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FINNINGHAM WALKS: TO BACTON CHURCH

4.6 mls/7.4 km • 1hr 40 mins

ALTERNATIVE: 2.2 mls/3.5km • 45mins

From the Village Green ...

Head south to join the road with a large white barn on your left. Turn right, (taking care here as it is a slightly blind spot for traffic). You will then see a footpath sign just ahead on your left. ❶ Cross the road safely and take this path along a driveway to join open fields and reach a lane at the top. (Just opposite here in the field is where the Finningham Post Mill once stood, and was in use up until the end of the 19th century.) A glance behind will give you a view of the village sitting in the valley.

❷ Turn left on to the lane/bridleway and continue up to the railway bridge, do not cross, but take the narrow footpath to the right of the bridge and continue close to the railway line on your left, then turning sharp right on the path to pass between housing to reach the road. Turn right and then left opposite the *water tower*, ❸ to walk down *Ladywell Road* for one third of a mile and reach a bridleway on your left and a road to the right. (*Those choosing the shorter walk will turn right.)

❹ Take the bridleway to the left which runs between hedgerows and trees, and after a small brook and footbridge, enters open farmland. Continue straight ahead keeping to the left of this triangular-shaped field to shortly reach a lane which curves from your left to then take you straight ahead, passing a *treatment works* on the left, and hereafter the bridleway narrows between hedges and brings you out on to the car park for *Bacton Village Hall*. ❺

(Saint Mary the Virgin Church is now in front of you, and if taking a walk to the right, you will pass Bacton Manor, The Bull Pub, and reach the Village Post Office and Stores, along with a large pond with abundant wildlife [A].)

Whilst in the car park, look to your right and take the footpath to the left of the bridleway you have just walked, this takes you along a short driveway, past a house on your right and to open fields. Take a look back for a nice view of the cottages and church, and to your left, *Bacton Manor* is in view. Keep on the verge of this field until you reach a very wide opening on the left which takes you into a meadow, continue with a hedge on your right, passing a footpath sign to reach a grassy opening with a small clump of trees. Take the oak-lined track down to a gateway. ❻ Turn right and follow the hedge line, going then around to the left and passing a wide opening. Continue, to pass a pond on your right and go through another opening, turning left on to a very wide headland. This takes you up to meet a road (Wyverstone left – Westhorpe right).

⑦ Turn right here and travel 0.1 mile to a footpath on the right, take this path with an 'S' bend, towards the hedgerow and trees ahead. These hide a bridlepath. Turn right and then turn left at a way-marker for a footpath. Go over the bridge with a hedge and trees on your right to another footbridge and a view of the water tower on your right. Cross the field slightly to your right to reach *Ladywell Road* again.

⑧ Cross the tributary of the River Dove (with a footbridge if the water is high) and walk up to the road junction where you had taken a bridlepath to Bacton earlier. ④

*(Here the shorter walk continues.) Turn left on the road to pass *Topcroft* farmhouse and farmyard and then on your right *Pink House*. Continue on the byway ahead which is a grass track and take a footpath left ⑨ ** across the field heading north to reach *Westhorpe Road*.

Carefully take the steps down the bank and look for traffic before crossing the road to a pavement. Turn left and then ⑩ right on to a footpath and a wide stretch of grass. There may be sheep nearby, so keep dogs on leads until you cross the tributary of the River Dove. Carry on, keeping close to the hedgerow until you reach the top of the meadow.

[11] Turn right and follow the hedgerow (about 150 yards) until you see a gap in the hedge. A view here to your left, you should see *Old Finningham School*. Place dogs on leads here as there will be many kinds of farm animals etc on the next stretch of footpath. Pass through the hedge then left in a meadow to a gate and footbridge. This leads on to *Moon Lane*, passes mobile homes and mostly small farm animals, then a private copse and reaches the B1113 Road.

[12] Cross with caution to a pavement opposite, to the right you will see what used to be called *The Iron Bridge* spanning the river. Keep ahead for a few yards and then cross the road before the large converted barn (*Church Mouse Barn*) and take a bridlepath crossing the river, pausing perhaps to take in the view. This surfaced path takes you towards the church and Village Green, but you will pass on your right *The Old House* which used to be a village stores. Ahead is picturesque *Walnut Tree Cottage* on Church Lane, with *Yew Tree House* to your left which was once used as the Rectory because the purpose-built one was not favoured by the Rector, LH Frere, at the time! Typically as you are close to the churchyard the rooks and crows will be making their presence heard as you pass the church to finish your walk.

**A short return walk ahead (250m) and back at this point would allow you to view or visit *Quest Antiques* adjoining *Rose Villa*, circa 1750. These buildings were once home to a saddle & harness maker.

SAINT MARY THE VIRGIN – BACTON

The parish church of St Mary the Virgin is a lovely flint rubble building dating to the 14th century. The oldest part of the church is likely the west doorway, set into the wall of the tower. This round-arched door is probably 12th century. The tower has had a stair turret of brick inserted during the 16th century.

The nave has a beautiful hammerbeam roof of 10 bays. This was probably decorated with carved figures when new, but there are no remaining figures now; they were probably destroyed in the Reformation.

The rood screen has been much restored, in part by the famed Victorian architect William Butterfield; it was not even a rood screen to start with but acted to enclose a chapel in the south aisle. The octagonal font dates to 1500, and there are several attractive wooden pews boasting beautifully carved poppyhead ends and buttress figures.

Over the chancel arch is a faded 15th century Doom wall painting. The centre of this painting has disappeared, but the sides are still quite clear. To the left, a group of figures including royalty and clergymen emerge from their graves and cluster at the gates of Heaven, where they are met by St Peter.

St Mary the Virgin, Bacton is a very satisfying church to visit, and well worth taking the time to explore.