

Walk 1

The Early Village

This circular walk, mainly on footpaths across farmland, is about 2.5 miles and takes about one hour. Parts may be slippery when wet.

It crosses the original parts of the village, from the Neolithic, Bronze, Iron, Roman and Mediaeval periods. Now often perceived as being on the edge of Little Baddow, this is the original village, as shown by archaeological finds, the possible site of a Roman brickworks, the mill, church, earliest manor house and no less than 9 farms, along with a long-lost public house. The walk invites you to use your imagination to traverse places with few signs of their former significance.

Start at the History Centre, parking in the URC car park, or on the roadside opposite the Chapel.

The URC Chapel



Founded in 1708, the Chapel thrived through the 18th and 19th centuries, during which the village was much influenced by Protestant and Puritan families, particularly the Barrington's of Tofts, who gave the land and helped fund the building of the Chapel. It is unusual for a chapel of this period to have its own

churchyard. To the right of the chapel, is the Manse, built at the end of the 18th century as a home for the Chapel minister.



Part of it was also used as a small boarding school. The illustration below shows pupils waiting to go home at the end of term, their luggage set out on the grass in front of the house.



Now turn round to face eastwards and walk towards 'The Forge'.



Formerly known as Herds, this was one of four forges in the village (the other three being in the working centre of the village over on Wickhay Green). Below is a photograph of the forge probably as it was in the 1920s, when the Everett family operated as 'agricultural engineers', repairing farm machinery.



Take the footpath to the left, just before the house.

Follow the foot path over open fields, eventually coming to a cross paths on the slope below Holybred Farm, looking to your right, you have this view south east towards that farm and Holybred Wood.



Turn left and walk down towards the navigation. The historian Jesse Berridge thought this could have been a mediaeval road, leading down to Jerry's Island from Holybred Farm and the upper part of the village...

Reaching a junction of paths, continue north towards the navigation.

Looking to your left, you see St Mary's Church across the fields.



You are now looking across the centre of the original village – this area was the first to be cleared from virgin forest in the Neolithic

period. It was inhabited through the Bronze, Iron and Roman periods, and in the mediaeval period it was the highly productive. Between the spot on which you are now standing, across to Hammonds, there were nine farms, making the most of the fertile alluvial soils of this part of the village.

Although the actual site is unknown, this area was significant in the Bronze Age, as shown by the discovery the Little Baddow Diadem (now in the Chelmsford Museum), a strip of gold to be worn as a headband or around the neck, a sign of wealth in the area during the earliest part of the Bronze Age, known as the Chalcolithic, or 'Copper Age'.

But now, walk on and follow the path to the left and you arrive at...
Jerry's Island



Hardly an island now, but you can imagine it would have been so if the ditch to your right had been wider.

But why 'Jerry's Island'? There is nothing here today, but open grazing and watery parts with rushes. However, in the 1246, there was a farm here, sold by Lodewicus Gerard de Vil (Jerry!), and – according to Berridge – possibly also a ford, leading over to Boreham. If that is so, this was a significant part of the village. Now, on reaching the navigation, turn left to walk upstream.



Look across towards Boreham. In Neolithic times, where you now see a reservoir, there was a woodhenge. In use at the same time as Stonehenge, it would have been a religious and social centre for the area in the earliest period of settlement, as the original woodland was cleared and farms established across the valley of the Chelmer.

Eventually, you come to a signpost for a footpath off to the left, leading up to the Church. But, before turning, just go forward onto the small bridge where Sandon Brook flows into the Navigation.





Here, it is possible that there was a wharf in Roman times, transporting the wares of the brick factory (or which more later) for shipping down the river.

Now walk up towards St Mary's. You are now crossing an important focus of village life.



Somewhere to the left of your path there was a Roman villa, bricks from which were eventually used in the construction of St Marys. How significant this was, we do not know, but it was probably owned by a local Romano-British landowner, rather than soldier from the Roman military occupation.

The path also crosses the village centre in the Iron age, as shown in a geophysical survey of the area. Numerous crop marks show buildings across the centre of this field.

Looking over to your right, you can just see Mill House through the trees.



In the late 19th century, it would have looked like this...



There has been a mill on this site since Domesday.
You now arrive at St Mary's Church...

