

Arlesey to Letchworth Garden City (Main Walk)			Short Walk & Morning Extension		
1 <sup>st</sup> walk check	2 <sup>nd</sup> walk check	3 <sup>rd</sup> walk check	1 <sup>st</sup> walk check	2 <sup>nd</sup> walk check	3 <sup>rd</sup> walk check
13 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2014	05 <sup>th</sup> April 2021		25 <sup>th</sup> March 2021		
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## Arlesey to Letchworth Garden City

**Start:** Arlesey Station

**Finish:** Letchworth Garden City Station

Arlesey station, map reference TL 190 378, is 8 km north of Hitchin, 39m above sea level and in **Bedfordshire**. Letchworth station, map reference TL 217 328, is 5 km north east of Hitchin, 84m above sea level and in **Hertfordshire**.

**Length:** 25.4 km (15.8 mi), of which 6.8 km (4.3 mi) on tarmac or concrete.

**Cumulative ascent/descent:** 200/156m. For a shorter or longer walk, see *below* **Walk Options**.

**Toughness:** 4 out of 10

**Time:** 5 hours 30 minutes walking time.

For the whole outing, including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 8 hours.

**Transport:** Arlesey station is on the London Kings Cross to Peterborough East Coast Main Line but is also served by Thameslink trains via St. Pancras International. Trains usually call at Finsbury Park. Journey times are 40 minutes Mondays to Saturdays (two Thameslink trains per hour), and 37 minutes on Sundays (hourly King's Cross service). Letchworth Garden City is on the London Kings Cross to Cambridge Main Line, the first stop after branching off from the East Coast Main Line at Hitchin, but also served by Thameslink trains from Cambridge. Journey times are 37 to 51 minutes (two to four trains per hour). Buy a return to Letchworth Garden City. You may then have to buy a Hitchin-Arlesey ticket on board the train.

**Saturday Walkers' Club:** Take the train closest to 9.30 hours.

**OS Landranger Map:** 153 (Bedford & Huntingdon) and 166 (Luton & Hertford)

**OS Explorer Map:** 193 (Luton & Stevenage)

### Walk Notes:

This not too challenging walk in the Bedfordshire/Hertfordshire borders leads straight from the platform into the wildlife-rich riverside meadows of the Hiz River, a meandering high quality chalk stream, followed for a few kilometres. It then leads west along field boundaries and through RAF Henlow Camp to the linear hilltop village of Meppershall, past its manor house and a motte-and-double bailey. The following stretch offers far views south to the Chilterns and north to the Greensand Ridge, before heading to the imposing hilltop church in Shillington, dubbed the 'Cathedral of the Chilterns' by John Betjeman.

After lunch green lanes lead to the pretty village of Pirton, with more impressive remains of a motte-and-double bailey and traces of an abandoned medieval village.

The Icknield Way leads you to one of the very few British lavender farms and then to the World's first and Britain's best Garden City: Letchworth.

## Walk Options:

An optional – flat – **Extension** right at the start adds 2.2 km.

Mutually exclusive **Shortcuts** around lunch reduce the length of the walk by either 3.0 or 1.4 km.

An infrequent **bus service** (lines 79 and 89, Mon-Sat only) gets you from Meppershall, Shillington and Pirton to Henlow Camp, where you can connect to the more frequent service to Hitchin. That bus can also be caught 5 km from the end, on the A600.

## Lunch (details last updated 02/09/2024)

**Roger's Bakery** 105 High Street, Meppershall, Bedfordshire, SG17 5LZ (01462 813 398, <https://rogers-bakery.edan.io/>). Roger's Bakery is located 7.8 km (4.8 mi) into the full walk. Open 8.00-14.30 Mon-Fri and 8.00-13.15 Sat.

**The Crown** 104 High Road, Shillington, Hitchin, Bedfordshire, SG5 3LP (01462 711 667, <http://crownshillington.com/>). The Crown is located 11.3 km (7.0 mi) into the main walk and is a country pub and restaurant with log fires in winter and a large garden in summer. Open all day every day. Food served 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-21.00 Tue-Sat and Sun 12.00-18.00.

**The Musgrave Arms** 16 Apsley End Road, Shillington, Hitchin, Bedfordshire, SG5 3LX (01462 712 789, <https://www.themusgravearms.com/>). The Musgrave Arms is located 12.9 km (8.0 mi) into the main walk. Open all day every day. Food (pizza and pasta) served all day every day.

**The Motte & Bailey** 1 Great Green, Pirton, Hitchin, Bedfordshire, SG5 3QD (01462 711 117, <https://themotteandbaileypirton.com/>). The Motte & Bailey is located 16.1 km (10.0 mi) into the main walk, and 13.1 or 14.7 km if taking one of the shortcuts. With a garden facing the green. Open 15.00-20.00 Mon-Tue and all day Wed-Sun. Food served 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-20.30 Wed-Sat and 12.00-15.00 Sun.

