



# Knebworth to Welwyn Garden City walk

Knebworth Hall, Ayot St Lawrence, and gently undulating woodland and fields.

**Length** 20.8km (13.0 miles).

**OS Maps** Explorer 193 for Knebworth and 182 for Welwyn Garden City. Landranger 166

**Toughness** 3/10. Ascent 278m; Descent 287m.

The walk is stile-free and the paths and trails are easy.

**Features** This is a companion walk to SWC 69 the Welwyn Circular, and SWC 353 Knebworth Circular, but covers new territory before lunch to visit the impressive **Knebworth Hall** and its extensive grounds and deer park. You can also visit the attractive church of **St Mary and Thomas of Canterbury**. After you leave the motorway behind it is a quiet, pleasant ramble gently undulating woodland and fields. There are no stiles on this walk.

The village of **Ayot St Lawrence** will be familiar from the Welwyn Circular walk and is a perfect spot for a picnic at either the Palladian Church or the ruined old St Lawrence Church. Also here is your lunch-time pub the **Brocket Arms**.

After lunch you reach perhaps familiar territory around Brocket Hall before crossing a golf course en route to Ayot Green and then through woodland to Welwyn

**Walk options** There are no written instructions to reduce the walk apart from a more direct route as you approach the lunch time pub the Brocket Arms. If you want to shorten the walk further you will need to use a map or gps device.

**Transport** Trains to Knebworth run from London Kings Cross station. There are two an hour during the week and one an hour on Saturday and Sunday.

Return trains from Welwyn are more frequent and return to London Kings Cross.

Buy a day return to Knebworth

Suggested Train: Get the nearest train to 10am from London Kings Cross

**Lunch and Tea** Your lunch pub is the **Brocket Arms** (tel [01438 820250](tel:01438820250)) in the village of Ayot St Lawrence, some 11.7 km (7.3 miles) into the walk. This 14th century country inn has many of its original features and is full of character. The pub has spacious internal dining areas plus a small rear garden and a large garden area to its front and side with a covered area. Lunch is served seven days a week between 12 noon and 14.30 hrs. Service tends to be slow but the high quality of the food usually makes the wait worthwhile. On a Sunday booking ahead is essential and it is advisable to call ahead with numbers during weekdays.

Welwyn Garden City has a good choice of cafes, pubs and bistros for your tea stop, most en route and close to the station. Becoming popular with SWC walkers - for its delicious cakes - is **Simmons**, next door to Cafe Nero, and open until 5 pm.

**Notes** **Knebworth House and Park**

The house has been the home of the Lytton Family since 1490. The house was originally built in red brick as a late Gothic Manor house around a central court. The house was remodelled in Tudor Gothic style in the early 19th century and the interior of the house was redesigned by Sir Edwin Lutyens in the early 20th century. The current resident is Mr Henry Lytton-Cobbold and his family. The house and grounds have been a popular setting for films and pop concerts. Since 1974 Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd and many others have performed in the grounds. Recent films include the Kings Speech (the Balmoral party) and scenes from the Harry Potter series. The house, extensive parkland grounds and tea room are open to the public at weekends and on certain weekdays, from the end of March until the end of September. The park, gardens, adventure playground, dinosaur trail and tea rooms are open from 11 am until 5 pm, and the house and British Raj Exhibition from 12 noon until 5 pm. Prices (2020): adult including the house: £ 14.0. Excluding the house: £ 10.00. Concessions and family tickets are also available.

The walk route takes you by the beautiful **St Mary and Thomas of Canterbury church** in Knebworth Park. The church dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and is a Grade 1 listed building. The churchyard has listed tombstones by Edward Lutyens.

### Ayot St Lawrence

This lovely village and its 18<sup>th</sup> century Grecian style Palladian church and the 12<sup>th</sup> century Old St Lawrence ruined church will be familiar from the Welwyn Circular walk SWC 69. See this walk for further details. Your lunch pub is here and it makes a perfect spot for your picnic lunch.

