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

Latimer and other Chiltern villages
Flaunden, Sarratt, Chenies, River Chess

Distance: 14 km=8½ miles, add 1½ km=1 mile if by rail easy walking

Region: Chilterns (Bucks & Herts) Date written: 10-oct-2021

Author: Phegophilos Last update: 24-may-2026

Refreshments: Flaunden, Sarratt, Chenies

Map: Explorer 172 (Chiltern Hills East) *but the maps in this guide may suffice*

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

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Villages, natural meadows, river, water meadows, churches, autumn colours, woodland trails, parkland, equestrian, historic houses, pubs

In Brief

Just half an hour by train from central London is a blissful land of woods and pastures ringed by rolling hills. The River Chess flows here through water meadows and over cascades. Young riders go on horseback along the quiet lanes. Folk from this most prosperous part of England sit in the generous gardens of the local inns drinking the afternoon away. Chirpy families skip along the long woodland trails. Medieval church bells resound around these villages with names you have probably never heard before.

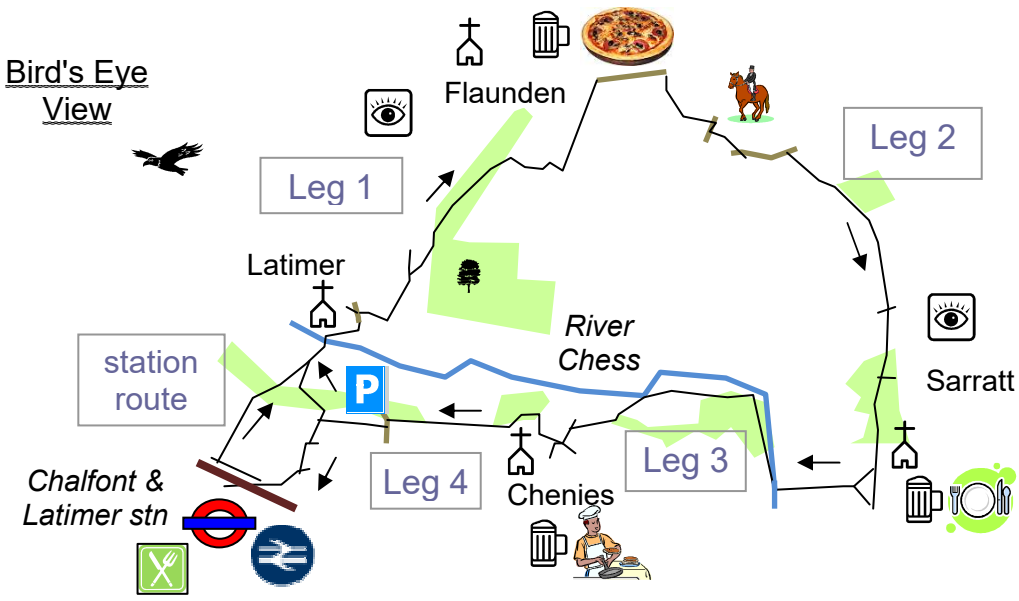
The walk is also easy to reach by car, with a large free car park near the starting village.

This is a fascinating area with loads of historical connections. As usual, they are *in italics*, so you could optionally skip them or read them later, or over a drink in one of the famous inns. You will be quite carried away by the landscape and you won't notice the distance. If you're normally used to 5-mile walks, don't be put off: the paths are all easy with hardly any steep sections and only **three** easy stiles, and the landscape is ever-changing. You can shorten the walk a little by omitting the churches and by taking a shorter path to Chenies in Leg 3.

There are some scratchy sections and you might brush past some nettles, maybe not enough to rule out shorts. Comfortable boots are best, because of the distance, not the terrain which is easy. Your feet may get wet crossing the water meadow in Section 12 after rain. Your dog is welcome – everyone seems to have one.

The walk begins at **Chalfont and Latimer** railway and Underground station, or at the free **Stony Lane car park**, near Amersham, Bucks, approximate postcode **HP6 6SP**, w3w:assist.quiet.hours. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

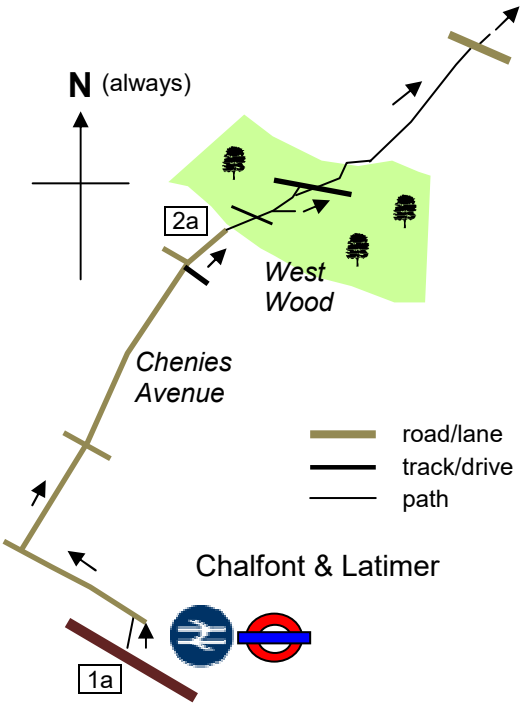
The Walk



If you arrived by train, do sections 1a and 2a and skip to Leg 1. If you came by car, do sections 1b and 2b.

