

Skylarks in the meadows alongside. Turning right onto a footpath beyond the bridge try to identify some eight species of tree indicative of ancient hedgerow.

6. WATERHALL MEADOWS: Here many insect species are attracted to the great variety of grasses and wet flora. In Spring, Lady's Smock predominate amongst the grass but late Summer produces a lovely colour combination when the yellow umbellifer, Pepper Saxifrage, flowers alongside Devil's-bit Scabious. The meadows are an important site for dragonflies, 17 species having been recorded including the pretty Banded Agrion. Of the butterflies, the Comma has such an abundant source of its foodplants, Nettle and Hop, as to make it more likely to be seen than elsewhere. During Winter months noticeably large flocks of Fieldfare and Redwing congregate and sing in the hedgerows before their departure in Spring.

7. UNITED REFORMED CHURCH: (Optional detour) Built in 1708, it is one of the oldest nonconformist chapels in East Anglia. The churchyard is part of The Living Churchyard project and is managed to encourage wildlife.

Start B - CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN

8. The original nave was built in the late eleventh century and the present North wall with its plain door and Roman brickwork still dates from then. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the South wall and the chancel were rebuilt and the tower added. Opposite the church stands the timber-framed Little Baddow Hall, fourteenth century with later additions.

9. CHELMER AND BLACKWATER NAVIGATION: In 1793 an Act of Parliament was passed authorising 'the making and maintaining of a navigable waterway between Chelmsford and Colliers Reach on the Blackwater'. The navigation was used commercially up to 1972. Approach the towpath quietly! The Kingfisher may be seen in any season. Cleaner water has improved riverside plants and many species of wildflower may be identified along this short stretch of the canal.

10. HOLYBREDS FARM: It has been suggested that the farm (to the South) might have been the property of the church in mediaeval times and thus provided an endowment for the supply of 'holy bread' for the Mass.

11. HOLYBREAD WOOD: Though small in size the wood is much appreciated by all kinds of birds and animals. This footpath cuts through the lower section of woodland, mainly old Hornbeam coppice, with the added interest of mature Holly and a few Wild Service Trees. Wood Anemone and Bluebells take advantage of Springtime Light. Fungi thrive on the abundant dead wood. Woodpeckers, especially Green Woodpeckers foraging on Wood Ant colonies, are a common sight.

12. TOFTS: One of the manors of Middlemead. The house was rebuilt and the road diverted by General Strutt in the nineteenth century.

13. BASSETTS: The other Middlemead manor. The present house is sixteenth century, the original having reverted back to a farmhouse. Look back at the house and the superb view on a clear day when you are half way up High Field.

14. GIBBS: The present house probably dates from the late eighteenth century, although the name 'Gibbe' is first mentioned in 1383.

15. OLD RODNEY: Originally the Cock and Warren alehouse, it was opened as a pleasure garden at the end of the nineteenth century and then became well known in the area as the Old Rodney Tearooms.

With thanks to Mr. Tim Sargeant of the Old Vicarage, Bishops Stortford, Herts., for allowing a permissive walk across his land.



Circular: Approx. distance 11.1K (6.9 miles)
Start A: The Memorial Hall
Start B: The Church of St Mary the Virgin

Start A - MEMORIAL HALL

1. The present Memorial Hall was opened on 12th November 1960, replacing the former hall destroyed by fire in 1959.

2. PARSONAGE LANE: This is the 'new way' made 1717 leading to Parsonage Farm and its lands, the property of the Rector of the Parish.

3. BLAKES WOOD: was given to the National Trust in the 1950s and is now managed jointly by that Trust and Essex Wildlife Trust. Comprising 103 acres it is mainly Sweet Chestnut coppice. Rotating the coppicing produces excellent woodland flora. Bluebells are everywhere in Spring. Along the stream valley there is a good selection of waterside vegetation, including Great Hairy Woodrush - a local speciality. In shady areas several kinds of fern flourish. Yellow Archangel may be found below the trees. Elsewhere in more light, Red Campion is interwoven with White Climbing Fumitory. From April to June listen out for Nightingales.

4. GREAT GRACES: The remaining part of a large mid - sixteenth century red brick house, one of the manors of Little Baddow.

5. GRACES WALK: In 1615 Lady Alice Mildmay, wife of Sir Henry, drowned herself in a pond because of her husband's unkindness. She is reputed to haunt Graces Walk by the bridge which crosses Sandon Brook. While walking toward that bridge look out for

