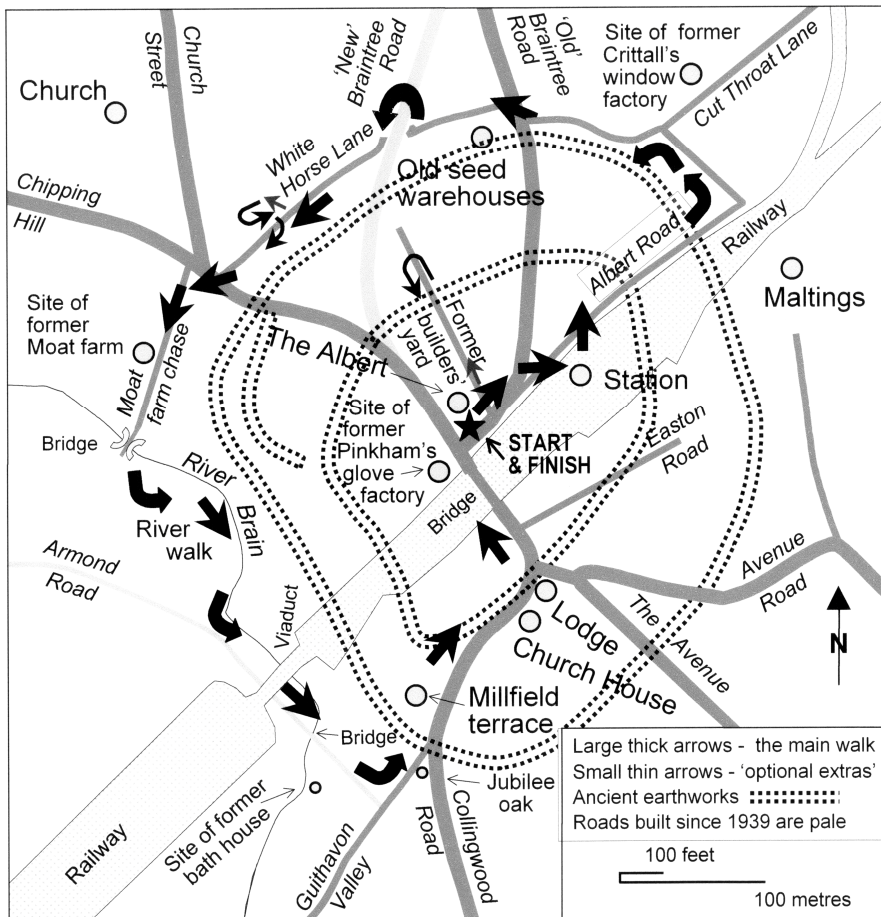


WALK 1

ROUND THE ANCIENT EARTHWORKS



The route of walk 1. The circular earthworks enclose about 25 acres (10 hectares). There were two rings, the inner one higher, so today there is a 'dome' effect. This originated as an Iron Age 'hill fort' probably strengthened by the Saxons in 913 AD. For centuries afterwards the main Witham manor had its headquarters here. The walk starts in the centre, goes down to the edge, and then round about two thirds of the outside anti-clockwise (looking out for the old embankment), and back to the centre again. Other interesting features include the late Victorian and Edwardian buildings of the 'Temples Estate' of over 100 houses, started 1882.

The distance is rather less than a mile ($1\frac{1}{3}$ km). Street numbers are given in brackets in the text (but not marked on the map). Landmarks may of course change or even disappear as time goes by. Pages 16 to 20 of the colour section show examples of bricks, railings, street furniture etc.

Start on the pavement at the edge of the Albert car park, opposite the railway.

The **Albert** and the **Grange** (hidden behind) – on site where Knights Templars and Hospitallers had chapel and farm buildings till 1500s. Albert a pub since 1842 – once had ship's figurehead of African chief outside (1880-1990s), brought from London by innkeeper George Best (some thought it insulted Prince Albert).

Right of Albert car park, unexplained **rise** up to adjoining taxi parking place. **Long yard** visible – workshops and warehouses. Belonged to Joseph Smith and Son, prolific builders 1882-1914 (see pages 86-88). They were 'builders, contractors, and brick manufacturers' with a 'steam joinery works & sawing & planing mills'. Had 40-foot brick chimney (12 metres) Old sawing shed now the carpet warehouse on far left (optional trip there and back). **Tiny building** on road side (1A) – taxis – built 1911 as haulage office. Then Employment Exchange in 1920s (manager Frank Cundy also taught typing). Then George Thompson, 'coal and coke merchant, cartage contractor, firewood, logs, buyer and seller of old Tudor tiles and bricks'.