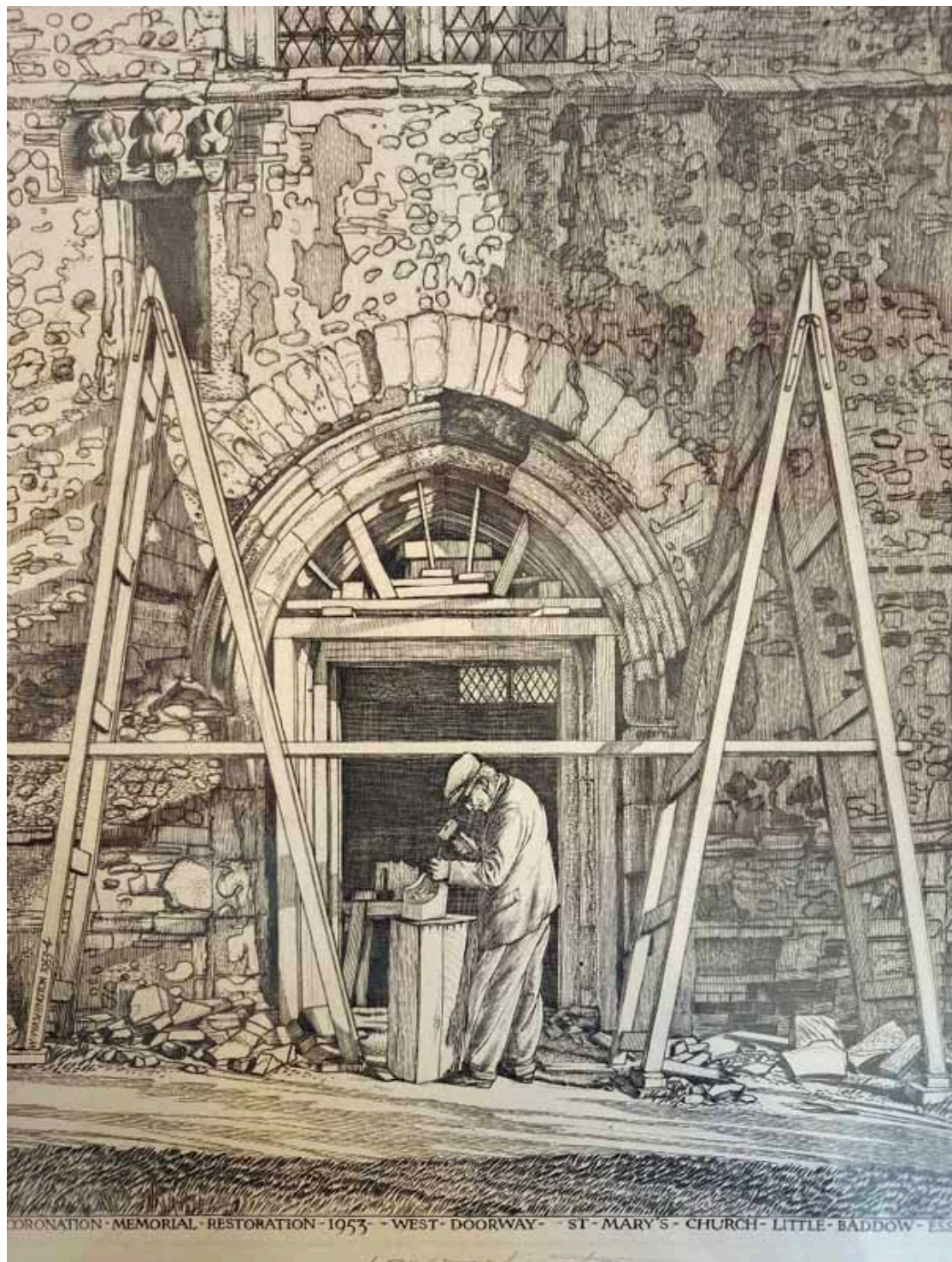


Possibly of Saxon origin, but now mainly from the Norman period and extended in the 14th century, St Mary's marked the centre of the parish of Little Baddow.

