon every day.*



Leg 2: Hughenden Valley to Hughenden Manor 3¼ km=2 miles

5

See map overleaf. Go through a small wooden gate and walk in front of the pub through its garden and past the tables (this *is* a footpath), then through a small wooden gate onto a path between fences. Cross a residential cul-de-sac and go up steps between more fences. Soon there are more steps and tree roots as you climb. After 300m, the path thankfully flattens and continues beside a field on the left with fine views. In another 150m, opposite a metal kissing gate, turn **right** beside a fence through trees. Stay on this fairly level path until it leads you through a metal kissing-gate and begins to descend more steeply between fences. Finally, go through a wooden gate in front of Boss Lane House and turn **right** on a lane. Stay on the lane as it curves left, passing between a garden and the scrumptious 17th-century grade II listed *Boss Lane House*. Continue onwards, passing some modern houses and bungalows, curving right to reach the main road by a mini roundabout.

6

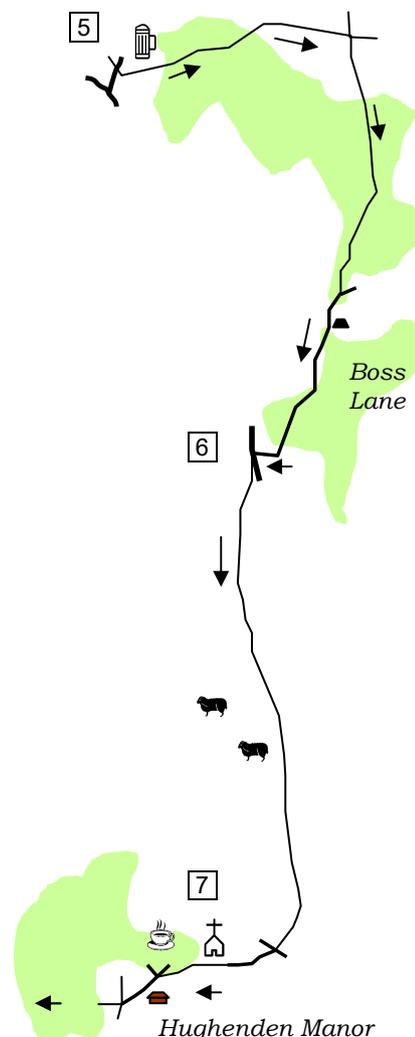


Cross carefully straight over and take a footpath opposite, just to the left of a community centre. (The little shop in the cabin sells ice creams and snacks.) Turn **left** behind the cabin. The narrow enclosed path eventually

goes through a metal gate into open sheep pasture. Keep straight ahead, soon reaching a line of trees, then passing through a gap between metal gate posts and along the left-hand side of a large meadow. At the other side, go through a small metal gate beside a large wooden gate and continue along the left-hand side of a sheep meadow. You pass the buildings of Church Farm, then go through a gate and along the left-hand side of another sheep meadow. Now go through a metal gate under a clump of maples and over a tarmac drive and across the car park by Hughenden Church.

The Church of St Michael and All Angels, the so-called “church in the park”, looks like a sombre Victorian building but is actually from the 1100s. The church is best known as Benjamin Disraeli’s church. (Although born into the Jewish faith, he was a converted Anglican, and a devoted one too.) His memorial is inside and his tomb is outside by the east wall. Beside his grave is that of Sarah Brydges Willyams who left him her fortune on condition that she would be buried beside him. Inside the church, the east and west walls have remarkable stained glass. The Victorian decoration in the chancel is also a marvel. In the small chapel or vestry in the north east side are a set of reclining stone effigies, including one of a cross-legged knight, dating from about 1285. (There is another effigy beneath Disraeli’s monument). (See another walk on this site “Stone Giants and a Sting-in-the-Tail” in Berkshire.)

