

How to find us

St Stephen's Church is at the top of Church Lane, Great Wigborough, CO57RL. There's a free car park on the right, just before the church. If open, don't forget to look inside the church which has its own Young Explorer's Guide and guidebook. There's also an excellent 360 degree tour of the church available on the church website, including views from the top of the tower. For further information visit: www.ststephensgreatwigborough.org



What to take on your adventure

Waterproofs and walking boots are recommended for the two longer walks, though trainers or strong shoes should be fine in dry weather. Remember to take your mobile phone, plenty of water, a first aid kit and a picnic or snack. All routes are on *Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 184 (Colchester)*.

Why not stop for a rest or a picnic at Abborton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park or Little Wigborough, the halfway points of the longer routes?

There is a café and toilets at Abborton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park (during opening hours), but no facilities at Little Wigborough.



Family-friendly walks from St Stephen's Church, Great Wigborough



Circular walks for
all ages and abilities

Introducing the walks

There are three walks, including something for all ages and abilities to enjoy – from a short stroll to investigate St Stephen's Church, to longer walks to the Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park and Little Wigborough.

All start and finish at St Stephen's, where there is free parking and extensive views over the surrounding countryside.

WALK
1
easy

...explores the outside of St Stephen's Church and the wildlife in its churchyard.



WALK
2
moderate

...follows a quiet path around the edge of the Abberton Reservoir to reach the Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park.



WALK
3
moderate

...passes medieval manor houses and the site of a WW1 Zeppelin landing to reach Little Wigborough Church.



With thanks to: Gill Graham & family, A Meeting Place for the Community project committee, Essex Wildlife Trust, Essex & Suffolk Water. Text: Martin Crowther. Design: John Devlin (The Design Practice). Images: Michael Anderson, Martin Crowther, Mersea Museum, Essex Records Office, Canterbury Museums, David Cross. Researchers: Elaine Barker, Tony Millat, Mel Newton. Funding: National Lottery Heritage Fund, Friends of Essex Churches, Allchurches Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation. © St Stephen's Church, Great Wigborough.

WALK
1
easy

A Walk Around St Stephen's

Suitable for all, including people with reduced mobility, wheelchair users and families with very small children.

Enjoy a short stroll around the outside of this small medieval church and explore inside if it's open. There's an accessible level path from the car park to the church. The churchyard is a haven for wildflowers and wildlife and includes a bench where visitors can sit. A stroll to the end of the churchyard is rewarded with a fine view towards Mersea Island.

St Stephen's dates from the 14th century and probably replaced an earlier church on the site. Historic features include an impressive hammerbeam roof, rare octagonal font and Victorian stained-glass. The church was badly damaged in the 1884 Great English Earthquake, when the tower was completely rebuilt. Look around the outside to find...

- Septarian nodules in the church walls. Also used in Colchester's Roman walls and Norman castle, these orange-brown rocks are claystone concretions (smaller rocks stuck together) and are approximately 50 million years old.



- Evidence of the tower being rebuilt after the 1884 earthquake. Clue: there's a carved foundation stone at the base of the tower. **Can you read what it says?**



- Wildflower areas and wildlife, including birds and insects. The church also has its own beehive (don't get too close) which in a good year produces over 40 jars of honey. Long-eared, pipistrelle and serotine bats roost in the church tower and roof and are often spotted hunting for insects at dusk.



A walk to Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park

Suitable for adults and children age 5 plus (no busy roads to cross). 6km (1 hour 50 minutes) with optional halfway stop at Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park. Please note, dogs are not allowed in the discovery park.

Enjoy a leisurely walk to the Abberton visitor centre, returning by the same route. The walk begins with a short down Church Lane, crosses a field with extensive views over the reservoir, then follows a grassy path to reach the causeway and visitor centre. Highlights include church pinnacles, a talking bench and the chance to see lots of wildlife. This is a safe route for younger children with no busy roads to cross, but do take care.



