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FINNINGHAM WALKS: TO HISTORIC WESTHORPE HALL

3.6mls/5.8km • 1hr 15 mins.

From the Village Green ...

We set off on the bridleway towards the church and pass *Yeoman House*, an 18th-century cottage on your right. At one time this was home to a dressmaking business run by a Mrs Emily Punt, and she was able to offer young girls a four-year apprenticeship, but the pay was a pittance, rising to 2/6d a week at the end of their term!

Head straight through the churchyard and past St. Bartholomew's to reach *Church Lane*, cross slightly left to continue on a tarmac pathway and pass over a narrow bridge, giving a nice view of the stream and *Church Mouse Barn*, a beautifully restored building. ❶ Cross the road to a pavement and turn left to reach a junction on the B1113. (Here the pavement curves right and leads up to the old Primary School, which closed in 1984. You can imagine hearing the children's voices from the playground there! Just to your right is also the *Old Rectory*, not the original, but built in the early 1900's. Strangely the Rector at that time, Rev. Leonard H Frere, declined to live in it and resided at Yew Tree House, Church Lane instead!)

❷ Take the footpath opposite, called *Moon Lane* and walk here with dogs on leads as you are likely to come across many smaller farm animals which are not penned. There is also a managed wildlife area/spinney on your left, before you come to the site of a smallholding and some living accommodation.

Keep to the right and continue west to reach a footbridge and wooden gate, which takes you into the next field. Close the gate behind you and travel 30m to a gated gap in the hedge. Pass through the gap, securing the gate and follow the footpath left on the perimeter of this large field. Looking to your right there is a copse, and often wild deer to be seen.

You will pass a way-marker and footpath to the left before coming to a footbridge. ❸ Cross over and continue on this next field edge to yet another footbridge, after which you turn left and follow the ditch. Keep to the border of this field heading south, and then west again from the corner, to come to a large gap in a hedge ahead and some trees. ❹

Pass through this gap on to a farm track, and, looking left, you can just see the back of *Westhorpe Hall*, set back from the large farm gate. This building is now a residential care home for up to 20 people, but turning a dog-leg left and right you may just spot some of the moat which surrounded the original grand house built early in the 16th century.

Continue west with the spinney on your right for about 250m on this footpath and you will reach a way-marker ⑤ and another footpath to the left, which will take you past a large pond, and a wide grassed area. Follow the track curving left, to pass a farm barrier and reach a concrete roadway. Bear right here and pause to see the Hall again in view, particularly the bridge, which still crosses the moat in its original position. * *See further history.*

Walk on in a southerly direction to join the Hall's driveway and reach the road, with a cottage opposite. You will see a narrow bridleway to the right of the cottage. Cross the road to take this route between hedges for a few metres then to open out on to *The Green* and reach *Wyverstone Road*, after passing *Green Farm* and other houses on your right. Walk carefully on the roadside passing *Little Thatch Cottage* and a stream. Just as you come to an open field to your right, you pass a footpath and dog bin. Looking out for traffic on these bends in the road, cross diagonally left to a signed bridleway ⑥ which travels for quite a stretch between tall hedges and trees. (Do bear in mind that there may be horses travelling this path.) You will pass a footpath on the right, and then after a short distance take the next footpath to the left. ⑦

As you start this next path, with a ditch on your right, you may notice on the field beyond the ditch, some strips of land perhaps not cultivated.

This area was known to have been set aside in medieval times by the Lord of the Manor encompassing Westhorpe, for the use of local people to grow their vegetables or use to keep animals such as sheep. The areas in those times were known as 'Roods', roughly a quarter acre and were divided up in that manner across Suffolk and other counties as far back as the early 14th century.

As you reach a footbridge, from here you have a lovely open view, with Finningham water tower to your right and ahead, sight of *Topcroft Farm*. Cross this next field slightly right to *Ladywell Road* where you bear right and cross the stream, a tributary of the River Dove. Sometimes after heavy rain this water is too high to keep to the road, so fortunately you have a footbridge to make use of! ⑧ Stay on this quiet road, passing a paddock and meadow on your right, and use the water tower as the point to head for. When you reach the B1113 turn right for just a few metres and then cross the road to a narrow footpath between hedgerows ⑨ and continue east for a little way and then sharp left as you reach the main Norwich – London railway line. This path then brings you out on to a lane next to a railway bridge. Keep walking ahead on what is now a bridleway too, and then take a footpath to your right ⑩ to cross a field and walk between an oak tree and hedge, but not before taking a photograph to capture St Bartholomew's church tower within the 'frame' made by the oak and hedge! This path takes you down to the centre of the village again, where you reach *Wickham Road*. The *White Horse Pub* is to your left 150m and across the road to the right you will see the large white converted barn on the entrance to the *Village Green*, from whence you started.

* The moated site of Westhorpe Hall was once the home of Charles Brandon and his wife Mary, 'Queen of France'. In 1514 Henry VIII sent his seventeen year-old sister Mary to France to marry the then King, Louis XII. However this fifty-three-year-old died three months after their marriage, so Henry duly despatched his trusted friend Charles Brandon, the first Duke of Suffolk, to France to escort Mary home. But Charles and Mary had been childhood friends and, to the immense outrage of Henry, in March 1515 the two secretly married in Paris.

In the same year Brandon acquired the Manor of Westhorpe and he and Mary set up their home here. They quickly built Westhorpe Hall, spending the modern equivalent of over £1 million on it to create a grand, estate house with sixteen principal rooms arranged around a central courtyard and a chapel with stained glass windows. The house was surrounded by a moat and beside the three-arched brick bridge stood a porter's lodge.

Mary, who preferred the title the Queen of France, bore Brandon four children, but died at Westhorpe Hall on 25th June 1533 aged just 37. Her body was embalmed and laid in the Hall's chapel before an elaborate funeral procession walked the coffin to the Abbey in Bury St Edmunds. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries her body was moved to St Mary's church in Bury where her tomb can be seen today. There is also a plaque in nearby St Margaret's Church to Mary Tudor, sister of Henry VIII.

The house was large and costly to maintain and was sadly pulled down around the mid 1760s. The only feature remaining from that Tudor period being the three-arched bridge, one of the few remaining Tudor bridges in East Anglia that can still be seen there today. It is Grade II listed. The present Georgian building, which is also Grade II listed, became a public house, then a hotel, a family home and finally a care home in the 1980s. Over this time it was extensively added to so as to create the complex of buildings you see today.