Station Start 1 km=0.7 miles

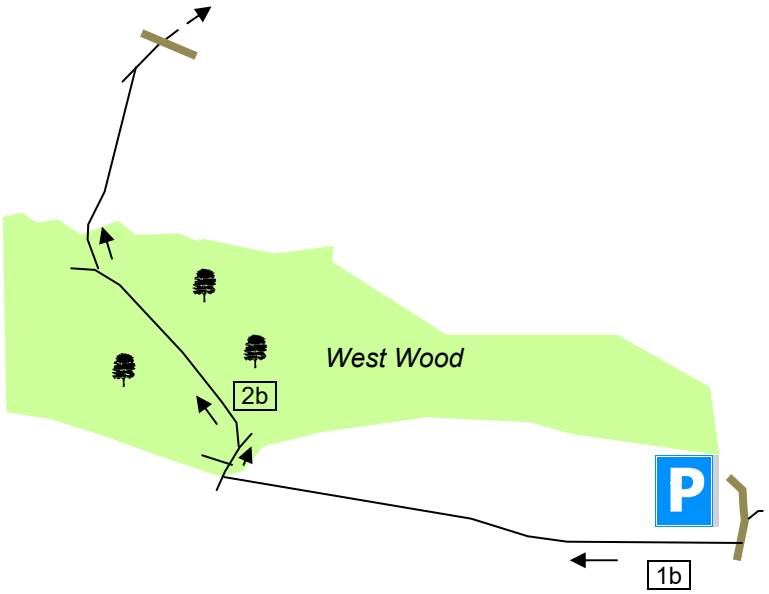
1a On arriving at Chalfont and Latimer station, if you caught the train in or near London, you need to use the underpass to cross to the **north** side (but first note that the shops, if you need them, are on this side). Exiting the station building, cross straight over and take a path marked by a sign *"Private Footpath to Bedford Avenue"*. Cross a car park and turn **left** on that residential road. Walk 150m or so to the first side road and turn **right** on it, slightly uphill. Go straight over a crossing road, where you discover that your road's name is *Chenies Avenue*, a foretoken of a village on your route today. The road ends at a junction with a sign for *Westwood Park* on your right. Keep going **straight ahead** along a short driveway of superior houses (a private road but also a right-of-way).



2a In only 50m, at the end of the drive, keep straight on, on a path into West Wood, immediately meeting a junction of several paths. Go straight over a crossing path to meet a fork of two paths with yellow arrows. Avoid the right-hand level path and instead choose the **left** fork, the more descending path. Continue down, fairly steeply, for about 80m, till you see an extremely wide level path about 10m ahead. Fork **right** now and cross the wide path diagonally. Your path takes you down to meet a field on your left, leading to a modern kissing-gate. Go through the gate and keep **left** to go down the left-hand side of a grassy meadow. The path ends at a kissing-gate just before a road. Now skip to Leg 1.

Car Park Start 1 km=0.6 miles

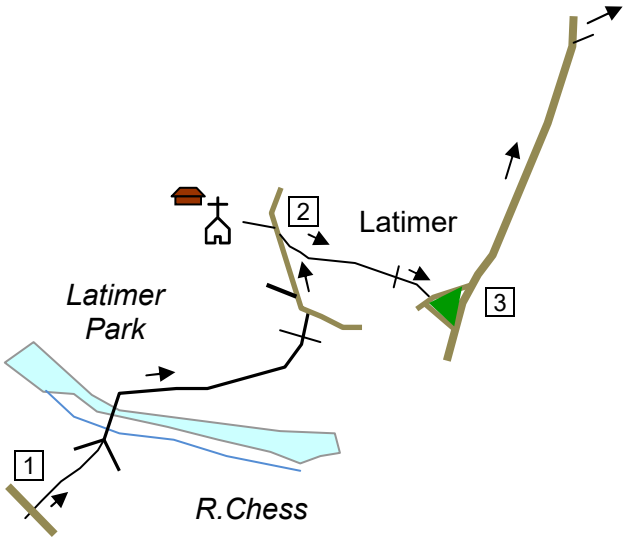
1b Starting at the Stony Lane car park, walk with the road on your left to the end of the car park and turn **right** onto a signed footpath, going through a modern kissing-gate onto a path between wire fences. You come out through a kissing-gate into a large playing field. Immediately turn **right** into woods. Ignore a path on your left and continue down into the wood for 30m to meet a marker post with blue and yellow arrows.



2b Choose the **left** fork, the yellow arrow. Follow this fine descending path through beechwoods to reach the bottom of the slope in 200m. Avoid a path that forks left uphill and instead keep **right** to go through a small wooden gate into a natural meadow. Keep straight ahead, shortly staying close to a crop field on your right. In 150m, a path joins from your left and you reach a kissing-gate just before a road.