### Brocket Hall

Brocket Hall is a Grade 1 classic Country house built in 1760 by architect Sir James Paine. Since its onset the house has been the home of the Brocket family, including former Prime Minister Viscount Melbourne (Lord "M" in the TV series - Victoria). During the 2nd World War the house became a maternity centre - and at least one regular SWC walker was born in the house. More recently, the current 3rd Baron Brocket fell foul of the law over an insurance fraud concerning vintage motor cars and whilst he was a guest of Her Majesty he leased the estate to an Asian company which has converted the estate into a hotel, conference centre and luxury golf centre. The company has added a second golf course - the Palmerson Course - to the Melbourne course.

**The Ayot Greenway** is the railway bed of the former **Welwyn to Dunstable** single track branchline. This branchline opened in 1858 with stops in Ayot, Wheathampstead, Harpenden East, Luton Hoo, Luton Bute Street, Dunstable Town and Dunstable North. Of all the branchlines in Hertfordshire, the only one to survive Dr Beeching's cuts in the mid-1960s is the St Albans Abbey line, familiar with SWC walkers from our Garston to St Albans walk. The Welwyn to Dunstable branchline closed in 1966, following which the railway bed was turned into a very pleasant level walkway.

**Updated** First draft and posting of walk May 2019. Features expanded July and August 2019. This update February 2020.

**Help Us!** After the walk, we would love to get your [feedback](#)

You can upload photos to the [SWC Group on Flickr](#), and [videos to Youtube](#). This walk's tags are:



**By Car** **Start** SG3 6AT **Finish** AL8 6HA

**Help** National Rail: 03457 48 49 50 • Travelline SE (bus times): 0871 200 2233 (12p/min) • TFL (London) : 0343 222 1234

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## Walk Directions

- Exit **Knebworth Railway Station** and go straight ahead up Park Lane, immediately passing the Station pub (re-opened February 2020) on your left. You are heading gently uphill, your direction west. The road swings gently to the left and some 650 metres from the railway station you cross the A1(M) on a bridge.
- Keep ahead, still on Park Lane, and in 550 metres you come to the village of **Old Knebworth** at the start of houses on your left and right. In some 300 metres, immediately after the last semi-detached house on your right-hand side (190 Park Lane), with a road

narrowing measure ahead of you, there is a green footpath sign at the top of and within the hedge on your right-hand side (in summer it is likely this sign is hidden from view). Here *turn right* on a grassy, car wide path between hedges, gently downhill, your direction north.

