

Bentley Priory Nature Reserve is Harrow's only biological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Its biological importance derives from the mix of ancient woodland, flower-rich grassland, streams and open water. A nature trail leads visitors around the site and describes the natural history in more detail. Trail leaflets are available in metal dispensers. Alternatively, a more detailed description can be accessed by using a smartphone with the QR tags on the numbered bollards. Bentley Priory Nature Reserve is managed by a committee comprising council officers, councillors and volunteers and is maintained by an enthusiastic group of Harrow Nature Conservation Forum volunteers: see at the end of the text for how you can help.

Starting from the Priory Close stop on the 258 bus: walk a short way north, away from Harrow, until you see London LOOP waymarker sign on a lamppost. This points to a wooden field gate on the right hand side of the road. The wooden field gate leads into Bentley Priory Nature Reserve.

When the track ends at Grimdyke Cottage bear right and continue past the three houses on your left then follow the clear path over a number of boardwalks. You will pass Lenn's Avenue on the right, named in memory of a ranger who worked on the Common. Watch out for the roundel that guides you to the right. Follow the arrows to steps leading up to Common Road, A409. Cross the road watching out for traffic as this is a fast road and enter Bentley Priory Nature Reserve through the wooden field gate situated between Glenhome Cottage and Glenhome Lodge.

After a slight bend to the right, the ground under the hornbeam trees becomes noticeably hummocky. This is the result of 19th century gravel extraction. Enormous amounts of Stanmore Gravel were removed for road surfacing and other usages. Looking to your right, you see a bank leading up to the garden centre complex: this reveals that the original ground level was over a metre above the present surface. Until 1899, gravel extraction was a common right of Harrow Parishioners.

This circular walk takes you through some of the most attractive parts of the Harrow green belt. It is centred on Bentley Priory Nature Reserve but also passes through Harrow Weald Common, Stanmore Common and Stanmore Little Common. The route gives both Sunday strollers and experienced ramblers the chance to enjoy the countryside. The route is clearly marked by roundels as shown on the left and follows public footpaths and other rights of way. The walk will take you through woods and parks, past streams, ponds and historic settlements, and on a fine day, gives spectacular views over London.

Distance: The complete circuit is 4.3 miles (7 km) and should take about 2½ hours, possibly longer in poor weather or at a very leisurely pace. If the weather changes or you discover that you are not as fit as you thought, you can use the 'short cut' path shown dashed on the map to create a western loop of 3.2 miles or an eastern loop of 1.7 miles.

The going underfoot is very varied, and some parts can be muddy so stout footwear or boots are recommended.

Dog walkers should keep their dogs under control particularly in the nesting season (April-June) when there are ground nesting birds in the grassland and scrub. Dog waste must be bagged and disposed of in a rubbish bin. Nitrates from dog waste are a major threat to the wildflowers that make this area so attractive.

