

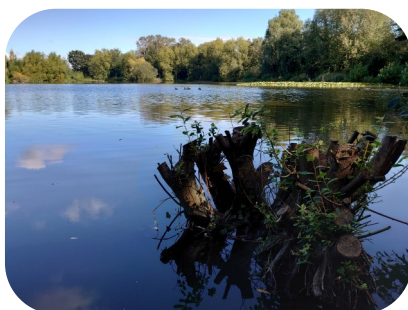
# The Fen Edge Trail

## Somersham to Earith

5.1 miles (8.1 km)  
plus optional 2.2 miles (3.6 km)  
to Somersham Local Nature Reserve

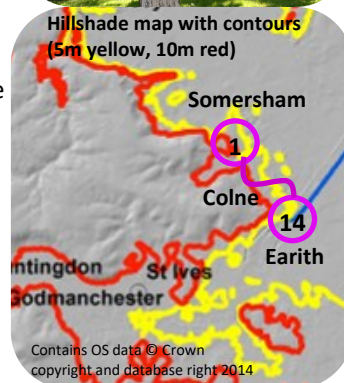
*'history, geology,  
geography .. such a  
lot of interest on the  
fen edge here - even  
some OS  
benchmarks!'*

**Paul M, Fen Edge Trail  
team**



**The route: 'over river terraces on the edge of the marshes and along the famous Old Bedford Drain'**

This walk, in the south western Fens, takes you from **Somersham**, on the fen edge, 'inland' via **Colne** and on to **Earith**, an important crossing point on the **River Great Ouse**. To the west is higher land where there were once **thick woods** full of deer and wild boar whilst to the east, gravel terraces, formed by a previous, **much larger river than the current Ouse**, slope down to the low fens. Prior to fen drainage, the area was the first expanse of dry land when approaching across the marshes from the Isle of Ely in the east, making it a natural place for settlement. A rich cultural history therefore developed. The **Somersham-Colne-Earith** fen edge is known for its extensive **Romano-British settlement** whilst in the early **Bronze Age**, it was on the western edge of tidal saltmarsh, the furthest inland extent of the sea incursion lying just to the south. A flint axe head found in Somersham, now in the **Norris Museum** (St Ives), dates to the **Lower Palaeolithic** (over c.200,000 years ago). The local geology is also of **significant importance**: beneath the surface is an **exceptional record of environmental change** covering the last 150,000 years. Now a quiet part of the fen edge, it is still of strategic importance, with the **Old Bedford Drain** and **adjacent Ouse Washes** playing key roles in the current **Fens drainage and flood prevention**.



**Photos: 3e.1f Somersham LNR Lake; 1.4f St John the Baptist Church; 1.5f Dovecot in the churchyard; 7.1f Colne village sign on the green; 1.6f Hatties Map; 5.1f Turn left before the lone tree; 3b.1f Railway gates into Nature Reserve; 1.1f Somersham Village Cross.**

**Practicalities** As with all of the walks along the Fen Edge Trail, you can complete the full length of any walk or choose a short or long round trip option, or just visit some of the places on the route. The walk is divided into numbered parts as shown on the two maps. Photos are shown in the order they are seen except for those on this front page (f). The walk follows, in parts, the **Rothschild Way**, **Pathfinder Way** and **Greenwich Meridian Trail** and finishes on the **Ouse Valley Way** and the **Via Beata**.

**Length of walk** (one way) approx. 5.1 miles (8.1 km) plus optional 2.2 miles (3.6 km) Somersham Local Nature Reserve extension. Guide time main walk c.2hrs 30 mins plus stops. Grid ref start TL360779. Maps O.S. Explorer 225. Free, easy to use online geology map viewer on [www.bgs.ac.uk/map-viewers/bgs-geology-viewer](http://www.bgs.ac.uk/map-viewers/bgs-geology-viewer).

**Transport and services** There are limited **buses** between Earith and Somersham that also link with St Ives (and Huntingdon) [www.dewskoaches.com](http://www.dewskoaches.com) and **train services** to Huntingdon. Parking is available opposite the Church in Church Street and along the streets in Earith. There are pubs and shops in Somersham and Earith, a pub in Colne and tea room in Somersham.