3. In 50 metres, with a wooden gate ahead, the path reduces in width and heads down between hedges, with a playing field over to your right. In a further 50 metres go through a wooden kissing gate and keep ahead along the left-hand edge of a field, soon with **Cowpasture Wood** over to your left. In 115 metres at the end of the field pass through a wooden kissing gate and *turn left* on to a broad path along the edge of the wood, with an open field to your right, your direction 305°. In 70 metres at a dip in the path, go through a field boundary and keep ahead, uphill. In 110 metres go through a wooden barrier and come out onto Old Knebworth Lane. Cross over and enter **Knebworth Park** through a deer protection gate, with a cattle grid to its right.
4. You now walk through the Park on estate tracks and surfaced roads. In some 200 metres you pass **Knebworth House** over to your left, then you come to the church of **St Mary and Thomas of Canterbury** on your right (usually kept locked). Enter the churchyard by the lychgate and follow the path around to the left of the church, to leave the churchyard through a metal swing gate. Now keep ahead over a grassy lawn for some 100 metres to bear right to join the estate road and keep ahead on it, your direction west, soon passing through the main car park, with Knebworth Barns Conference Centre and tea room to your left.
5. Keep ahead, soon on a gravel estate road. Some 600 metres from the church's swing gate, by a footpath marker post, [!] *turn right* off the estate road and head diagonally down over grassy parkland, on a clear way, your direction 280° and head towards the next marker post. At the post follow the grassy way as it swings gently around to the right. Some 580 metres from leaving the gravel estate road, you leave the park through a metal deer protection gate. You now head through overgrowth for some 25 metres to come out on to the B656 road.
6. Cross over the road and enter **Graffidge Wood** by a footpath sign, on to tracks and paths that can be muddy in winter. Follow the track, initially close to the right-hand edge of the wood, as it meanders through the wood. In 220 metres you pass a seasonal camp and outward bound centre over to your right. Some 125 metres beyond the end of the camp [!] you come to a marker post with yellow and green arrows. Here *bear right* off the track, keep ahead for 25 metres to cross over another main earth track, and by another marker post with similar coloured arrows [!] take the narrower path directly ahead of you, into woodland, your direction 285°.
7. Following the path as it meanders through the wood, through some sharp turns, is a little tricky (February 2020) due to woodland clearance and tree thinning work in late 2019 which has obliterated the cpath in places, but if you keep in a general westerly direction through the wood you will, in some 320 metres or so, come out on to a tarmac lane. *Turn right* on to this country lane (Rusling Lane).
8. Keep ahead along this quiet lane, and in 200 metres you come to Rusling End Cottage on your left-hand side. Here [!] take the signed footpath to *your left* . In 15 metres pass through a wooden swing gate to the right of a wooden fieldgate, on a path between hedges, your direction 230°. You soon have a wood on your left and open fields on your right.
9. Follow the edge of wood on your left as your way gradually swings to the left. In 620 metres at the end of the wood *turn sharp left* to follow the direction of the footpath sign, due south, gently down the right-hand edge of the wood, with open fields to your right. In 220 metres at the end of the wood on your left, keep ahead between open fields, with a tree line to your left, now gently uphill. In 135 metres pass through a hedge to come out onto a road, Three Houses Lane, where you *turn right* . In 300 metres and just before Three Houses Farm, *turn left* off the road to follow the footpath sign onto a grassy way, with a woodland strip to your left and a fenceline to your right with horse paddocks beyond.
10. In 400 metres pass through a field boundary to come out into a vast open field. Keep ahead, your direction 155° and head towards some trees ahead by a marker post. At the trees go through a field boundary and head downwards towards another marker post, your direction 140°. In another 65 metres go through a gap in the hedge on your right, to head down then up a vast open field (not the path along the field edge to your left), in roughly the previous direction heading towards a field boundary hedge corner on a rise. In 160 metres at the top of the incline keep ahead on a broad, grassy way, initially with a hedge on your left, then between vast open fields.
11. In some 600 metres you exit the fields on to a road (the B656 again) where you *turn right* , on the edge of the village of **Codicote** . Almost immediately *turn right* down Whitwell Road. In 420 metres you come to a fork in the road with a grassy triangular area between roads. Here take the left fork (almost directly ahead) and in 80 metres, by a three-way footpath signpost on your right, *turn right* with the Hertfordshire Way up a bank through trees, ignoring the public footpath along the lane (Kimpton Mill 3/4). At the top of the bank go through a wooden kissing gate, to *bear left* through a pasture towards a wooden kissing gate, your direction 220°.
12. In 75 metres go through a wooden kissing gate to *bear half right* , 240°, over a grassy open field. In a further 180 metres go through another wooden kissing gate to *bear half left* , your direction 220° towards a wooden kissing gate on the edge of a wood. In 100 metres enter the wood through the kissing gate, to head downhill through the wood, going down a flight of earthen steps. At the bottom of the steps *turn right* at a T-junction and in 75 metres *turn right* at a waymarked T-junction, to continue down through the wood. Keep ahead along this woodland path, with treeline on either side. In some 500 metres [!] *turn left* through a wooden kissing gate, to head down to cross a wooden plank footbridge over a stream with the River Mimram on the left.