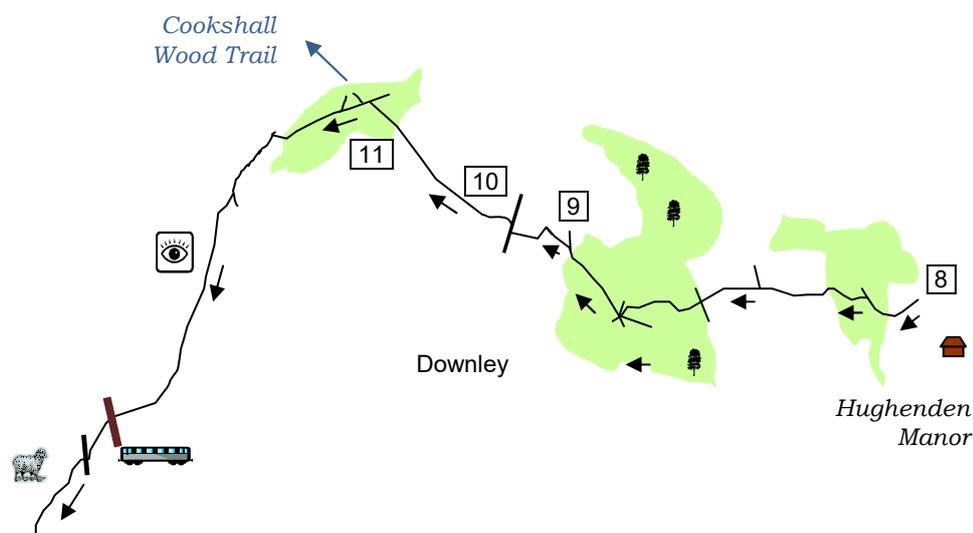
- 7** Continue through a small kissing-gate up the tarmac path through the churchyard with the church on your right, passing a picturesque row of cottages by the historic *Church House*. Go through a metal gate and straight on uphill. At the top, go through a metal gate near a tarmac drive. Keep straight ahead on the drive, ignoring a drive on the right. Soon you arrive at a junction in front of Hughenden Manor with the walled garden and restaurant on your right. (They do *not* require a ticket.) The House and its garden are not to be missed.



Benjamin Disraeli, British prime minister off-and-on from 1852 to 1880, and known to posterity as “Dizzy”, bought Hughenden Manor in 1848. At that time, it was a rather plain affair. To liven it up, as befits a PM’s dwelling, he engaged the audacious Gothic revivalist architect Edward Buckton Lamb who tarted up the brickwork and added all those pinnacles. The Manor is now owned by the National Trust and two floors are on view, showing a dazzling assembly of light Victoriana. Attached to the Manor are 6100 ha (1500 acres) of grounds. The garden has been restored to as Mrs Disraeli originally planned it. There is also the “ice house” used in WW2 as a command centre.

Leg 3: Hughenden Manor to West Wycombe 4 km=2¼ miles

- 8 Keep straight ahead on a drive between flint walls. At a fingerpost, keep ahead downhill on a broad path in the direction of the *Downley Monument Walk*. In 60m, at a fork with a post, fork **left** on the downhill path, following the sign marked *Downley*. The path bends left and right and comes out into the open by wooden gates. Veer **right** on a fenced path. After 300m, ignore a permissive brideway on the right and follow your path back into woodland. Keep ahead, gently uphill through Common Wood, in the direction of the blue arrow. In 300m, you meet a path coming from the left and immediately arrive at a complex junction where you need to turn right – but you need to choose the correct path. Ignore a path sharp right but take the path on the **right** that runs along the **left-hand side** of a bank and ditch (not the narrower path that runs along the right-hand side of the bank and ditch).



- 9 Follow this wide path straight uphill until it comes out of the trees into a clearing. Keep straight ahead as you approach some of the houses of Downley. At a marker post, fork **left** through bushes, against the direction of the arrows. This path goes over a crossing path and up to a cricket green. If there is no match in progress, cross the green aiming for a signposted footpath just to the **right** of a little brown hut with large windows which serves as a cricket pavilion. (If there *is* a match in progress, go round the edge but be sure to take the footpath, *not* the brideway 30m on its left which is also signposted.) Go through a metal swing gate on the left and along the right-hand side of a small meadow.
- 10 Go through a metal kissing gate and along the right-hand side of a hayfield. You have views ahead of the Chiltern Hills, including the telecoms mast at Stokenchurch. The mausoleum and church at West Wycombe, your next destination, are soon visible to the left. At the other side of the field, continue on a narrow path into trees. After nearly 150m in this attractive Little Cookshall Wood, the path comes out into a long narrow clearing at a T-junction. (There is a marker post on your left, festooned with many yellow arrows, now clear of undergrowth). Turn **left** here onto a good wide path running through the clearing. In only 5m, there is a footpath forking away up to your right.