Leg 1: Latimer to Flaunden 3.3 km=2 miles

1 Cross the road to go through another kissing-gate. Traverse a small meadow to a wooden swing-gate and keep ahead on a concrete track, crossing a bridge over the River Chess. A narrow channel is followed by a wider part of the river. On your left is the spillway from the Great Water and Lower Water which were formed in the 1750s by the damming of the river. On your right is an especially pleasant section of the river where, if you are lucky, a pair of swans may come into view for a photo opportunity.



The River Chess is a 18-km=11-mile pure chalk stream, named after Chesham where it rises. After flowing through the sites of several lost Roman villas and water mills, it empties into the River Colne near Rickmansworth. The river and its valley support a great range of wild- and plant-life. There is a 10-mile Chess Valley Walk between Chesham and Rickmansworth.

Follow the curving track for around 200m, eventually going over a crossing path and around a large wooden gate to meet a tarmac lane. Turn **left** on the lane, avoiding a private drive on your left for *Latimer House* (now a hotel). In 80m your route continues on a footpath signed on your **right**, but only 10m further on your **left**, just before a pair of Tudor cottages, you will see a metal gate. This gate will lead you to the church of St Mary Magdalene with a peek at Latimer House, returning the same way.

Latimer Park was known as Latimer Abbey until the old house suffered a fire and was rebuilt in 1838. The park down to the Great Water and Lower Water of the enlarged river was designed by Capability Brown. Latimer played a role in intelligence during WW2. It was a "very secret place; the prisoners entered and left in closed vans, so they never knew where they were" (to keep the Red Cross from nosing around). Thousands of Germans, including some of Hitler's generals, were "guests" here. Secret bugging devices listened to the prisoners' conversation which helped Bletchley Park glean war secrets.

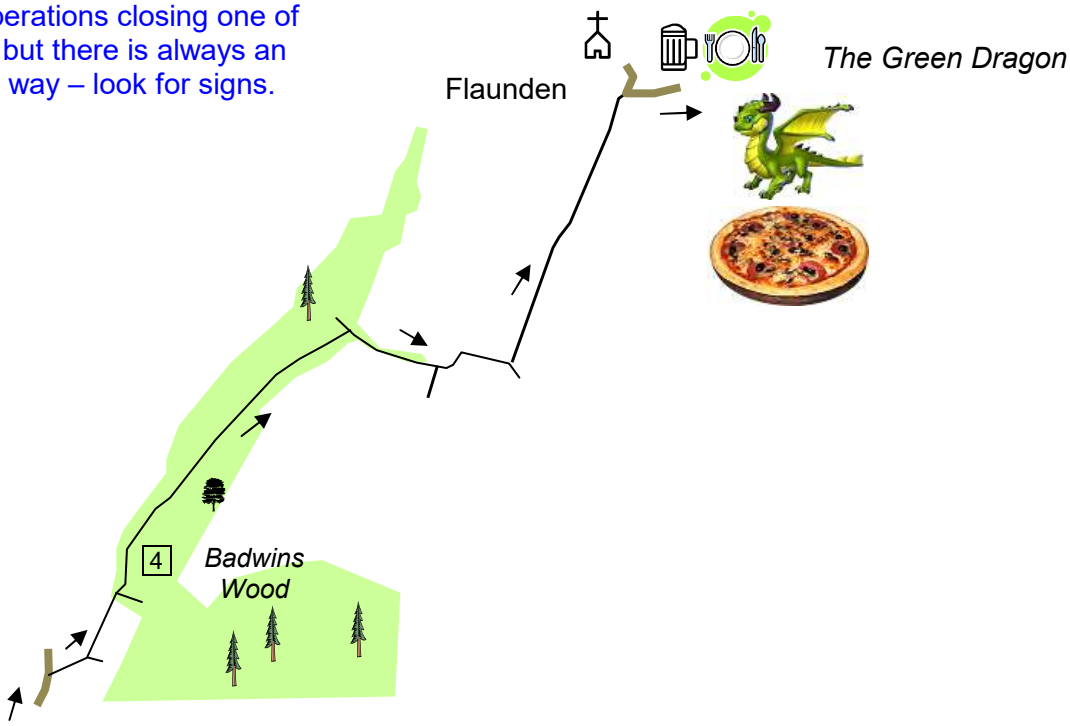
The present-day Church of St Mary Magdalene was designed by Edward Blore but Sir George Gilbert Scott (of St Pancras Station fame) gave it its neo-Gothic exterior in 1867. An older church stood here or nearby since at least 1303 when Thomas of Chinnor was its first rector.

2 Having turned **right** on the footpath (that is, **left** if coming back from the church), follow the path as it doubles back and leads through a wooden swing-gate to a sloping meadow. Your route is to the left of some pines, through a swing-gate on the other side, straight ahead on a narrow path between hedges, leading down to the village green in the centre of Latimer. The little triangular green has a memorial to the Boer War in South Africa, an old pump and a seat from which you can enjoy the perfect setting and the historic houses.

