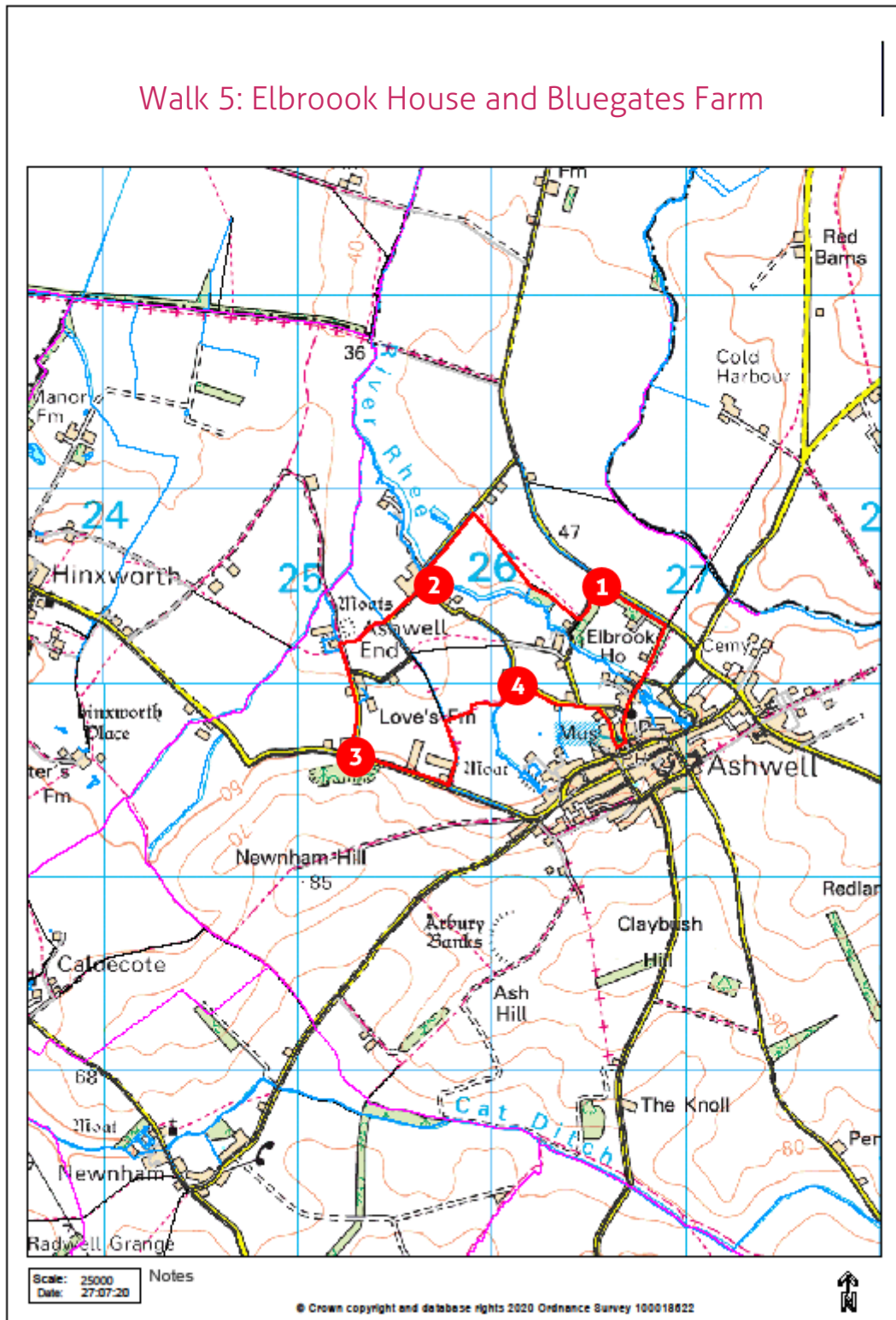


ASHWELL WALKS

Walk 5: Elbrook House and Bluegates Farm



Length and timing

5.8 Kilometres (3¾ miles), about 1hr 10 mins walking briskly, 1hr 40 mins at leisure.

A flat, gentle walk with stretches of quiet road and one short, busier section.

There is quite a bit of variety along the route, with attractive views over dairy and arable farm land, and some wooded paths.

Directions

With your back to the Parish Church lych gate go right along Mill Street and cross the little bridge over the River Rhee. Go through the gate that you will see straight ahead and follow the path up to the road.



