

Ingatestone to Battlesbridge			Ingatestone to Wickford		
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Ingatestone to Battlesbridge or Wickford

Start: Ingatestone Station

Finish: Battlesbridge or Wickford Station

Ingatestone Station, map reference TQ 649991, is 9 km south west of Chelmsford and 58m above sea level. Battlesbridge Station, map reference TQ 776948, is 13 km south east of Ingatestone and 10m above sea level. Wickford Station, map reference TQ 744936, is 11 km south east of Ingatestone and 13m above sea level. All three are in **Essex**.

Length: 24.8 km (15.4 mi), of which 4.9 km (3.0 mi) on tarmac or pavements.

Cumulative ascent/descent: 180/228m. For a shorter walk, see below **Walk Options**.

Toughness: 4 out of 10

Time: 5 hours 20 minutes walking time.

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

Transport: Ingatestone is on the Great Eastern Main Line from Liverpool Street to Norwich (half-hourly service, hourly on Sundays), with a journey time of 27 or 28 minutes. Battlesbridge is on the single-track Crouch Valley branch line from Wickford to Southminster, which has at least one train an hour Monday to Friday, one every 40 minutes Saturday, and hourly trains on Sunday (journey time from 47 to 58 minutes).

Saturday Walkers' Club: Take the train closest to 10.15 hours if intending to eat in Stock, 1/3 into the full walk; or the train closest to 9.15 hours if intending to eat in South Hanningfield 2/3 into the full walk.

OS Landranger Map: 167 (Chelmsford) and 168 (Colchester) and 178 (Thames Estuary)

OS Explorer Map: 183 (Chelmsford & The Rodings) and 175 (Southend-on-Sea & Basildon)

Walk Notes:

This rewarding Essex walk avoids major roads and all remnants of industry and suburbia to initially traverse through fields in the Wid Valley and follow the Wid itself for a while, while passing through the Fristling Hall estate, one of the largest – but quite scenic – cattle farms in the country (with sturdy black metal fences separating humans from beasts), before proceeding through a delightful wood to lunch in Stock.

From there, several tree-lined tracks are walked along and some charming woods (some of them good bluebell woods) and the Hanningfield Reservoir Nature Discovery Centre with its Nature Reserve are passed through, before a late lunch/early tea stop in South Hanningfield is reached.

From there the route descends through some fields-with-views and more woods into the Crouch Valley to the finish in Battlesbridge, on a good day with fine far vistas beyond the Thames Valley to the North Downs.

Notes: In high summer, the fenced paths through the Fristling Hall Estate and some others towards the end of the walk can be encroached by nettles and brambles.

After rain, the 1.2 kilometres of arable field crossings near the end (along clear paths) will be challenging.

Walk Options:

Morning Shortcut (cuts 3.5 km): avoids the fenced paths along the Wid River and the tracks through the Fristling Hall estate to ascend along a choice of two routes into Stock (one using tracks and lanes, the other field boundaries and a field crossing).

Bus Shortcuts:

- **Bus Line 300** (Chelmsford – Basildon) goes from the early lunch location Stock to Billericay Station (every 20 mins Mon-Sat, every 30 mins Sun);
- **Bus Lines 13/13A** from the late lunch/early tea pub in South Hanningfield go to Wickford Station (about every two hours Mon-Sat).

Alternative Ending: From Crowsheath Community Woodland, you can finish **in Wickford**, reversing the start of SWC Walk 157 Wickford to Battlesbridge: 18.8 km (11.7 mi) with 116m ascent (**2/10**).

Lunch (details last updated 10/08/2023)

The Bakers Arms Common Road, Stock, Essex, CM4 9NF (01277 840 423,

<http://www.bakersarms.co.uk/>). The Bakers Arms is located 8.9 km (5.5 mi) into the walk. Open all day every day. Food served Mon-Thu 12.00-14.30 and 18.00-21.00, Fri-Sat 12.00-21.00, Sun 12.00-17.00.

The Hoop High Street, Stock, Essex CM4 9BD (01277 841 137, <http://www.thehoop.co.uk/>). The Hoop is located 8.9 km (5.5 mi) into the walk. Open all day Tue-Sat and 12.00-19.00 Sun. Food served 12.00-14.30 and 17.30-20.30 Tue-Sat and 12.00-16.00 Sun.

Dandelion & Burdock Kitchen & Lounge 20 The Square, Stock, Essex CM4 9LH (01277 829 772, <https://www.dandelion-burdock.co.uk/>). D & B is located 9.2 km (5.7 mi) into the walk. Open from the morning to 15.00 Mon-Sat plus some Friday evenings.

The Bear Inn 16 The Square, Stock, Essex CM4 9LH (01277 829 100, <http://www.thebearstock.com/>).

The Bear is located 9.2 km (5.7 mi) into the walk. Open all day Mon-Sat and 12.00-18.00 Sun. Food served 12.00-15.00 and 17.00-20.30 Mon-Sat (-21.00 Wed-Sat) and 12.00-16.00 Sun.

