



Essex Extras: Steeple Bumpstead

Start and finish: Steeple Bumpstead, outside the pottery on Church Street (TL 679410)

Distance: 5 miles (8 km)

Walking time: 2½ hours

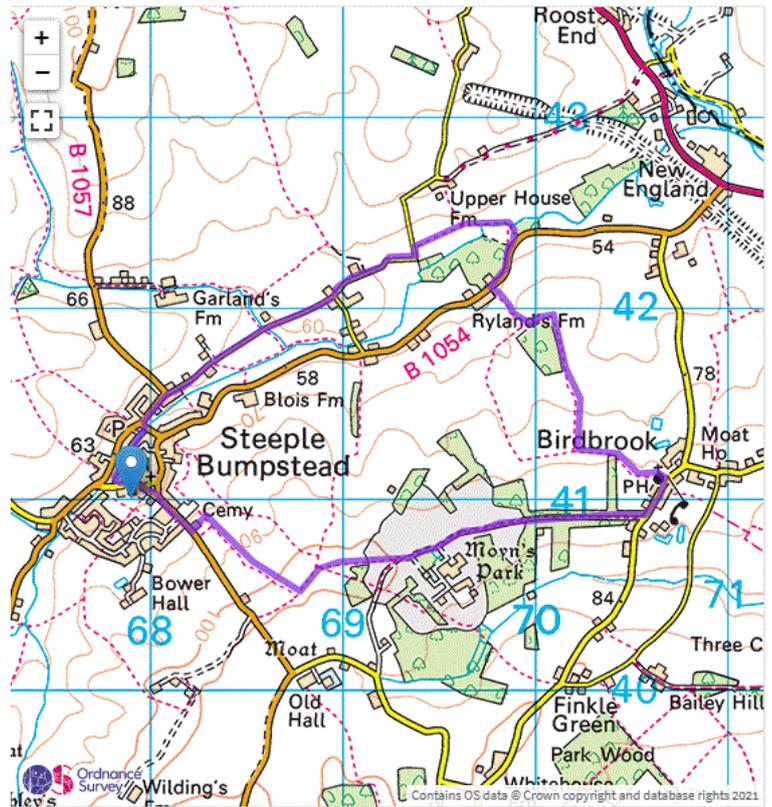
Maps: OS Explorer 210, Landranger 154

Transport: bus from Haverhill or Saffron Walden (not Sundays)

Refreshments: the [Red Lion](#) and [Fox & Hounds](#) in Steeple Bumpstead, and the [Plough](#) in Birdbrook

This walk takes you past the Grade 1-listed mansion at Moyn's Park and through its attractive park to the quiet hamlet of Birdbrook.

There's much to see in Steeple Bumpstead too, where courageous nurse Edith Cavell was first employed (look for a plaque in the church), and a spectacular ford at the top of Church Street.



With the pottery on your right, walk to and admire the half-timbered **Moot Hall**. Built in 1592, it was a school in the 1830s when the lord of Moyn's Park attempted to install an unpopular head teacher. The villagers occupied the school, and won.

Continue on the Finchingfield road. Just past the last house in the village – about 300m from the Moot Hall – turn left on a footbridge, then right at the next path junction. At the top you meet a footbridge and plank bridge combination; cross both, keeping to the left side of a field, to a large kissing gate. From the gate, you cross a paddock half left to another similar gate, from where you continue on a broad grass path. This meets a drive: on one side, you have the elegant expanse of **Moyn's Park** (with Scots pines a perhaps surprising feature), and soon on the other, the eponymous Elizabethan mansion.

This grade-one listed house was built in the late 16th century and incorporates part of a courtyard house of about 1500. Built for the Gent family, the name comes from the Le Moyne family, Normans who had owned much land in the area. The site has been a stud farm – a reminder that Newmarket is not too far away – since 1955; James Bond author Ian Fleming stayed there shortly after. Its appearance might be familiar to Hammer film devotees as it was one of their most popular locations.



Stay on the drive through the park, ignoring a couple of branches to the right. Just beyond the estate gates you come to a minor road, where you turn left through the tiny village of **Birdbrook**. Enjoy your amble through this quiet little place, which manages to keep hold of its pub the Plough, and enter St Augustine's churchyard by the pretty little thatched Yew Tree Cottage.

The impeccably-kept St Augustine's is one of the oldest churches in the county, the north wall of the chancel surviving from the church's foundation in 1050. But there are some welcome modern additions too – look out for a stained-glass window of 1966 celebrating a churchwarden's life, and richly-carved choir stalls and pews from 1969.



Continue to the kissing gate at the end of the cemetery. Cross the field half-right to a marker (or follow the headland round to it), where you turn left with a ditch on your right. At a gap, turn right at another marker, keeping to the right side of a field. Soon you come to **Moyn's wood**: turn right through a gap, so that you have the wood on your left, following it round a left-hand bend to a marker where you turn right. This brings you to the B1054, which links Saffron Walden to the Stour Valley. It could be followed left 1½ miles back to the start, but it's one of the busier roads in the north of the county, and there is a much quieter alternative.

For this, turn right, keeping to the field headland just above the road. In just over 200m, where the headland descends, cross the road and take the unsignposted path in a gap. You will soon find a marker indicating the way, with conifers on your right, to a footbridge and a plank bridge, both crossed. (*Warning – once in high summer I found this path so overgrown even I could not find the footbridge!*) Continue on the left edge of a field, ignoring a path up to the farm but instead crossing a field to a plank bridge and the next field half-left to a minor road. Turn left and follow it for the mile into Steeple Bumpstead, ignoring the left turn at **Maltings Cottages**. Just before here, you will have passed a little tree-shrouded cemetery of vintage British cars – they may be the only vehicles you see on this quiet lane. It was not always so quiet: in a field on your left near the village in 1527, a local man was burned at the stake for the crime of reading the New Testament.

Entering Steeple Bumpstead, look out for the substantial Claywall Bridge on your left. Don't cross it, but take the path above the Bumpstead Brook. A Stour tributary, it can be devastating in flood, most recently inundating many houses in June 2007. Turn left over a footbridge, left pass cottages, and you are soon back at the start point.