Cross both Braintree Road and Albert Road to reach railings by railway, i.e. passing snack bar, formerly a bus shelter, on your left.

Deep **cutting** dug by hand through earthworks for railway in 1843 (see pages 62-65). **Station** built 1906 after old one crushed by fatal crash of Cromer express (1905). Before, main entrance was on far side, and smaller one here. New 1906 station well built – lengthy specifications, e.g. 'bull nosed' bricks, brass fittings etc. Ironwork made by Crittall's at Braintree (they had to build a new plant specially) – firm's name visible under middle of three windows (and elsewhere in station) See colour pages 16 and 17.

Car park across rails was coal yard. Various industries came to that area 1880s onwards, including Cooper Taber (seeds) – from 1956 to about 1990 they had a prize-winning glass building by Chamberlin, Powell and Bon,



The Temperance Hotel (9 Albert Road) in the 1890s. Its builder and first owner was Robert Moore (from the same family that founded a well-known local carriers' business in 1815 – it continued as a 20th century bus company). He was a member of Witham's 'Temperance Ark', founded in 1875 to campaign for total abstinence from alcohol. To start with, he also had an undertakers' business here. The boy on the horse is his son Robert Gladstone Moore. Note the decorated wooden gable end, and the moulded bricks between the upper and lower windows.

later the architects of the Barbican in London. Only industry remaining now is the **maltings** – taken over by Scottish company Hugh Baird, 1920s, much rebuilt since 1961.

Continue on down the hill, crossing to the left hand side sometime before the pavement runs out.

Opposite the station – in 1848 were stables, forges, workshops etc for building Maldon and Braintree railways. **House (4)** where William and Rebecca Pinkham first made gloves c 1904-05 (see colour page 12). **Fern Cottages (5-8)**, built 1887 as part of new 'Temples estate', in which displays of dates, names and moulded bricks and chimneys were popular. Former **Temperance Hotel (9)** with large balcony, built 1883. **Pair of tall semi-detached houses (13-14)**, the Pinkhams' second glove-making place (1905-12) – family lived in far one, about ten girls worked in other – connected by internal door.

Keep left at bottom – **edge of earthworks** is on your left – shown by raised houses – note level of front doors above road. Look at (but don't follow) **Cut Throat Lane** on right – once a main road to Rivenhall. Disappointingly for some, it's a corruption of 'Cut Athwart Lane' – lane cut across a field – there are others elsewhere in Essex. Has yellow **brick wall** – only surviving relic of vast **Crittall's** metal window factory – transformed Witham 1920 – war work in Second World War – several bombings (see pages 110-112, 136, and colour page 13). Demolished 1992, now site of supermarket (designed to look rather like Crittall's – long horizontal windows). In **Albert Road**, houses high up on old earthworks – bank dug into for car parking.



Your view as you approach the end of Albert Road. In the house at the far end of the row on the left (23), Edgar Sainty's 'wireless doctor' business started in the 1920s. This row of houses and the big hedge are well above the level of the road. This is because they are on top of the old earthworks, which were started in the Iron Age and enlarged in 913 AD. The white building behind the right-hand end of the hedge is mostly along the bottom of the embankment. It used to be one of Cullens' seed warehouses.

Staggered cross-roads. Narrow **Braintree Road** to your left – interesting 1880s houses – incredibly this road carried all traffic to and from Braintree until 1970. Going across into **White Horse Lane** (formerly called Hill Lane because of earthwork), you go to the right of an attractive tall **weatherboarded building** – former seed warehouse. Built 1890s for Thomas Cullen – brick extension added 1908. Now home of popular Witham Technology Centre. The drive-in at far end of it is up steep slope because of old earthworks. Archaeological excavation here in 1970 (when 'new' Braintree Road was built) rather inconclusive.

At the dead end, take path sloping up to right and cross the busy road carefully.

From the road, see the pleasantly **'wild' area**. This and car park on land formerly bought by parish officers in 1600s, with money left by Dame Katherine Barnardiston. Rent paid for bread for the poor every Sunday till early 1900s. Once a gravel pit for road mending. Had playground with swings in 1900. Now known as **Bell field** (though name originally further east). Probably not for making bells – Witham's church bells all made in other towns. Considered for Council houses in 1919 – Government commissioner said 'too far beyond the town and shopping centres'.

To left of the field, take path between metal railings, leading down into the rest of White Horse Lane.

Immediately on right, **concrete base in corner** was site of Hurrell and Beardwell's motor engineering and omnibus business's first site (1920). **New houses** (2004) on right – replaced offices, earlier busy builders' yard (1914–74), first John Dean's, then Adams and Mortimer's, whose stock, auctioned in 1974 (391 lots), included '100 squints and splays', 'complete contents of paint shop', '2 planks of African pear', and sacks and sacks of nails. On **left** side of road, **earthworks** again, this time in back gardens of bungalows. All formerly the Cullens' garden, between their seed warehouse and their house.