**The Fox** High Street, Pirton, Hitchin, Bedfordshire, SG5 3PS (01462 339 652, <https://www.foxpirton.co.uk/>). The Fox is located 16.4 km (10.2 mi) into the main walk, and 13.4 or 15.0 km if taking one of the shortcuts. Open from 15.00 Tue-Fri and from noon Sat-Sun.

## Tea (details last updated 01/04/2021)

**The Motte & Bailey** (as above). The Motte & Bailey is located 9.3 km (5.8 mi) from the end of the walk.

**The Fox** (as above). The Fox is located 9.0 km (5.6 mi) from the end of the walk.

**The Plume of Feathers** Upper Green, Ickleford, Hitchin, Herts, SG5 3YD (01462 432 729). The Plume of Feathers is located 5.2 km (3.2 mi) from the end of the walk.

**The Old George Inn** Arlesey Road, Ickleford, Hitchin, Herts, SG5 3UX (01462 629 538). The Old George is located 5.2 km (3.2 mi) from the end of the walk.

**Café at Hitchin Lavender Farm** Cadwell Farm, Ickleford, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 3UA (01462 434 343, <https://www.hitchinlavender.com/visit-us/our-cafe.aspx>). The Café is located in a 17<sup>th</sup> century barn, and provides a range of lunches and home-made cakes. Open until 17.00.

**Broadway Hotel & Carvery** The Broadway, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 3NZ (01462 480 111, <http://www.broadwayhotel.co.uk/>).

**The Platform** Station Road, Letchworth, Herts, SG6 3AN (01462 486 807, <https://www.craft-pubs.co.uk/theplatformletchworth>).

**No 12 Coffee Lounge** 12 Leys Avenue, Letchworth, Herts, SG6 3EU (01462 487 600, <https://www.number12coffee.co.uk/>). Open 07.00-18.00 Mon-Sat and 08.00-17.00 Sun.

**The Grapevine** 14 Leys Avenue, Letchworth, Herts, SG6 3EU (01462 677 522, <https://www.thegrapevineletchworth.com/>).

**Crafty's Micropub** 15 Leys Avenue, Letchworth, Herts, SG6 3EU (<http://www.craftysbeershop.co.uk/>).

**The Three Magnets** 18-20 Leys Avenue, Letchworth, Herts, SG6 3EW (01462 681 093). A Wetherspoon's.

**Esquires Coffee** 27 Leys Avenue, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 3ED (01462 675 755, <https://esquirescoffee.co.uk/store/esquires-leitchworth/>). Mon-Fri to 18.00, Sat to 17.30, Sun to 16.00.

**Cultivo Lounge** 32 Leys Avenue, Letchworth, Herts, SG6 3EW (01462 686 903, <https://thelounges.co.uk/cultivo/#>).

**The Cakely Lady at the Bake House** 16 The Wynd, Letchworth SG6 3EL (07932 337 980).

**Garden City Brewery** 22 The Wynd, Letchworth SG6 3EN (07932 739 558, <http://gardencitybrewery.co.uk/>). Open to 22.00 Wed-Sat and 14.00-20.00 Sun.

**Oh My Cod!** 5 Station Parade, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 3AW (01462 683 586). A Fish & Chips.

**La Concha Wine & Tapas Bar** Station Place, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 3AN (01462 673 804, <http://www.laconchaleitchworth.co.uk/>). Open Tue-Sat 11.00-23.00. Food served Tue-Sat 12.30-14.30 and 18.30-21.30. A formerly derelict part of the station building lovingly converted by the proprietors in 2005.

## Notes:

### Hicca Way

A linear waymarked path of 13 km (8 mi) length, opened in 2012. The choice of name for this path which meanders along the River Hiz is based on history going back to the days of King Offa of Mercia who founded a religious settlement in Hitchin. The path follows the route the Hicca tribe (*'the people of the horse'*) might have followed from Hitchin to the Danish Fort south east of Henlow, where the Saxons would have regularly had to pay their 'Danegeld' tax.

### Hiz River

The Hiz is a high quality chalk bed stream and a tributary river that feeds the Ivel that, in turn, feeds the Great Ouse. Starting at its source just south of the village of Charlton, the river winds its way into and through Hitchin, where it meets the River Oughton and River Purwell. The Hiz finally meets the River Ivel near the village of Henlow.

The Hiz is properly pronounced "Hitch" as it takes its name from the Hicca tribe who inhabited the area and gave their name to Hitchin. This fact seems to be little known and it is now normally said as it is spelled.

### Kingfisher Way

The Kingfisher Way is a 34 km (21 mi) linear path, following the course of the River Ivel from the source at Ivel Springs to Roxton Lock where it meets the River Great Ouse, passing through the towns and villages of the Ivel Valley. The route links the Icknield Way at Baldock with the Greensand Ridge Walk.

