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

Brocket Park and Coleman's Green

Distance: 9½ km=6 miles or 5 km=3¼ miles easy walking

Region: Hertfordshire Date written: 26-jul-2017

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Refreshments: Coleman's Green

Map: Explorer 182 (St Albans) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

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Woodland, river, parkland, historic house, easy field paths, history

In Brief

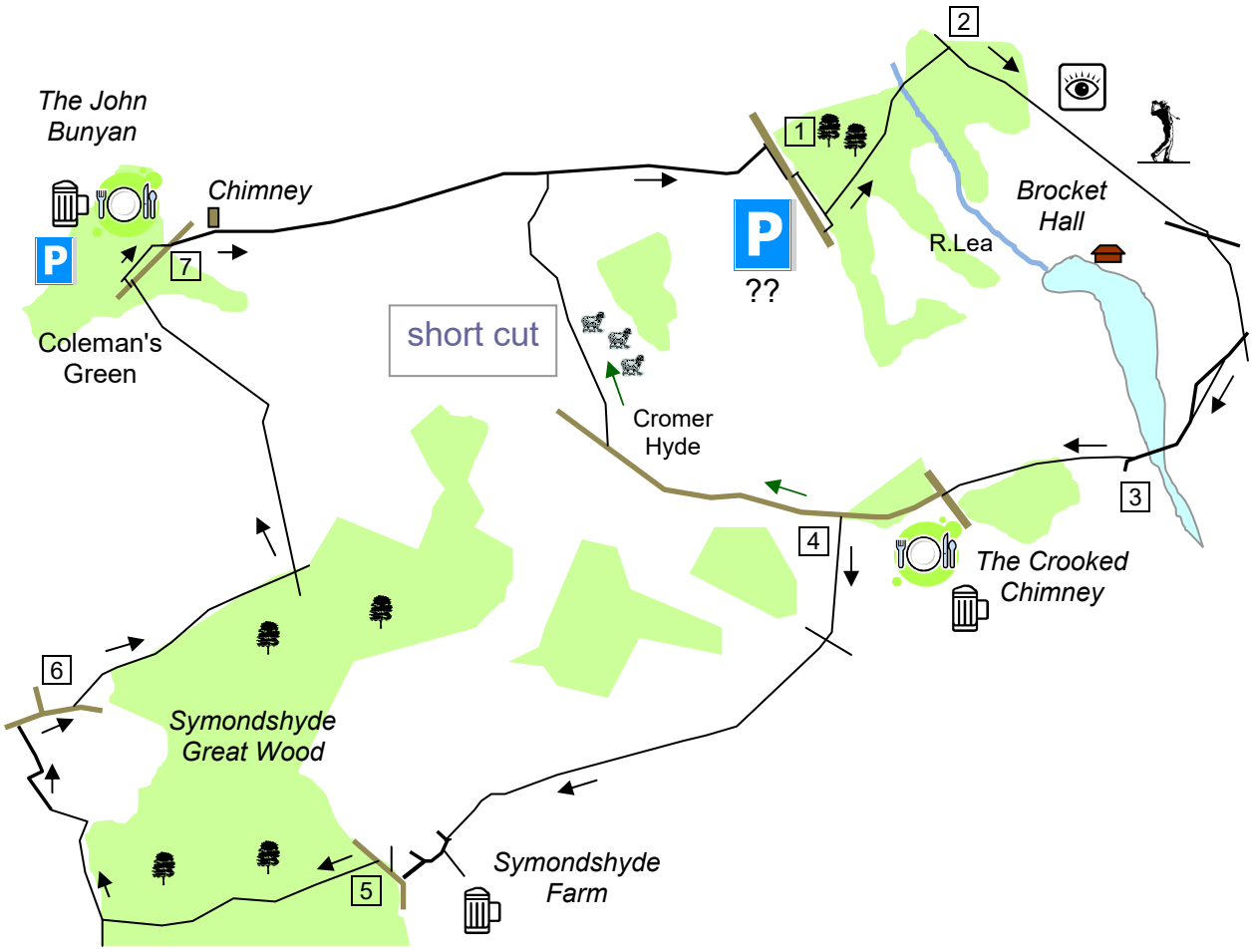
This is a gentle walk through Hertfordshire countryside with a stunning dramatic episode. As well as woodland, pleasant field paths, a sleepy village and an ideal inn on the village green, you visit the great sculpted parkland of Brocket Park with its great house, Broadwater and Palladian bridge over the River Lea.