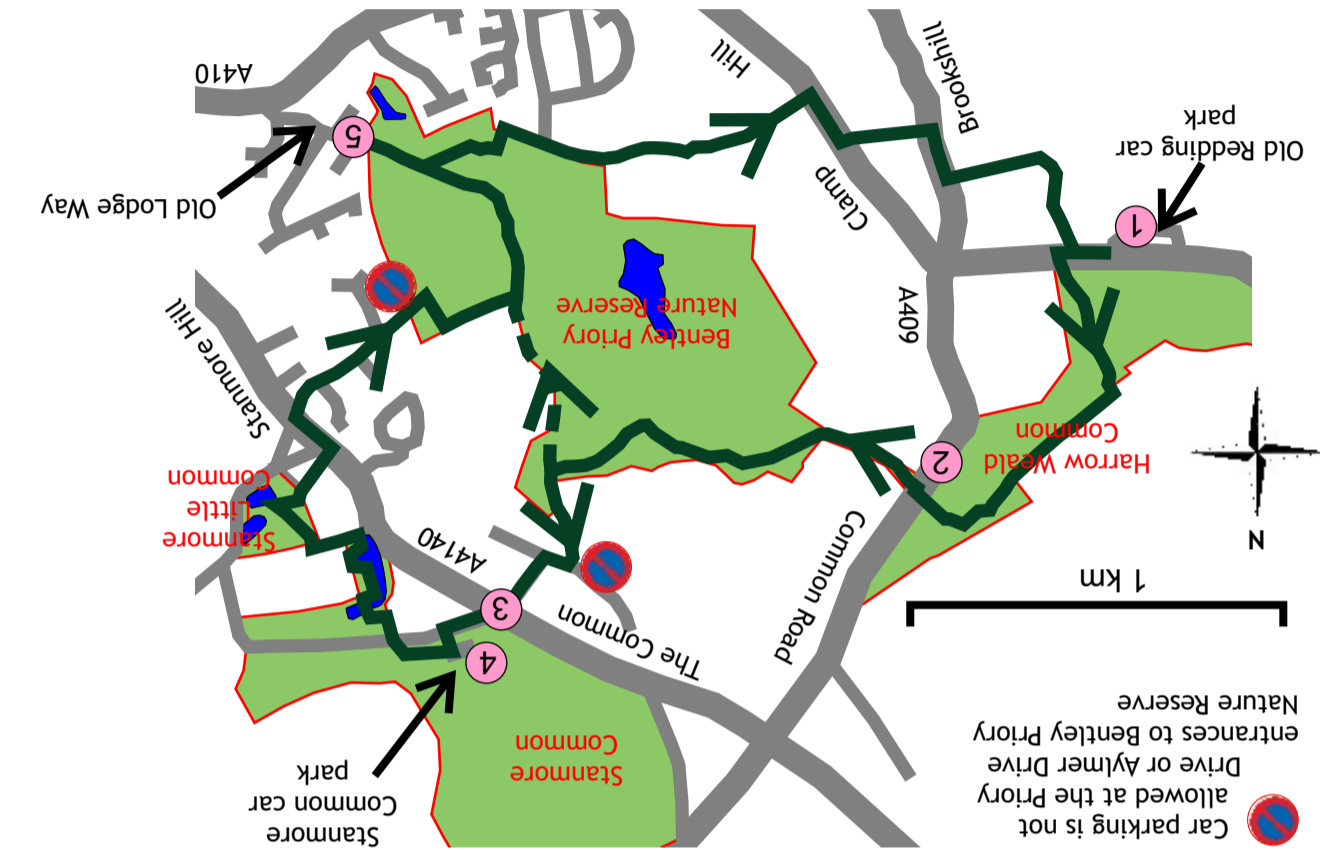
You will pass a private deer park with tame fallow deer that love vegetables (especially carrots) and apples - so especially if you have children in the party, take something suitable along. The deer must not be fed bread which will upset their stomachs badly.

Parts of the route follow the London Outer Orbital Path (LOOP), a 150 mile route encircling London.

There are five good starting points for the walk, indicated by pink circles on the maps. For each, start reading the text at the corresponding pink circle

1. Old Redding car park, just west of The Case is Altered pub
2. Priory Close stop on 258 bus
3. Priory Drive stop on 142 bus
4. Stanmore Common car park on Warren Lane
5. Old Lodge Way, Stanmore

Harrow Weald Common is designated a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) because of its geology. All along the Harrow Weald ridge London Clay is topped by first a clay/sand mixture called the Claygate Beds, and then by a layer of rounded pebbles called the Stanmore Gravel. The Stanmore Gravel is very recent in geological terms, being laid down about two million years ago (in contrast, the dinosaurs died out sixty million years ago). The Stanmore Gravel is thought to have originated as the pebbly shores of a tributary of the "protoThames". Of course the pebbles of the Stanmore Gravel are formed of stone that is itself much older, cut upstream by the river and carried down to this point.



How to find the walk

The numbered pink circles on the maps show five good starting points for the walk. For each, start reading the text at the corresponding pink circle.

1. Old Redding car park, just west of The Case is Altered pub
2. Priory Close stop on 258 bus
3. Priory Drive stop on 142 bus
4. Stanmore Common car park on Warren Lane
5. Old Lodge Way, Stanmore

Refreshments



The Case is Altered. Image by Diamond Geezer, Creative Commons licence

The Case is Altered pub lies on the route, close to point 1 on the maps. Canned drinks and confectionery are available at a newsagents on Stanmore Hill, but going this way means missing the tame deer - see text for details.



Harrow walks

Bentley Priory
Circular Walk

Leaflet revised and redesigned by Harrow Nature Conservation Forum August 2016

Starting from Old Redding car park Leave the car park by the eastern vehicle access and turn right to pass The Case is Altered public house. This popular pub name may be a corruption of "Casa Alta" or "High House"; appropriate here since from the garden you can look down over six counties. Cross the road at the traffic island and enter Harrow Weald Common by the five bar gate. Continue along the track following the waymark signs.

text continues... After a second gate the land opens out with wide views over London. Bear left and continue along the concrete path. Beyond the fence on the left lies Bentley Priory house.

The Bentley Priory house we see today was begun in 1775, designed by the prominent architect Sir John Soane. The bell tower was added in 1864. Bentley Priory played a critical role in World War II, since it was from here that Lord Dowding controlled RAF operations during the Battle of Britain in 1940. The house now hosts a museum describing this important period in Britain's history. There is no direct access from the nature reserve into the museum grounds; the only entrance is from the A4140 "The Common" west of Priory Drive. At the time of writing the museum is open on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. See <http://bentleypriorymuseum.org.uk/> or phone 020 8950 5526 for more information.