### Meppershall

Meppershall is a linear hilltop village on a ridge and surrounded by farmland. Village and Manor House were mentioned in the Domesday Book, and the Manor House belonged to the De Meppershall family for nearly 300 years following, however the present house is early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Next to the Manor House a Motte and two Baileys can be seen.

As well as through farming the village earned its income from coprolite digging. Coprolite is the fossilised dung of pre-historic creatures, which when ground and treated with sulphuric acid produces a superphosphate fertiliser. To extract it a long trench was dug on one side of a field. The overlaying clay was then dug out until the nodule bed was reached.

### St. Thomas the Martyr Chapel

In October 1164 Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury stayed at nearby Chicksands Priory when travelling from Northampton to Kent. After his violent death his shrine in Canterbury quickly became the most popular pilgrimage place in England. As many people could not travel to Canterbury, in around 1175 Meppershall built its own shrine. It consists of a nave and sanctuary, with a Norman arch originally between them. It is nowadays used as a barn.

### All Saints' Church, Shillington

Originally a Saxon monastery, today's All Saints Church is mostly 14<sup>th</sup> century, with an 18<sup>th</sup> century tower and is locally known as the 'Church on the Hill'. It is Grade I-listed and has been referred to by John Betjeman as the "Cathedral of the Chilterns". There are pre-Reformation painted ceilings in the nave and the Lady's Chapel, a crypt of unknown purpose, accessible down a circular stairway from the northerly vestry, as well as an extensive collection of graffiti. The large size of the church is partly accounted for by the fact that it serves the surrounding area.

A local landmark, it is situated on an outcrop chalk hill rising up through the surrounding clay, seemingly the most easterly of the Chiltern Hills.

### John Bunyan Trail

The John Bunyan Trail is a way-marked 124 km (77 mi) circular Long Distance Path. It starts and finishes at the Sundon Hills Country Park just north of Luton and is almost entirely in Bedfordshire, while briefly passing through Hertfordshire near Hexton. The route visits many sites associated with John Bunyan, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan evangelist and writer. He lived in Elstow, just south of Bedford, and travelled this area extensively, first through his trade as a tinker and later as a non-conformist preacher. He was arrested and tried at Harlington for preaching illegally and imprisoned at Bedford, which is where he wrote his best known work 'Pilgrim's Progress'.

### Pirton

Pirton lies at the eastern end of the Chiltern Hills and is on the Icknield Way. Several important prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon sites have been identified, but it is for the medieval monuments that the village is especially noted. The most famous is the Motte and Bailey castle, known as 'Toot Hill' (meaning 'look out'). This comprises a large earth mound (the motte) with a water-filled ditch and two outer, defence areas (the baileys). The Grade I-listed parish church of St. Mary, which dates from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, also lies within one of the castle baileys. To the south east of the castle and church is a large grassed area known as 'The Bury' which contains the earthwork remains of the now deserted part of the ancient village. Long depressions are clearly visible which were once the streets of the old village and the areas of raised ground

indicate the position of the houses. Both the Castle and the Bury are nationally important and are designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

### **The Icknield Way**

Said to be one of the oldest roads in Britain, the Icknield Way is one of the few long distance track-ways to have existed before the Romans occupied the country. The name is Celto-British in derivation, and may be named after the Iceni tribe, who may have established this route to permit trade with other parts of the country from their base in East Anglia. It has also been suggested that the road has even older prehistoric origins. It stretched from the Dorset Coast to the Wash, crossing the River Thames near Wallingford. It was later one of the "Four Highways" of medieval England (the others being Ermine Street, Fosse Way and Watling Street). Today the Ridgeway National Trail follows parts of the ancient Icknield Way for 139 km (87 mi) from Overton Hill to Ivinghoe Beacon in the Chilterns. The modern day Icknield Way long-distance path then runs for 274 km from Ivinghoe Beacon to Knettishall Heath in Norfolk.

### **Hitchin Outer Orbital Path (HOOP)**

A 19 km (12 mi) circular walk around Hitchin following public rights of way around the town centre and through surrounding countryside.

### **Hitchin Lavender**

Lavender has been associated with Hitchin for 400 years (as one of the two major growing areas in Britain) and at its peak the Victorians grew 100 acres. Lavender had completely disappeared from the town though by the 1960s but was reintroduced in 2000 by Hitchin Lavender, currently covering over 15 acres of fields. Field entrance tickets include one bag of 'Pick Your Own'. Also on the farm: a one acre display area containing over 60 varieties, a gift shop and a café serving tea and cake in a 17<sup>th</sup> century barn.

Usually open late May to mid-September (10.00-17.00).

<http://www.hitchinlavender.com/>

### **Letchworth Garden City**

One of only two true garden cities built in England, the town's name is taken from one of the three villages it surrounded.

It was laid out by Raymond Unwin as a demonstration of the principles established in 1898 by Ebenezer Howard who sought to create an alternative to the industrial city by combining the advantages of cities and the countryside while eliminating their disadvantages. Industry would be kept separate from residential areas – such zoning was a new idea at the time – and trees and open spaces would prevail everywhere. The term "Garden City" is derived from the image of a city large enough for a full social life, but being situated within a belt of open countryside, which would contribute significantly to food production for the population. Therefore he saw it as having a maximum population of about 30,000.