There are few nettles on this walk, making shorts wearable. Paths are generally firm and easy, making boots advisable but not essential. Your dog can certainly come with you but a lead is essential in the parkland.

The walk begins at the car park off the **Marford Road**, near Lemsford, Welwyn, Herts, w3w:scores.sugar.edit. There is no exact postcode but the *Crooked Chimney* inn, ½ mile south, is at **AL8 7XE**. The car park is a layby parallel to the road. Oct 2022-Mar 2023: the car park was *still* blocked with concrete and this closure is beginning to look *extremely permanent* (as opposed to a temporary measure in winter, e.g. for woodland operations). In the meantime, you should park anywhere along the route. Coleman's Green is no longer a good option because of wooden posts. A good option now is Lemsford Village, about 700m from the walk, where there is roadside parking, with the added benefit of the *Sun Inn*. If you are doing the short walk and you are a customer, there is the *Crooked Chimney* car park.

For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



1 Starting at the Marford Road (closed?) car park, you need to find the entrance into Brocket Park wood. The little signpost at the south entrance of the car park points nowhere. Your entrance is roughly half way through the car park. It is unmarked but you will find a gap between two concrete posts. *Yes, this is correct!* Keep to the main path all the time, avoiding minor turnoffs. You soon see fields on your left and your path now follows a wire fence. On your left is a flintstone shelter, all that is left now of the Flint Bridge which takes you over the River Lea and was part of the Brocket Park pleasure grounds in earlier times. You reach a T-junction with a field visible ahead. Turn **right** steeply uphill aided by the wooden railings.

2 *You are on part of the Lea Valley Walk, a 50-mile=80 km walk from near Luton to Limehouse in London.* Your path runs over high wooded ground under tall beeches. After 250m of woodland, suddenly you come out into the Brocket parkland with great views. Your route seems to be over a golf course but in fact it only skirts it. Cross a fairway, heading for a large cedar, soon passing close to the golf club car park. Shortly, Brocket Hall, the Broadwater and the Bridge come into view.

Brocket Hall goes back to the 1200s but the present house was built by the architect James Paine for Sir Matthew Lamb in 1760. Sir Matthew kept open house for royalty, poets and artists and the place was notorious for its scandals. Sir Matthew's son handed over his own wife as mistress to the Prince Regent (later George IV) and it paid off as he became the (first) Lord Melbourne. The wife of the second Lord M harboured a passion for the poet Lord Byron and

apparently fell off her horse on seeing his funeral cortege passing the house. The same Lord M was young Queen Victoria's first prime minister and she became almost totally dependent on him as mentor, often staying at the Hall. On his death, the Hall passed to his sister who married future PM Lord Palmerston who died at Brocket Hall in strange circumstances, allegedly involved with a chambermaid. Mrs Thatcher (then Baroness) wrote her memoirs while staying at the Hall. Brocket Hall is now the centre point for two golf clubs. The interior is fascinating to view, if you book a table in the restaurant or get invited to a wedding. Locals say you can simply drop in and have tea there. Incidentally, the Latin family motto which you may have seen "Felis Demulcta Mitis" means "a stroked cat is gentle" with the implication "but don't push your luck!".

Keep a wooden fence on your right as you cross another fairway. As you meet a tarmac drive, cross over and immediately, as directed by a yellow arrow, pass between wooden barriers and onto a narrow footpath. You are now walking close to the trees on your right. In 250m you come to a marker post just before a tarmac drive. Avoid the path ahead across the links and instead turn **right** on the drive. In 100m, look for another marker post and here fork **left** along the side of the greens, passing to the right of two large oaks and some sand bunkers. Make your way down the grassy slope towards a marker post and the Palladian Bridge. Cross the bridge, taking time to absorb the views across the Broadwater (made by damming the River Lea).