13. At the far end of the bridge go through another wooden kissing gate and cross over a small, grassy field. In 85 metres go through a wooden kissing gate to cross a wooden footbridge with wooden railings over the River Mimram to reach Kimpton Road, where you *turn right* . In 30 metres *turn left* by a public bridleway sign to Abbotshay. Now walk along the right-hand edge of vast open fields with treeline and hedges on your right, initially steadily uphill. Your way levels out and starts to head in and out of a woodland strip on your right. In 900 metres you come out onto a road. *Turn right* for some 90 metres to come to a junction.
14. For the direct route to the lunchtime pub, at this junction turn left and take paths and estate roads for some 600 metres past a Mansion House on your right, heading long its access drive, until you reach the main road, where you turn right for 40 metres, to come to the Brocket Arms pub on your left-hand side.
15. But for a more interesting route to the pub: take the right-hand fork with woodland to your left. At the end of the woodland the path bears left through a wooden kissing gate and you cross a large pasture diagonally towards a church. Leave the field through a wooden kissing gate by the church. The walk route will veer left along a fence on the left before the church, but first explore the churchyard of **Ayot St Lawrence Palladian Church** (usually open). Then follow the fence on the left through a pasture, ignoring another public footpath diagonally across it. Leave the field through a wooden kissing gate to follow a fenced path to reach a road where you turn left past the ruined parish church. In a further 50 metres you come to the **Brocket Arms** pub on your right-hand side, your lunchtime stop.
16. On leaving the pub *turn left* into Bride Hall Lane. You pass again the ruined parish church on your right. Continue along the road as it bends to the left. At the road junction with Bibbs Hall Lane (Shaw's Corner) turn right, if you wish to visit **George Bernard Shaw's house** , after which you return to Shaw's Corner. Continue down the road through two bends and as the road bends again to the right, take the footpath [!] *on your left* signposted to Codicote Road and Ayot Green Way, a path enclosed by hedges on either side, your direction east.
17. In 1.3 km you come to Codicote Road, which you cross, *turn left* for 5 metres then take the path *on your right* on a public bridleway. You have a wood on your left and an open field on your right as you head gently uphill. In 220 metres go through a field boundary and *turn right* following a footpath sign, initially down the right-hand edge of an open field with a hedgerow on your right, then gently up the field edge. Near the top of the slope, *turn left* away from the wood along a car-wide farm track, your bearing 140°, and in about 150 metres you have another wood on your left, with a vast open field to your right.
18. Keep ahead and ignore ways off as you leave the wood on your left and proceed between open fields. In 850 metres you cross a dismantled railway bed on **Sparrowhall Bridge**. The railway bed is now the **Ayot Greenway** path.
19. For a shortcut to Welwyn Garden City, drop down to this path and head in an easterly direction to the Garden City. This shortcut reduces the length of the walk by about 2 km, but you miss Brocket Park.
20. Ignoring a track turning left towards some sheds, the main walk continues ahead now on a narrow path, gently downhill, with gorse to the left, and open fields to your right. In 335 metres you drop down a flight of earthen steps to a path T-junction, where you *turn left* , and in 40 metres you reach a road (Waterend Lane), where you *turn right* .
21. In 40 metres, just before a ford in the road, [!] *turn left* onto a footpath signed to Brocket Hall and Lemsford. Keep ahead on this path, initially with the stream (The River Lea) on your right. Ignore all ways off. In 550 metres you come to a path junction. Here follow the sign ahead into **Brocket Park** up a steep bank through light woodland with a tree route footbed. At the top of the bank keep ahead through the light woodland to come out on to a golf course within Brocket Park.
22. Follow a clear waymarked path in the open between links and in 420 metres you pass **Brocket Hall** over to your right and golf club buildings. The recommended route will have you turning right to cross over the access road - market exit - to soon head up and over the Melbourne golf course.
23. If you have difficulty finding the recommended route, or if the two golf courses are particularly busy on tournament days, you might find it easier to follow the surfaced estate exit road in a north north easterly direction for some 700 metres until you come to a lodge building on the edge of the estate, with controlled exit gates. Unfortunately there is no pedestrian exit gate, so you have to scramble through undergrowth to the right of the gates to come out onto a public road, where you turn right and keep ahead. At a road junction bear right and walk through the pretty village of Ayot Green, to cross over the bridge over the A1(M) road - to rejoin the recommended route below.
24. **The golf course route** .
25. Your path having descended to join the estate's surfaced access road, marked "exit", you cross over this road with sections of new post and rail fencing on either side, with post tops painted white. Take the footpath signed *on the right* , which soon swings left through a woodland strip. In 80 metres you emerge from the woodland strip, to follow the right-hand edge of golf course open land, with a hedgerow and fenceline to your right. The path is signed the Lea Valley Walk, which you first joined at Waterend before the ford.