**Safety** Be aware of risks you may encounter and take note of warnings given by landowners or on pathways. The terrain is generally flat, with potentially muddy ground when not walking along streets. Take particular care with uneven terrain, when near water, on soft or slippery ground, in the presence of livestock or walking along or crossing roads. Ensure your dog is kept under control as needed. All Fen Edge Trail walks are on publicly accessible routes. Anyone undertaking walks on the Fen Edge Trail does so at their own risk; these notes are for general guidance only.



# The Fen Edge Trail Somersham to Earith Directions map (5 miles / 8.1 km)

(If you want to visit **Somersham Nature Reserve** before the walk, take **1a** to join the additional walk from **3b**.)

**1** Start at **Somersham Cross** (1.1f).

Cross the **High St**, walk south on **Church St** to the **church** (1.4f).

**2** After the **church** continue until you pass Hammond Way and then immediately after branch left.

**3** After c.100 yards take footpath signposted on right just past a house. Walk through **kissing gate** (3.1) and continue on path keeping hedge to your right then skirting the edge of a meadow. Go through another **kissing gate** and over a **footbridge** (3.2).

**3a** To visit **Somersham Nature Reserve**, at kissing gate at end of this bridge, take left track. (See directions below.)

**4** If not, continue straight ahead along field edge through **3 kissing gates**, over **old railway track** through another **kissing gate** to open fields. Follow path past sewage works, through **gate**.

**5** Follow track to **Colne**. Go left just before **lone tree** (5.1f), right over **footbridge** and on past **Church Farm**.

**6** On reaching the gate after farm turn right onto **Old Church Lane**. After two

bends you will see the old village cemetery of St Helen's Church in front of you (6.1). **Take care on uneven ground. Do not go within fence around ruins.** Retrace steps to first bend and **take footpath right through trees**. Exiting wood, turn right on **Old Church Lane**.

**7** Cross road and walk directly on down **High St**, skirting the green (7.1f) to pass the **church** (7.2). Turn right down **Drury Lane** then left at the bottom into **East Street**.

**8** At the main road B1050, cross road (**take care as this is a main road**) to go straight on, down **Holme Fen Drove**.

**9** Where the overhead telegraph wires cross the road (just before Elm Tree Farm on the right) branch left at the tree (9.1) along **Back Drove** track and then take the **footpath signposted** on the right (9.2) to skirt around the fields, turning left where the fields meet at the tree (9.3) and continue around the field until you pass the fenced **Earith Lakes** entrance on the right.

**10** Keeping fields on left, follow the edge of the fenced **lakes** on right until you pass through a gate onto road and past **Bridge Farm**.

**11** Continue along this track (**Meadow Drove**) past **Earith Business Park**.

**12** Turn left at **Business Park entrance sign** (and postbox), down a short side road (**Short Drove**). Take gate on right to walk up onto bank, turn right along **Old Bedford River** (12.1).

**13** At the end of the bank, once out the gate, turn left to cross **bridge** to a memorial (13.1). Cross road to the small **viewing area** over the **River Ouse** (14.1f) **next to the pumping station**, which is the end of the walk **14**.

**Somersham Nature Reserve can be visited (there and back) from 3a (or pre-walk):**

**3a** At kissing gate after bridge, turn left through field, and after a short while follow path diagonally, right, across field to exit onto **Galley's Drove**. Walk along this to **Colne Road** (3a.1) and turn left.

**3b** At junction, with **High St** to left and **Chatteris Rd** off to right, cross (**with care!**) and go right to then bear left uphill along **Station Approach**. Turn left through **old railway level crossing gates** (3b.1f) into **Somersham Local Nature Reserve**. See map on noticeboard.

**3c** After c.200 yards take the path right, and follow it as it arcs to the left and then straightens out passing through light woodland. Follow the path for a third of a mile **through the woods** as it skirts a meadow. After a right and left turn, the track turns left. Follow the path as it crosses the top of the meadow and exits.

**3d** Turn left to walk down the **old railway track**. **3e** After a quarter of a mile take path to right and **walk around the lake** (3e.1f) and exit following the track back to **Station Approach**, retracing your steps back via **3b Colne Road** and **Galley's Drove** to point **3a**.