1 Fallen pinnacles

In the undergrowth by the church noticeboard are several pieces of carved stone – the remains of two pinnacles from the church tower which were struck by lightning and crashed to the ground. They have since been replaced. Can you work out how they fitted together?

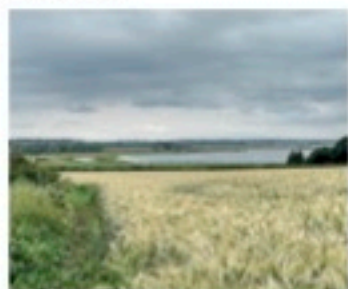
Walk down Church Lane passing the entrance to The Old Rectory on your left.



2 The Old Rectory

The Rectors of St Stephen's lived here for hundreds of years. Many church events including Victorian fêtes and WW2 weddings took place here.

A short distance down Church Lane from the entrance to The Old Rectory, take a footpath on the right over a narrow wooden bridge and stile.



3 The Abberton Reservoir

This narrow footpath soon opens out to reveal an extensive view of the Abberton Reservoir. Built in the 1930s to provide drinking water for Essex and London, it's now a haven for wildlife, and is the most important reservoir in Britain for wintering wildfowl.

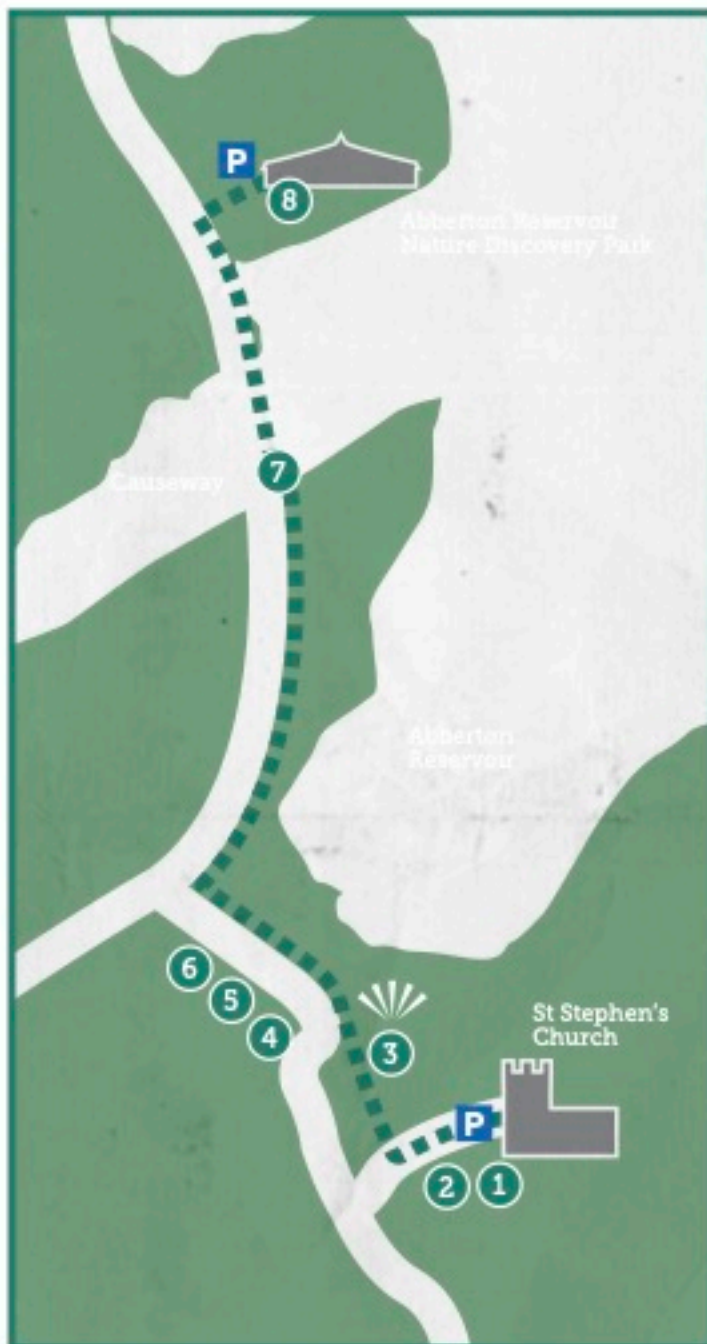
Walk straight ahead down a gently sloping field to reach the road.