3 Ignore tarmac left and right and go dead straight over the grass, heading for a wide mown path. (As a guide, you should be just 15m to the right of Tee No. 3, known as "Templehill".) Your route goes towards the right-hand border of some woodland. It clings to the edge of the wood for 300m and finally comes up to the main road, with the *Crooked Chimney* Inn straight ahead.

The chimney of this pub has always been crooked. It was a farmhouse during the 1600s and 1700s, dispensing ales from the mid-1700s. Around 1780 it became known as the "Chequers" and was owned by the long-standing Searancke family of brewers. In 1815 it was taken over by the Hatfield Brewery. It is now in the "Vintage Inn" chain and provides a wide menu at fairly reasonable prices.

Cross this busy main road very carefully, a fraction right, and take Cromer Hyde Lane opposite. After passing some large redbrick houses, you meet a signpost pointing left along a track. *By looking behind you here, you get a long vista view of Brocket Hall.*

Decision point. If you are doing the shorter 3-mile=5 km walk, ignore the turn and skip to the section called Cromer Hyde Crossing near the end of this guide.

4 Turn **left** at the signpost, passing to the side of a large metal gate, onto a wide track running between fields. When you reach a line of trees, cross straight over a farm track onto a nice clear path across a crop field. Continue along the right-hand side of the next field, with time to admire the generous fringe of wild flowers. As a field opens out on your right, continue between fields, on the right-hand side of the dividing hedge. You pass a small patch of woodland on your left, after which your path joins a track running under large oaks towards a house. When you reach *Symondshyde Farm*, keep **left** round the buildings, ignore a signed footpath on your left and continue on a public footpath round past stables. (2022: The **3 Brewers** of St Albans have opened a brewery in the farm and they offer beer to drink on site on **Fridays and Saturdays**, making this a good place for a refrehment break.)

Turn **left** on the main entrance drive, easily identifiable from the vehicle checkpoint. The drive leads out to a road by a bridleway sign.

There is a big kerfuffle among the locals about a threatened development near here involving three new plots of new houses on Green-Belt land. If you are doing this walk after 2018 you may have noticed work in progress (or hopefully not!). It is rumoured that Lord Salisbury, owner of Hatfield House, offered this land to the Council in a deal to prevent compulsory purchase.

5 Turn **right** on the road, ignoring another bridleway on your right. Very shortly after, turn **left** on a signed bridleway into Symondshyde Great Wood. Always keep to the main path through this large beautiful wood, avoiding any side paths made by foresters in the past. There is some evidence of a hard surface, indicating the importance of the path in earlier decades. When you reach the far end of the wood, in 750m, you come to a T-junction. Turn **right** here on a wide path running just inside the wood. In 250m, the path comes out of the wood and bends **left** on a sheltered path between meadows. The path zigzags past the pink *Hollybush* and the thatched *May Cottage* and reaches a tarmac lane. Turn **right** on it.

6 Avoid a lane on your left and continue 100m to just before the large *Park Croft House*. Go **left** here through a swing-gate onto a grassy path between fences. It leads through a narrow gap onto a path running just inside a wood. *On your left is a tiny private airfield.* Go over a stile into a crop field and continue along the right-hand side. (It is possible to stay unofficially on a path just inside the wood, especially in bluebell time, but there is a risk of missing the next turn.) In 200m, less than half way along the edge, you meet a crossing path coming from the wood on your right, marked by a fingerpost. Turn **left** here on a good path across the crop field. Near the other side, your path continues beside a hedge on your left. As the edge curves right, go **left** through a gap between posts and down the left-hand side of another field, beside a florid hedgerow. At the other side, go through a metal barrier and a strip of forest to a road. Cross the road, a fraction left, onto part of the common and in 15m turn **right** on a path through trees, direct to the *John Bunyan* pub.