In keeping with the ideals only one tree was felled during the entire initial construction phase of the town, and an area devoted to agriculture surrounding the town was included in the plan – the first 'Green Belt'.

It is home also to the UK's first roundabout, which was built in 1909.

In 1905, and again in 1907, the First Garden City Ltd. Company held the Cheap Cottages Exhibitions, contests to build inexpensive housing, which attracted some 60,000 visitors and had a significant effect on planning and urban design in the UK, pioneering and popularising such concepts as pre-fabrication, the use of new building materials, and front and back gardens. The Exhibitions were sponsored by the Daily Mail, and their popularity was significant in the development of that newspaper's launching of the Ideal Home Exhibition (now the Ideal Home Show).

The concept outlined in Howard's book is not simply one of urban planning, though, but also included a system of community management, which combined financing for community services with a return for those who had invested in the development of the City, while all profits were ploughed back into the community.

His ideas were mocked in the press but struck a chord with many, especially members of the Arts and Crafts movement and the Quakers. The land used was purchased by Quakers who had intended to farm the area and build a Quaker community. Letchworth's founding citizens, attracted by the promise of a better life, were often caricatured by outsiders as idealistic and otherworldly. One commonly-cited example of this is the ban, upheld until 1958, on selling alcohol in public premises in the town centre.

As one of the world's first new towns and the first garden city it had great influence not only on future town planning and the New Towns movement (it influenced Welwyn Garden City, which used a similar approach in the 1920s, and inspired other projects around the world including Canberra, the Australian capital), but also inspired British urban architectural design for many decades – a style which, according to critics "shunned urbanism to an extent otherwise unknown on this continent".

Many of the main features of British urban design in the 20<sup>th</sup> century owe their origins to Letchworth Garden City: "...a social experiment on a par with the Welfare State, ... [and] that affected us all and still does." (Jonathan Meades).

## WALK DIRECTIONS

Alight from the train in **Arlesey Station** on platform 2 and walk down some steps and to the left of some car park spaces, past a metal kissing gate and an information board for **The Hicca Way** on the left-hand side, to a wooden kissing gate by a two-way signpost for the **Etonbury Green Wheel** just beyond it.

**Here you have a choice:**

**For an Extension**, adding a 2.2 km circular walk along a peaceful and scenic stretch of the **River Hiz** and past **Henlow Bridge Lakes**, *continue ahead* and pick up directions at the end of the main text under **Extension**.

**For the main walk** *turn left* through the kissing gate into **Glebe Meadows** and \*) *veer right* between information boards for **Glebe Meadows** and **Arlesey Bridge** to then follow the river to the right of a fence. In 150m you *turn left* through a wooden kissing gate into a meadow and *veer right* (150°) towards a two-railed wooden bridge. In 40m cross the bridge over a concrete culvert and go through a wooden kissing gate to continue along any one of several clear paths towards the far left corner of the adjacent meadow. In 140m enter a wooded area (**Arlesey Old Moat Nature Reserve**) through a wooden kissing gate and in 10m *turn right* along a narrow path that in 25m hugs the river, *ignoring* the path straight ahead parallel to the railway line. In 210m the path turns left, in another 25m *turn right* with a reed pond on the right, in a further 85m *turn left* back towards the railway line, in 40m *turn right* and cross a railed wooden plank bridge across a pond. Continue along a grassy **Permissive Path** between fences.

In 340m walk through a metal kissing gate out of the trees into a large grassy field, where you *turn right* along the field boundary with Permissive Footpath and Hicca Way markers on a yellow-topped pole. Follow the boundary around to the river and then the river through this field. **Respect the Permissive Footpath** and **do not cut short** the twists and turns of the river across the grass! In 470m *turn right* across a two-railed wooden plank bridge over an inlet and walk towards a two-railed bridge over the **Hiz River** by a small weir, which you cross in 80m. Continue on a clear grassy path towards a metal kissing gate (265°) 80m away. Once through the gate, *veer left* along a grassy path, soon swinging right (230°) towards a line of electricity poles, which you then follow. In 65m a footpath joins from the right along a farm track. Continue in the same direction along a grassy farm track, with trees on the right and a large field on the left.

Continue ahead for 1.6 km towards **Lower Stondon**, in the general direction of the water tower ahead in **Meppershall**. But in more detail: in 250m a farm track joins from the right. In 210m, where it turns left, you continue along a usually well-cleared path between fields, now with more open views on the left towards the eastern end of **The Chilterns**. In 325m cross a farm track and continue in the same direction through a field, on a usually well-cleared path. In 270m cross a two-railed concrete bridge over a brook, briefly *turn left* and across another bridge to then *turn right* to continue in your previous direction along a grassy path. In 260m continue with a fenced MOD housing estate on the right, and in another 260m you reach a tarmac lane at a T-junction. *Turn left* along the lane and in 30m *turn right* along the pavement of **Oldfield Farm Road**. In 300m you reach **Hitchin Road** at a bend and continue in the same direction through **RAF Henlow Station**. In 340m *turn right* at a roundabout along **Bedford Road**.