4 Building the reservoir

Before the reservoir was built, this area was farmland. This 1935 photo shows the last harvest at Badcocks Farm – one of several farms that disappeared beneath the rising waters. Construction of the reservoir began the following year and it opened in 1939.

The footpath continues straight ahead along a wide grassy path between tall hedges.



5 The Dambusters

In 1943 RAF Lancaster bombers practiced low-level bombing here before a successful mission to destroy the Möhne and Eder Dams in Germany. They soon became famous as the Dambusters. The painting shows a similar practice run at Reculver on the Kent coast.

Continue along the grassy path.



6 The talking bench

A short distance along this grassy path is a wooden bench – a great place to stop for a rest or snack. Press the buttons to learn about the importance of Abberton Reservoir for wildlife conservation, including a message from Sir David Attenborough.

Continue along the grassy path. After a while the path turns sharp right before emerging onto a roadside footpath leading to a causeway across the reservoir.



7 The causeway

A narrow causeway allows the busy B1026 road to cross the reservoir. The footpath across the causeway is a perfect vantage point to spot wildfowl including widgeon, mute swan, teal, tufted duck, gadwall, great crested grebe, goldeneye and coot.

Cross the causeway, then turn right into the Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park.



8 Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park

At the end of the causeway is the Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park with wildlife walks, café and toilets. Look back across the reservoir to spot distant St Stephen's Church. Check www.essexwt.org.uk/nature-reserves/abberton for opening hours and facilities.

Retrace the same route to return to St Stephen's Church.

Alex's Two Churches Walk

5km return to Little Wigborough Church (1 hour 30 minutes)
7km return to the sea wall (2 hours 10 minutes)

Alex Graham loved St Stephen's Church and the local countryside. This was one of his favourite walks and we hope you enjoy it too! The walk follows public footpaths through fields and along quiet country lanes and is suitable for adults and older children. There's a short section along the edge of the Peldon Road. Take great care here!



1 St Stephen's Church
There's been a church at the top of Wigga's Hill (the origin of the name Wigborough) since Norman times, although this building dates from the 1300s. Pop in if its open, or explore outside (see Walk 1).
Walk to the end of the churchyard and over a stile. Turn left and then almost immediately right along the edge of a field. At the bottom of the hill is Moulshams Manor.



2 Moulshams Manor
Mentioned in the Domesday Book, the ancient manor of Moulshams takes its name from William de Mulsham. Other owners have included Sir John Peake (Lord Mayor of London in 1687) and the Bullock family. In the 1884 Great English Earthquake so many tiles were shaken off the roof... they had to cover [it] with haystack cloths.
Pass the manor on your left, then continue in the same direction along the edge of a large open field.



3 Huge, smelly and full of maggots!
Crops grow in the fields today, but flocks of sheep once grazed here, providing valuable wool, meat and milk for Essex cheeses. John Skelton, poet and tutor to Henry VIII wrote... A cantle [segment] of Essex Cheese was well a foot thick, full of maggots quick. It was huge and great and mighty strong meat for the devil to eat.
Turn right at the end of the field to join a farm track to Seaborough House.



4 Seaborough House
This photo shows the Horton family at Seaboroughs over 100 years ago. Recent research has shown that in 1816, the Revd John Rawstorn Papillon inherited the property. He's believed by some to be the man on whom Jane Austen based Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*.
Pass Seaborough House to reach the main road.



5 Peldon Road
In Edwardian times this was a quiet country lane. On leaving Peldon I wended my way towards Great Wigborough. I met few persons on the road, and heard few sounds save the bleating of sheep... Herbert Winkworth Tompkins, *Marsh Country Rambles* (1904).
Today the road is very busy. Cross with care, making sure children are closely supervised. Turn left and walk along the verge to Copt Hall Lane. Turn right and follow this quiet lane to Little Wigborough.



