



The

Discover Chatteris Circular Walk

be a *Fens Adventurer!*



www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Early Chatteris

As a large island with a variety of soils and near to access routes through the surrounding fenland, Chatteris was well suited to early settlement. The only extant Neolithic earthworks in Cambridgeshire are found here, at Horseley Fen. There is much archaeological evidence, especially funerary, from the Bronze and Iron Ages on the island, with 15 Bronze Age barrows in the parish of Chatteris and at Langwood Fen a 10 hectare Iron Age settlement. Pottery from throughout the period of Roman occupation to the 4th-century AD shows that the island continued to be populated during the Roman period. Numerous cropmarks on the island appear to indicate a division of land into fields, paddocks and enclosures, presumably for stock-control.

A nunnery was founded in Chatteris between 1006-1016, one of only eight nunneries in England recorded in the Domesday Book. It remained a small and relatively poor foundation as it did not have any royal patronage. When it was dissolved in 1538 there were only eleven nuns in residence. Nothing now remains of the nunnery buildings; some of the cloisters survived as part of a mansion known as Park House. This was demolished in 1847 and the site has now completely vanished beneath streets and housing, although the "Park Streets" of Chatteris mark the boundary of its walls and several buildings contain stone originating from the nunnery.



A Victorian town

The walk begins in the centre of the town at Market Hill. From 1834 to the beginning of the 20th century there was an important corn market here. The Church of St Peter and St Paul is on the site of a 12th century church, although the earliest part of the building you see today, the tower, dates from the 14th century. The church was extensively restored in 1910.



One curious feature is the Chatteris Labyrinth. This comprises a series of burial vaults on the southern edge of the churchyard built by the Reverend Gathercole in the late 19th century. The story is that Gathercole was opposed to Non-Conformity in all its forms and when the churchyard was closed and a civic cemetery opened in New Road in 1850 for the purposes of burial of all Christian faiths he took offence and built a series of brick tombs for his family and other worthies.

Unfortunately little survives of these tombs apart from a facade; it appears that the adjacent car park was built over the actual tombs themselves.

Victorian Chatteris grew as the surrounding countryside was converted from pasture to arable taking advantage of improvements in agricultural technology in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1851 the town was said to be 'considerable', to be 'lighted with gas', and to contain 'some handsome houses and good shops'. There were at that time 15 inns and 43 beerhouses to serve a population of about 5,000.

Chatteris has suffered from major fires – in 1310, 1706 and 1864 – which destroyed most of the town's medieval and early-modern buildings. 117 of the town's listed buildings are from the nineteenth century, a considerable number.

The railway comes to Chatteris

Walk along Park Street then Huntingdon Road to a wide grassy driveway leading south. This is the bed of the old St Ives to March branch of the Great Northern and Great Eastern Railway, which was opened in 1848 but closed to passengers in 1967. To the north of this point, the track bed was used in the 1980s as the basis of the A141 Chatteris bypass linking through to the market town of March. The track bed to the south is now dedicated as a public bridleway. It is possible to walk, cycle or ride a horse all the way to Somersham, a total distance of 5.5 miles.

Chatteris today

Chatteris is a thriving Fenland town with many local shops and businesses. The town still celebrates its rich history with an annual History Festival and is the place to be at Christmas for the famous and splendid Chatteris Christmas Lights.



Fenland wildlife

After following the bridleway for 1.5 miles, with fine views over the surrounding productive agricultural land, the circular walk runs eastwards along Toll Drove and then along Dean Drove. These green lanes and the network of drains provide an important refuge for wildlife.

The drainage network criss-crossing the fens is a unique habitat for a range of insects, mammals and birds. The Fens are a national stronghold for Water Vole. Otters are also starting to make a comeback due to more sensitive management of the ditch network

The farmland provides home to a variety of birds nesting in the trees and hedgerow

(Yellowhammer, Dunnock, Blackbirds) and on the ground (Skylarks, Yellow Wagtails and Reed Buntings). The poppies, mayweeds, thistles and grasses growing along the field margins support a variety of insects, which in turn provide food for bats and birds.



Follow the Countryside Code – why?

Because the countryside is a place to be enjoyed by all; do protect wildlife, plants and trees, don't leave rubbish behind and don't disturb others with unnecessary noise.

Because the countryside is a place of work; do keep to paths and use stiles and gates to cross boundaries; don't let your dogs disturb stock and don't interfere with crops or machines.



The Cambridgeshire countryside is there to be enjoyed by *everyone*. This route follows farm tracks and grassy field edge paths. The surface is uneven.

The Public Rights of Way and Access Team is endeavouring to replace stiles with gates where a barrier is necessary. More information about other walks is available on the Cambridgeshire County Council website at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countrysideandrights and at www.visitcambridge.org

Come and enjoy it!



This project is supported by the Fens Adventurers Local Action Group (LAG) who deliver the Rural Development Programme England in Cambridgeshire and West Norfolk through the Leader approach. The LAG is managed by Cambridgeshire County Council & Cambridgeshire ACRE and supported by EEDA, Defra, Local Authorities and the EU's European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe Investing in Rural Areas.

Web Link: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index_en.htm

This leaflet is one of a series produced by Cambridgeshire County Council to encourage the use and enjoyment of some of the many public rights of way in Cambridgeshire. We hope you have enjoyed the walks and would appreciate any comments you may have.