## Ages of the rocks

### 'Superficial':

#### Holocene

Less than 11,700 years

#### Alluvium, Peat

#### Pleistocene

##### River Terrace Gravels

(1st/2nd) c. 12-50,000 years

##### Glacial Till

c.425,000 years (Anglian)

#### Jurassic Bedrock:

**Amphill Clay** c.158 to c.159 million years

million years

This walk starts on the **River Terrace gravels** c.13m above sea level before descending to c.6m to cross river **Alluvium** and Amphill Clay in a small river valley. After Colne, at c.16m, on the **Terrace Gravels**, the walk crosses a small patch of **Amphill Clay** in another small valley before descending below 5m onto lower **Terrace Gravels** and **Alluvium** of the floodplain of the **Ouse**. The walk finishes at c.5m on the extensive **Alluvium** within the **Ouse Washes**, a huge flood-relief area between the **Old and New Bedford Rivers**. These major engineering works now carry most of the water flowing down the Ouse.

## Walk: Somersham to Earith - geology and landscape



The **Amphill Clay** bedrock, formed when 'mud' on the floor of a shallow **Jurassic** sea (think **Ichthyosaurs** and **Pliosaurs**!) became compressed enough to form a sticky and relatively soft mudstone rock. It is now overlain by much younger deposits, from the **Pleistocene** 'Ice Age', the oldest being **Glacial Till (Boulder Clay)**, material left by glaciers during the **Anglian** glaciation. There are also substantial amounts of **sand and gravel** deposited by powerful **braided rivers** during subsequent **glaciations**. These river gravels are mapped as a series of '**River Terraces**' but they consist of complex accumulations of material of different ages (dated by their fossils). The gravels here are from the youngest two terraces, the 1st and 2nd, which are difficult to separate due to intermixing. They date from the cold **Devensian** stage from c.70,000 to c.12,000 years ago (although possibly some are older). These deep sands and flint-rich gravels have been **quarried extensively** for use in construction leaving a large number of flooded pits.

In the last few thousand years (the **Holocene**), **Peat** formed on top of the gravels in lower areas when (fresh) waterlogging lasted long enough for the build up of this organic material. The river now called the **River Great Ouse** has had a dynamic history with its course changing numerous times, particularly since Man has had such a **dramatic impact on the fenland landscape**. **Alluvium**, a fine material deposited relatively recently by the river, particularly in times of flood, extends over the current Ouse river valley and also in other areas, showing the location of old water channels that have now disappeared. From **Earith**, the main river once **flowed north**, to the west of Chatteris and then on to the Wash. Called the **West Water**, this course can be seen by the significant **band of Alluvium** that covers the Peat and River Gravels to the east of this walk. The rest of the flow entered the **Old West River** modified and enlarged, probably during the Middle Ages, to go east to join with the Cam and then north to the Wash.





# Places of interest along the Trail

## The Somersham Gravels — a unique geology

Research carried out by **Prof Richard West (University of Cambridge)** showed a sequence of fen edge deposits north east of **Somersham**, with elevation above/below OD (OD = sea level):

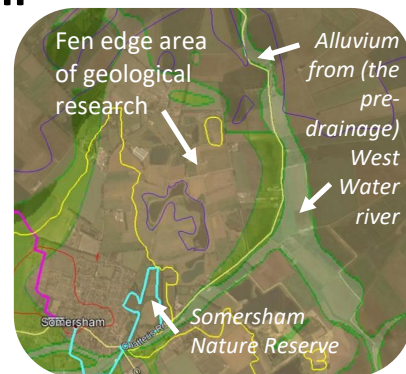
**Holocene** (since the end of the last glaciation 11,700 years ago) **peat and marl** c.1m OD

**Devensian** (the last glaciation, before 11,700 ya) **lake sediments (Lake Sparks)** c.-1m to 1m OD and **river gravels** with reworked fossils from below -1.5m to 3m OD

**Ipswichian** (interglacial c.120,000 ya) temperate fossiliferous freshwater and marine-influenced sediments c.-3.5m to 2.5m OD

**Late Wolstonian** (end of the **Tottenham glaciation** c.150,000 ya) river gravels deposited on or after the retreat of the ice c.-4m to 0m OD