Latimer was once joined with the ancient village of Chenies as an extended village called "Isenhampstead", the location of a royal palace. Its new name came from William Latimer (1st Baron) whose name means "Latin scribe". King Charles I came to Latimer but not willingly – he had just been captured by Oliver Cromwell's troops. As well as the Boer War memorial, there is another one on the green, dedicated to a horse, Villebois, which Charles Cavendish (Lord Chesham) brought back from its service in South Africa.

3 At the bottom of the green, turn **left** on a main road, *Flaunden Hill*, passing another timbered cottage. 150m after the entrance to Home Farm, turn **right** at a signpost on a bridleway, marked *Glendale Farm*. Welcome to Hertfordshire! In 100m this sandy path elbows **left**: ignore a footpath on the right here. At the top, the path enters Badwins Wood. Ignore a bridleway on the right and keep straight ahead on a bridleway signed *Flaunden 1¼*.

You may need to watch out for forestry operations closing one of the paths, but there is always an alternative way – look for signs.



4 This level wide forest path runs for 800m with a deep valley down on your left and views of the countryside. Finally, by a 3-way signpost with a field visible ahead, you meet a path from the left and your bridleway bends **right**. The bridleway now runs between fields. In 200m you pass a byway on your right. Stay on the bridleway round two bends to arrive at T-junction. Turn **left** here, heading for power lines visible in the near distance. This straight wide sandy track is popular with horse riders. The view is hidden by the hedges until a farm gate on your left suddenly reveals the surrounding landscape. Your path exits at a bend in a tarmac lane in the village of Flaunden. The church is on your left.

Flaunden church, built in 1838, also dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, was the first to be designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott. It replaced the old church which was located near Latimer. Note the really striking east window. The best-known houses of the village have been lovingly sewn into the Flaunden Quilt hanging over the gallery.

Up to the late 1700s you would have been standing in fields. Flaunden stood on the banks of the River Chess but later moved to this site. It might have been because of the plague, maybe carried along the river in rags for paper-making. The history is well described in Jack Debnam's "The Flaunden Book". Flaunden is blest with two pubs.

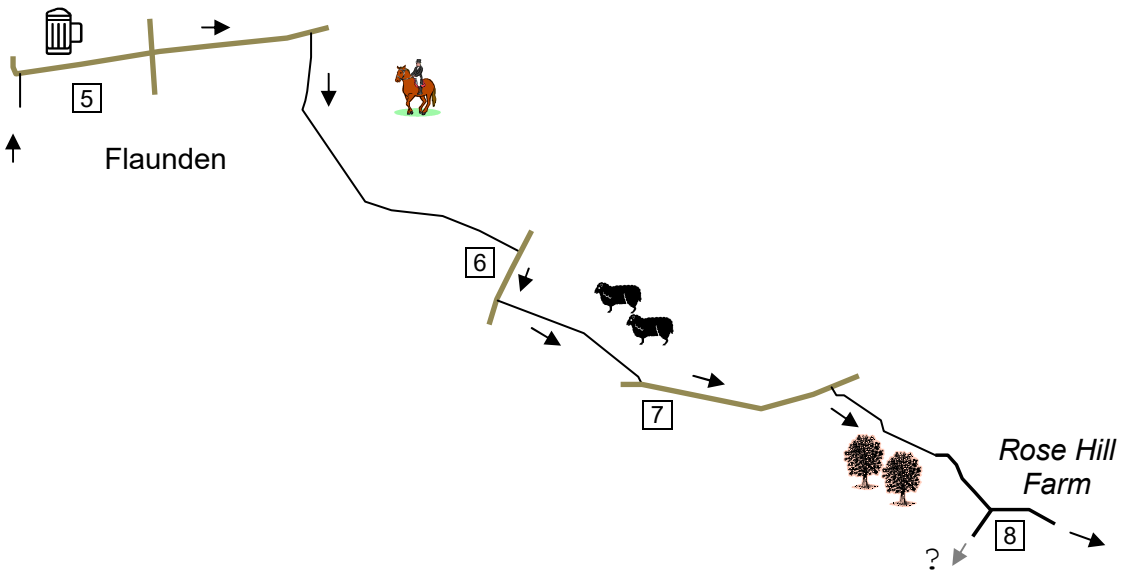
Turn **right** on the lane, immediately reaching the *Green Dragon*, inn and pizza bar, a pub with its own Wikipedia entry!

The Grade-II listed Green Dragon dates from the early 1600s and has hardly changed in 150 years. People come here for its new stand-alone Pizza Bar or for a roast on Sunday, or for more humdrum food, in its extended dining room or its summer tent. Beers include Landlord, Rebellion Smugger and Knowle Spring. Dogs are welcome in the bar – children only on leashes! It opens every day at 12. For booking or information, ring 01442-832020.

But the pub is best known from the names of the people who drank here. In 1936, none other than Joachim von Ribbentrop, later architect of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Russia, spent time in England as Ambassador and was a regular here. Von Ribbentrop was one of the few top Nazis with extensive experience of the world, having worked in Canada, speaking fluent French and English. In 1937 he committed a social gaffe when greeting King George VI by giving the Nazi stiff-arm salute which nearly knocked the king over. But as originator of much of the policy that led to the Holocaust, he was the first to be hanged in 1946. (That honour was intended for Göring but he cheated the hangman with cyanide.)

