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## Harlow Circular

**Start and finish:** Harlow Town station

**Length:** 14km (8.7 miles)

**Time:** 4 hours. For the whole outing, including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 8 hours.

**Transport:** Trains go from London Liverpool Street to Harlow Town, journey time is half an hour.

**OS Landranger Map:** 167

**OS Explorer Map:** 174

Harlow, map reference TL 447112, is in **Essex**, 25km west of Chelmsford.

**Toughness:** 1 out of 10.

**Walk Notes:** This is a fairly easy walk with the advantage of being close to London. Depending on the time of year, there are a couple of sections where the footpath is not obvious across expansive (recently harvested / fallow) fields; however there are distinctive landmarks to guide you. After periods of heavy rainfall, some of the fields are prone to get quite boggy. For lunch at Hunsdon, you have the choice of the more upmarket Fox and Hounds or the more traditional Crown Inn. Shortly after lunch you pass by Hunsdon Airfield, a former Second World War RAF base - now used for light aircraft..

**History:** Gilston dates back to 11th Century and was founded by Geoffrey de Mandeville, a Norman warlord. Its History saw Oliver Cromwell send troops to resolve troubles in the village. Having been found guilty in Gilston, Jane Wenham was famous as the last women in England to be found guilty of witchcraft and was sentenced to death. Queen Anne reprieved her sentence and ultimately resulted in the witchcraft act being changed and the death sentence being abolished for such acts. Gilston Manor was built in 1850 as a Baronial style Chateau, by John Hodgson who brought The Estate. The old Gilston Park manor house was demolished, and replaced by a sumptuous baronial home of imposing proportions. Its history has been very varied. After world war II the Estate was owned by the Guinness Family and more recently by Smith and Nephew.

**Saturday Walkers' Club:** Take the nearest (fast) train to 10.55am from Liverpool Street Station to Harlow Town.

## WALK DIRECTIONS

[1] Exit the main entrance of the station and turn right up Station Approach. After 220 metres, *at a roundabout turn right*. After 100 metres *cross the bridge over the railway to immediately turn right* down a grass track, your direction 70 degrees.

In 150 metres you come down to a lane. Continue ahead across a waterway, and in a further 40 metres cross the River Stort Navigation (with Burnt Mill Lock on your right hand side), to *turn left along the towpath*, your direction 300 degrees. In 220 metres you go under a road bridge and in 30 metres *fork right through a metal kissing gate* into a field, to veer right aiming for the far right hand corner of the field, your direction 270 degrees.

In 150 metres at the field corner (with a fence corner on your right hand side), veer slightly right, aiming for a metal kissing gate in the field fence on the far side, your direction 285 degrees.

After 140 metres go through the gate, followed by a plank bridge and another metal kissing gate, to continue in the same direction aiming for a metal kissing gate on the far side of the field. In 160 metres go through the gate into a small field, and turn right aiming for a metal kissing gate in the far corner, your direction 340 degrees. After 90 metres go through the gate, and turn right over a footbridge across the Stort River (on the right hand side of a ford).

In 80 metres *at a road T-junction*, cross with care the busy A414, and *turn right* along a grass verge for a few metres *to then turn left* along Eastwick Road.

In 320 metres you pass by **The Lion** pub on your left-hand side (the early lunch stop) to reach a T-junction. [2] Continue ahead to go through a metal kissing gate (to the left of a double metal fieldgate) into a field, to go up across it, your direction 290 degrees. After 140 metres, go through a metal kissing gate (to the left of a metal fieldgate) into the next field.

Depending on the time of year, there maybe no clear path across this field: In the far distance there are 3 high voltage pylons (the right hand pylon being the point where the cable run turns off in a north-easterly direction). Walk in the direction of the middle

pylon[3], your direction 320 degrees. (Just over 1km further on, you will pass by this pylon.)