Just past new cul-de-sac called 'Bellfield Close', a red brick **house**, 1928, inscribed '**Stefre**' between the top windows. Previously site of butcher's slaughterhouses, with pig styes, 'sticking pound', bullock pound, stables, hay loft, bone shed and chicken house. Built by Frederick Fuller (named after Stella and Fred) with Council subsidy. Electricity just arriving then – specifications asked for either nine gas points or sixteen electric points. It is said that wooden panelling inside the house was damaged by machine-gun fire from plane during Second World War.

Black weatherboarded **office building** – optional trip round it anti-clockwise, past its door into long car park – has stone on its left wall with the initials of John Coote, 19th century resident of 4 Church Street whose back door you can see.

Back in White Horse Lane, continue to the White Horse, then cross over the main Chipping Hill road and down Moat Farm Chase, nearly opposite you (walk 2 crosses here).

House at bottom on left uses name **Moat farm** – in fact was outbuildings – farmhouse was on right (built 1500s, demolished 1950s). Medieval house here sometimes called 'the Moot' – perhaps place for Saxon 'moot' or meeting – these held in a banked square – perhaps where there was a square pond near the river in the 1800s ?

Brick **bridge** (built 1700s) once had a ford alongside on left – both used for carts and animals crossing to meadows – brick barrier narrowing the bridge is quite new.

At the other side of the bridge, turn left along the path or by the river towards the viaduct (after which you'll turn left up the road).

The **River Walk** follows the river Brain nearly two miles through the town – established by Witham Urban District Council early 1970s. **Meadow** between path and river – previously, since Domesday (1086) and before, belonged to Powershall, over a mile away – people came from there to grow hay and graze animals. Given to Council 1937 as memorial to Philip Hutley, farmer at Powershall – known at first as ‘Hutley Memorial Recreation Ground’. The **earthworks** on left now on other side of river in gardens, partly natural. Through **railway viaduct** 30 or 40 feet (10 metres) high – built 1843, blocking view between Chipping Hill and rest of the town.

Going over river and up Armond Road, looking to right, area of **grass and bushes** about 30 yards away was place used for working and washing skins and cloth in medieval times, with house called ‘the Watering’ in early 1500s. Then at end of 1700s was a small bath house and cold water pool – special path from the mansion at the Grove. More recently, several cottages by river, picturesque but damp and crowded, demolished 1930s in Council slum clearance programme (see page 124-25).



The Jubilee Oak in the early 1900s, and part of Millfield Terrace, built 1827-1858 by the Crump family of Freebournes farm. At first there were no roads here – the houses stood on their own. A ‘sweet briar hedge’ grew along the front and the field produced ‘very fine crops of corn’. They were quite good dwellings – the stationmaster lived in one – but too early to have drains or running water.

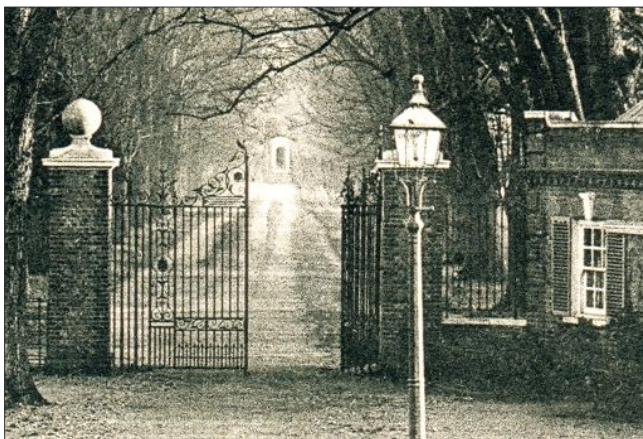
At T-junction turn left up the hill; you are now in Guithavon Valley.

Now climbing outer **earthworks**. **Jubilee Oak** – on traffic island on right – ‘moss cupped oak’ planted 1887 – Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee. Suffered unauthorised ‘mutilation’ by electricity workers in 1935 – looked like lamp post for a time. Small plaque on ground by it for Queen Elizabeth’s Golden Jubilee, 2002. Continue uphill into main **Collingwood Road**, built 1869, was fields till early 1900s, then large houses came. ‘The most fashionable road in the place’ in 1919 according to postcard sent by a soldier to his mother.