Another customer was Guy Burgess, one of the Cambridge Five, a notorious ring of Soviet agents. Recruited on the recommendation of the spy Kim Philby, he eventually fled to Moscow with Donald Maclean.

Leg 2: Flaunden to Sarratt 5 km=3 miles max



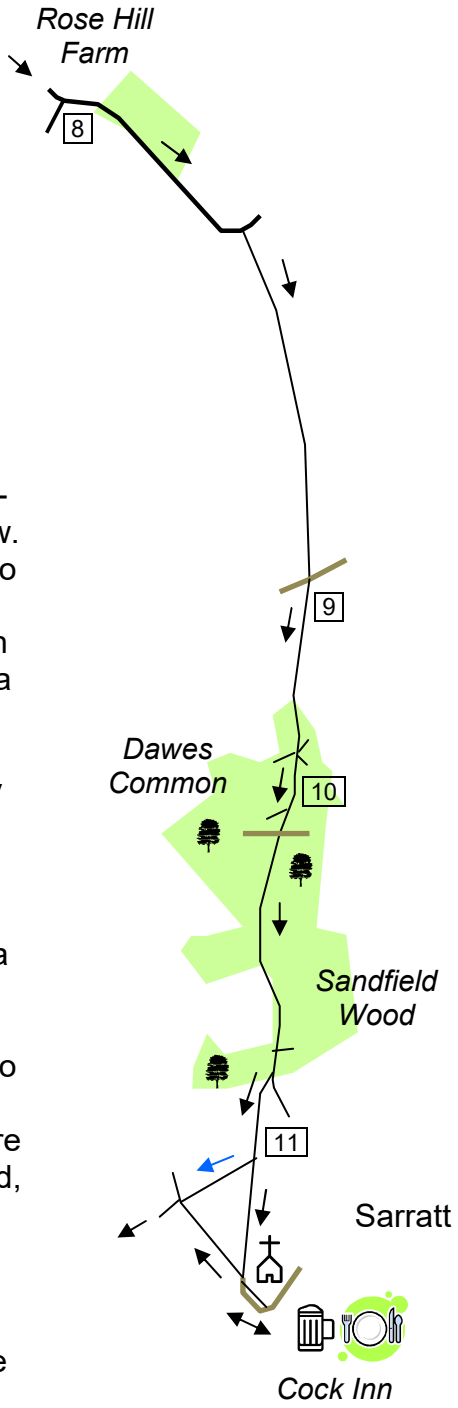
5 After a possible rest-break, continue along the road in this attractive village, going straight over at a crossroads. In 150m or so, shortly after the last house, at a signpost, turn **right** on a footpath going through a wooden swing-gate [May 2026: gate removed], joining part of the Chiltern Way (CW). *The Chiltern Way is a (very) long-distance circular path of around 200 km=125 miles.* You will be following the CW all the way to your next meeting with the river Chess. The path runs beside a paddock on your left, taking you through a wooden swing-gate [May 2026: gate removed] and diagonally across a crop field. At the other side, go through a wooden swing-gate and straight ahead along the left-hand edge of a field. You come out to a tarmac lane.

6 Turn **right** on the lane, passing Newhouse Farm. In nearly 100m, turn **left** at a signpost, go through a wooden gate and onto a footpath, still on the CW. The path runs along the left-hand side of a meadow, over an easy stile into another meadow. Keep straight ahead on a clear path across the centre. In the corner, by a wire fence, go over a stile by lifting the top bar (if only they were all made like this! remember to replace the bar). A few steps lead down to a tarmac lane.

7 Turn **left** on this quiet lane. In 100m, ignore a permissive path on your right. In a further 200m you reach the driveway to *Great Bragmans Farm*. Just to the left of the entrance gates, go **right** through a small metal gate, continuing on the CW. The path goes up the right-hand side of a rich meadow, passing a fine old barn on your right. A wooden swing-gate leads you onto a sheltered path under dark hollies, hazel, ivy and ash. You come past a redundant stile to reach the first buildings of *Rose Hill Farm*. Continue past a large wooden gate onto a concrete track. In 50m you reach a junction with an unmarked concrete track on your right.

The drive on your right is an unresearched shortcut to Chenies, saving 2¼ km=1½ miles. The end point is marked below. This path, SA36, seems to be mainly a farm or forestry track through woodland and it wasn't investigated because it misses the star features of this walk. The official start of this footpath is totally obliterated by brambles, so the track deputises for it. Note that the route zigzags right-left after the first field to run along the left-hand side of the next field. But please continue with section 8 regardless! … .

8 Ignore the concrete track on your right and keep ahead on the current track which turns to gravel. After 200m alongside Rosehill Wood on your left, the track starts to bend left. Leave the track here by going **right** over a stile (gently nudging the horse out of the way if need be). The path runs along the right-hand side of the pasture, passing under power lines. At the other side, go through a small wooden gate and a wooden swing-gate and take a path diagonally across a horse pasture. In the far corner, two wooden swing-gates either side of a track lead you diagonally across the next charming meadow. At the far side, another wooden swing-gate and some steps lead down to a tarmac lane.



