

Years ago walking along field paths was the only choice for many people to move about between rural villages. The early part of this circular walk is on the direct footpath between Helmdon and Greatworth; it would have been well used by those who needed to get to work in or near the other village, or to visit family or friends. Today we only walk this path for pleasure and it is ideal for that!

### Getting Ready.

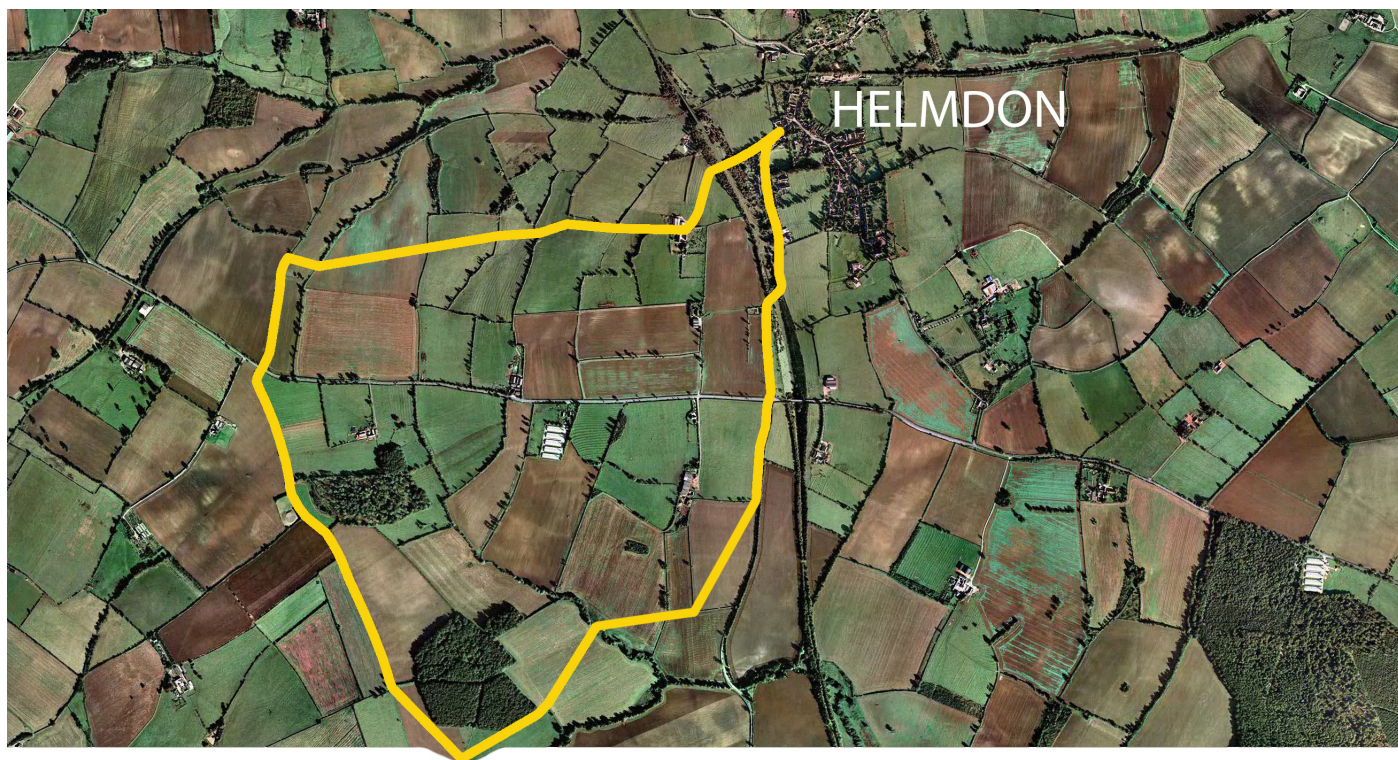
The complete circle is approximately 5 miles and will take about 2.5 hours to complete if walking at a moderate pace.

Parts of this walk will probably be muddy and uneven so stout footwear is needed, as well as appropriate clothing. Also two crossings of the busy B4525 road are involved and some walking along the side of another road, so special care is needed if children are in the party.

Whilst enjoying the countryside do please respect its life and work: keep to the public paths, fasten all gates behind you, leave livestock, crops and machinery alone, keep your dogs under close control and take your litter home.

### Starting out

From opposite Helmdon School turn right as if to go up Station Road but fork right into the lane and walk through the tunnel under the old railway. Fork left up the lane to Grange Farm, passing between wire-fenced horse paddocks. As you enter the farmyard look right for an arrowed gateway, between a garage and the large sheds, and go a few yards to a stile into a grass field; from here the path slopes gently away from you down to a wire fence with a metal gate. Use the small stile beside this gate and note that the black arrow shows the path now runs upwards across a wide stock field; take care not to disturb the cattle that are often here. From the brow of the slope, head for the middle of the stout hedge in front of you and find a stile and gate into the next field.