The track goes up to Northfield Road from Mill Street

At Northfield Road pick up the track on the left. It winds along the north eastern boundary of Elbrook House, Occasionally there are breaks in the undergrowth that allow a view back into the village across green paddocks.

1 The track will come to a road junction. At that point, stay on it, following it round at a right angle to the left.

Just over 200 metres after turning left, leave the path and cross the road on your right. *If you come out from the track in front of the dairy you have gone too far.*

You should see a finger post pointing to a track across a field toward a cluster of mature trees. Take that track.



The turning is just visible from the wooded track. After passing the trees to your left and then crossing an open field you will come to a quiet road. Turn left toward the houses and Bluegates farm buildings.

2 When you get there it might be an idea to perch on the bench that someone has thoughtfully provided outside the barn. The view has real bucolic charm.

Go past the cowshed to Ashwell End 300 metres further on. No doubt Ashwell End has this name for a reason, but I'm afraid I don't know why – It has no obvious features. Take the path that goes straight ahead when the road bends sharply left.

Where the path arrives at a lane there are two medieval moats. The most noticeable one is to the right just before reaching the lane. The other is dead ahead as you come onto it..

The moated enclosures are not that obvious if like me you are unfamiliar with these things. One I cannot see at all. According to Historic England, enclosures like this form a significant class of medieval monument and are important for understanding the distribution of wealth and status in the countryside during the thirteenth and fourteenth century.

Go left along the lane (southwards). Newnham hill will be in the background.

Just before the junction with the road between Ashwell and Hinxworth there is a small nature reserve and spring on the left.

Straight ahead across the road is a former quarry, now also a nature reserve. Worked from early Roman times, the Tottenhoe clunch (a hard chalk rock) it produced may have been used to build St Mary's Church, as well as having been used in a number of other buildings in the village.

A wide range of chalk-loving plants have colonised the quarry's soil, attracting creatures that depend on them, including the Holly Blue butterfly.

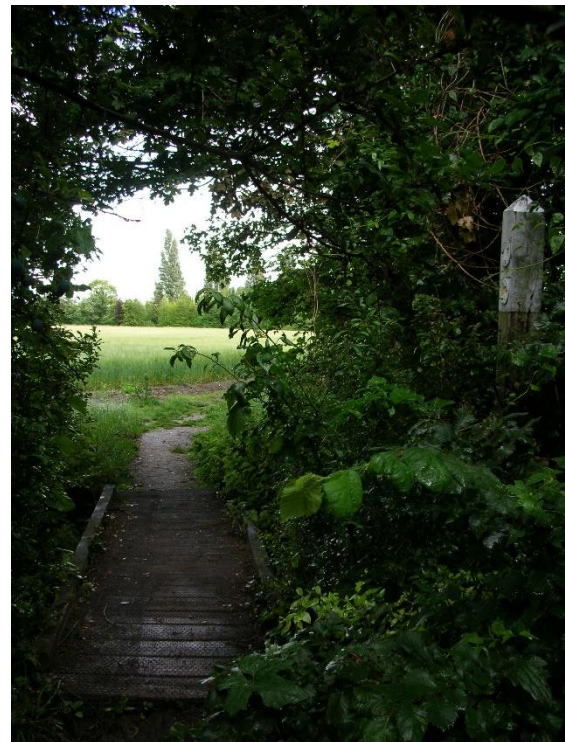
It is possible to go into the quarry but a permit has to be arranged in advance with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust on 01727 858901.

3 From Loves Lane (the street nameplate helpfully tells you that it was formerly known as Love Lane) turn left along the road in the direction of Ashwell. This section is reasonably quiet but traffic goes along at a fast pace, so beware.



Junction with Love Lane and the Hinxworth Road

After 500 metres on the road there is a path on the left, just after Holme Park Stud. Take the path and keep a lookout for a right turn marked by a post. There is a small footbridge over a ditch onto an open field. The track goes straight ahead and then does a dog-leg to the left and right.



The footbridge at a break in the trees and undergrowth

Keep following it through the trees and then left. After a short distance you will reach Gardiners Lane where you go right.

4 Gardiners Lane takes you back into the village. Look out for the Cob Wall running alongside the road on the right hand side.

Apparently it is home to six species of mason bees. In the summer time, if you take a minute, it is easy to see them coming and going.

Keep an eye out for the cottage garden at the junction of Gardiners Lane and Swan Street. A left turn into Swan Street and another left into Mill Street takes you back to the church.



On this walk there's plenty to look out for, including the occasional plant that would be an unwelcome visitor in a garden or allotment, - pretty though it is here