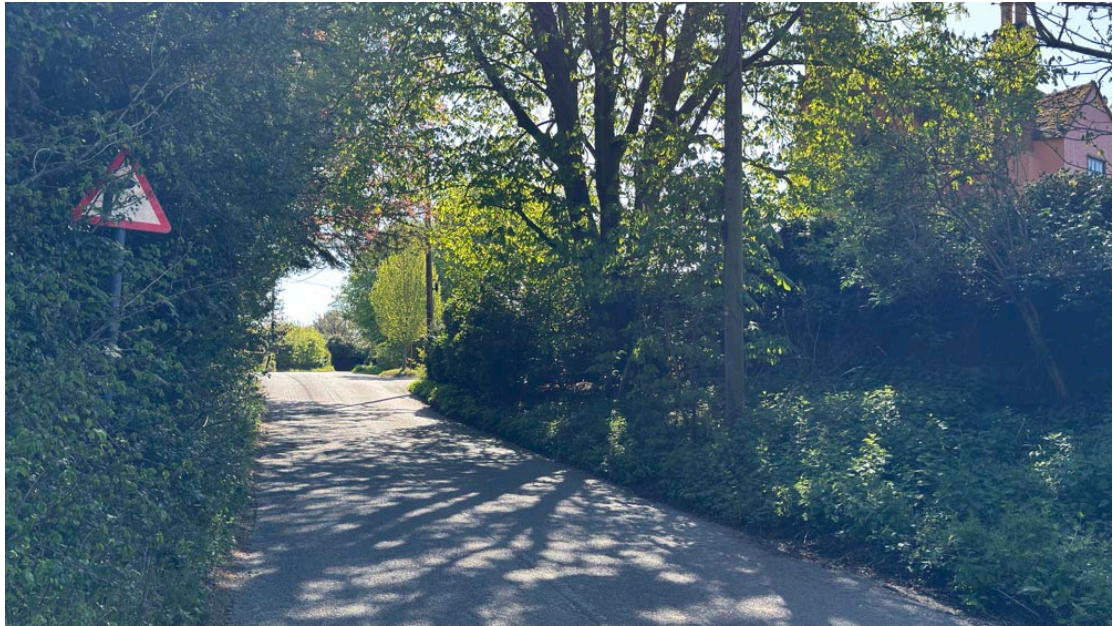
Diverting off your path, take a look at the door in the north wall. Either Norman or Saxon in origin, it displays a fine set of Roman tiles, as does the rest of the wall.



As you return to the path, around the west end of the church, take a look the west door, restored in celebration of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 as shown in this etching by William Washington.



At the end of the footpath, go down the steps and turn left and up the road.



This is the track leading down towards the river between the church and the Little Baddow Hall, the original manor house. The wall of the house has a fireplace on the outside, showing that the wing nearest the church has been demolished. The original track would therefore have been far narrower than present road.



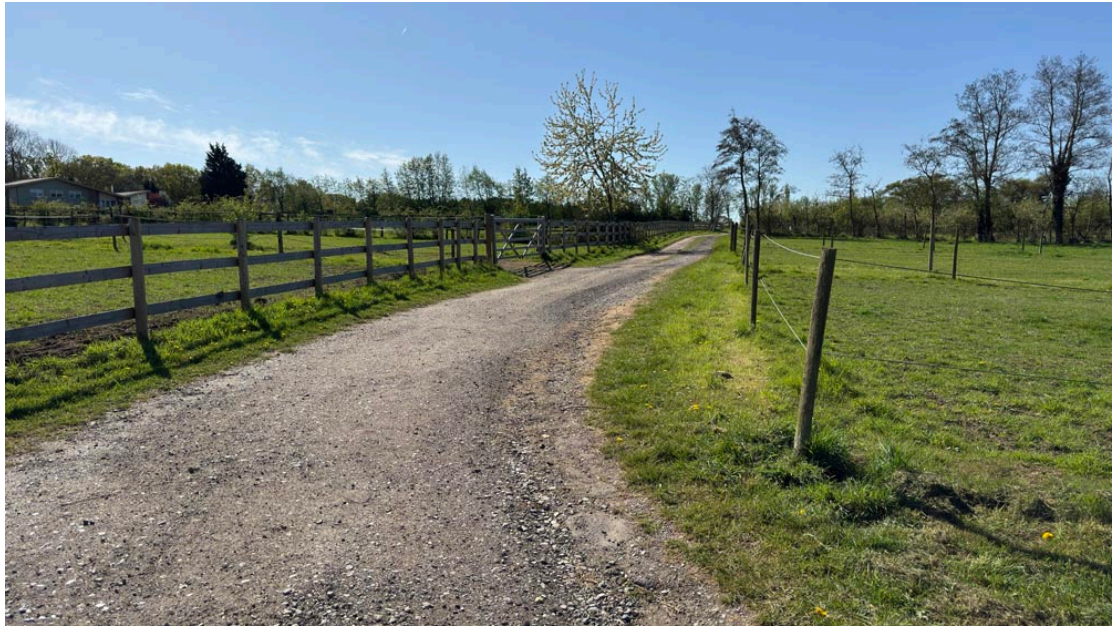
As you come up to the south entrance to St Mary's, turn right to pass in front of Little Baddow Hall.