9 Cross the lane, up two steps and through a wooden swing-gate. Walk along the left-hand side of this natural meadow. At the other side, yet another wooden swing-gate leads into a new green pasture. Keep straight ahead towards the wood opposite where you will find a bench seat from which to enjoy the view. From here, the path takes you through a wooden gate into Dawes Common and a magical tree garden. On your right is an avenue of cedars and on your left a plantation of poplars, established some years ago by a local man. On your right is the perfectly landscaped private garden of *Heathfield*. You come out through a metal swing-gate to a junction of five paths.

10 Avoid the first path on your right but take the **right** fork at a marker post, following the CW sign. You come through more attractive woodland with some stylish seats on each side. Ignore a footpath on your right and continue ahead to a metal barrier. Your route continues over a tarmac lane and through a wooden swing-gate, still on the CW. You are now walking between wire fences, through Sandfield Wood, soon developing into a cathedral-like vault of tall beeches. You pass the *Old Rectory* on your right. *Note the clipped bushes and the standing stones in the garden*. The path has morphed into a surfaced drive. *In passing, note the lovely ornate metal gate on your left.* Immediately now, as the drive bends left, ignore a footpath and small metal gate on your left, but go **right** through a metal kissing-gate and a metal gate.

11 The path across the grassland will lead you to Sarratt, but with a shortcut which hopefully you will not take, because the church and pub are unmissable. Keep straight ahead across the top of this sloping meadow, with good views. As you reach the half-way point, looking right, you will see a metal gate under some trees and you may notice other people going that way. You have a choice of omitting Sarratt and waiting till Chenies for the next pub and church, or continuing a *very short* distance for a quick break.

To omit Sarratt: turn diagonally **right** towards that large metal gate. When you reach the useless gate and a junction of paths you will find a 3-way fingerpost. Go straight ahead down the left-hand side of a sloping meadow, in the direction *Chenies*. Skip to the next Leg.

To call in at Sarratt: keep going dead straight across the meadow, passing through a metal gate in a fence. Continue into the far corner to go through a wood-and-metal kissing-gate. (Note that the CW does a very sharp right turn before this gate, doubling back: this will be your return route.) The path leads to Sarratt church.

The Church of the Holy Cross also owes much to Sir George Gilbert Scott who lived nearby and refurbed it. The church was founded around 1190, built on the familiar Hertfordshire "puddingstone" (local pebbles in sand and cement). Some of the materials were brought over from a Roman villa in the Chess valley. You can see that the tower was added a few centuries later in an unusual crosswise position. The large interior is worth exploring, especially during the annual Flower Festival. The font had been remodelled into the shape of the village pond.

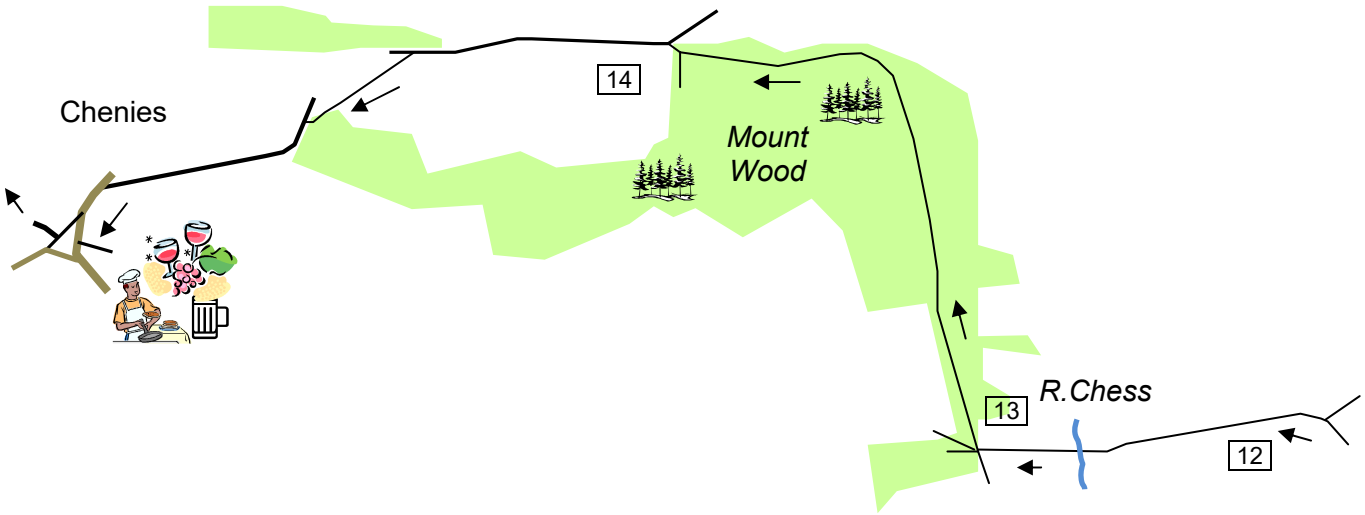
Continue past the church on your left and keep **left** to go out through the lichgate. Turn **left** on the road immediately reaching the *Cock Inn*.