The Harvard Inn High Street, Stock, Essex CM4 9BJ (01277 840 008, <https://theharvardinn.co.uk/>). The Harvard is located 9.2 km (5.7 mi) into the walk. Open all day every day. Food served 12.00-15.00 and 18.00-21.00 Mon-Sat and 12.00-18.00 Sun.

The Old Windmill South Hanningfield Road, South Hanningfield, Essex, CM3 8HJ (01268 712 280, <http://www.brunningandprice.co.uk/oldwindmill/>). The Old Windmill is located 17.6 km (10.9 mi) into the walk. Open all day every day. Food served all day every day.

Tea Places both Endings (details last updated 08/08/2023)

Café On The Water Hanningfield Reservoir, Giffords Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM3 8HX (01268 712 182, <https://www.watersideparksuk.com/park/hanningfield/>). Open daily 09.00-16.00. Café on the Water has a large decking area overlooking the reservoir.

The Old Windmill As above

Tea Places in Battlesbridge (details last updated 08/08/2023)

The Hawk Hawk Hill, Battlesbridge, Wickford, SS11 7RJ (01268 767 236,

<https://www.thehawkbattlesbridge.co.uk/>). Open all day every day. Food served all day every day.

The Barge Inn Hawk Hill, Battlesbridge, Wickford, SS11 7RE (01268 732 622,

<https://bargebattlesbridge.co.uk/>). Open 10.00-20.00 every day. No dinner served.

Tea places in Wickford (details last updated 10/08/2023)

Pisces Fish Bar, Plush, Wickford Diner, Costa Coffee, Mem's Kitchen, Tony's, Cookies and Cones.

The White Swan 35 The Broadway, Wickford, Essex, SS11 7AD (01268 768 849).

Posh Boys' Brewery & Taproom 8 Riverside House, Lower Southend Road, Wickford, Essex, SS11 8BB (07474 594 379, <https://www.poshboysbrewery.com/>). Open Tue & Thu evening; all day Wed and Fri-Sat.

Little Beans Café 10 Willowdale Centre, High Street, Wickford, Essex, SS12 0RA (01268 767 225).

Mist Café Bistro 40 High Street, Wickford, Essex, SS12 9AY (01268 906 446).

The Duke 80 High Street, Wickford, Essex, SS12 9AT (01268 766 694).

Notes:

Ingatestone

32 km north east of London, Ingatestone was established in Saxon times on the Essex Great Road that runs between the two Roman towns of London and Colchester. The name, derived from the Middle English Yenge-atte-Stone, means parcel of land at the stone. The stone in question – deposited by glacial action – is unusual for the area. It can still be seen, split into three stones, one by the west door of the church and one each side of the entrance to Fryerning Lane.

Ingatestone belonged to Barking Abbey from about 950AD until the dissolution of the monasteries, when it was purchased from the Crown by Sir William Petre. Originally a lawyer from Devon, Petre had risen to become the Secretary of State to Henry VIII. He built a large courtyard house, Ingatestone Hall, as his home in the village, along with almshouses which still exist today as private cottages in Stock Lane.

Ingatestone Hall

Ingatestone Hall has been the home of the Petre family since the 16th century, who chose the location due to the similarity of the village's Latin name (Ginge ad Petram) with their own.

The Hall has two priest holes (hiding places for priests built into many of the principal Catholic houses of England during the period when Catholics were persecuted by law). Among the priests to have been at the hall was St. John Payne who was executed in 1582.

Ingatestone Hall is open to the public. It represented the exterior of Bleak House in the 2005 television adaptation of Charles Dickens' novel, and also appeared in an episode of the TV series Lovejoy.

The Hall is today open as a tourist attraction. Queen Elizabeth I spent several nights at the Hall on her Royal Progress of 1561, and the Petre family reside there to this day. The Hall largely retains its Tudor appearance following restoration carried out between 1915 and 1937 and is set in formal gardens surrounded by eleven acres of grounds.

River Wid

An innocent looking stream in flat country, the Wid regularly breaks its banks after heavy rainfall to flood extended areas. It joins with the Can near Writtle, with the Can then flowing into the Chelmer in Chelmsford.

St. Mary's Church, Buttsbury

There has been a church on this prominent site since at least the 12th century. The oldest parts of the current building are of 14th century origin. Thought to have once been the centre of a thriving village, all that remains are a couple of cottages and the church.

St. Peter's Way

A 66.1 km Long Distance Path from Chipping Ongar to the ancient chapel of St Peter-on-the-Wall at Bradwell-on-Sea. It runs across the open agricultural land of Essex, passing Hanningfield Reservoir and inlets of the Blackwater Estuary and reaching the coast to the east of Tillingham, then following the sea wall from where there are extensive views across the Essex marshes.

Stock

Although signs of Iron Age, Roman and Saxon settlement of the area have been found and despite Stock also being on two ancient salt trackways (from Maldon to Hertfordshire and to London), the first documentary evidence of the settlement dates only from the 13th century. Until the 16th century it was known as Hereward Stock/Stoke, after a Saxon leader, or variations thereof, such as Harvard Stock.