In 60m *turn left* across the road at a pedestrian crossing and continue along the opposite pavement. In 100m you pass the dilapidated site of **Henlow Greyhound Stadium** on the left. In another 250m, *turn left* with a footpath signpost along a gravel path with a ditch on the left and a new housing estate on the right. Ignore any paths and cul-de-sacs to either side and in 300m (20m after the last house on the right), *turn*

*right* at a three-way footpath marker post along the continuation of the gravel path, to the right of a hedge and still with houses to the right. In 100m, where the gravel path turns right, you *bear left* to continue along a field boundary in the previous direction. In 150m, in the far-right field corner, *turn left* with the boundary hedge. In 400m continue through a gap in the hedge along another field boundary, soon on a farm track. In 880m *continue ahead along a grassy path* at a three-way footpath junction, where the farm track turns left into a farm yard. In 65m walk through a metal kissing gate and *turn left* at a road T-junction along a grassy verge in the direction of the **large water tower** seen earlier (initially hidden by trees). In 200m ignore a lane leading left to Chapel Farm and **St. Thomas the Martyr Chapel**, where there used to be a shrine to **Thomas Becket**, and which is now used as a barn.

**20m further along you have a choice:**

**For a Shortcut to Pirton**, continue along the road (**Chapel Lane**) towards the water tower and pick up directions at the end of the text under **Shortcut I**.

**For the main walk** *turn right* at a footpath signpost through a metal kissing gate in a hedge gap and cross a field on a usually well-cleared path (280°). In 240m continue through another metal kissing gate and across a bridge over a ditch and along a field boundary with a tall hedge on the right initially, then a raised grassy path between fields. In 460m you reach the houses of **Meppershall** where a footpath joins from the right and walk through a metal kissing gate. Continue along a narrow tarmac track between houses and in 30m cross a lane (**The Acres**) and continue in the same direction (260°) down another tarmac track with a red brick wall on the left. In 100m *turn left* along **High Street** through the village. In 210m pass **Roger's Bakery** on the left (very good value, hot or cold, delicious, pastries, pies and sandwiches, freshly baked on the premises). The recommended lunch pubs are 3.5 and 5.1 km away respectively...

In 180m at a three-way road junction, *veer right* with **High Street** (signposted Campton), and in 40m *fork left* into **Church Road**, ignoring the footpath into a field between the two roads. In 140m you reach the church yard of **St. Mary's Church, Meppershall**. The church is usually open, and a stroll around it is worth the effort, if just for the close views of **Meppershall Manor House** and its gardens behind it. Else *turn right* and walk through a metal kissing gate to the right of the **Rectory** into a grassy field and follow its left hand fence around to the left. In 65m go through a metal kissing gate and follow the garden hedge of the manor house on the left. Pass the gardens, including a well-preserved motte-and-double bailey site, and in 190m walk through a hedge gap (ignore a footpath turning right) towards the far-right corner of a grassy field. In 100m exit the field through a gap and in 20m enter another field in a corner, where you *turn right* along its boundary.

Superb views on the left-hand side show **The Chilterns Range** and "**The Cathedral of The Chilterns**" (John Betjeman) in **Shillington** in its exposed position on a solitary hill. In 120m a footpath joins from the right at a hedge corner. Continue on a car wide grassy track between fields (260°). Just to the left of the path visible in the distance is the large water tower in **Pulloxhill** (SWC Walk Harlington to Flitwick), on the right-hand side is the village of **Upper Gravenhurst**, and on the far right the **Flit Valley** and the **Greensand Ridge** rising behind it (all passed on SWC Walk Flitwick Circular). In 400m a footpath joins from the right across a large field: *bear left* with the boundary towards the grounds of **Shillington Bury**, reaching its boundary hedge in 165m.

There are now **three ways around the house and its gardens**, down to a road:

- the **most straightforward** is to continue along the path to **Upton End Road** at a T-junction and to *turn left* there to a road junction, where you *turn right*;

- **similarly straightforward** is to continue in the same direction for 90m and to *turn left* across a plank bridge and through some squeeze gates, and continue along a driveway down towards **Upton End Road**, which you cross in 180m;
- **most interesting** though is to *turn left* across a wooden plank bridge and then along an earthen path which soon continues along a field boundary with a hedge on the right. In 140m *turn right* through a metal kissing gate along a fenced path through gardens. Over 100m you go through a couple of metal kissing gates and then *bear right* along a winding path through a wooded area. In 65m *turn right* with a marker post along a field boundary. In 100m *turn right* along **Upton End Road** to a road junction 70m away, where you *turn left*.