Decision point. If you would like to return to Bradenham by a more direct route, omitting West Wycombe, go to the end of this text and do the **Cookshall**
www.fancyfreewalks.org

Wood Trail. But, if you have never visited West Wycombe, please promise to make amends another day! Recommended is the separate *Bradenham West Wycombe Walk*.

- 11 Ignore the footpath forking away right and continue through the narrow clearing. Where, in 350m, the path comes out into the open, turn **left** onto a semi-tarmac track. In 200m, at a signpost, fork **right** across a gravel space and go between fence posts onto a clear path across a barley field. At the bottom, go through a hedge and a line of blackthorn to cross a track and, by a marker post, continue straight on uphill on a narrow winding path through dense shrubbery. Once out in the open again, you are on a high path between fields, with a very mature hedge on your right. West Wycombe House is visible on the hilltop opposite (summer foliage permitting) and suddenly the Mausoleum and church come into view. Your path descends through a high band of shrubbery and goes down the right-hand side of a field by a wire fence. It then passes through an open metal gate to the right of a redundant stile, under the railway and on a wide diagonal path across a crop field to reach the A4010 road.

Leg 4: West Wycombe to Bradenham 4½ km=2¾ miles

- 12 Cross the main road to go through a metal kissing gate opposite into a sheep pasture. Cross the pasture diagonally, on an unclear path, heading for the far left-hand corner. As you near the far side road, you will make out a wooden swing-gate about 30m from the corner. Go through the gate to the A40 road and turn **right** through the village. As you go, you can admire this unspoilt village, hardly changed from centuries past (apart from that busy traffic). Pass as you go the little redbrick St Paul's church, then the 15th-century timbered Church Loft on the right with its 1670 renovated clock. Continue to the end of the village, no doubt taking the chance for refreshment. *A new ghost has now floated out of the history book as a guide for the next hour: welcome to the home and estate of a certain Sir Francis Dashwood.*

West Wycombe belongs to the National Trust and has therefore been left alone by estate agents and developers, as you can see from the plain doors and peeling paint. A village has stood here for at least a thousand years but most of the buildings are from the 1600s or early 1700s. Nos. 57 and 58 were once the village poor house. The "George and Dragon" cosy old coaching inn dates from 1720; it now serves some good St Austell and Marlow brews and has a historic courtyard; it is open all day every day; (slow) food includes specials and a Sunday carvery. Other pubs are "The Plough" and "The Swan Inn". Just before the latter is a yard that holds the old butchers shop and next to it the library. The



lady volunteers who run the library also run a volunteer open-air tea shop and bake their own cakes for it.

At the end of the village is the entrance to West Wycombe Park and House, a must-visit, although perhaps another day.

West Wycombe Park is a quite magnificent Georgian landscape garden, created, from about 1740 onwards, by Sir Francis Dashwood. From various corners and their temples and follies you have views of the lake and the house. The unique house was given to the National Trust in 1943 by the then Dashwood and later restored by the next Dashwood. It is still dwelt in by the same family. It is a primer of the dilettante architecture of that time. Sir Francis had done the Grand Tour from the age of 18. Normally this would take him to France and Italy but Sir Francis added Turkey and Russia. Returning home, he became an MP and founded the Society of Dilettanti, which still exists. He also co-founded the infamous Hellfire Club for high society rakes devoted to immoral acts, which they undertook beneath a kind of religious cloak. One centre of activity was Medmenham Abbey (see "Pheasants and Thames Pasture", another walk in this series). Sir Francis based his group here in the village.

- 13 At a road junction at the end of the village turn very sharp **right** on Church Lane and, keeping to the tarmac footway on its right, follow the road uphill past a school. Soon you pass, on your left, the café and entrance to the Hellfire Caves.

The caves are man-made. There were already chalk caves from olden times here but Sir Francis saw the chance to extend them. Between 1748 and 1752 he paid the local villagers to dig (they were in need after a bad harvest) until the caves extended a quarter of a mile underground. They became a centre for drinking and wenching. The members addressed each other as "Brother" and the leader, who changed regularly, as "Abbot". Female "guests" were called "Nuns". Sir Francis soon ran up a five-figure bar bill and was consequently made Chancellor of the Exchequer. The caves are open to visitors for most of the year.