Stock Tower Mill

Windmills were mentioned in Stock's historical records as long ago as the 13th Century and it is presumed that these were some form of post mills. The current Grade II* listed windmill was built 1816 and is a fine example of the millwright's craft of the late 19th century. Restored to working order by Essex County Council in the early 90s, it has five storeys with four single Patent sails. Open on the afternoons of the 2nd Sunday of each month from April to September (14.00-17.00) and on the National Mills Weekend in May. <https://www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go/find-whats-near-me/stock-tower-mill>

Crowsheath Community Woodland

Crowsheath Community Woodland is a diverse mixture of meadows and young woodland. The site is popular especially with dog walkers – there is even a designated 'dog dip' area in the wildlife pond. Managed by Essex & Suffolk Water and Essex Wildlife Trust, it is home to barn owls, kestrels, dormice and water voles. Look out for dragonflies around the pond and birds of prey hunting over the long grass.

Hanningfield Reservoir

Hanningfield Pumped Storage Reservoir is the 11th largest reservoir in England. It covers 352 hectares, can hold 25.500 m³ of water and is owned by Essex & Suffolk Water. It was needed after WWII to supply the Essex New Towns, a growing Southend and new industries in the area and was built 1950-57 and formed by flooding an area formerly known as Sandon Brook Valley between West and South Hanningfield, thereby covering the ancient hamlet of Peasdown; although contrary to popular belief, no buildings survive under

the water. The reservoir is filled by pumping water from the rivers Chelmer and Blackford through a 15 km pipeline. It currently supplies water to around 540,000 homes in the Southend, Thurrock, Dagenham, Barking and Redbridge areas.

The reservoir has been declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to the important numbers of wildfowl that use it in autumn and winter, and large parts of it and the surrounding countryside have been developed as a Nature Reserve. The reservoir also is one of the premier fisheries in the UK, providing some of the best reservoir trout fishing by either bank or boat. A fishing permit needs to be bought in advance.

Hanningfield Reservoir Discovery Centre and Nature Reserve

A 40-hectare of mature woodland part of the Hanningfield Reservoir estate is leased by Essex Wildlife Trust and is home to vast numbers of wildlife. There are many footpaths in the woods around the water where wildlife can be seen and hides have been erected to afford excellent views of the visiting and resident bird population. 12 hectares of the woodland are ancient in origin and spring flowers include carpets of Bluebells and Stitchwort. Open every day 09.00-17.00 (-16.00 Nov-Feb) except Christmas and Boxing Day.

<https://www.essexwt.org.uk/nature-reserves/hanningfield>

River Crouch

The Crouch rises in Little Burstead. It runs parallel with the A176 (Noak Hill Road) for approximately 2 km and then follows a generally easterly course, passing by, near or through: Crays Hill, Ramsden Bellhouse, the centre of Wickford (where it flows along a concrete culvert), Runwell, Battlesbridge (the head of the 28 km 'River Crouch Navigation'), South Woodham Ferrers, Althorne and Burnham-on-Crouch. It flows into the North Sea between Holliwell Point and Foulness Point.

Runwell Hospital

A former Mental Hospital, closed in 2010. After plans to build a male prison were shelved due to spending cuts, a housing estate has been developed on and around the grounds.

Battlesbridge

Battlesbridge is named after the Bataille family, who kept the bridge over the Crouch in repair in its early days.

St. Margaret Church, Downham

There has been a church here since the mid-13th century and it is likely that Christians have worshipped on this site for over a thousand years. The church is dedicated to St Margaret of Antioch – slayer of dragons and patron saint of child bearing. The oldest part of the present building is the redbrick tower that dates from around 1470. The main part of the church, the nave, was rebuilt in the 19th century using much of the material from the 13th century building. In March 1977 the building was gutted by fire, therefore you may be surprised to find a bright, modern interior with comfortable chairs.

The churchyard (Best Kept Churchyard in Essex 2010) is home to some remarkable trees: sizeable yew trees, a 200 years old Californian Sequoia and a pollarded Field Maple, some 5 metres in girth and the largest of its kind in the UK. The dovecote, just outside the lychgate, originally stood in the farm below the church and was moved to its current site brick by brick in 1991. The small half-timbered building next to it was built in the early 1700s as stables.

Wickford

Wickford is first attested in a Saxon charter of 995, although there is evidence that the area itself was inhabited in prehistoric times (probably by a tribe of Britons called Trinobantes), Roman and Saxon times. Wickford was referenced by the Domesday Book in the year 1086 as *Wincfort*. The name means 'ford by a wych elm or ford by a dairy-farm'. Before the 20th century it was an agricultural village.

Wickford became the birthplace of Naturism in the UK: In 1922 the English Gymnosophist (meaning 'naked philosophers', a name given by the Greeks to certain ancient Indian philosophers who pursued asceticism to the point of regarding food and clothing as detrimental to purity of thought) Society was formed and had its home in the town.