The Wig Wigs
In 1934, a poem about Great and Little Wigborough appeared in *Punch* magazine. Written by John Kaye Kendall under his pseudonym Dum-Dum it is much-loved by many local people.

Now retrace your steps back to St Stephen's Church. We hope you've enjoyed your walk.



15 Salcott Channel
South of the sea wall is the Salcott Channel which leads from the Blackwater Estuary (and River Thames) to the village of Salcott-cum-Virley. Many local people were involved in making a living from the sea, including transporting hay to London. Hay barges came far inland, up tiny creeks, to stack their cargoes.

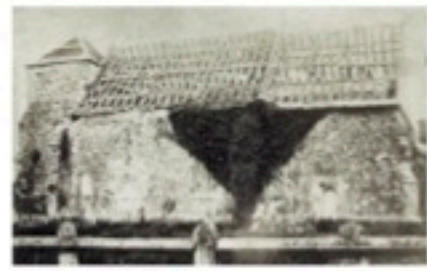
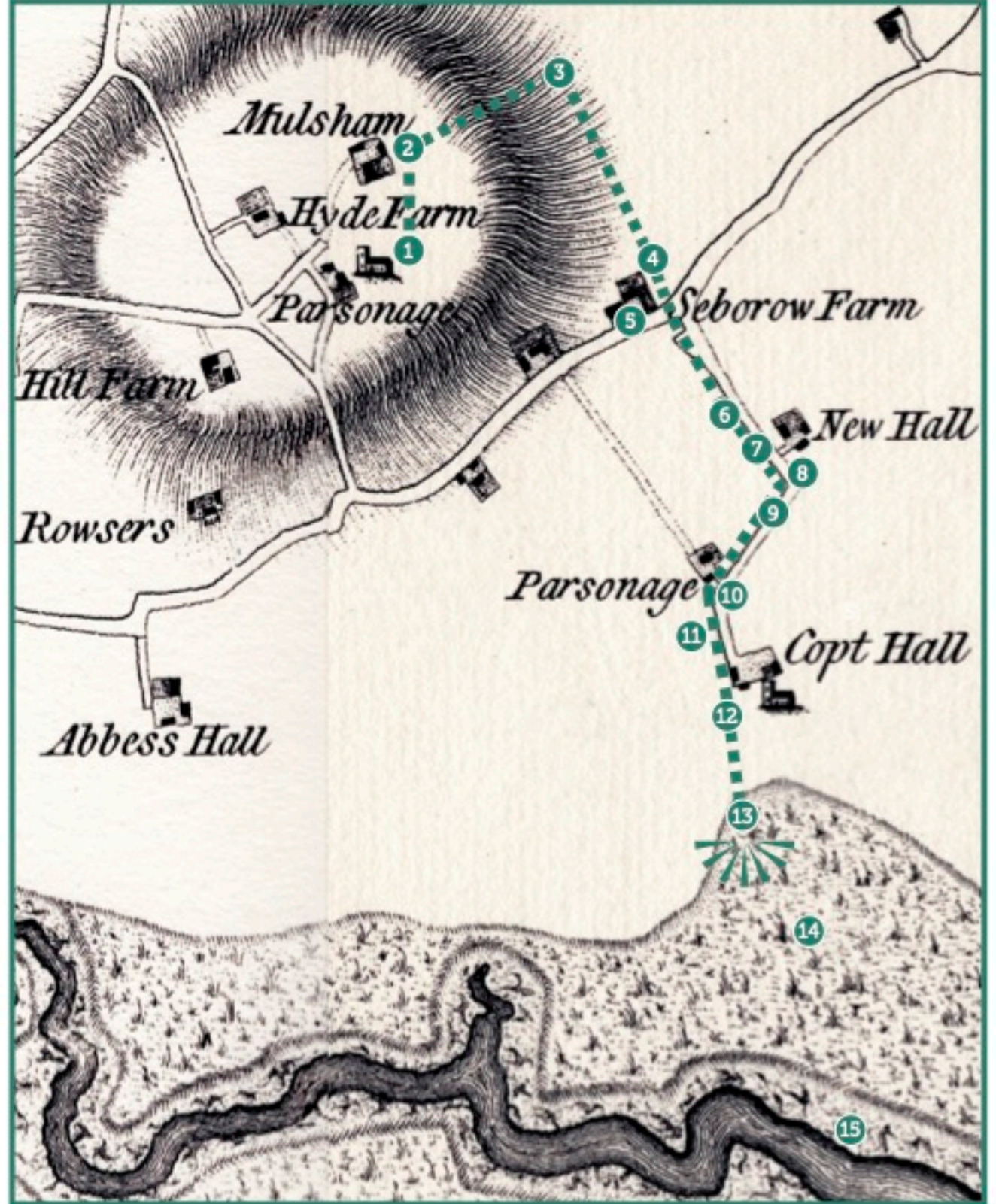