Bentley Priory.
Image by Leslie Bolsover

After another gate you climb up, still on the concrete path, to meet the Deer Path at a T junction. The full route turns left here. For a shorter walk (3.2 miles) turn right and descend Deer Path, picking up these notes at "Short cut" at the bottom of the middle column.

For the full route, turn left and pass through a gate onto an enclosed path that leads to Priory Drive. Turn right on this private road. At a junction, turn left and continue to the main road (A4140 "The Common") ahead. Cross the busy A4140 at the traffic island, taking great care since traffic travels fast here.

3 Begin here if starting from the Priory Drive stop on the 142 bus.

Walk a short distance along Warren Lane and turn left into the Stanmore Common car park.

4 Begin here if starting from Stanmore Common car park.

Stanmore Common comprises around 122 acres of mixed woodland, wetland and grassland. The circular walk passes through only the southern tip of the Common; further north are significant tracts of acid grassland with expanses of heather, an unusual sight in northwest London. A nature trail leads visitors around the site and describes the natural history in more detail. Trail leaflets are available in the metal dispenser in the car park. Alternatively, a more detailed description can be accessed by using a smartphone with the QR tags on the numbered bollards. Stanmore Common is maintained by an enthusiastic group of Harrow Nature Conservation Forum volunteers: see at right for how you can help.

There are a number of information panels in the Stanmore Common car park, including one describing the nature trail on the Common. Take the path to the right of the Bentley Priory Circular Walk panel. This bears right after approximately 50 yards and soon crosses a driveway. Continue straight on to eventually emerge on Warren Lane.

Cross the road and you're back into woodland with Stanmore Cricket Ground to your right. You soon reach the two Brewer's Ponds. Pass between the two ponds then bear right to follow the winding bank of Great Brewer's Pond, eventually bearing left to reach the garden fence of a row of houses.

The route now turns left along the side of the fence, but we recommend a short detour to the right to emerge on the main road. Look downhill to the left to see the white clapboarded tower of Clutterbuck's Brewery. This was founded by Thomas Clutterbuck around 1763 but sadly stopped brewing in 1916, although Clutterbucks continued as a chain of public houses until 1923. Brewer's Ponds were created to serve the brewery.



Clutterbuck's brewery.
Image by Steve Bolsover

Retrace your steps along the path and continue with the houses on your right to emerge on a grassy lawn. This is Stanmore Little Common, where a cluster of 18th and 19th Century cottages adjoin open common land. Follow the edge of the woodland then pass through a gap and descend to the edge of Spring Pond. This lovely pond is man made, but much older than Brewer's Ponds, and may indeed be the "Stane" (that is, stony) "mere" that gave Stanmore its name.



Spring pond.
Image by Steve Bolsover

After admiring Spring Pond, turn round and return a short way up the hill to a tumbledown corrugated iron building. This tiny building served as Stanmore's fire station prior to World War II! Turn left at this building to emerge at an unsurfaced parking area. Continue straight ahead between "Faircot Cottage" and "Maytree Cottage". Look out for a square stone block in front of Maytree Cottage which was once used by members of the local fox hunt to mount their horses. Continue on past a tiny village green on the left to reach a main road, Stanmore Hill.

Directly in front of you on the other side of the road is Hill House (173 Stanmore Hill). This played an important part in World War II: from August 1943 onward it housed the Filter Room of Fighter Command H.Q., where enemy air activity was mapped.



Gatehouse of Stanmore Hall.
Image by Steve Bolsover

Use the traffic island to cross Stanmore Hill and turn left downhill. As you descend, the grey turrets and heraldic gateposts of Stanmore Hall come into view to the left. This Victorian gothic pile was built in 1843. Owners have included William Knox D'Arcy, who founded the Anglo Iranian Oil Company which later became British Petroleum.

If you need a snack or a drink at this point, an alternative route that does not add distance - but misses out the tame deer in Bentley Priory Nature Reserve - is to continue down the main road, Stanmore Hill. The first building after you cross Green Lane is a newsagent that sells canned drinks and confectionery. Then continue on down a few more yards and take a public footpath on the right signposted to Green Lane. Cross Green Lane and take a driveway on the other side indicated "1-4 Park Cottages". Follow this path past St. John's School to emerge onto Embry Way. Continue along Embry Way all the way to the end, where a footpath leads onto Bentley Priory Nature Reserve. Continue straight ahead and cross the metallated Deer Path. Continue reading at "Newsagent diversion - resume here", at the top of the next column.