In 1958 the town centre was hit by a flood, which made national news headlines. A second bad flood in 1960 meant changes to the course of the River Crouch were made. This included turning the river into a concrete channel through the centre of the town.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Alighting from the train in **Ingatestone** on platform 2, cross over the footbridge to platform 1, and leave the station into a car park. *Turn right* through the car park to reach **Hall Lane** where you *turn left*. In 385m, where the lane turns right, head straight on through wooden gate posts to the left of a large tree and then along a grassy strip. In 60m *turn right* at a T-junction along an earthen path between trees. [!] In 120m *bear left* out of the trees with the main path, ignoring a faint path further ahead between the trees. In 120m, after passing a couple of large barns and sheds on the right, *veer left* with a marker post along a car wide earth track between fields (75° initially). To the right you have good views of **Ingatestone Hall** behind its garden wall. In the distance and on the other side of the **Wid Valley** is **St. Mary's Church, Buttsbury** – the intermediate aim.

At the bottom of the valley cross the **Wid** on a two-slab two-railed concrete bridge and *veer right* with a grassy path along a field boundary, with the river to your right. The path and the river *bear* to the left and where the river bends to the right, you continue ahead uphill between fields, heading towards the right-hand side of the church and then keeping just to the right of the churchyard hedge. You get to a road where you *turn left* along **Ingatestone Road**, without a pavement and some fast traffic. In 190m you pass **Buttsbury Hall** and in 250m come to a left turn of the road, with a gravel farm track continuing in the same direction (and a 'Private – No Right Of Way'-sign on a double metal field gate ahead) and a footpath turning right in 20m up some steps in a hedge and through a metal gate into a pasture by a footpath signpost.

Here you have a choice:

For a Shortcut, *turn right* up the steps and through the metal gate and pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Morning Shortcut**.

For the Main Walk, *turn left* with the lane and in 200m cross a single lane road bridge over the river and in 30m *turn right* with a footpath signpost across a railed wooden plank bridge over a ditch. *Turn right* through a metal kissing gate and follow a fenced grassy path to and then along the river. This is the first of many fields belonging to the **Fristling Hall Farm Estate**, one of the largest cattle farms in the UK. In 700m *turn left* away from the river through a metal gate and follow the metal fence on your left along the grassy field margin (due N) towards a wooden strip, and in 150m upon reaching the wood, *veer right* and continue to the left of the adjacent field's metal fence in the previous direction (300°), now with the wood on your left. In 290m at the end of the wood, you pass a footpath marker post pointing right but continue ahead with the fence and in 40m *turn right* between fences (250°). In 70m, on the other side of the field, *veer left* along a grassy margin with a marker post.

In 30m you walk through a set of metal kissing gates either side of a concrete farm track and continue along the next fenced grassy field margin, soon with a reservoir on the right behind trees. In 400m go through a metal kissing gate and *bear right* with the path and in 100m go through a metal kissing gate and *turn right* at a T-junction with a car wide farm track, parallel to the railway line. In 65m walk through a metal kissing gate to the left of a metal field gate and pass a railway crossing at **Church Lane** on the left with **St. Margaret of Antioch, Margaretting** (usually closed) on the right. Continue with a bridleway signpost along the earthen farm track through a metal gate left of a metal field gate, [!] ignoring the footpath forking left along the railway line. You have fine views over the rolling landscape of the cattle farm. In 750m cross **The Wid** over a car wide concrete bridge and follow a fenced gravel track around a large field on the right, later with **Pound Wood** on the left.

At the top of the track, with a double metal field gate and a private drive down to the right, *turn up to the left* along the drive. In 75m pass the entrance to **Fristling Hall** on the right, now with **views back** to **Ingatestone** and the **Wid Valley**. Keep ahead along a gravel and grass path between trees, gently uphill. [!] In 280m *turn right* through a metal kissing gate 5m to the right into a pasture in the grounds of Fristling Hall. Walk along a grassy strip with a metal fence on the right towards the left of a barn ahead (160°). In 180m walk through a metal kissing gate by a footpath marker post and then *bear right* with a metal fence on the left through a stand of trees by a pond on the left, then continue through a small pasture. In 110m exit from the field through a metal kissing gate and *turn left* along a tree-lined tarmac drive.

In 600m, at a T-junction with a tarmac lane, *turn left* and in 20m *turn right* across a stile with a footpath signpost and a **St. Peter's Way** marker. *Turn right*, with a golf course on the left, in 40m continuing between trees. At a fork, take the right fork, and in 240m continue in the same direction at a marked footpath crosspaths. You have **Swan Wood** on the right (bluebells in season), managed by the Woodland Trust and **Access Land**. In 160m you pass a pond away to the left across the nearest fairway. In 30m there is an unmarked narrow path turning right into the wood, which a few metres away connects to a clear forest path at a bend.