26. In 170 metres you come to a footpath post with a white painted top. [!] Here you turn *sharp left* , almost turning back on yourself, to commence your traverse of the Melbourne golf course. Your initial target is a marker post some 120 metres ahead of you, on a bearing of 35°.
27. In 35 metres you cross a course access path. You then cross a fairway and some 85 metres from the road you come to the marker post. Now keep ahead through trees and in a further 75 metres you come to the next access way, with a wood chip base. Here keep ahead, your direction now 20° and in 50 metres you cross another fairway by a marker post.
28. In 100 metres you come to the next marker post, to then head through trees. In a further 100 metres you pass the Tee to hole 13 on your right-hand side, with a putting green over to your left, as your path swings gently downhill to the right, to then cross a narrow tarmac access way, with a putting green over to your right. Your path now swings to the left, and some 85 metres from the last tarmac access way, and by a marker post, cross a fairway, slightly to your right, and in 70 metres you come to the next marker post.
29. Now follow the path uphill through light woodland as your way swings to the right, your initial direction 50°. In 45 metres at the top of the slope, cross another fairway and in 85 metres you come to the next marker post. Now keep ahead on a gravel drive through light woodland. In 180 metres leave the light woodland to cross the head of a tarmac path, with the Tee to hole 4 over to your right.
30. Keep ahead, soon to pass a Brickwall Cottage on your right, newly renovated (October 2019), with a new post and rail wooden fence surround. You now exit the course through horse blocking measures, to keep ahead on a gravel path (Brickwall Close) with a fence to your left, which soon bends to the right, and in some 80 metres you come out onto Brickhill Close, directly opposite the **Waggoners pub and restaurant** .
31. Turn left on this Close, passing the pub on your right-hand side. In 100 metres, as the Close bends to the left, towards the pretty village of **Ayot Green** keep ahead over some grass, to come out beside the substantial road bridge over the A1(M). Cross over to the far side of this bridge and carefully cross the busy B197 road a little to the left, and by a finger sign post enter **Brock's Wood** through a metal kissing gate (ignoring another kissing gate about 80 metres away to the right).
32. Keep ahead through the wood on a meandering woodland track. In 140 metres you come to a broader woodland track which you join by turning right on to it. You now follow this broad track more or less as straight as an arrow, gently downhill, through **Sherrardspark Wood** , a nature reserve, your direction 125°.
33. Some 900 metres from the start of the Sherrardspark Wood track, having gone straight over Six Ways Junction in the direction of Roundwood Drive, you leave Sherrardspark at its exit, through a car blocking barrier, on to a residential road (Sherrards Park Road) which you cross. Head down the residential road opposite - Roundwood Drive - and in 50 metres as this road swings left, keep ahead on Reddings (road) for 45 metres, to enter a surfaced footpath between close panel fences.
34. In 100 metres you come out onto the **Ayot Greenway** dismantled railway bed, where you *turn left* . Keep ahead along this quiet greenway and in 470 metres you come to a road bridge. *Turn right* up earthen steps to the road above - Digswell Road. Here *turn right* and keep ahead, in 75 metres to cross over the main, busy road roundabout with care, to enter the formal gardens of **Welwyn Garden City** , your direction 200°.
35. Keep ahead through the formal gardens, passing memorials to Louis de Soissons, who designed and town planned the Garden City, and Sir Theodore Chambers, first chairman of the Garden City Council. You come to a road junction with Cote Brasserie on your left, where you *turn left* into Howardsgate. On your left you pass a pub, cafes, and restaurants, and you soon come to the recommended tea stop on your left, **Simmons** which serves delicious cakes.
36. Leaving Simmons, turn left and continue down Howardsgate towards the **Howard Shopping Centre** . Rather bizarrely, you have to enter this shopping centre in order to reach the railway station. In the main entrance foyer of the Centre, go up the escalator to level 1 where you enter **Welwyn Garden City railway station** for trains back to London. Fast trains to Kings Cross usually leave from platform 2.

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