The last three periods cover much of the later part of the Pleistocene Ice Age which ended c.11,700 years ago. It was during its last glaciation, the Devensian, that the Fenland basin was formed. A large lake, **Lake Sparks**, developed covering much of the basin when fenland rivers were blocked by ice in the Wash c.20,000 years ago. *"On gazing over this typical Fenland landscape from the Somersham Fore Fen road it would be beyond belief that such a complex history was recorded here. The sequence covers a period from c.150,000 years ago to the Holocene (present), including the presence of significant gravel bed rivers in the colder periods of low sea levels and fossiliferous deposits in interglacial conditions, in the time since the retreat of the Tottenham ice."* **Prof Richard West 2019**. The bones of **Woolly rhino, Mammoth, Horse and Bison** have been found in the gravels as have two Levallois (Neanderthal) flakes (flints).



## Additional walk to Somersham Local Nature Reserve

Owned jointly by Cambridgeshire County and Somersham Parish Councils, the 12 hectare reserve is managed by Somersham Nature Reserve Friends Group. Habitats include wet woodland, meadow and open water. The **disused railway line** is good for spotting grass snakes and common lizards and is designated a **County Wildlife Site**, recognising the importance of its **neutral grassland**. Birds to be seen in the reserve include Common tern, Great crested grebe, Grey heron and Kingfisher. Plants include Red bartsia, St John's wort, Common toadflax and Purple loosestrife and the meadow is good for butterflies.

**3a** The **Cranbrook Drain** carries water from the higher land to the west. It flows east and then south along the Colne fen edge to empty into the **Counter Drain** alongside the Old Bedford at the **Black Sluice**.

**3b** A little further east (right) along Chatteris Rd is an area called **Turkington Hill** where the remains of a **Romano British villa** were identified, with many coins and pottery shards also found. To your left is a short stretch of railway track (**3b.2**) from the **Great Northern and Great Eastern Joint Railway line**. You are walking where **Somersham railway station** once stood. It still exists, having been re-erected at Fawley Railway Museum in Buckinghamshire, whilst Chatteris Station was rebuilt in OO gauge at **Chatteris Museum**. **Somersham** was on the **Great Eastern Railway** between **March** and **St Ives**.

**3c** To the north east of the reserve is a large area of both **working gravel pits** and disused, flooded pits that are now used for fishing. This was an area of **significant geological research** (see above).

**3d** The walk here follows the old railway line, which is a **County Wildlife Site** due to its 'neutral' (i.e. neither calcareous nor acidic) grassland which supports a specific range of plants.

**3e** The lake (**3e.1**) now fills the gravel pit where material was taken for use as ballast when the railway was built. After use as a rubbish tip it was cleared and is now used for fishing. It has a good population of **water lilies**! After exiting the reserve and returning to the B1040, you could make a short detour before turning into Galley's Drove as c.250 yards further along Colne Road, on the right is 'Annabelle's Cakes' **tea rooms** (closed Wednesdays) in Cranbrook Plants.

## Main walk (see last page for benchmark information)

**1 The Village Cross (1.1f)** was the site of the medieval village market. Somersham lies on the **Greenwich Meridian Line** and a short detour along the High St to c.28m east of the Cross, takes you to a **marker** in the pavement (**1.2**), dating from 1884, showing its position. One of the shops opposite has an **Ordinance Survey (OS) Benchmark** (see last page). It is a **cut benchmark**, 0.6m above the ground and 10.78m above ODN (ODN = sea-level). The slope of the land from here down to the low 'fenland' to the east, is shown by comparing this height to that of the OS benchmark on an outbuilding towards the end of the High St at Willow Rise. The latter stands at 0.3m above the ground and 8.12m above ODN showing the **descent of the land** from 10.18 to 7.82 ODN (i.e. 2.36m in c.370 metres). This area of the **fen edge** has a **rich archaeological history**. Traces of post holes from **Iron Age huts** have been found along Parkhall Rd and Chatteris Rd.