Here you have a choice:

- **For the quickest route** to the lunch options, stay ahead, and in 120m cross a stream on a wooden bridge to immediately ascend on a stepped boardwalk (can be slippery). Keep ascending a grassy path, still with the wood on your right, to reach **Crondon Park Lane** and *turn right* along it with the wood on the right.
- **For the recommended route**, *turn right* into **Swan Wood** to *fork right* (245°), ignoring another path to the left parallel to the path just left. In 60m *turn left* along a clear path (135°). In 35m pass a bench on the left and in 40m *bear right* with the path (150° initially). In 40m *turn left* at a T-junction (120°) and in 60m cross a stream on a wooden plank bridge. Re-ascend along a stepped engineered path and 60m *turn right* at a T-junction. In 20m ignore a path turning left and up and stay on this path (195°), slowly ascending. In 180m, by a plank bridge over a ditch on the right, continue ahead along the ditch. In 120m curve up the left with the path and in 50m you pass an electric substation to exit from the wood through a wooden kissing gate onto **Crondon Park Lane** and *turn right* along it.

The views back on the left are towards **Chelmsford**. Upon reaching **Stock Road** by a **bus stop for services to Chelmsford** on the left, cross the road and *turn right* along the pavement into **Stock**, past a **bus stop for services to Billericay**. After 165m on the road *turn left* into **Common Road**, with one of the recommended early lunch stops, **The Bakers Arms** ('No Muddy Boots'), 65m ahead.

[Other lunch options are: **The Hoop**, 150m further along Stock Road (now called **High Street**), **Dandelion & Burdock Kitchen & Lounge** and **The Bear Inn**, a further 200m along from The Hoop, on a left fork off High Street called **The Square**, as well as **The Harvard Inn** past The Bear 30m to the right along **Mill Road**. From those far options, you could pick up the Shortcut to save you going back to Common Road.]

Past **The Bakers Arms**, continue along **Common Road** past the **Cricket Green** on the right, but at the end of it, where the road bears right, you stay ahead following a high marker post with a **St. Peter's Way** marker along a tarmac drive. In 40m *fork right* along a concrete footpath with a ditch to your right and a hedge on the left. In 70m continue along an earthen track past a cul-de-sac on the left and onto a wide grassy track to eventually exit onto **Mill Lane**. A short detour 100m to the left gets you to the imposing **Stock Tower Mill**. *Turn right* and in 35m *turn left* along **Mill Road**.

***)** In 480m *turn right* into **Furze Lane** and in 265m by **Sunrise Cottage**, *turn left* off it with a concrete footpath signpost along a fenced-in grassy path with an orchard on the left. In 110m *turn right* with the path and in 15m *turn left* into **Little Bishop's Wood** (**carpets of bluebells** in season). Follow the narrow path to the right, now with a pasture behind trees on the left, until you come out by a wooden footpath signpost on a gravel-and-earth lane to a house half left. *Turn right* on the lane and in 60m *turn left* with a footpath signpost to cross a ditch over a two-plank bridge into **Kiln Common**. In 80m cross a stream over a two-railed wooden plank bridge with yellow markers and *turn left* immediately over another two-railed plank bridge across a stream with a yellow marker. In 90m cross another stream and in 150m **at the edge of the wood** *turn right* on a dog-leg (265°) at a three-way footpath junction by a white-topped marker post.

In 140m cross another stream and in 50m when a waymarked footpath joins from the right, you continue in the same direction to exit the wood along a narrow path between trees. *Bear left* to then continue along a concrete drive and past a metal gate to in 60m reach a tarmac lane at a bend. *Bear left* along the lane, with views of **Hannigfield Reservoir** in the distance through the trees on the left (foliage permitting) and **Great Bishop's Wood** on the right. In 480m, where the lane turns left, you continue in the same direction with a bridleway signpost 20m ahead along a tree-lined gravel car wide track. In 460m another bridleway joins from the right by a bridleway marker post, and in another 150m you *turn left* over a railed wooden bridge with a footpath marker then a marker post and then along a grassy field boundary with a fence on the right.

In 230m cross a couple of streams and continue between trees. In 170m *turn right* at a T-junction with a road. In 150m, just after passing a thatched cottage on the right, *turn left* with a footpath signpost through a gap to the right of a metal field gate and along a grassy field boundary with some trees on the right. In 350m, with a fisheries pond behind an earthen wall to your left, walk through a fence gap with a marker post to enter **Crowsheath Community Woodland** by an info panel. In 100m *turn right* along *the second of two grassy paths* with a footpath marker post (can be overgrown) on the left (160°). You walk to the left of a ditch until you get to a four-way path junction with a pond on the left in 250m. Pass the pond and *bear left* around it on its right-hand side and continue on a grassy path, now with a stream on your right behind bushes (100°). In 160m a public footpath joins from the right over a two-railed footbridge.

Here you have a choice:

For the Alternative Ending in Wickford *turn right* across the bridge and pick up the directions at the end of this text under **Alternative Ending**.

