

The starting point for this circular walk is the War Memorial at the bottom of Wappenham Road, whichever way round, clockwise or anti-clockwise, you are planning to go. Parts of the route can be muddy and uneven so stout footwear is needed, as well as warm clothing for the higher exposed sections.

Whilst enjoying the countryside do please respect its life and work: keep to the public paths, fasten all gates behind you, leave livestock, crops and machinery alone, keep your dogs under close control and take your litter home.

A detailed map is at the back of these notes. Map number 207 in the Ordnance Survey Explorer series of 1:25000 scale leisure maps covers this area. Alternatively, customised versions of this scale map can be obtained, including from the Old Hall Bookshop in Brackley.

#### CLOCKWISE START:

Looking from the bridge towards the War Memorial, take the left fork into Sulgrave Road, and pass the old house and barns of Priory Farm on your left. As the road begins to curve uphill, a fingerpost indicates our route over a plank and style into a pasture field.

Veer left around the corner of the hedge facing you, and then go right, up the slope following the tractor tracks and with the hedgerow on your right. You now have a good view ahead of the Viaduct; continue through a gateway and straight on to a gate that takes you onto the old railway line.

Cross the old railway and a black arrowed way marker disc points diagonally to your right showing the path crossing the field corner, towards a gap in the old hedge near a large tree. Continue diagonally across the next field to a new footbridge into an arable field. Note that on the skyline you can see a grey stone house which is Stuchbury Hall Farm; this is our target for this part of the walk.

From the bridge over the stream, which is the boundary of Helmdon Parish, follow the line pointed by the arrow across the right side of this field towards an open gateway. At the gateway, as the arrows show, you now have a choice of two paths forking left and right and both will take you up to the



farms that are all that remains of the lost village of Stuchbury. Our preferred path, because the views are better, is the left forking path that goes straight uphill through the middle of the field. This may be unclear if the field has recently been cultivated so head towards the line of trees until from the top of the hill, you will see the land slopes down to a stout hedge but to the right is a plank bridge with handrails over quite a deep ditch. Straight on up the slope and then down to a wire stock fence, where you climb over a stile with a single tread board and a grab post. About 70 yards ahead across the field is a metal gate out onto the grass in front of the farm. Do look back at the view towards Helmdon before moving on.

From Stuchbury Hall Farm our route continues to the right along the narrow tarmac road passing farm buildings on your left and the entrance drive to Stuchbury Lodge on your left; here the spring flowers are a fine sight. Continue towards a pair

of houses on the left and the gateway onto a right-angled bend in the Helmdon to Sulgrave road and now you have several choices!

A right turn here and walking along the road for 1.5 miles will take you back to our start point and

complete a walk of about 3 miles. Or the stile just behind the open gate will take you across two fields on a path that goes back to the parish boundary bridge that was mentioned above.

The road straight ahead would take you to the shop or the pub in the centre of Sulgrave in about 20 minutes. This may be the wise choice on a wet day!

However, the fingerpost on the left verge of the road indicates the gap in the high hedge, which adds an attractive loop to our grand circle. Go through into the field and walk along the headland with the hedge on your left, at the field corner climb over the wooden rails and then continue on the headland in the same westerly direction but now with the hedge on your right hand. Over to your left are two farms in the direction of Greatworth.

Continue westwards along the headland with the high hedge on your right; after about 280 yards ignore the first gate on your right. Continue to the end of this field, through the gateway to where a line of wires on poles crosses from left to right and a small gate on your right takes you into a large field. The path runs parallel with the poles to a five-bar iron gate into a meadow.

Strike diagonally across the meadow, towards the right and to where you will find a way marker post near a right-angled hedge corner and the site of a spring, so the ground may be soft! From the post the path continues up over a small hill and then down towards a kissing gate, with Sulgrave church beyond. Through the gate the path crosses a stream and marshy ground on two footbridges the up the right side of an arable field to the corner of a farmhouse.

At the corner of the Farmhouse, go through the hedge and leftwards across the front lawn to the road! Yes, this is the public path! Go up the lane to the road junction and turn right passing stone houses on your right and notice the grassy mound of the remains of Sulgrave castle on your left. Turn left into the churchyard and straight ahead across the road from the church is the Sulgrave village shop, affording delightful prospects of refreshment!

Or turning right then straight on down Manor Road takes us past the Star Inn where other forms of sustenance can be taken! Continue past the entrance to Sulgrave Manor then at the road junction turn right and go 50 yards to your

right where a finger post indicates a footpath across two narrow meadows which lead down to a wide bridge, then through an iron gate and the entrance to a long tunnel under the disused railway line. From the tunnel you emerge onto a field headland path with a stream and hedge on your right.

Straight on across two large fields to meet the Helmdon – Weston road where a right turn onto the road will take you back to Helmdon in about 20 minutes. But our circular walk goes left up the hill into Weston and to the Crown Inn at the road junction.

Turn right and walk along the village street on the right-hand side. If you want a longer walk staying on the road to Weedon Lois will add a loop of an extra mile or so, but forking right among the last houses in Weston takes us onto a path following a stream through several fields. Care is needed to stay on the path, especially where it crosses the stream!

The last stile takes you onto a wide grassy track which to the left runs up into Weedon Lois but our route turns right and heads up a slope before offering good views, including a bit of Helmdon on the ridge ahead. Going down the sloping track we surprisingly reach a three-armed wooden signpost. Following the track that swings left would take you on to Astwell and more options, but we will now show the quickest way home!

From the wooden signpost, we fork right and walk down along the field edge to a substantial new bridge over the stream, which is in fact the Parish boundary, so you are now back in Helmdon. Walk along the next field's edge with the hedgerow on your left, to a small old wooden gate in the corner; be careful to close this gate as there are often cows or sheep in the next field. Straight across to a small metal gate, then up a rough grassy slope to another wooden gate in a stout hedge. Ahead the grassy path curves up through the middle of an open arable field towards some metal barns and a pair of metal gates.

The path ahead passes an interesting private planting of Australasian trees that was created by the late Mr Geoff Gulliver, who gave a great deal to Helmdon. Emerging onto the road, a right turn takes you down Wappenham Road and back to our start point after a walk of 8 miles!

# HELMDON PARISH PATHS

## CIRCULAR WALK No 1

Helmdon - Sulgrave - Weston - Helmdon



*The view from Helmdon looking towards Weston*

The Parish Plan survey in 2004 found that many people wanted more information about the footpaths in and around the village and were keen to have greater access to the surrounding countryside. The working party that was formed to survey the network of paths and to promote their use has prepared this leaflet.

A great circular walk to the North of Helmdon, can include refreshing stops at 'The Star' or the village shop in Sulgrave, or 'The Crown' at Weston; the whole route of about xx miles is mainly through fields but several short cuts home include two road options. This leaflet describes the whole route, shows the shortcuts back and of course it can all be walked the other way round to enjoy different views!