Public Rights of Way and Access, Box CC1305, Cambridgeshire County Council, Castle Court, Castle Hill, Cambridge CB3 0AP
Tel 0345 045 5212

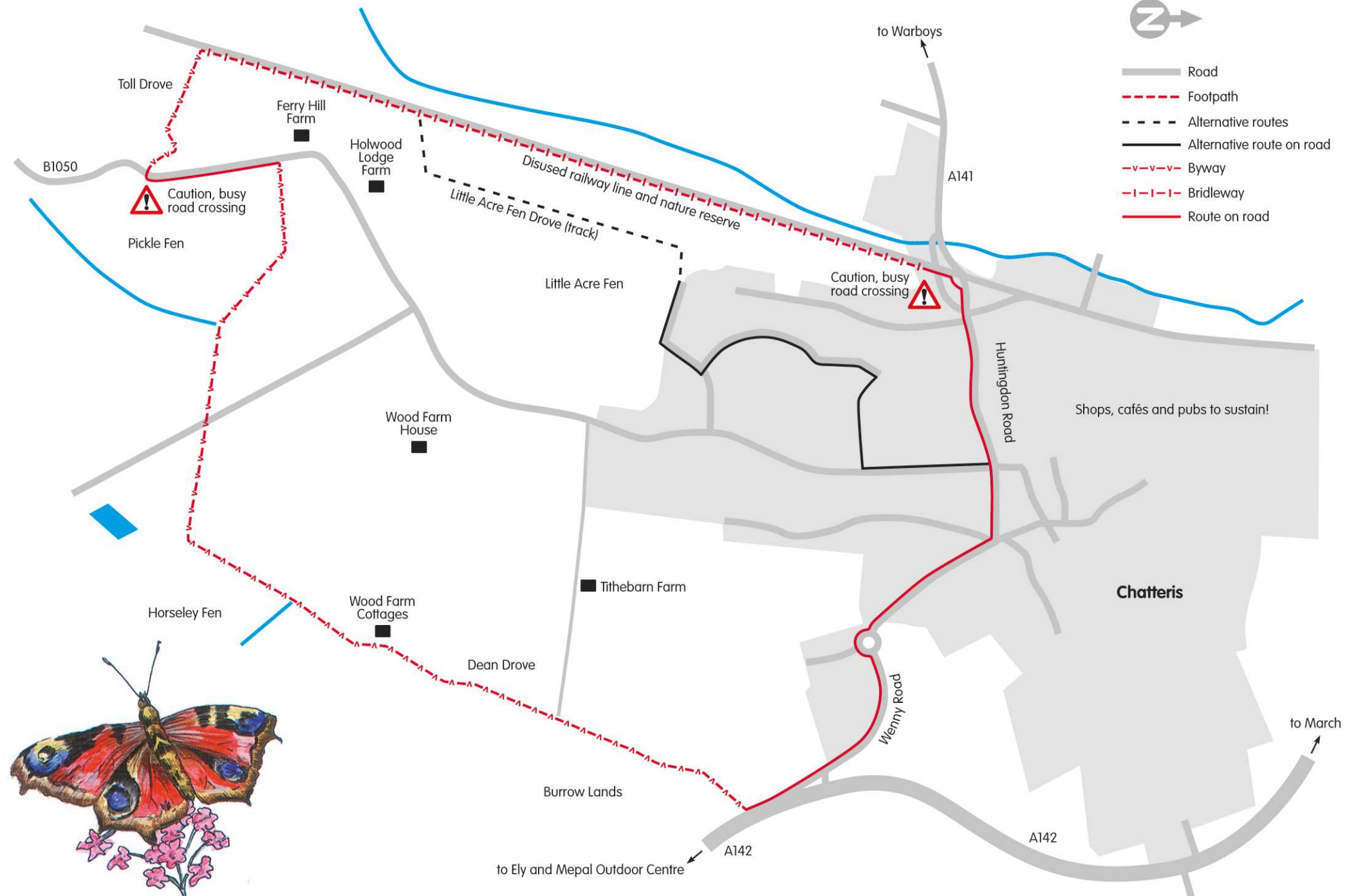
www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countrysideandrights

www.visitcambridge.org

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- Road
- Footpath
- Alternative routes
- Alternative route on road
- Byway
- Bridleway
- Route on road



Discover Chatteris Circular Walk

Circular route **5 miles**
Allow approximately **2.5 hours**

Following public bridleways, byways and country roads the Chatteris Circular Walk takes you through the attractive market town of Chatteris and out into the surrounding Fenland countryside.

Chatteris is one of a number of settlements sitting on a long isle of clay and loam rising out of the fen. The Fens were very wet, often flooding and the islands provided safe places to start settlements and defend them. The Domesday Book (1086) records a settlement here called Cetriz, deriving from the Anglo-Saxon Caeteric – Ceto meaning a wood.

The town and countryside has a long history with recent archaeological work uncovering evidence of settlement back to Neolithic times. This walk will introduce you to the abundance of Victorian architecture in Chatteris, as well as taking you out along the old railway line and Fen droves into the highly productive Fenland countryside.



Further information

Take care when walking along roads.

Footwear: Much of the route follows grass droves which can be muddy in winter. Strong waterproof footwear is recommended.

Maps: The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Sheets 227 and 228.

Waymarking: Where paths leave the road there are directional fingerposts showing the way. At other locations you may find waymark discs.

Refreshments: Chatteris has a number of shops, cafes and public houses at which you can buy provisions for your walk.

www.chatterismuseum.org.uk

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countrysideandrights

www.visitcambridge.org

How to get there

By bus Numerous bus services run to Chatteris Monday to Saturday, with only a limited service on Sunday.

Cambridgeshire County Council Passenger Transport Inquiries 0345 045 0675

By train Nearest station is March
National Rail Inquiries 08457 484950

By road The A141 west of Ely or south from March, the B1096 east from Ramsey