For the main walk, ending in Battlesbridge, *veer left* along a wide grassy path along the stream towards a wide gap in the hedge 320m away. Walk through the gap onto a car wide track, with a concrete bridge over the stream on the right. **[!] Turn left** along the track. In 80m *turn right* along a narrow earthen path (80° initially, then 20°), with a wire fence on the left. In 260m you emerge into an open grassy area, with electricity cables running across. Follow the right-hand side of this meadow towards a white house (may not be visible in summer) and leave it in 70m by a **Crowsheath Community Woodland** information panel, across a wooden two-railed plank bridge and through a small grassy area beside the house. Emerge onto a tarmac track by a footpath signpost and *turn left*. In 40m *turn right* with a white-topped marker post and then up some steps and through a metal gate onto **Hawkswood Road** – with **Hanningfield Reservoir** on the other side.

Cross the road and *turn right* along the pavement. On the other side of the reservoir dam continue along the grassy pavement. In 40m **Crowsheath Lane** joins from the right. In another 35m you reach the double wooden gate entrance to the **Hanningfield**

Reservoir Nature Discovery Centre. [The rest of the route to **The Old Windmill** pub leads through this **Essex Wildlife Trust**-run site. It is run as a charity and no entrance fee is charged, but **donations are suggested** (£2 adults, £1 children). **To avoid the charge:** continue along Hawkswood Road for 1.1 km, *turn left* into **South Hanningfield Road** and in 1.25 km you get to **The Old Windmill.**]

Turn left through the entrance gate, follow signs for the visitor centre, soon veering *half right* and passing a car park on the right. After 20m *turn left* along a gravel path towards the visitor centre (refreshments, public conveniences). A box for donations can usually be found at the cash till, where you can also purchase a detailed and informative map for a nominal price. Exit the visitor centre at the back, following signs for **Nature Trails**. *Fork right* just outside the Visitor Centre and in 60m at a T-junction *turn left* with a seating area to the right. In 65m ignore a left turn for **Lyster Hide**. In 190m and in another 125m paths join from the left. 120m further along *turn right* across a two-railed wooden plank bridge over a ditch and in 75m, after having passed a pond on the left, *turn right* at a T-junction and *right again* in another 200m (take any of two paths). In 90m *turn left* with the path (views of the reservoir on the left through the trees).

In 60m, *turn left* with the path, ignoring a wooden kissing gate ahead into a pasture and a subsequent path towards a wood. In 190m, by the field corner on the right, *turn right* and in 70m *turn left* past an info panel ('Ancient Woodlands'). In 150m at a T-junction *turn right* ('Fishing Lodge') and in 40m *turn left* where another path meets from ahead. In 30m exit the **Nature Reserve** through a metal gate. In 90m pass a display panel for **Hanningfield Reservoir Nature Discovery Centre** and *bear right* towards the car park by the **Fishing Lodge** with its **Café on the Water** and wooden terrace overlooking the reservoir. Follow the path to the left around the Fishing Lodge and then to the right to stay to the left of a fence and some tarmac drives. **[!]** *Turn right* along a gravel path along the fence along the second tarmac drive. In 60m walk through a fence gap and cross a car park approach and continue to the left of the fence along grass.

In 50m join the tarmac drive. In 160m *turn left* at a junction with **South Hanningfield Road**. In 140m, just before reaching the late lunch/early tea option **The Old Windmill**, you pass a footpath signpost and *turn right* into the gravel car park. Exit the car park in the far-left corner through a gap in the hedge and over a bridge and continue in the same direction with a marker post along a field edge, slightly uphill. In 40m where the hedge on your left turns left, you continue in the same direction towards the brow of the field, following a marker post and a usually well-cleared path which closely follows a line of electricity poles with yellow markers. In 175m at the other side of the field *veer right then curve left* with the field edge to in 160m exit onto a road to the left of a concrete barrier, with the fenced-in **Downham Reservoir** on the other side.

Turn right along the road and in 70m *turn left* into a field past a redundant stile and a footpath signpost. Follow the fence on the left and in 115m cross the field in the same direction towards the corner of the field boundary hedge on the other side (160°) along a usually well-cleared path. In 100m continue with a field boundary hedge on your right, soon downhill, into the next field, now on a grassy field margin, with views into the **Crouch Valley**, as well as – weather permitting – beyond it across the **Thames Valley to the North Downs**. At the bottom end of this field *turn left* at a junction of paths with a marker post, now with trees on your right. In 230m *turn left* with the field boundary and in 50m *bear down to the right* into the next field along an obvious but unmarked path. Stay on the right-hand side of the neighbouring field through a dip. In 140m *turn right* through a gap in the boundary hedge to *turn left* along a wide fenced-off path with a grassy field on the right. In 125m you pass through a fence gap onto a tarmac lane at a bend and *turn right* along it.