Turn **left** to the café but immediately to the **right** of the entrance, take a narrow path uphill. As you go, there are views behind to the village and the hills beyond. Ascend the grassy path, up steps, over a flowery meadow, finally reaching the Mausoleum.

This hilltop is believed once to have been the site of a prehistoric monument, perhaps a little like Stonehenge, and an iron-age fort. There was also possibly a Roman temple here. This Dashwood Mausoleum was built in 1765 of Portland stone and flint to house the urns of the ashes of the Dashwood family, including Sir Francis. It is floodlit at night and a well-known sight from afar.

Turn **left** around the Mausoleum and fork **right** to the church wall and keep **right** to reach the entrance to the church.

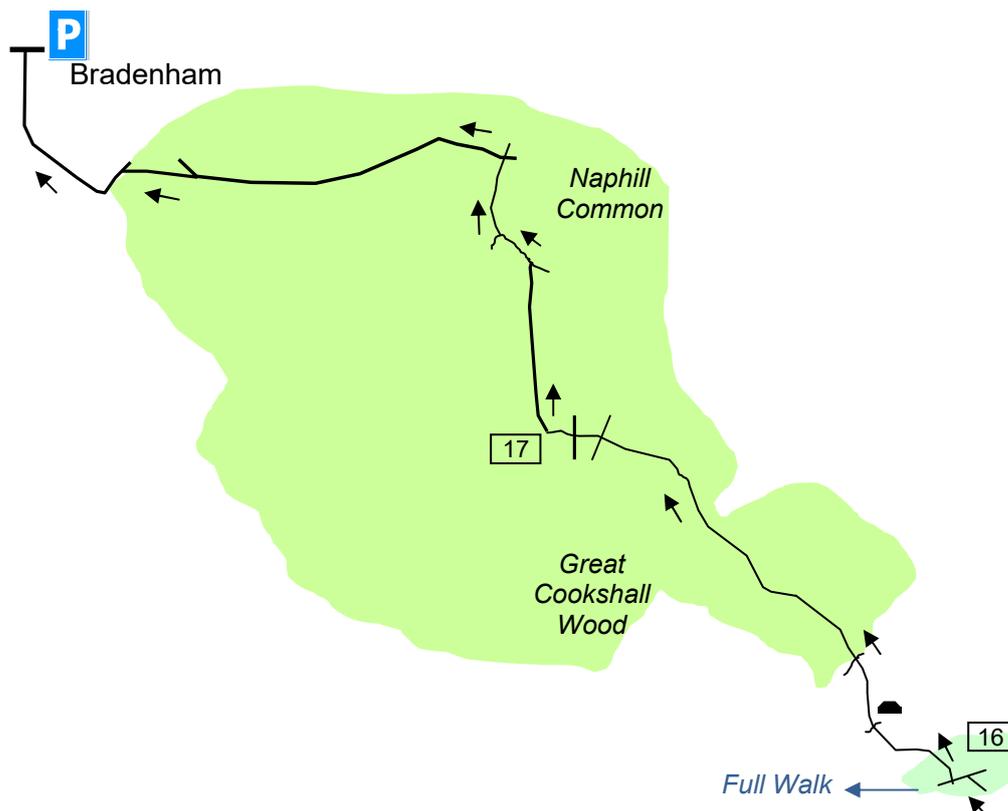
The Church of St Lawrence is famous for its tower topped off by a golden sphere. The sphere is said to be big enough to hold eight people and to have been formerly used for secret meetings. It is usually possible to ascend the tower. The church has a square classic interior, looking more like the kind of baroque church that Sir Charles would have seen on his Grand Tour. Note the painted ceiling in the chancel and the font with its serpent and dove motifs.

- 14 Pass the entrance to the church and continue on a gravel path through the churchyard, then through a wooden gate to a large oval sandy area used as a car park. Bear **left** and keep ahead to the far end. Where the stony track bends right, keep straight on between a row of stumps and quickly fork **right** to join a wide track running beside a hedge with a house (*Windy-haugh*) and its garden immediately on your right. You will be following this track for nearly 2 km. At first there are shrubs, then tall beeches,

occasionally a faded white arrow on a tree. Almost 1 km after the house, the path forks. Choose the **right** fork. This is the most beautiful part of Hearnton Wood with its tall pines [Mar 2020: all recently harvested, causing a temporary bleak landscape and some mud]. About 250m from the fork, your path goes over crossing path by a post with yellow arrows. There is now a large open area on your left with woodland of various conifers on your right. 700m from the fork, your path goes through a swing gate onto a path by a hedge and passes the entrance to Nobles Farm.

