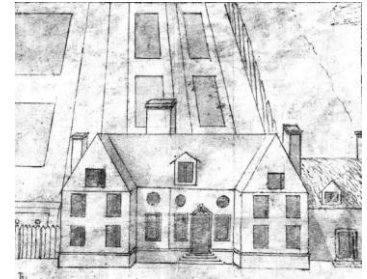


Combs Circular Walk – Number Three

Around the Bounds of Combs

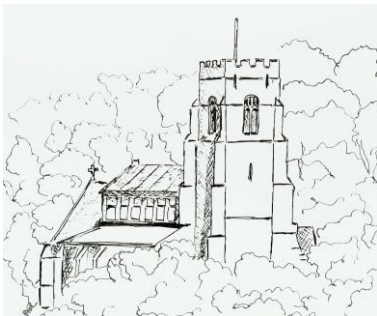
Combs, like most parishes, has a very convoluted boundary so it is impossible to literally walk the boundary as it goes across fields and through people's gardens. This 10 mile walk is an attempt to walk as close as possible to the parish boundary using roads and footpaths.

From Combs cemetery follow the tarmac drive up to the church with Combs Meadow Local Nature Reserve on your left. Where the drive goes up to the church go left and soon left again – some of the houses off to your right were still within Combs parish boundary up until a few years ago. Once upon a time, when there was a large Combs Hall up to the right of the church, this was all part of the Hall front garden. The pond in the middle of the meadow on your left has a matching pond equidistant behind where the old Hall stood, now within the boundary of Combs Wood. The Church Meadow information board shows how the layout once was with the terraces on the meadow. At the road turn right then go left at Combs Beck – as at October 2019 this section of the stream is still the boundary between Combs village and Stowmarket town.



Old Combs Hall from a 1710 map

Follow the field edge path to reach a metal bridge and take the rising path to reach the 2012 Queen's Jubilee Memorial bench. Pause to enjoy the view of St Mary's church with Combs Wood beyond. Turn right onto Tannery Road then continue onto Poplar Hill passing Prospect Place dating from 1854. As you go through the dip, the Slough, you enter Stowmarket. Once Combs parish extended all the way down to the Rattlesden River some $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile away but over the years more and more of it has been slowly absorbed into the relentless Stowmarket spread.



St Mary's viewed from Poplar Hill

Enjoy the special view across the field to the Grade 1 listed St Mary's church as you walk up the slope. At the Church Hall continue ahead and turn left into Verneuil Avenue, pass Farriers Way to reach Maltsters Walk. Go left, cross the stream and left again and enter a stretch of woodland and scrub that runs along the watercourse. You are now back into Combs. The official footpath stays close to the stream but is prone to becoming overgrown, so a walked path has developed on the right, outside this wooded strip. The path through the wood reaches a bridge across the stream and you go right to follow the path at the bottom of the sloping field. At the corner go left with a long narrow field now on your right.

Keep a lookout for a path on the right across the field to take you over a plank bridge and up to Boyton Hall. The boundary of Combs and Great Finborough runs through the farm buildings there. Off to the right of Boyton Hall the Combs boundary is still down at the Rattlesden River. Pause to take in the view across to the prominent spire of Gt Finborough church in one direction and the panorama of Stowmarket and the Gipping valley in the other.

Turn left along the concrete track, go through a section of Gt Finborough before returning to Combs as you reach Jacks Lane. Go left then right into Jockeys Lane, pass Jockey's Hall, and follow this through to Bildeston Road at The Brambles having dipped through a section of Little Finborough parish.



Gt Finborough church spire

For a 6 mile loop go left here and follow the road back to Prospect Place which you passed earlier, at the corner of Park Road and Tannery Road. Go right and quickly left, by the bench, to retrace your steps to the cemetery car park.

For the full village circuit turn right at the Brambles – the road is the boundary between Combs and Little Finborough – and follow the road up to the bend with the roof and bell of Little Finborough church hiding in the trees off to the right. Go round the bend and turn right onto the Byway (Cagman's Lane) by Moat Farm Cottages. The gravel path becomes a green lane between hedges – you are now temporarily in Battsford. Follow the path right and left. At the next corner Cagman's Lane goes off to the right through a hole in the hedge, but you need to go down the ditch and take the smaller gap in the hedge just to the left.