The "John Bunyan" is an ideal pub on the village green, much favoured by walkers. It is owned by McMullens, the Hertford brewery and serves the native three brews plus a guest ale. It serves "locally-sourced game dishes" and at weekends food is available till 3pm.

7 After possible refreshment, continue on a track past the pub quickly re-joining the road, but immediately fork **right** on a track marked as a byway. On your left here, through a little wooden gate, is a brick chimney, supposedly all that remains of John Bunyan's cottage.

The puritan preacher John Bunyan (1628-1688) might not have approved of a pub in his name. He was born near Bedford and served with the Roundheads in the Civil War. After a carefree youth he was converted by his wife to an austere form of Protestantism. He persisted in preaching and was briefly imprisoned. His book "Pilgrim's Progress" became a huge hit and is even now one of the most-read books in the English language.

This wide sunken path is partly brick-lined, running under trees and will take you all the way to the Marford Road. [Winter 2023: waterlogged, but there is a parallel unofficial path in the fields to the right of the byway which avoids the flooded section.] In ½ km it rises to cross a farm track and descends again into trees. In another 300m, you pass a marker post and footpath on your left. Shortly after, there is another footpath on your right.

Here, the shorter 3 mile=5 km walk re-joins the main walk.

Soon your track comes out into the open. As you near the main road, at a T-junction, turn **right** on a narrow path that leads up to the main road. Cross the main road very carefully and turn **right** into the car park where the walk began.

Cromer Hyde Crossing

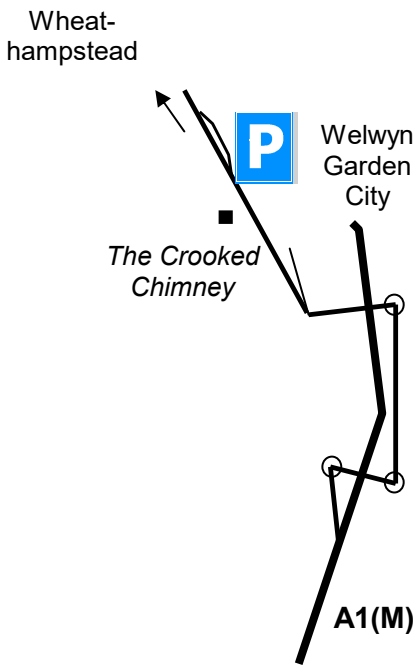
Take this option if you are doing the shorter 3 mile=5 km walk.

Continue along the tarmac lane, ignoring a rather unpromising footpath on your right. Soon you pass through the hamlet of Cromer Hyde, starting with a timbered cottage and including old redbricks and ending with *Keeper's Cottage*. At a fingerpost, just before another house, turn **right** and take a narrow path by a white-topped post. It runs beside a garden hedge and emerges to take you through a modern kissing gate into a sheep meadow. Cross straight over to a gap to the left of a large gate. This gap takes you into a larger sheep pasture. Head straight across along the left-hand edge. Keep ahead along the top left-hand edge, going through a kissing gate into a crop field. Keep ahead along the top edge. You gradually descend to a line of trees. Finally, after 300m beside this field, at a marker post, go straight over a farm track and past a tree trunk to come down to a sunken byway. Turn **right** on it.

Now re-join the main walk near the end of the last section.

Getting there

By car: the B653 Marford Road is close to the A1(M) motorway. Come off at **Exit 4** (*Hertford*). Your route goes **right**, over the motorway, and **left** as for *Wheathampstead*, then **left** under the motorway, still following signs for *Wheathampstead*. At the next roundabout, follow a sign for *Lemsford, Wheat-hampstead*. This is the B653 Brocket Road which becomes Marford Road after the next junction. Look out for the *Crooked Chimney* pub on your left. The car park is another ½ mile on your right.



By bus/train: bus 610 connects with a host of stations, including Luton, Potters Bar and Cockfosters (for the Underground!), not Sunday. Check the timetables.

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