This field and the next one are used by ‘Tanks a Lot’ for military activity days, so be prepared to see and hear armoured vehicles moving around these fields. Here the landowner offers an alternative to the official path that is shown on Ordnance Survey maps and you are advised to use it. So take the well-marked permissive path along the field edge, keeping close to the hedge on your right side. In the second field the path runs behind an earth embankment and over a plank bridge to the field corner, where you turn left and go about 100yards to a hedge break and a sleeper plank bridge over the ditch.

Here you cross the ditch and re-join the official path, walking away from the tank field across a large arable field. If the proposed wind turbines are erected, you could now be walking between two of them and see another ahead of you. As you cross this large arable field, possibly between turbine construction work, you will go up

over a brow before gradually going down to an arrow-marked gap in the hedge. Continue across a narrower arable field to a wide gap in the sparse hedge that slopes down from your left to the right. Here you meet a wide grass and vehicle-rutted track.

This byway is in fact an old Anglo-Saxon road that went North to the lost village of Stuchbury. Ahead of you the public footpath continues on towards Greatworth across a large arable field. But our circular walk route now turns left to go South and slightly uphill along the grass track marked by vehicle wheels until you reach the busy B4525 road.

Take great care in crossing over the road as traffic coming round the bends has little time to see you. Go straight on along the gravel roadway, passing after 350m the entrance to an Anglian Water premises, and go through a

gateway; use the small gate to the left if the main gate is closed. Ignore the stile on your left and continue on the track along the left side of a wide field. Note the wood away to your left and another one ahead of you on the same side of this track which is a bridleway, so you may meet some horse riders.

After another 450m, near the second wood and at a gateway, pause to note that if HS2 is built it will cut deeply through this part of the rural landscape and take out some of the wood; also this section of the bridleway will be removed. Walking here could be very different, although there may be a cycling and walking path alongside the railway.

Today the path ahead could take you on to Brackley, or to other paths to Radstone that will also be dramatically altered by HS2, but now we turn for home.

### Back to Helmdon

From the gateway on the farm track you turn about 15 degrees to your left and go diagonally part-way across an arable field to a track coming from the right, which runs in a line from the water tower on your right towards the edge of the wood on your left. Here you turn left and go through a grass pasture with the wood on your left. This is a particularly quiet and pleasant place to be walking on a fine day or a summer evening. At the far corner of the wood there is a gateway into a large arable field. From here our path is straight on across the middle of this field.

You are heading towards a solid-looking high hedge and need to find where a modern wooden bridge crosses the stream that is hidden by the hedgerow. If you are walking in the summer then keeping to the sprayed out path through the crop will take you to the bridge; at other times try to keep straight as you cross the ploughed land, and look for a tall willow tree with a smaller oak in front of it!

After the wooden bridge the path crosses some rough, deeply rutted and often wet ground, so go slowly and carefully for this short piece. At the edge of the cultivated ground the path turns slightly right to cross the arable field to a gap in a low hedge. Here the post with way indicator discs shows that you cross over the gravelled farm track. Now keeping the newly planted hedge on your left continue along the field's edge to a right-angled corner of a thick hedge. As another way-indicator shows, you go through the gap in this corner and up into a belt of young trees bordering an open field.

The path now goes diagonally right and slightly up across this open grass field to a large tree on the left side of a wide gap at the junction of two hedges. On the other side of the hedge on your right is the Brackley to Helmdon road. There used to be a stile onto the road but the path was diverted when the Blackpits Barn recycling business was set up. Now the path continues up the side of the field to the cross-roads. Away to your left are sheds where household waste is sorted for recycling, and where organic material is processed into gas for homes in Brackley. Also visible are large mounds of composting green waste and you may notice an odour that some find unpleasant. However, this useful recycling of garden waste is another new element of our rural landscape to reflect upon as you pass by.

The stile from the field corner takes you onto the verge of the busy cross-roads and great care is again needed whilst crossing over into the road to Helmdon. Then continue to be cautious as you walk down the roadside into Helmdon, perhaps pausing at the end of the old rail bridge to look down at the site of the former Great Central railway station. There is no footpath until you reach the houses on either side but then it is a short walk back to Helmdon School.

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## HELMDON PARISH PATHS CIRCULAR WALK No 5

Tanks, Green Energy and HS2



Walking from Grange Farm across Spring Ridge

*After the Parish Plan survey in 2004, a group was formed to improve access to the many public footpaths around Helmdon. This is the latest of five leaflets designed to help people to enjoy this undulating, rural landscape. A grant from Helmdon Parish Council has funded the printing.*

*This walk between Helmdon and Greatworth crosses open land with wide views and visits places where traditional farming is being replaced. A former dairy farm now offers tank driving and other military style activities; also now in 2016 there is a proposed wind-farm development. Later this route meets a short section of the planned HS2 train route and then passes by a green waste recycling centre. So whilst walking these paths one can reflect on how the countryside is still being changed by human activity.*