The old name for the Cock Inn was the "Cock Horse". It dates back to the 1600s when it was a coaching inn for the London run. The huge garden is probably all you will see when you sit to enjoy the views. But the cosy bar offers snacks and hot stuff, or you can eat in the quaint restaurant with its wonky walls and original exposed timbers. Food is substantial pub favourites, served from 12-2.30 (4 on Sun). For info or to book, ring 01923-282908.

If you say you could murder a steak pie, you could be taken literally, because the pub and surrounds have been a location for TV shows "Midsomer Murders" and "Murder Most Foul". Much of the village appeared in – you guessed it – Four Weddings and a Funeral, particularly the white house, Goldington's, just east of the village where Charles falls for Carrie.

Retrace your steps, passing the church on your right, out through the kissing-gate. Immediately take the **left** fork, marked as the CW. The path runs along the left-hand side of the pasture, through a metal kissing-gate, to reach the useless large metal gate under some trees. Here there is a junction of paths and a 3-way fingerpost. Turn **left** down the left-hand side of a sloping meadow, in the direction *Chenies*.

Leg 3: Sarratt to Chenies 2⅔ km=1⅔ miles



12 After descending the meadowside, with great views into the valley, under overhanging beeches, go through a metal kissing-gate in the corner and continue under trees to reach the valley of the River Chess, with its ponds and water meadows. Welcome back to Buckinghamshire! Go **left** through a wooden swing-gate and **right** in the direction *Chenies* marked on a signpost. A metal gate and a long narrow concrete bridge lead you over the river. Go down two steps and keep straight ahead on a stone-chip path. The path narrows and soon takes you to a 4-way kissing-gate.

13 There are three paths leading to Chenies, two of which are indicated by a wooden signpost over the wooden gate. But the route chosen here is slightly longer than those: it takes you through a spectacular wood and up a pretty hillside, avoiding fields and roads. So turn **right** just *before* you reach the gate, going through a metal swing-gate into dark Mount Wood, an area of tall beeches. For about 600m the path leads you through several wood-and-metal swing-gates. The path now starts to wheel left imperceptibly and, after a complete turn, runs for another 300m through more fine woodland, with the Chess valley down on your right. The path ends at a wooden swing-gate beside a large metal gate. Avoid a steep path uphill on your left here and continue straight on. In a short distance, turn **left** on a narrow hard-surfaced hedged path coming from your right.
The "unresearched shortcut to Chenies" joins the main walk here.

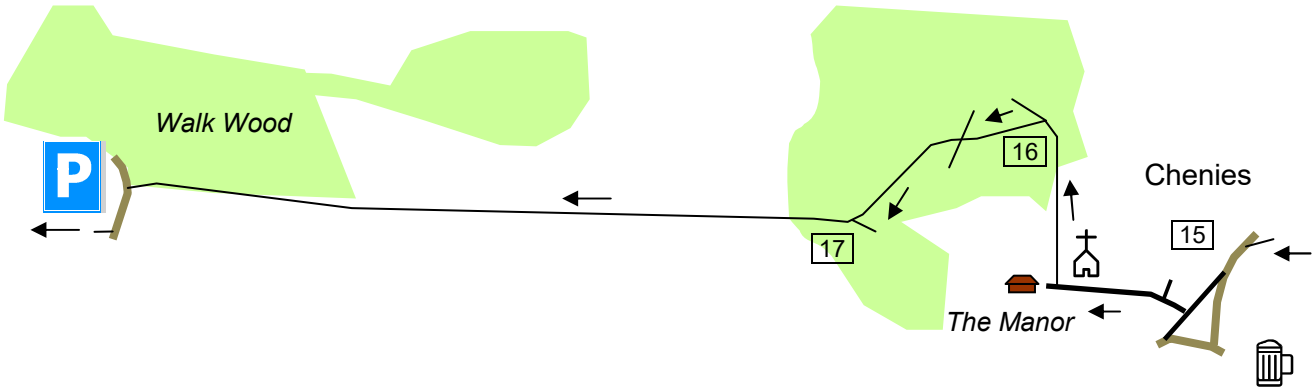
14 The path rises a little and, after about 300m, gets a little wider. In the hedgerow on the left side, look for a tall metal fingerpost beside a flight of six steps. Go **left** up the steps, through a wooden swing-gate and straight ahead up the slope of this attractive meadow. At the top, go through a wooden swing-gate beside a large metal gate and keep **left** on a tarmac drive. Follow the drive, with good views on the right, soon ignoring footpaths left and right, finally coming out to a road in the village of Chenies. Turn **left** on the road, immediately reaching the village green.

Although not on your route, there is a superior inn just 100m up the main road on your **left**. *The Bedford Arms is an elegant hotel and restaurant with a wide-ranging menu. You can sup your drink on the front terrace, or simply*

partake of a cup of coffee, or even wine with canapés. It often hosts a wedding party, but confined to one side. Phone 01923-283301 to enquire or book. You need to return to the village green afterwards.