In 300 metres cross over into the next field to veer slightly right, your direction 335 degrees, aiming for a gap in the wooded field boundary on the far side, marked by a footpath post. (If you can't initially see the gap, using the middle HV pylon [3] as a marker for the far field boundary, aim just to the right.) After 350 metres go through the gap into the next field. (Passing by a wooden footpath post on your left-hand side.)

Turn half left to follow the footpath up across this field, your direction 270 degrees. In 150 metres at the far corner of the field, veer right through a hedge gap to cross over into the next field, to go along its left hand grassy boundary (bordered by a hedgerow), your direction 350 degrees. After 120 metres, you pass to the right of the HV pylon (on the other side of the hedgerow). [3]

In 140 metres continue in the same direction (350 degrees), along an enclosed wooded field boundary, (tree arbour). After 350 metres you emerge from the wooded area, to reach a *path T-junction*; *turn left along a car wide track*, your direction west.

In 60 metres where the car wide track swings to the right, continue ahead (marked by a footpath post), to go along a car wide grass track bordered by trees, (immediately passing by a wooden bench on your left), your direction west.

After 500 metres you emerge from the wooded area into a field to turn half left across it, your direction 310 degrees. [!]This exit into the field is easy to miss, in which case you just follow the faint path through the wood, eventually turning right with it, inside the wood and then turning left with it, where the plank bridge [\*] mentioned below is on your right hand side.] In 200 metres on the far side of the field, follow a footpath into a wood. After 25 metres cross over [\*]a plank bridge, (with a pond off to your left). In 75 metres go through a gap to reach the corner of a field, to continue along its right hand side, your direction 300 degrees. After 170 metres *go over a stile and cross a road to turn right* along a pavement. In 70 metres ignore a footpath over a stile to your left.

After a further 80 metres, *turn left along a car wide shingle byway*, your direction 310 degrees.

*In 180 metres at a T-junction with a road*, cross over and *turn right*. *In 50 metres turn left* along a car wide shingle byway, your initial direction 290 degrees.

*After 450 metres at a dip in the track, turn right [4]* (marked by a footpath post) to go along the left-hand side of a field, with a stream down to your left, your direction 50 degrees.

After 280 metres at the left hand corner of the field, go through a wooden kissing gate frame to continue in the same direction, now with gardens on your right hand side. In 45 metres cross a road to go up a car wide tarmac track, and after 40 metres, go through a wooden kissing gate to cross a park, your direction east.

After 130 metres turn left along a road, to reach after 80 metres the **Fox & Hounds**, a more upmarket lunch place. For a more traditional pub lunch stop, continue for a further 70 metres to reach **The Crown**.

*Coming out of the Crown turn right along Drury Lane*, your direction 60 degrees. After 200 metres at the end of the lane, continue ahead and in a further 40 metres go through a wooden kissing gate (passing by a telegraph pole with a transformer box mounted on it), your direction 60 degrees.

In 300 metres follow the footpath round the left-hand side of a clump of trees, and after a further 50 metres just past the clump, continue across a field, your direction 60 degrees. In 220 metres, at a marker post, veer right on a bearing of 100 degrees towards a wood.

In 90 metres *at the wood* (with a footpath leading into the wood), *turn right to follow the footpath along the side of the wood*. In 150 metres ignore a track off to the right, to continue along the border of the wood, with the former RAF Hunsdon aerodrome (now used for light aircraft), on your right hand side, your direction 100 degrees. [Unless you want to have a look at the WWII Memorial, commemorating the British, ANZAC and Canadian Air Forces that operated from here: follow the track to the memorial and then further on to get back onto the woodside footpath.]

After 180 metres cross a concrete track, and in a further 100 metres at the corner of a wood (on your left-hand side), continue across a field, aiming for a footpath post in the middle, your direction 100 degrees. In 150 metres go over a footpath/bridleway

cross paths (marked by the marker post), to veer slightly to the left, up across the field aiming for the right hand corner of Battles Wood, your direction 70 degrees.

After 450 metres at the corner of Battles Wood, continue along the footpath with the wood on your left hand side, your direction 80 degrees. In 200 metres at the corner of the wood on your left (by an HV pylon pole), continue across the field, your direction 80 degrees.