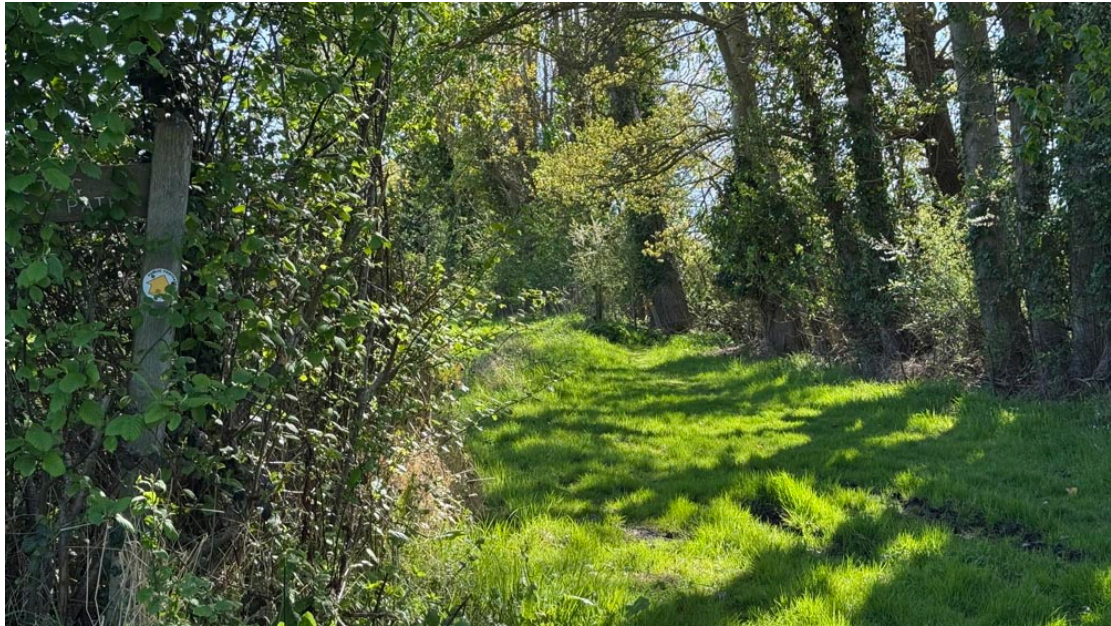
Follow the path, towards the farm. To your right is a small pond, mainly hidden behind trees. Until the early years of the 20th century, when it was still operating as a dairy farm, this is where the cows would have been brought to be washed before being milked.



Beyond the pond, still on your right are the barn, cold-store and other buildings of Little Baddow Hall Fruit Farm. Follow the footpath as it turns to the left by the store, and then swings right. Follow it between paddocks.



As you walk along this stretch of track, look to your right, down towards a row of trees and Sandon Brook. This is the possible site of a Roman brick factory, explaining why so many bricks were still around and incorporated in the building of St Mary's, five hundred years after the Roman's left.



As you approach a row of trees, turn left and right...



...and follow the path straight over an open field. To your right, back in the 18th century, would have been one of the many lost farms of Little Baddow – Harwoods – and beyond it Belmers, another farm now surviving as the house called Water Hall, but originally known as Priestlands. In the distance, is Hammonds Farm, and to the right Phillows and Whitwells – farms that we still have on the map, but there were three other farms originally visible from here: Apsfields, Rees and Bubbs. With 8 farms, and most of the population working the land, you are looking over what would have been the busiest part of the village in Mediaeval times.



But, ignoring the long-gone agricultural labourers, head straight on over the field, following the partly-marked footpath, towards the centre of a wooded area. You have been following a path taken by generations of clergymen and are about to enter the grounds of the Old Vicarage.



Prepared for a report in 1810, this sketch shows the original vicarage, just a short walk over the fields from the church. Two hundred years earlier, it was described as having a little stable, a barn, two orchards and a garden plat. It features in Jesse Berridge's novels, Bettina and Goddess's Grove. No longer used by the clergy, it was used by farm labourers until the 19th century, when it fell into ruin and eventually vanished.



Follow the path and you will be walking through the vicarage property towards the road.



Now turn left...



To your right, as you walk up the road, you look over open grazing land towards the property of Graces. Originally farmed by freemen in Saxon times, it was taken over by four Norman French farmers following the Conquest.

Follow the road as it turns left. Now known as Chapel Lane, this was originally called 'The Little Baddow Endway', and you are heading north back into the centre of the village.

Within a few minutes you reach what was once The Rose and Crown pub, the physical centre of the village of Little Baddow, featuring in Jesse Berridge's novels Goddess's Grove and Tudor Rose.



And so you return to the History Centre.