[!] In 660m, 60m after the road starts to descend more prominently, and just before **Kennel Farm** on the left, *turn right* with a footpath signpost through a metal kissing gate in the hedge. In 20m you have a ditch and a field on your left, trees on your right and a large farmhouse half left ahead on a hill (**Runwell Hall Farm**) and walk along a narrow grass path to the right of a ditch. In 80m *turn right* into a wooded strip and in 175m follow a marker post around to the left just inside the wood. In 40m exit into a field and follow its right-hand edge with a ditch and trees on the right, in 125m *turning* right and in 80m left again. Head downhill and exit the field to the right of a fenced off grassy area and continue along a fenced wood (**Pitfield Shaw**) in the same direction. At the end of the wood, you see the site of the former **Runwell Hospital** on the left (now housing), with the church in **Rettendon Place** behind it on a hill. Continue between hedges, through a random metal kissing gate and over a two-railed wooden footbridge and in 700m *turn left* with the path and then right again in 65m.

You emerge in a large grassy field and follow a marker post across it between paddocks. In 270m continue in the same direction along a gravel track through a farmyard and in 90m cross a gravel lane at a T-junction to continue in the same direction across a small grassy area with a white-topped pole and a wooden fence on the right. You enter some hedges along a narrow path and keep in the same direction for 440m until you reach a road through a metal gate – partly along paths between hedges prone to being overgrown, partly through broad grassy strips. Cross the road and pass a double metal field gate into a small grassy area and head towards a white-topped pole in the left corner (135°), where you *turn left* across a field towards a gap in its far boundary hedge (85°). In 100m cross a wooden plank bridge and a stile to emerge into another field and continue between fences, slightly uphill (due E). In 200m exit the field over a stile and a plank bridge into the next field. *Turn left* and in 20m *turn right* across the arable field on a now obvious path (105°).

In 280m exit the field onto a grassy strip to cross a stream by a footpath marker post on the left and *bear right* to a tarmac drive 40m away, where you *turn left* along a usually well-cleared path across the next field (due E). In 300m at the opposite field boundary pass a wooden post in the growth on the right and *veer left* along a usually well-cleared path across the next field towards the right of a large tree on the other side (70°). In 190m cross a stream on a plank bridge about 20m to the right of the tree into the next field. Cross this field (most times with a clear path) in the same direction, heading towards a point 50m to the left of the HV pylon just in front of the raised **A130**. On the other side follow a footpath marker and signpost *to the right between fences*, underneath the pylon (or continue to the right of the pylon if too overgrown).

At the field corner you *turn left* with a signpost under the **A130** and then another smaller road (the **A1245**), with a railway line now to the right. In 25m after the second road bridge *turn right* through a white wooden kissing gate to cross the railway line. *Turn left* on the other side along a narrow path between hedges and continue for 280m in the same direction to emerge into an overgrown grassy area. Leave it past a redundant stile in the far corner. *Turn right* to a tarmac lane, where you *turn left* past the recommended tea stop **The Hawk**. At a T-junction with a road (with the alternative tea stop, **The Barge Inn**, 380m to the right), *veer left* and up along **Station Approach** to reach the single platform at **Battlesbridge** Station in 160m.

Morning Shortcut

Turn left to follow the left-hand field boundary around to the right in 80m, with the gravel track visible to the left beyond a hedge. In another 110m (50m before the far corner of the field) you have a metal gate on the left by a footpath marker post.

Here you have a choice:

For the continuation mainly along field boundaries and across a field, continue ahead and in 50m cross a two-railed footbridge across a ditch and go through a metal gate into a pasture and follow its left-hand boundary gently uphill. In 230m enter a large arable field and follow its left-hand grassy boundary uphill. In 520m at the top of the rise by a white-topped pole, continue ahead across an arable field along a usually well-cleared path. Aim for the left-hand corner of **White's Wood** and in 360m *turn left* along the field's grassy boundary. In 200m *turn right* with a marker post through a hedge gap and *turn left* along a path between hedges, gently uphill. In 130m *turn left* at a marked three-way junction of public footpaths, finally on the level, and in 90m you emerge on a tarmac lane. The other variant of the Shortcut joins from the left up the lane. *Turn right* along the lane and pick up the directions below at the asterisk *).

For the continuation entirely along gravel tracks and tarmac lanes, *turn left* through the gate and *turn right* along the track with a marker post (can be overgrown). In 20m *curve to the left* with the track to continue gently uphill between fields, with occasional oak trees and through a couple of turns. Eventually you can spot a large house up ahead and the track becomes a tree-lined avenue on its approach. You pass **Imphy Hall** and continue between the following sheds and barns. The track curves to the left and in another 170m you *turn right* at a T-junction of tracks by a three-way footpath marker post. In 200m pass a couple of cottages on the left with some views on the left behind to a wooded ridge with a transmission mast. You continue along tarmac, still uphill with an earth bank on the right and a hedge on the left. In 80m a signposted footpath joins from the right between trees. This is the other variant of the Shortcut.