Follow **Bury Road** into **Shillington** and in 250m pass a village store. In 70m ignore a footpath from the right, but in 80m – opposite **Woodmer Close** – *turn left* off the road and through a metal kissing gate into a meadow. *Veer right* diagonally (130°) along the right of two footpaths across this field towards its far-right corner. In 175m go over a railed plank bridge and through a wooden kissing gate into another field to continue along its left-hand boundary (150°). Ignore a footpath turning left in 20m. In another 90m go through a wooden kissing gate and continue along the left-hand boundary of a sports field. In 130m walk through a hedge gap into another sports field and continue along its left-hand boundary. In 120m, in the field corner, *turn right* and in 110m pass a footpath marker post indicating a left turn. In another 10m *turn left* up a few steps through a hedge gap and go through a field for 20m and then *bear right* along a usually well-cleared path to the far-right corner of the field (195°).

In 150m leave the field through a metal kissing gate and *turn right* along a gravel lane to a road. *Turn left* along the pavement of **Hillfoot Road** and in 200m *turn right* and up at a road T-junction. [For the early recommended lunch stop **The Crown, Shillington** (the other lunch stop is 1.9 km further along) *turn left* in 20m through metal gates beside the **Congregational Church**, in 125m emerge in **Vicarage Close**, *turn right* and in 40m *turn left* towards a main road. In 70m *turn left* and in 50m you arrive at the pub. After lunch re-trace your steps to this point.] In another 160m you reach steps leading up to **All Saints' Church, Shillington**. **Visiting the church** is recommended, for the remaining Pre-Reformation painted ceiling parts, as well as for the small crypt, unusual for a parish church and accessible through the left-hand vestry. **Walking round the outside of the church** is recommended for the views.

**After re-joining the lane** from the church **you have a choice:**

**For a Shortcut to Pirton**, walk down a tarmac path a little to the right of the steps with a footpath signpost and continue downhill between houses with a footpath signpost. Pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Shortcut II**.

**For the main walk** – with the church behind you – *turn right* (210° initially) to continue up the hill, with the churchyard on the right. In 80m ignore a footpath forking left through a metal kissing gate. In 180m cross a car wide two-railed wooden plank bridge over a stream. In 45m *turn left* through a wooden kissing gate with a footpath marker post into paddocks and walk between fences. In 170m go through a wooden kissing gate and *turn right* along a narrow path at a three-way footpath-junction with a **Bunyan Trail** marker. In 40m continue in the same direction through a wooden kissing gate, now with a stream on the left and a field on the right. In 130m ignore a right fork at a fence corner and in 150m *bear right* through some kissing gates towards houses. In 150m *turn left* along a road pavement (**Hanscombe End Road**) and in 250m at a four-way road junction *turn right* along **Apsley End Road**, signed for **Pegsdon** and **Hexton**. In 420m pass the recommended lunch stop **The Musgrave Arms** on the right.

Continue in the previous direction (*turn right* if coming out of the pub) and in 230m *turn left* through a wooden kissing gate and a grassy area (140°). In 120m cross a stream on an earth bridge and continue along a hedge guarding **Shillington Manor** from view. In 170m continue in the same direction, now with a tall hedge on the left. Follow this for 600m with occasional views of **The Chilterns** ahead, out to the **Pegsdon Hills** on the right (SWC Walk Hitchin Circular), and then cross a two-railed plank bridge over a stream. *Veer left* (85°) along a grassy field boundary. In 1.1 km you emerge on **Shillington Road** through a gap in the boundary and *turn right* along a verge towards **Pirton**. In 225m ignore a road turning up right towards **Hitchin** and continue in the same direction signposted **Holwell**. In 260m, where a row of houses begins on the left, *turn up right* with a footpath signpost along a car wide gravel lane.

**\*\*)** In 250m *fork left* with a school on your left behind a fence and in 50m continue in the same direction along a road (**Docklands**). In 75m *turn right* at a road T-junction and in 20m **[!]** *turn left* with an **Icknield Way** marker along a tarmac path between hedges towards church and motte-and-double bailey (**The Motte and Bailey** pub is 110m further along the road around the left). In 35m 'Jack's Path' turns right and leads all the way around the motte, in 40m you *veer right* at the entrance to the church yard of **St. Mary's, Pirton**, and in 20m you reach an excellent information board about the motte-and-double bailey structure. Walk through a wooden kissing gate into a large grassy area and continue along the left hand edge of the grassy area. The uneven ground in the field indicates the **remains of a deserted medieval settlement**.

In 170m exit the area in the far-left corner through a wooden kissing gate onto **Walnut Tree Road** and *turn left* along it. In 40m at a four-way junction:

- for **The Fox** *turn left* along **High Street** past the village pond and the Post Office to reach the pub in 220m;
- to continue the walk, *turn right* along **Hambridge Way**.