At the end of the 10th century, Somersham was a thriving manor, one of several in Cambridgeshire owned by the ealdorman **Byrhtnoth**, the subject of a well-known **Anglo-Saxon poem**. Byrhtnoth took an army of East Anglians down to Maldon to engage with a Viking invasion in 991. According to a story propagated by the monks of Ely, they fed Byrhtnoth and his army after the Abbot of Ramsey refused. In return Byrhtnoth gifted to Ely many of his manors including that of Somersham should he die in battle. Maldon turned out to be a major victory for the Vikings, Somersham passed to the Abbey of Ely and a long-running feud with the Abbot of Ramsey (who owned manors at Chatteris and St Ives) began. There were frequent incidents including fighting, cattle rustling and illegal hunting, in an area known as **Crowlodemor**, in the marshes to the east between Somersham and Chatteris. As you walk down



Photos: **3a.1** Galley's Drove exit on Colne Rd; **3b.2** Railway track; **1.2** Meridian Line (and Benchmark on opposite building, no 93); **1.3** 18th century former school; **1.7** Millennium memorial stone.



**Church St** you will see a fine, red-brick building (Grade II listed) on the right side (1.3) - this was the **18th century school**, built in 1782. It has interesting graffiti on the porch, where former pupils have carved their initials. The Grade I listed **St John the Baptist Church** (1.4f) dates from 1250-1300 and is built of rubble with dressings of **Barnack Stone** (Jurassic limestone from a quarry near Stamford). The church has a 'flush bracket' benchmark, 0.3m above the ground and 10.71m above ODN, last verified in 1969. Situated in the churchyard is a fine example of a late 18th/early 19th century **Dovecote** (1.5f). **Hattie's Map** (1.6f) commemorates Hattie Skeggs and her legendary knowledge of the village's history and was put together by the Parish Council with her help, although she died (at almost 90) before it was completed. It shows the **village footpaths** that she liked to walk '*Hattie was adamant that she didn't want people to forget all the old names, and it was quite important to her that people knew where things were*'. Outside the church there is also a **Millennium memorial stone** (1.7).

**2** Further down the road, at the end of a row of houses, is a public footpath to the right (don't take it!). Beyond it is a field in a 'dip' (2.1). This area was once one of two wildfowl or **fish ponds** for the **Bishop's Palace**. Located at the far end of Church St, the Palace was a grand affair visited by both King Richard (the Lionheart) and King John around 1200. There is very little left of the magnificent buildings and grounds located on what is now a farm at the far end of Church St. The Bishop of Ely's palace is well documented historically and has important ecclesiastical associations which extend back before the Norman Conquest. There was once a significant amount of **woodland** in the area, of which only a few small spinneys remain, and the Bishop owned some of the **surrounding forest**, in 1341 claiming the right to hunt deer freely 'throughout the whole forest of Somersham'. As you walk past Hammond Way look behind you to see how the **ground rises slightly towards the centre of the village** due to the **River Terrace Gravels** that underlie much of Somersham. On the palace approach, the higher ground would have given 'horse-borne' visitors an impressive view of the approaching grounds and buildings. In contrast, the palace site is on **bedrock Amptill Clay** (no doubt providing lining for the ponds) on the northern slope of a small valley. The site of the palace (and its gardens, ponds and moat) is now a **Scheduled Monument** which also includes an island with a derelict 19th century house, **Cranbrook House**, on a moated island.



**3** The footbridge crosses **Cranbrook Drain** in a small valley that once had a **larger river** running through it from west to east, shown by the band of **Alluvium** that remains. It provides fertile and more easily worked soil than that of the underlying Amptill Clay and you pass by an **ancient meadow** here.



**4** The railway track you cross held the **Somersham to Chatteris** line, part of the **Great Northern and Great Eastern Joint Railway line**. It cost £56,000 to build and **opened in 1889**, carrying both freight and passengers but closed to regular passengers in **1930** and to freight in 1964, closing finally in 1967.