14 Abbotts Hall Saltings
A salting is an area of coastal land regularly covered by the tide. Saltings provide a rich habitat for many species of wading birds. These ones are under the care of Essex Wildlife Trust, which has its headquarters at nearby Abbotts Hall. Please stay on the sea wall as the saltings are dangerous.



13 The sea wall
Built to defend low-lying farmland from flooding, the sea wall extends from Salcott-cum-Virley to the northern end of the Ray Channel. Nearby are several small mounds called Red Hills - evidence of Iron Age and Roman salt production. Salt was made by heating brine from seawater in red clay pots. Broken fragments of this pottery give the red hills their distinctive colour.

You can turn round here and retrace your route back to St Stephen's Church. Alternatively, continue past the church to the end of the track. Then turn right to reach the sea wall at Abbotts Hall saltings.



12 St Nicholas, Little Wigborough (the Cracked Church)
This is Little Wigborough Church after the Great English Earthquake of 1884, when it was described by the Revd Frederick Watson as being perfectly riddled. The body of the Church has been separated from the tower, and I cannot think of ever having any more services in it. The church is currently closed.



11 Teardrops and yellow bells
People living in the Wigboroughs in the past had their own local names for plants. According to Edward Ponder, born circa 1916, snowdrops were teardrops, bluebells butter bells, primroses yellow bells and daffodils golden trumpets.



10 A wealth of wildlife
Country lanes support a wide variety of wildlife. Edna Smy was delighted by a profusion of wildflowers, honeysuckle, fleabane, meadowsweet, bryony... some used medicinally by country folk in days gone by. Young rabbits will scuttle away at your footfall, or a fox may cross your path. Skylarks sing in the summer whilst many birds nest in the hedgerows.
Follow the lane round a sharp left bend. It's not far now!



6 Little Wigborough School
In 1875 a small National School was built at Little Wigborough. This is a detail from the original plan. The school was in use for about 20 years. The pupils had many weeks off for pea-picking and at harvest time. Nothing survives of the school today, though bricks are sometimes ploughed up in the field where it once stood.



7 The animals of Copt Hall Lane
Marsh harriers, buzzards, little and tawny owls, long-tailed tits and muntjac deer are just some of the species seen along Copt Hall Lane. You may be lucky enough to spot one. Can you find the owl in the photo? You can get as close as you like to this one, it won't fly away!



8 New Hall Farm
A little way down on the left hand side is New Hall Farm. Bernard Ratcliffe worked here for many years, starting in the 1950s. He can be seen in the photo driving a Fordson Major tractor.
Soon the lane turns sharp right past New Hall Cottages to reach the site of the World War 1 Zeppelin crash-landing.



9 Zeppelin-mania
In 1916 a German Zeppelin returning from a raid on London, crash-landed here. The crew knocked on the door of New Hall Cottages (visible behind the wreckage) to warn local residents, before setting the airship on fire. Thousands of people flocked to see it. A baby girl born that night was named Zeppelina! In old age she opened a Zeppelin museum in Germany.