- 15 Just after the entrance to the farm, turn **right** at the corner of a fence. Follow the narrow winding forest path downhill. It ends at an unneeded wooden gate. Now go down the right-hand side of a meadow, through a thicket and through another wooden gate. Your route turns **right** to run along the top of a field, where the church and manor of Bradenham come into view. Go through the wooden gate next to a large metal gate and turn **left** down the left-hand side of a meadow. Veer **left** to go under the railway. Go through a small metal gate and finally through a kissing gate beside a large metal gate, taking you to the road. Cross the road, turn **right** and **left** on Bradenham Wood Lane, passing the site of the old *Red Lion*, using the green as a pleasant footway, and passing the houses of Bradenham, soon reaching the car park where the walk began.

Cookshall Wood Trail 2½ km=1½ miles



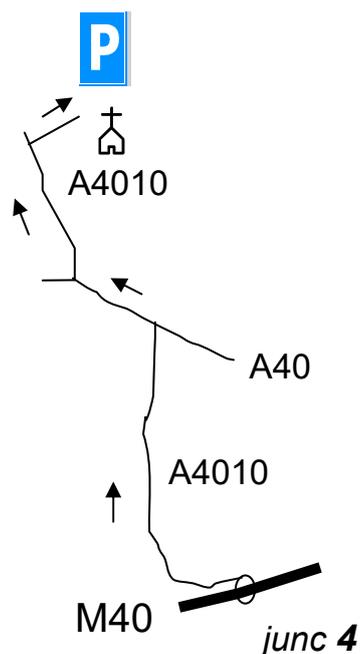
Take this shortcut from Little Cookshall Wood if you would like to return to Bradenham by a more direct route, omitting West Wycombe.

- [16] Turn **right** on the footpath that forks away from the main path, up into a woodland of hollies and tall beeches. Your path is marked by white arrows on trees. Soon your path bends right, goes through a wooden gate and into Cookshall Farm. Keep straight ahead on a track with the farm buildings on your right. The track reaches trees, going over a farm track, and continues straight ahead, a fraction right, as directed by a fingerpost, into Great Cookshall Wood. Keep ahead downhill through the wood, then uphill again through firs. The path comes down to a more open area with a crossing path ahead. Keep straight ahead over the crossing path in the direction of a faded white arrow on a tree. The path descends fairly steeply and crosses another path in a valley. It rises beside a wire fence on your left under more beeches and finally reaches a gap with some private land and a large decrepit old wooden gate on your left. Veer **right** here on a clear path, very gently uphill.
- [17] At the end of the path, go through a small unneeded wooden gate and turn **left** on a footpath uphill. After winding for 60m, your path comes to a 3-way junction in Naphill Common. Veer **right** here, thus leaving the official footpath. The path curves right and follows the edge of a meadow on your left and, in just over 100m, reaches a major junction. Turn **left** here on a bridleway. Keep straight ahead at all times on the bridleway, passing a noticeboard about Naphill Common on your right. Eventually your route is joined by a residential track coming from the left and runs beside a house. (This location should now be familiar from the beginning of the walk.) As you descend, the track forks. Take the **left** fork, thus leaving the main track. The track curves left by the wall of the Manor, then right, taking you back to the green at Bradenham where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: Bradenham can be reached from the M40. Come off at junction 4. Follow signs for the A4010 to *Aylesbury*, over several roundabouts. In 2½ miles= 4 km, after a gradual descent, at a series of mini roundabouts by a filling station, fork left for *Aylesbury*. Follow Chapel Lane to a T-junction. Turn **left** here on the A40. At the next roundabout, just before West Wycombe village, turn **right** on the A4010, signposted *Aylesbury*. Bradenham is signposted in about 2½ km=1½ miles on the right.

There is also public parking opposite the *Harrow* pub in Hughenden Valley and by Hughenden church.



By bus/train: Saunderton Railway Station is 1 mile=1½ km from the walk.

fancy more free walks? www.fancyfreewalks.org