Follow this ancient trackway for 2.9 km in a straight line, mostly between trees **and ignoring all ways off**, until you get to a road at a T-junction. Walk through a gap to the right of a metal field gate and *turn right* with a **Hitchin Outer Orbital Path (HOOP)** marker along a fenced-off **Highway Verge Bridleway** along the **A600 Bedford Road**. In 140m *turn left* across the road with a HOOP marker and Icknield Way and Public Bridleway 15 signposts and continue along a gravel path. [A **bus stop** for services into Hitchin is approximately 300m further along the road].

In 380m you emerge on a road at a bend in the village of **Ickleford** and continue in the same direction. In 170m pass the **Plume of Feathers** pub on the right and in 50m *veer right* along a tarmac path towards the right of a large rest hut/bus stop on a main road. With **St. Katherine's Church, Ickleford** on the right and **The Old George Inn** about 100m further to the right, cross the road and follow **Icknield Way** signs along a gravel car wide lane. In 100m walk through a gap to the left of a double metal field gate and in 60m cross **The Hiz** on a car wide un-railed wooden plank bridge or on a railed footbridge to the left of it. You go between the buttresses of a former railway bridge (the Hitchin to Leicester branch of the Midland Railway line) and pass **Gerry's Hole** on the right, a local Nature Reserve and in another 200m cross the **East Coast Main Line**.

In 600m, by a bench and a marker post on the left, you *turn left* along a car wide bridleway and in 480m reach a three-way junction of farm tracks in the centre of Cadwell Farm/ **Hitchin Lavender**. You find the **recommended café** (and shop), on the left in a barn, but the onwards route *turns right* (45°) in front of a circular red brick silo with a right-of-way marker high up the wall. Pass the nursery beds and ascend a gravel-and-grass farm track with the main lavender fields on the right. In 460m at the brow of the rise *turn right* at a T-junction of paths. Follow the ridge (views to the left are out to **Arlesey**, your morning start) and in 700m go through a wooden gate into a lightly

wooded area to continue in the same direction between hedges. In 160m you emerge from the trees by The Wilbury Carvery on the left, cross a main road and *turn left*. Immediately *turn right* along **Icknield Way** (road).

In 200m a footpath joins on the right through a hedge gap. In 810m **[!]** *turn right* along **Spring Road** cul-de-sac towards an arched railway bridge 115m away to go underneath it. On the other side continue in the same direction at a minor roundabout uphill along **Spring Road**. In 400m, where **West View** turns right, **[!]** *turn left* along a tarmac path, in 35m (opposite West View and the Letchworth Baptist Church) cross a road and continue along **West View**. In 230m you reach the main green square in **Letchworth Garden City** (**Broadway Gardens**) with **St. Michael the Archangel Church** on the right. Cross a road (**Broadway**) and *veer right* towards a large fountain, then *turn left* past the fountain and continue in the same direction (10°) across a green and later along Broadway to eventually reach **Letchworth Station**.

**Options for tea** are to be found at the station end of **Broadway** (**The Broadway Hotel** and **The Platform**), along the parallel road to the right (**Eastcheap**) or in one of the roads leading right from **Station Place**: **Leys Avenue** (**No 12 Coffee Lounge**, **The Grapevine**, **Crafty's Micropub**, **The Three Magnets**, **Esquires Coffee**, **Cultivo Lounge**), or in a courtyard off Leys Avenue to the left, called **The Wynd**: **The Cakey Lady at the Bake House** and **Garden City Brewery**, or at either side of the station building (**Oh My Cod!** and **La Concha Wine & Tapas Bar**).

## Extension (add 2.2 km right at the start)

Cross the medieval **Arlesey Bridge** over the **Hiz River** and *turn right* along a road pavement under the **A507 flyover**. In 60m continue through a wooden gate and along a wide grassy path, with the **Hiz** on the right, to pass a memorial stone for **The Kingfisher Way** on the left. *Ignore the left turn* immediately behind the stone along a grassy track between fences (this is the return route), and continue ahead – initially along the river, sometimes between hedges. The occasional **Hicca Way** marker, as well as a few large green footpath signs, leave you in no doubt about the onwards route.

In 1.2 km walk through a wooden gate left of a wooden field gate and *turn left* at a footpath T-junction with a Hicca Way marker along a car wide grass-and-earth track (the path turning right leads to the 17<sup>th</sup> century **Henlow Grange**, nowadays operating as **Champneys**, a luxury health & beauty spa resort). In 270m walk through a gap to the left of a metal field gate and in 20m *turn left* through a wooden gate along a grassy path with a fence on the right-hand side. In 440m, having crossed a couple of lanes leading into **Henlow Bridge Lakes & Riverside Park** on the left, *turn right* at the memorial stone passed earlier and re-trace your steps to the car park at the railway station where you *turn right* through a wooden kissing gate into **Glebe Meadows**.

Pick up the directions at the asterisk **\*)** in the main walk text.