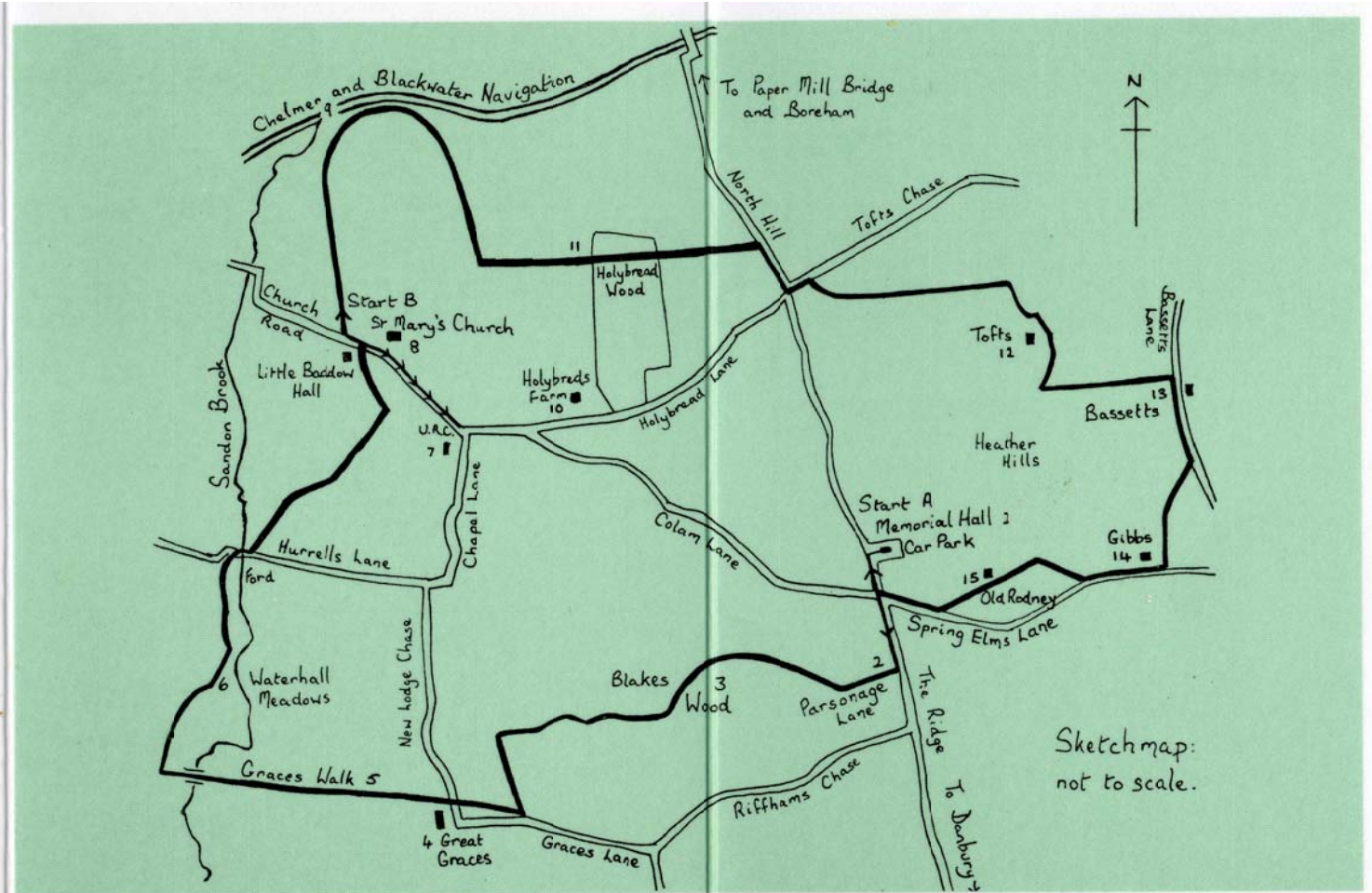
ROUTE - FOLLOWING BLUEBELL LOGO

Start A - Memorial Hall (1)

Leaving car park turn L and proceed up The Ridge to Generals Arms. Immediately beyond turn R into **Parsonage Lane (2)**. L at 3-way fingerpost. Entering **Blakes Wood (3)** continue for 100M then bear R. Pass bridge on R and keep straight on. Continue passing another bridge on R and a 'Wildside' marker on L. Almost immediately take a path to your R. Go over wooden footbridge and earth bridge. At next junction go straight across and continue W. Just before a NT marker post turn R (downhill) on to newly formed way. Follow earth bank boundary, climbing up again and crossing through wire fence. At T junction with footpath turn L and continue on until almost at the road. Instead turn R onto FP (C.B.C. Wildlife Habitat Board). Follow FP until stile opposite **Great Graces (4)**. Cross road and join **Graces Walk (5)** going over bridge at Sandon Brook then soon R at fingerpost. Continue along ancient hedgerow and enter **Waterhall Meadow (6)** at stile. Cross meadow (Sandon Brook on R). Leaving Waterhall cross road, then Brook on footbridge. Turn immediately L by fingerpost and cross field by FP to Fruit Farm. Take care through farmyard to follow correct signs. On coming to Church Road turn R for detour to **United Reformed Church (7)** - (toilets)

Start B - Church of St Mary the Virgin (8).

Join the FP at roadside fingerpost on W boundary of church. Walk N to join towpath, **Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation (9)**. Walk E along towpath 400M only. Follow fingerpost direction to open field beyond water meadow. Turn L onto track then R across field at white-topped marker post. Continue



past 1st marker and incline L to 2nd in the middle of field. Now turn L to next marker post and over plank bridge. **Holybreds Farm (10)** to S. Follow straight across field and enter **Holybread Wood (11)**. Keep straight on at fingerpost. Leave wood by plank bridge, cross field and on into Spring Close. Keep straight at fingerpost. Continue to North Hill, turn R then L into Tofts Chase. After 100M turn R at fingerpost and follow signs to Tofts. On coming into open field incline L to large oak, bear L to end of fence. Follow FP behind **Tofts (12)** then E on FP to Bassetts Wood. Continue through wood inclining L. Leaving wood go straight across field and turn R on road. Pass **Bassetts (13)** on L. At road bend in 200M cross High Field on FP (aim for L/hand end of cottage on skyline). Soon white marker post can be seen leading into lane to **Gibbs (14)**. R along Spring Elms Lane for 300M then R across Wedlock Green. At fingerpost incline L. FP follows straight across grass at **Old Rodney (15)** (house on R). Turn L onto track leading to Spring Elms Lane. At road turn R and R again at crossroads to Memorial Hall. (Those proceeding from Start B., turn L at crossroads, pass Generals Arms, then R into **Parsonage Lane (2)**.)