On left, up the hill, **Millfield Terrace** (2-8, 57-67) – white brick – some dated, e.g. 57-59, the earliest two, with ogee arches (S shaped) over the windows, have ‘I C 1827’ for Iohannes (John) Crump. At 59 from 1880s to 1930s was dressmaker Elizabeth Smith with ‘Miss Smith, Robes’ on brass plate. Two newer houses inserted 1990s.

As you go on, look at buildings across Collingwood road, right to left. Red brick **bungalow** (46) with wooden fence – built 1920 as ‘Nurse’s bungalow’ (see page 126) – innumerable Witham babies born here – intended as War memorial, but sadly plaque by door recording this now hidden by bushes. To its left, **Warwick House** (48), tall, original cast iron railings (see colour page 19). Built 1910 for William Heddle, bishop of the Peculiar People. His son had shop here for credit drapery business till 1970s – men known as ‘johnny fortnights’ collected payments at your door. Two **newer houses** (48A-50) on site of former **YMCA hut**, built 1915 as social centre for soldiers billeted in Witham for training. **Church House**, built 1909 as a meeting hall – funded by anonymous donation (now known to be from Hester Holt) – designed by well-known Chelmsford architects Chancellor and Son. All these buildings have steep banks behind them from the earthworks.

Still looking to the other side of the road, **junction** with long straight **Avenue** marks edge of inner earthwork – gradient at this end formerly one in two – reduced in 1960 to one in twenty – old slope survives in pavements. **Lodge**, one **gatepost**, and small piece of **railing** between them, survive from when Avenue was in grounds of mansion at the Grove – people could walk here if they behaved. Burton family lived in lodge early 1900s – six red-headed children – bedrooms in attic reached by fold-down ladder in living room. House-building started 1920s and magnificent lime trees cut down. One of earliest houses was ‘**North Corner**’ (45) – white – down between the two roads – said to be first Witham house with Crittall’s metal windows.



The top of the Avenue. The top picture is from the 1890s; the porch of the Grove is at the far end, and Avenue Road on the left. The other pictures show (bottom left) part of the same view in about 1903, with the lodge, gateposts and ornate iron gates which were added in 1898 (the architect, George Sherrin, was designer of Spitalfields market in London), and (bottom right) one of the gates in 2004, now at Great Ruffins, Great Totham – (moved there in the early 1920s when houses started to be built in the Avenue).

Still looking over to the other side, **Avenue Road** – branching off to left of the Avenue – for centuries the only road between Newland Street and Chipping Hill. Edwardian wall **letter-box**. **Pair of houses (62-64)** at top on left dating from 1884 (then part of new ‘Temples estate’ like others in Avenue Road, some very imposing). Earlier the site of first (tiny) Church School, built 1813. **Black brick wall** further left – former site of parish pound for stray animals (till 1880s). Left again, past Easton Road, **Slythe’s** monumental masons – one of oldest Witham businesses still working. James Slythe came to town about 1840 – his son moved to this site early 1860, had the two white houses built 1862. Last of the family died in c 2000. **Railway station** entrance originally on this side. After it moved to the other side in 1906, the third James Slythe was too impatient to go across by road – used to scramble down the bank and across the rails – also complained about the soot from the steam trains.



The cattle market in 1931, with the Christmas prize bull from Tolleshunt Darcy. He weighed more than half a ton (nearly 600 kg), and butcher Frederick Fuller of Church Street paid £60 for him (over £3,000 at today's values). Church House is behind. In spite of the railings, there were occasional exciting escapes into the road by bullocks. Now the site of the Labour Hall.



Cissie West at her shop, the Cabin, which formerly stood by the railway bridge. Before she came it was part of the office for the cattle market, and was used as a temporary mortuary after the Cromer express rail disaster of 1905. Probably taken in the 1930s; a celebration seems to be in progress, to judge from the flags.

Back on your own side of the road, **Labour Hall**, opened 1962, seriously damaged by fire June 2005. The site was formerly the cattle market. Just past it was the market office, of which part became a shop ('The Cabin') in 1930s, replaced 1990 by **red brick office building**. Graffiti on fence beyond (illustrated). Continuing across **railway bridge** (widened 1960), on left, **Templemead flats** (1990s) – on the site of old **glove factory** which was built for William Pinkham in 1912 (replacing the Albert Road house seen earlier), extended 1948, closed 1961 (see page 98). Then, for a time, Guys Mechanical Engineers – one of first companies to move from London in 1960s. The walk ends here, back at the **Albert**.

Historic graffiti from the 1990 campaign against the community charge or 'poll tax'. It is on the wooden fence behind the red brick office building (between that building and the railway bridge). Similar inscriptions can be seen in the car park behind the Newlands precinct. The original 'Peasants' Revolt' against the poll tax was in 1381.