*) You now follow **Back Lane** into **Stock**, on the line of a historic **Salt Road from Maldon**. Ignore a public footpath from the right in 220m and in another 130m continue ahead at a four-way junction along Back Lane. Now between houses, there are a couple of stretches with pavement, others without, and also two stretches where a lane or path parallel to the left offers quieter walking than the road, which gets a little busier towards the village centre. You pass a well-camouflaged old water pump on the right and then a short stretch between old walls. You then reach **The Harvard Inn** on the left at a four-way junction, with **High Street** (the **B1007**) crossing and with a village shop opposite on **Mill Road**. Cross the road and continue along Mill Road. In 30m **The Square** joins from the left by **The Bear Inn** on the corner. 25m further along The Square is the **Dandelion & Burdock Kitchen & Lounge**.

Other lunch options are: **The Hoop**, 200m further along The Square and then to the right of the **village green** with the war memorial and village sign, as well as **The Bakers Arms** ('No Muddy Boots'), 150m further along **High Street** and then to the right, 65m down **Common Road**. [From those far options, you could pick up the Main Walk to save you going back to Mill Road.] Continue along Mill Road and in 135m pass the churchyard of **Our Lady and St. Joseph Church, Stock Harvard**. In 140m pass **Common Lane** on the left and in 30m a reed-filled pond on the right. In 120m cross **Well Lane/Common Road** and in 230m you can see the sails of **Stock Tower Mill** on the left. In 30m the Main Walk joins from the left along **Mill Lane**.

Continue ahead and pick up the directions in the main text at the asterisk *).

Alternative Ending

On the far side of the bridge, *turn left* along a grassy path with a marker post. In 30m, just after a marker post on the left (can be overgrown), *turn right* through a grassy area and then some trees. In 90m pass an info panel for **Crowsheath Community Woodland** and continue along a grassy strip, with a pasture behind a fence on the left, and a ditch and a hedge on the right. In 200m a tarmac lane joins from the right and in 55m you reach the main road through **Ramsden Heath** by a footpath signpost. Cross the road and *turn right* along the opposite pavement. In 60m *turn left* along a car wide lane (**Oak Road**), in 15m passing a brideway signpost on the left. In 300m continue through some bollards and along a path with a wood on the left. There is a car salvage business on the right and in 180m you *bear down to the left* with the path while passing some rather picturesque three-tier stacker storage system for the cars. In 600m, by a two-way brideway signpost on the left (can be overgrown), *turn left* along a car wide lane at a T-junction. In 80m ignore a footpath off to the left over a stile. At **De Beauvoir House** *turn right* with the lane and follow it for 300m past a handful of houses. By the last house on the left (**Rose Cottage**), you *bear left* along a narrow path between trees with occasional views over fields and up to **St. Margaret's Church, Downham** church. In 500m you reach a road opposite the drive to **Downham Hall**.

[The church is well worth a 180m detour for its sweeping views.] Cross the road and *turn right* for 15m and then *left* along the concrete driveway of **Downham Hall Farm**. In 65m, just before the farmyard, *turn right* over a stile into a pasture. Head for a stile 75m away (140°), and then *bear left* towards a redundant stile 50m away. From there, stay to the left of a fenced pond and head for a stile and wooden plank bridge 170m away in a hedge. Cross a stream into a pasture with a green metal bar fence on the left and cross the field diagonally to its far-right corner (105°). In 140m go over a stile to the left of a metal field gate and *bear right* (140°) to in 75m cross a stream over a two-railed wooden plank bridge. You go through some growth, ignore a left fork in it, and in 80m emerge in a large pasture and follow the left-hand high hedge through it (110°). In 150m leave the field through a metal kissing gate onto a track at a bend by a three-way footpath/byway signpost and take the right arm.

[!] In 15m *turn right* through a wide gap into a pasture and follow the right-hand boundary (due S). Exit the field through a squeeze gap in a hedge and follow a narrow encroached path into a field. The route follows the right-hand edge but the nearby area has been taken over by brambles and is difficult to negotiate. Therefore, *bear left* for a short stretch along a clear path into the grassy part of the field and *turn right* there. In 200m, with the hedge on the right, *bear left* across the field (140°) towards the right-hand corner of the other field boundary hedge on your left, in 30m passing a white plastic pole. In 130m pass the hedge corner and follow the hedge and in 75m enter a neighbouring field through a wide gap. The railway line is about 80m away on the right. *Veer left* across this meadow (100°) and in 160m leave it through a wide gap in the boundary hedge to follow a path through some housing for 100m, then through shrubs onto a road. Ignore all ways off and in 430m *turn right* along **Station Approach** to **Wickford Station** 80m away. London bound trains depart from the far platform 1.

For any tea places, continue down the road for 200m to the main road through town.

On the left you find **Pisces Fish Bar**, the **Posh Boys' Brewery & Taproom** (in a side street – Lower Southend Road) and **The White Swan** pub.

On the right beyond the railway, you find **Little Beans** café (in a shopping centre on the right), **Plush** restaurant, **Wickford Diner**, a **Costa Coffee**, **Mist** café bistro restaurant, **The Gatehouse** coffee shop, **Mem's Kitchen** (both on the left in another shopping centre), **Tony's** Italian restaurant, **Cookies and Cones** and **The Duke** pub.