From 1165 till as late as the 1800s, Chenies (pronounced "Chenny's") was linked with Latimer as "Isenhampstead", then as "Eastnamsted Cheynes". The prosperity of the village came from paper making. The name comes from the manor which took its name from the Cheyne family who lived here for nearly 300 years. Thomas Cheyne was an armed attendant to King Edward III whose family had a hunting lodge near here. Subsequently, the Russell family, who later became Dukes of Bedford, acquired the estate. They are buried in the Russell Chapel which is part of the huge St Michael's church. Chenies Manor House was rebuilt in its present form in the mid-1550s by John Russell, First Earl of Bedford. King Henry VIII stayed here several times, Sir John being his favourite Privy Councillor. The Manor is currently (2021) open for tours on Mondays and Tuesdays (see their website).

Leg 4: Chenies to Car Park 1½ km=1 mile



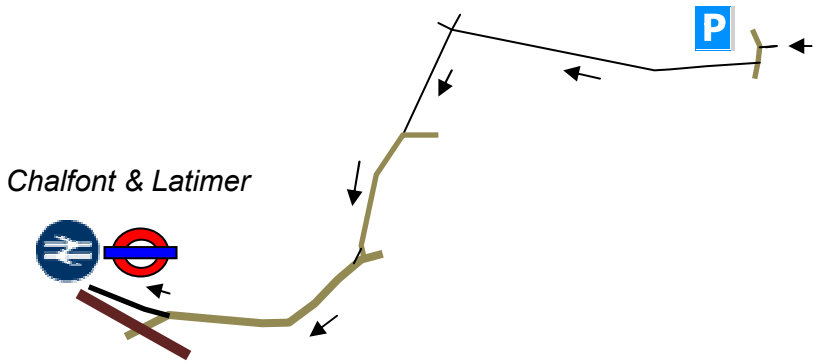
15 From the centre of the green in Chenies, near the old well, go **right** to a wide gravel driveway by a big sign for *Chenies Manor House*. On your right shortly are the precincts of the massive Church of St Michael, with the entrance to the church at the next opening. After possibly visiting the church, continue on the drive just a couple of metres to the entrance gate of the *Manor House*. Immediately *before* the gate, turn **right** on a narrow footpath between walls, passing the west door of the church on your right. The path takes you down into trees and through a wooden barrier into deep woodland. Here you have a choice of paths, indicated by a marker post and by arrows on a tree.

16 Take the **left**most (squarely left) most level of these paths. This wide woodland path has steeply-sloping woods down on your right. In 150m, at a marker post, go straight on, ignoring the oblique crossing path. In a further 150m you arrive at a rather chaotic area of wood debris and fallen branches. Keep **right** here, keeping those steeply-sloping woods down on your right. Head for a wooden swing-gate ahead. After the gate, you are joined by sandy path from your left, passing a wooden bench seat.

17 This stony level path has wide views on your right. Soon you are walking through the left-hand edge of the well-named Walk Wood, a nature reserve. You come out to a tarmac road. Opposite, a bit to the left, is the Stony Lane car park where, if you drove here, the walk began.

If you began the walk in **Chalfont and Latimer station**, continue with the section immediately below.

Station End 1½ km=1 mile

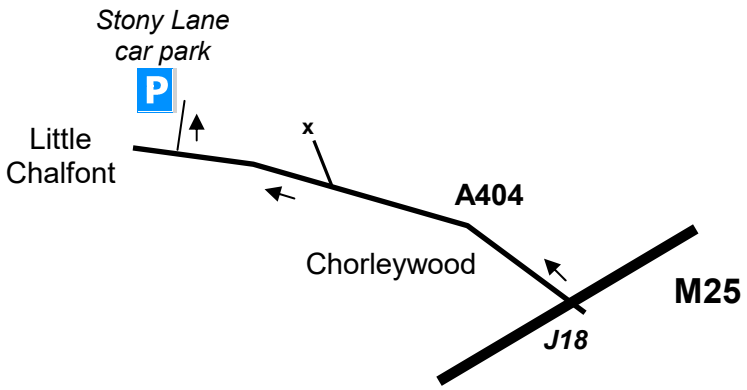


Turn **left** on the road to the end of the car park and turn **right** onto a signed footpath, going through a modern kissing-gate onto a path between wire fences. You come out through a kissing-gate into a large playing field. Immediately turn **left** along the edge of the playing field. You come out onto a residential road. Keep **right**, i.e. straight ahead, to the end of the road. At the end, turn **right** on the main Amersham Road. In 300m or so, before the railway bridge, fork **right** on an approach road leading quickly to the station where the walk began.

Getting there

By train: A 30-minute ride by Chiltern Railways from Marylebone (every 30 minutes including Sundays) or Metropolitan Line (Underground), both within the Freedom Zone.

By car: Latimer is extremely easy to reach from the M25. Come off at **Junction 18** (**A404**, *Amersham, Chorleywood*). Go **west** on the **A404**, *Rickmansworth Road* which becomes *Amersham Road*.. After a total of 1.6 miles, **avoid** a right fork for *Chenies, Latimer* and go one more mile. Immediately opposite the welcome sign for *Little Chalfont*, turn **right** on **Stony Lane**. The car park is ¼ mile on your left.



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