After 100 metres [4] *at a cross paths, turn right along a car wide track* byway bordered by hedgerows, your direction south. After 900 metres you pass by Overhall Farm on your left-hand side, and in a further 100 metres *at a T-junction, turn left* down a lane passing by St Mary's Church, Gilston on your left hand side.

After 160 metres you pass by two red brick houses on your left. Immediately past the second house, *fork right up a car wide tarmac track*, through a wooded area, your direction 160 degrees (sign-posted 'Eastwick').

In 350 metres you emerge from the wooded area now with houses on your right hand side. After 100 metres, go through some metal gateposts as the track curves to the right and becomes shingle.

In 80 metres you pass by Gilston Park House on your left, to continue ahead along a car wide shingle track, your direction 230 degrees. After 100 metres you come out into a field, to follow a footpath across it.

After 150 metres you go between two metal posts (to the left of a metal gate) to go up a broad grass track (acting as a border between fields), which gradually curves round to the left, your initial direction 220 degrees.

[!] After 300 metres, by a footpath marker post and a bench, and about 250 metres before the main track goes to the right of a wood, *fork left, across the field, your direction east*. You should be aiming about 50 metres to the right of a weathered oak tree in the middle of the field, 450 metres distant. (As you look at this tree it is to the left of some red brick houses beyond.)

[If the field is particularly muddy then you can follow the broad path for 250 metres and then where the path goes to the right of the wood, fork left along the right hand field edge to come out to the road [5] after 600 metres.]

After 450 metres you pass by the oak tree on your left, and continue in the same direction down across the field, aiming for a car wide metal barrier field exit, not initially visible. (There is a tall silver chimney beyond in the far distance.)

In a further 270 metres (TL447 123) cross a bridge over a stream, to go through a missing metal kissing gate (to the right of the metal car wide barrier) [5], and *turn right along the road* into Gilston.

In 200 metres *at a T-junction* with the **Plume of Feathers** (a possible tea stop), on your left-hand side, *turn right* along the pavement. After 80 metres where the pavement gives out, cross the road to continue along the pavement opposite. In 70 metres (where the main road swings to the right), *fork left down a pavement* passing by a row of houses / cottages on your left hand side. In 60 metres fork left through a missing wooden kissing gate into a grassy field to take the right fork, (sign-posted: public footpath no. 29 to river Stort ¼ mile).

After 50 metres the footpath goes to the right of a double mini pylon pole to follow the cable run, your direction 130 degrees. In 180 metres go through a wooden kissing gate into the next field to continue towards a bridge. After 150 metres go through a metal kissing gate, to *cross the bridge* over the river Stort, and *turn right* along the shingle riverside footpath. In 350 metres ignore a footpath to the left (leading to a footbridge over the railway).

After 450 metres you reach a decorative black car wide metal gate. If you wish to go to The Moorhen pub on the other side of the navigation for tea, continue along the river and cross over it further on. Otherwise leave the shingle footpath to cross a car park and then join a lane.

In 80 metres where the lane curves to the right, fork left up a grass track through a lightly wooded area, your direction 260 degrees.

After 160 metres at the main road, turn left over the railway bridge to reach the roundabout, to then turn left down Station Approach for Harlow Town station.

### Lunch and Tea places:

**The Crown** *High St, Hunsdon, SG12 8NZ (07415 370860)*

**Fox & Hounds** *High St, Hunsdon SG12 8NH (01279 843999)* One of Hertfordshires leading 'gastropubs'.

**The Lion** *Eastwick, CM20 2QY (01279 434388)*

**Plume of Feathers** *Pye Corner, Gilston, CM20 2RD (01279 424154)* Open all day Friday to Sunday

**The Moorhen** *Burnt Mill Lane, Harlow, CM20 2QS (01279 423066)*

There is a tea trolley on the frequent Stansted Express service. (The recommended fast train for this walk.)

Hunsdon is located 6 km from the start of the walk.