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FINNINGHAM WALKS: SUFFOLK DAY WALK

3.6mls/5.8km • 1hr 20 mins.

Leave the *Village Green* via the gate to the churchyard and then bear to the right to pass in front of the church and then on to a footpath between two hedges, around two corners to a gravel driveway, and join *Gislingham Road*. ①

Turn left on this road to pass several houses and a byway sign beside the stream. Continue ahead on this bend, taking care with traffic as the road can be busy. At the top of the hill ② turn left on the first bend in the road, taking a bridleway on a short farm track to a right turn, with a ditch on your left which leads towards a narrowing of the path between two hedgerows.

Continue straight ahead, passing a footpath to your right, and also be careful as underfoot there a few roots to trip on! This bridleway, locally known as *Jenny's Lane/Grove*, breaks out at the end of these hedgerows. ③

There is a story told relating to this area; A local lady, Nell Palmer, used to come to a small plantation here to collect firewood, and on the way back she spoke to a young girl heading into the woods, as Nell moved on, she looked around and the young girl had disappeared! It was said that a young girl in service became pregnant by her employer and hung herself in the plantation, and that was how it got its name. Apparently Nell never ventured into the woods on her own from then onwards!

The bridleway then sweeps round to the left, giving a lovely view back across the village with the water tower and Mendlesham mast far in the distance. The hedge is still on your right, as you come to a junction where the bridleway splits off to the right to go past *Jenny's Farm*. ④

Here keep straight and take the route passing a large tree and crossing an arable field to the way-marker (bridleway left – footpath right). Turn right for a short distance to the next way-marker and then left on to a grass area with a large fenced pond. You can walk to the left of this pond and then swing to the west and follow the wide area with hedgerow and *Rookery Farm* to your left to then reach a concrete storage area. Keeping left you reach the B1113 *Walsham Road*. ⑤

Turn right on the road for 50m, passing a footbridge on your right, then, looking out for traffic, cross the road to another footbridge opposite a house and cross over the ditch to follow the footpath diagonally left across this open field towards the hedges, trees and the back of a chalet bungalow. ⑥ Bear right and follow the field edge. (Dogs on leads here as you approach a wildlife conservation area.) You will reach a large opening on the left, and on to a concrete roadway. Bear right and then left on a track through a wooded area at the rear of *Finningham Lodge Farm*.

This is where you may hear the peacocks calling and often see them sitting on rooftops! Deer too are usually to be seen here in the surrounding woods and fields, and try to spot the March hares having a 'boxing match'. Continue down this farm track to leave the wood, and with a hedge on your left, you will come to a culvert and ditch along with a wide area of grassland on your right. ⑦ Look out for kestrel and buzzards, as they too are a sight to see.

Turn right to keep the ditch on your left and make your way up to and into an enclosed wild meadow, crossing diagonally to the right and crossing a footbridge. ⑦ Here, turn left and follow the field edge around this large arable space with a tall hedgerow on your left. Heading south, you come to a footbridge on your left, cross this with another view of the water tower ahead, and follow the footpath eastwards beside ditches, crossing another footbridge and field edge to reach a footpath way-marker where you turn right onto a grass meadow with a tall hedge on your left. ⑧

This leads you down to a stream and bridge (a tributary of the River Dove), and if you are very lucky you may catch sight of a kingfisher, sometimes seen sitting on the overhanging branches of the trees ready to dive in for a stickleback! There are usually sheep kept close by here, so dogs must be kept on leads as you head up the wide grassed area to reach a bungalow on your left, and *Westhorpe Road*. ⑨

Turn left on the pavement heading east, and you will pass *The Old Forge** and *Hampton House* on your left, with signs of the old osier beds behind them which are often still flooded. Passing more houses, you reach Finningham crossroads and adjacent, the *White Horse Pub*.

Carefully cross the road to go straight ahead to ponder the Village sign and the Notice Board. Just after, cross *Wickham Road* and pass *The Old Post Office* on your right, then within 100m you will be opposite *the Green*. Once again take care in crossing over the road to return to where you started.

* *The Old Forge*: formerly Rose Cottage. Until 1925 a Mr R Farrow conducted a business there as blacksmith and wheelwright. At this time the cottage was combined with next door, and then became known as The Forge during its time of business. Certainly the present house well and truly predates the first mention of a blacksmith as one of the inhabitants of the cottage. As there are records indicating that there was a wheelwright in the village from 1550, it could well have been here?