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FINNINGHAM WALKS: TO GISLINGHAM, TOWARDS THORNHAM ESTATE, THROUGH WICKHAM SKEITH & DAISY GREEN.

7.6mils/12.2km • 2hrs 50 mins

From the Village Green ...

Head towards *St. Bartholomew's Church* and through the gate to enter the churchyard, fork to the right and pass the entrance to the church and follow a path which takes you between a hedgerow and trees behind *Green Farm* to bring you to a gravel driveway and *Gislingham Road*. ①

Turn left on the road heading north to pass the village cemetery on the left. Keep straight ahead between domestic housing and pass over the small river to join a road from your left. A glance behind, and you will see a cottage on the bend which used to be the village bakery, which sadly closed long ago in 1947. So onwards you go, without a freshly baked pastie, up the hill ahead, keeping to the right of the road for safety until you reach a bend, where on your left a bridleway sign gives you the direction to take along a short farm track. ②

At the end of this track and hedgerow, turn right to keep a ditch on your left and follow this edge of open field to enter *Jenny's Lane*, a nice stretch of pathway between two tall hedgerows and trees for some distance and passing a footpath off to the right. When you emerge from the narrower pathway, the grass verge of the open field sweeps around to your left, with a tall hedge still on your right. Take time to get a view to the left back across Finningham, and spot the landmark water tower in the distance. Continue along this field edge and enter between hedgerows again and come to a footpath signposted on the left. ③ Pass this, turning right on a track to see *Jenny's Farm* and join a small roadway going straight ahead. At the end of this you join *Back Street, Gislingham*. ④

Turn right along this small road, which in early spring often has a migration of many toads crossing to their breeding areas. Continue on the road eastwards for about two thirds of a mile (1km) ignoring one footpath on your right and three on your left, to pass *Lodge Farm* and then *Ivy Lodge Farm* before reaching a footpath along with a red dog bin on your left. ⑤ Take this wide footpath heading north past one footpath on your right, and past the first plantation of trees, to take a footpath to the right just before the second plantation. ⑥ You will pass a Georgian house on the right which once was the Rectory with the path then going along beside its tall garden wall, before you reach an open meadow space with a plantation on your left just before you exit the footpath on to a pavement with the *Six Bells Pub* opposite.

Turn left to reach *Gislingham High Street* with the grocery shop on your left, and to your right the *Six Bells Pub*. (Further down the street is the village hall, and opposite there is St. Mary's Church, with a red brick tower.) [A]

⑦ Turn right opposite the shop and walk down *Coldham Lane* to find a finger post on your right just beyond the council houses. Take this footpath and follow it around the field edge (hedge on your left) and you will come to a footbridge on your left ⑧ to cross a ditch and take you east across a field to another footbridge within a hedge. Cross over and turn right, with a concrete pad on your left, follow a wide grassy path around to your left. Climb slightly to cross a brick bridge over the Norwich – London main railway line. (Incidentally, if you are able to see over the sides of the bridge, the line here is a stretch of 9 miles dead straight between Diss & Stowmarket stations!)

Continue on this track, which narrows to a path through a small wood and then follow the path alongside a field with the hedge on your left. As you approach a clump of trees, about half a mile from the bridge, the path forks; ⑨ bear slightly left passing some ponds to reach a concrete track. Turn right (at *Little Swattesfield Hall*) and follow the concrete track to a wide grassy path through woodland (*Coldham Grove*) and then walk down the field edge until you reach a small road (*Clay Street*). ⑩ Go straight over this road and down the wide track to reach and cross a ford (a path to your left gives access to the footbridge if the water is high) to join *The Street, Wickham Skeith*.

Turn right using the road edge as there is no pavement, and walk about 100m until you are opposite a large house on the roadside to your left, this was The Swan pub which closed in 1966 and is now a listed building. Carefully cross the road to the right of the old pub where there is a fingerpost for a footpath pointing south beside the driveway. [11] Take this path, keeping to the right, through the edge of garden, between fencing to reach an open field. Turn left here and follow the field edge around to the right on a grassy path and passing stables and paddocks on your left. You then reach a bridleway [12] where you turn left and walk between hedgerows for about 100m take a right turn off the bridleway between a large gap in the hedge. Travel up this field edge to reach a track, and turn left. [13]

*[At this point you do have an option to take time out by continuing straight along this track which becomes a small roadway taking you to the *Grimmer* once known as the 'Grim Mere' which actually is a lovely, very large pond on Wickham Green. On a nice day it is a good spot for a picnic or just to take in the view and stroll around this area. (For those with dogs, there is a litter bin here which can be used for bagged dog waste.) To continue your walk, return along the small roadway and track.]

After turning left, almost immediately turn right at a way-marker post and pass through a *kissing gate* on to a path between trees and hedges with some overhanging foliage, to pass a field with livestock and almost a moat leading to a farmhouse on the left. You then come to a gate and join the small road at *Daisy Green*. [14]

Turn right here and follow the road to pass a spinney and then *Walnut Farm* followed by *Holybank Farm*, here the road ends and a track forks off to the left with a hedge on the right, follow this out into open fields and views to take in Finningham water tower on the horizon. On reaching a concrete storage pad there is a way-marker at the footpath crossways, turn right here [15] on *Wickham Abbey Farm* roadway and walk straight through the farmyard, observing safety should there be farm vehicles etc in use. Beyond the farm you then join a small road and reach a T junction at *Cotton Lane*. Turn left heading west on the road, and after a short distance take the next footpath on your right to walk the edge of a field with the hedge on the left, which will drop you down to *Wickham Road*, with a plantation in front of you. [16]

Take care with traffic, and cross over the road to enter amongst the trees and follow this footpath around to the left, crossing a footbridge and reaching *Eastland's Lane*. Turn right to cross the river (a tributary of the River Dove). In the unlikely event of high water, there is a footbridge to give passage across to pass a storage pad on the left. Here you turn left on to a grassed byway [17] and follow the river edge to then pass under the railway bridge and onwards to go between hedgerows on more of a track surface to pass a small pumping station, then bearing right you reach the road and bridge beside you, that you passed earlier on your walk.

Turn right, then cross over the road and head west to go in front of the *Old Bakery* cottage, almost straight ahead on this bend in the road, taking care here as the road is quite narrow with no footpath. You will pass two converted barns until you reach a third called *Church Mouse Barn*, just beyond will be a bridleway [18] to your left. Take this to cross a bridge over the river once again, here often there are ducks or water hens in the water. The narrow bridleway path brings you to *Church Lane*, passing *The Old House* on your right, which used to be a grocery store for many years until 1969. The bay window, which was used to display items for sale then, can still be admired. In this area too, you can find *Walnut Tree Cottage*, a picturesque building dated back to 1536 and *Yew Tree House* which once was home to a rope-making business.

Ahead of course you have the church, so you can return to the *Village Green* by continuing on through the gate and churchyard to where your walk first started.

[13] With reference to the 'Notorious Grimmer' at Wickham Skeith, you may like to read this story @

www.franceshardinge.com/library/cuckoo_song_grimmer.html

< http://www.franceshardinge.com/library/cuckoo_song_grimmer.html >