Turn right into Aylmer Drive. Follow Aylmer Drive downhill until it ends at the edge of Bentley Priory Nature Reserve. Pass through the kissing gate and descend a boardwalk, then take a series of right forks and head gently uphill through woodland to arrive at a waymarker bollard in front of the metal mesh fence of the private deer park. Turn left and follow the path and then a boardwalk beside the deer park fence to arrive at the metallated Deer Path. The deer appreciate carrots, apples and most vegetables. They must not be given bread, which makes them ill. Turn left on the tarmac path through the woodland, passing two five-bar gates.

(Short cut: Walkers who took the short cut and descended the Deer Path should now proceed on down the metallated path to continue the route towards Old Redding. Similarly those wishing to take a shorter route to return towards Stanmore Common can turn right at the T-junction and follow Deer Path up to its exit on Priory Drive)

As you emerge from the edge of the woodland into Old Lodge Meadow you can see views of the Boot Pond to the right. Continue down Deer Path until a bollard directs you to the right, then follow this path through Old Lodge Meadow.

5 If starting at Old Lodge Way: Walk up the metallated Deer Path until a bollard directs you to the left, then follow this path through Old Lodge Meadow.

(Newsagent diversion - resume here) As you approach the woodland edge bear right at a junction towards a wooden gate with vertical slats. Once in the woodland bear left to a bridge crossing a small stream. The walk now passes between the stream and the backs of houses to cross the end of Masfield Avenue and continues alongside the stream to a gate at Lower Priory Farm. From here the farm track leads you to the main road at Clamp Hill.

Turn right at the waymarker sign and walk up Clamp Hill. Pass Brookshill Avenue but soon afterwards turn left on the path immediately before Honeysuckle House. At the top of the footpath, turn right into Brookshill where there is also a sign indicating Circular Walk. Cross the road taking care and turn left up Brookshill Drive. The track leads past, on the left, the Victorian Brookshill Farm. Look out on the right for Bridle Cottages, 1 and 2 Brookshill Drive, a particularly pretty Victorian cottage in the Arts and Crafts style with decorative brickwork. After Bridle Cottages, follow the track as it curves to the right past the 17th century Copse Farm on the left and then ahead to reach the road at Old Redding.

The car park at Old Redding lies just along the road to your left. To continue the circular walk, turn right and cross the road at the traffic island. Continue reading at "Harrow Weald Common" on the folded page.

Site management and contact details

Bentley Priory Nature Reserve Management Committee

The Committee was formed and constituted in 1974 while the whole of the Nature Reserve was designated as a SSSI in 1975. The purpose of the Committee is to work jointly with the voluntary sector, Council officers, Council members and representatives of Government organisations to:



- Manage Bentley Priory Nature Reserve and undertake conservation work in order to maintain and enhance its status as an SSSI Nature Reserve and a site of Metropolitan importance, in accordance with management plans agreed with Natural England or its successors.
 - Resist any development of property or land adjoining the Reserve which is likely to be detrimental to the Reserve and its wildlife.
 - Monitor wildlife visiting and inhabiting the site.
 - Arrange interpretative events to promote public access and awareness.
 - Raise, hold and spend funds in pursuance of the management of the site.
- Contact the Chairman of the Management Committee at camilla.bath@harrow.gov.uk

Harrow Weald Conservators

Harrow Weald Common is managed by a unique board of 'Conservators', which was established by an Act of Parliament over a hundred years ago. Our role is to care for the Common, preserving, for the community, the delightful open space we find today. Originally, the Conservators had to prevent the removal of "turf sods, gravel, sand and other substances", stop "bird catching, gin traps, laying snares and taking birds eggs", and apprehend "gamblers, card sharps, squatters, vagrants, persons guilty of brawling or any idle or disorderly person." Today we seek to preserve the nature of the Common, striking a balance between providing a haven for wildlife and offering leisure facilities such as our popular Nature Trail. We wish you a warm welcome to the Common and hope you enjoy your time here as much as we do. The current Conservators are Cllrs Stephen Greek, Ramji Chauhan, Pritesh Patel, John Hinkley and Phillip O'Dell. If there are any comments or queries, please feel free to contact the Conservators at hwccconservators@harrow.gov.uk.

Harrow Nature Conservation Forum

The wardens of Bentley Priory, Stanmore Common and Stanmore Little Common are members of the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum, which acts as an umbrella group to share tools, manpower, knowhow and funds. Other Forum sites include Wood Farm, Pear Wood and Stanmore Country Park in Stanmore, Bentley Old Vicarage in Harrow Weald and Roxbourne Rough near Rayners Lane station. Harrow's green belt open spaces need help to keep them in good condition. To learn more about the activities of the Forum and the sites it helps maintain email us at admin@harrowncf.org or visit www.harrowncf.org or our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/harrowncf/>, where you can learn about fun activities such as moth evenings and guided walks as well as our regular volunteer opportunities on the sites.