Rooftops and bell of Little Finborough church

Turn left on to another broad field edge path with wonderful open views to Hitcham. 100 yards before the next lane look for a Permissive Path off to the left and follow the field edge with the buildings on Mill Road Battsford on your right. You are still in Combs, just, the parish boundary now runs along the bottom of the gardens having previously run through the gardens on your right. At the road turn right to reach Battsford Punchbowl. I believe that up until 2009 the Punchbowl building was in Combs but the car park at the front was in Battsford.

Take the footpath to the right of the pub and follow it round to the left then look for a path into the field on the right. The line of the path, now into a single field, suggests that when it was established centuries ago it followed the hedges of much smaller fields. If the field has been recently cultivated and the path is not evident follow the right hand field edge all the way round. The cross-field path eventually swings back to the right-hand field edge and you follow this to the end of the field where, if you are tall enough to see over the hedge, there are views of Combs church, Stowmarket and the 1000ft tall Mendlesham mast on the far horizon. Go right over the plank bridge then left along a rough field edge and maintain direction on the rising path across the next field to reach a bridge onto Burnhouse Lane, which for a while is the parish boundary again. Go left and continue ahead past Mill Lane junction, from where you see the rooftops of the ever expanding Stowmarket just to the left of the top of Combs church. At the T-junction with Deadman's Lane go left then right by what was at one time one of three pubs in upper Combs. The Live and Let Live on Park Road, the Punchbowl and this building, The Gardener's Arms. There were more pubs in the parish in days gone by before Combs Ford became part of Stowmarket.



The pristine field of the successful Battsford and District Cricket Club is now on the left. After passing the notice board and letterbox at Moats Tye go right on a shingle track and maintain direction between houses to reach a green lane Bridleway, which my children called Dingley Dell when they walked it many years ago. Once again you are walking the parish boundary, now between Combs and Badley. Maintain direction across the meadow then have a high hedge on your right and Bluehouse Farm off to the left.

When you reach Badley Lane pause to take in the view. Fortunately most of Stowmarket is hidden by the trees of Sallow Grove and Fir Covert so the views across the valley to Stowupland and along towards Ipswich can be enjoyed. Turn left along Badley Lane and pass the quaintly named Pennyplot House then, before Half Penny Cottage, take the field edge path to the right, you are now in Badley. Enter the next field over a three plank bridge and go left and maintain direction to find the entrance to Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Combs Wood, with its information board.

The next section – through and around the wood - can be notoriously muddy in wet weather. Follow the long central ride down through the wood almost to the far end - unless you feel like taking one of the side rides to the right to explore through the trees. All the rides off to the left take you to the edge of the wood. Take the fifth ride on the left (if you have reached the clearing through the trees with the overhead wires you have gone too far) to exit the wood over a bridge and follow the well-worn path to reach a sloping field with the church tower straight in front of you, peeping out above the trees.



Elevation drawing of now demolished Combs Hall from a 1741 map

Go left and walk beside the wood. Take the cross field path on the right towards the church and cross the stile (there are sometimes cattle in this meadow). Look for the porch on this side of the church which is rather grander than the one currently used on the other side of the church. This is because you have just crossed the site of Orlando Bridgeman's Combs Hall in the early 18th century and this would have been the Lord of the Manor's way into church. The Hall was largely demolished in 1756. Cross another stile to enter the churchyard and, after exploring the treasures inside the church, retrace your steps to the cemetery.

Walk and map by Bill Baldry, October 2019

Church sketches by Sara Waterer

Combs Hall images from *The House and Gardens of Combs Hall* by Edward Martin and Alastair Oswald – [The Suffolk Institute of Archaeology](http://www.suffolk-institute-of-archaeology.org.uk/)

For more walks visit: www.combsvillage.org.uk/combs-life/combs-walks

Around the bounds of Combs