## Shortcut I (cut 3.0 km, and the tarmac count by 2.2 km around lunch)

### Lunch is in Pirton

In 340m cross **Meppershall Road** at a T-junction and continue with a footpath signpost along a grassy field boundary to the left of the fenced in water tower (190°). In 50m continue in the same direction across a field along a usually well-cleared path. In 110m cross a tarmac farm track and *veer right* across a larger field on a usually well-cleared path, with good views half right to **Shillington Church** on its hill top (passed on the main walk) and the **Sharpenhoe Iron Age hillfort** site to the right and beyond it. In 690m cross a gravel farm track and continue with a footpath signpost into the next field and walk along its right-hand grassy boundary. In 180m, at the corner of the field on the right, continue in the same direction along a usually well-cleared path across a field.

In 80m leave the field through a set of metal kissing gates 15m apart and continue along a fenced-in path to the right of **Chibley Farm**. In 210m go through a few gates by the farm house on the left and *veer left* with a marker post through a grassy field along the fence on the left. In 90m go through a metal kissing gate into an arable field at a three-way footpath junction. Continue in the same direction across the field on a usually well-cleared path (225°). In 320m exit the field through a hedge gap onto a road and *turn right* along its boundary. In 100m ignore footpaths turning off right and left and follow the road towards **Shillington**.

In 400m, at the top of the rise, *turn left* with a bridleway signpost and walk along a right-hand grassy field boundary. In 370m leave the field in the far-right corner through a hedge gap and *turn right* with the bridleway along a tree-lined path with a ditch on the left. In 130m *turn left* at a three-way bridleway junction along another car wide grassy path between trees. The path soon curves to the right, in 420m the trees on the left discontinue and in 130m it ends through a hedge gap in a small field. *Turn left* diagonally across this field towards its far-left corner. In 210m leave the field through a car wide gap in the trees with a bridleway signpost into a larger adjacent field and cross it diagonally towards a footbridge (145°).

In 470m leave the field and cross the railed wooden plank bridge to *turn left* along the left-hand grassy field boundary on the other side (a public footpath has joined from the right). In 300m *turn right* in a field corner with a marker post and follow the grassy boundary. In 500m at the far left field corner *turn right* with the boundary. In 35m *turn left* with the hedge on the left at a three-way footpath junction (Shortcut II joins from across the field) and continue along the grassy field boundary. In 300m *turn right* in the field corner and in 90m *turn left* through a wooden kissing gate into an adjacent grassy field and head towards the far left corner of the field and the houses of **Pirton** behind it. In 140m ignore a footpath joining from the left through a wooden kissing gate. In 80m continue through a wooden kissing gate and along a narrow path. In 25m *turn right* at a road T-junction. In 20m *turn left* with a footpath signpost along a car wide gravel lane.

Pick up the directions in the main walk text at the double asterisk \*\*).

### **Shortcut II (cut 1.4 km, and the tarmac count by 1.2 km around lunch)**

#### **Lunch is in Shillington or Pirton**

Follow the tarmac path down towards a road (eventually with **The Old Vicarage** on the left) and in 220m cross a two-railed concrete bridge over a ditch. Cross the road and continue with a footpath signpost across an un-railed wooden plank bridge and through a wooden kissing gate into a grassy field and follow its right hand boundary. In 220m leave the field in the far right corner through a hedge gap and continue across an arable field in the same direction along a usually well-cleared path. In 340m leave the field over an earth bridge across a ditch and *turn right* in the adjacent field along its grassy boundary. This soon swings left and in 350m (and about 50m before the far-right field corner) you **[!]** *turn right* along an unmarked car wide grassy path between trees.

In 20m the path *turns left* and in 50m you pass a footpath marker post on the left. In 30m you are out of the trees with a large field on the right. In 50m, by a footpath marker post at the corner of the hedge on the left, continue in the same direction across a field on a usually well-cleared path (130°), ignoring a left turn. In about 220m you reach the brow of this insignificant rise which nevertheless provides for 360°-views: behind to **Shillington Church**, half left behind to **Meppershall Water Tower**, ahead to **Pirton Church** and on the right to the **Pegsdon Hills** (SWC Walk Hitchin Circular). In 150m you walk through a car wide boundary gap into the adjacent field and cross it on a usually well-cleared path towards a hedge. In 200m continue along a gravel farm track, with the hedge on your right.

In 290m at the hedge corner, where the farm track turns right, *turn left* across the now narrow field on a usually well-cleared path. In 30m *turn right* at a hedge corner at a three-way footpath junction (Shortcut I joins along the hedge) and continue along the field boundary. In 300m *turn right* in the field corner and in 90m *turn left* through a wooden kissing gate into an adjacent field and head towards the far left corner of the field and the houses of **Pirton** behind it. In 140m ignore a footpath joining from the left through a wooden kissing gate. In 80m continue through a wooden kissing gate and along a narrow path. In 25m *turn right* at a road T-junction. In 20m *turn left* with a footpath signpost along a gravel lane.

Pick up the directions in the main walk text at the double asterisk \*\*).