**5** You are now walking down what is shown on old maps as the **coach track**, perhaps another route into the palace grounds. From here to Church Farm in Colne you are following **three Long Distance Walks**: the **Rothschild Way**, created in memory of Charles Rothschild, a pioneer of nature conservation in Great Britain; **Pathfinder Long Distance Walk**, devised to perpetuate the name of the Royal Air Force Pathfinder Force - the route links the historic RAF Pathfinder stations at Wyton, Graveley, Oakington and Warboys, passing many wartime memorials; the **Greenwich Meridian Trail**, a long-distance trail that follows the line of the Prime Meridian. Opened in 2009, the 125th anniversary of the Greenwich Meridian, it begins in Peacehaven in East Sussex and ends, 273 miles later, on the coast at Sand le Mere in Yorkshire. As you walk along this track, you can see **Bluntisham Water Towers** over in the far distance to the south. To the south west there used to be a large area of open heathland known as **Somersham Heath**. Lying between the parishes of St Ives and Somersham, it was divided and enclosed in 1796. In the 18th century, reference was made to a '**Spa**' situated on the Heath about three miles from St Ives at the side of Bathe Hill. In 1767 the spa was recommended 'for medicinal qualities'. The **Somersham to St Ives turnpike road** bisected the Heath. By 1804 the road was a mail coach road (used in 1836 by the '**Defiance**' mail coach from London to Wisbech).

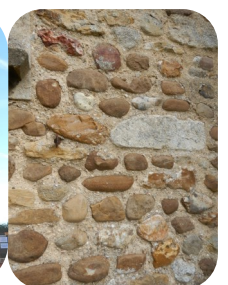


**6** Before turning right note the large conifer hedge to the left along the lane behind which (now in a private garden - no entry) is the site of a moat that is a **scheduled ancient monument**. It was the site of the Manor, owned by the **de Colne family** in the 12th to 14th centuries. Not long after turning right down the lane, note the large, coppiced ash tree on the left. Coppicing, once common in many woods, was used to obtain poles from the regrowth of the trunk after it was cut at the base. The old, abandoned **St Helen's church** dates from the 13th century. It was damaged in 1896 when the tower collapsed onto the church. The ruins contain a porch that is Grade II listed (6.2). As you walk around the copse of trees you reach the highest point on the walk, at 16m above sea level.



**7** This is an **ancient (late Saxon) village green** where you can now see the **village sign** (7.1f) and a WW1 memorial. The new church of **St Helen's** (7.2), next to the green, is Grade II listed. Built in 1900, its walls are of 'field stone' including many sandstone cobbles (7.3) and some flint. However, much of the finer stone (ashlar), mostly limestone, is from the earlier church, including the 14th century font. Most of the windows (except for the eastern window) are also mediaeval (14th century) and from the earlier church. There is a Benchmark on the south side of the church being 0.7m above the ground and **12.09m** above ODN. Arriving at East St, note the thatched 16th century cottage (7.4) on the right (Grade II listed). **A fire in 1844** destroyed many historic houses in the village but this is one that survived. Just along East St to the right is the

**Photos: 2.1 Area of fish ponds of Bishop's Palace; 3.1 Kissing gate after house; 3.2 Footbridge before turn for additional walk to Somersham Nature Reserve (3a); 6.1 Old cemetery; 6.2 Ruins of porch of village church; 7.2 St Helen's Church; 7.3 Wall with sandstone cobbles.**







Green Man pub (7.5), Grade II listed and with two inglenook fireplaces.

**8 Holme Fen Drove** is a an ancient '**Drovers road**' that was used to move livestock between summer and winter pastures or to market.

**9** Near the lakes, watch and listen for birds such as **wildfowl and waders** (maybe even a curlew!).

**10 Cambridge Archaeological Unit** have carried out many excavations on the **Colne fen edge** including just north of here, around what was **Lake Rhee** (an inlet of Peat and Alluvium on the geology map). Finds in the area date from the Mesolithic to Romano-British times; although the early **Bronze Age marine incursion** reduced settlement here, on the **edge of the tidal marshes**. Among many discoveries along this important fen edge were ring ditches, a **barbed and tanged arrowhead**, a Bronze Age **crouched inhumation** and a **burnt, drilled wolf's tooth**.

**11** You pass several **flooded sand and gravel pits**, now private fishing lakes (11.1). Beyond, to the east, in the distance is the Isle of Ely (11.2). The land in between was tidal **saltmarsh in the early Bronze Age**. Later, a band of Alluvium was deposited by the **West Water**, once the main course of the Ouse but now a small drain (although still a district boundary, between Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire).

**12 The Old Bedford River** (12.1) was dug to divert the waters of the Great Ouse directly to the Wash, thus draining much of the fenland. It was named after the fourth Earl of Bedford who contracted with the local Commission of Sewers to drain the Great Level of the Fens beginning in 1630. The New Bedford, known as the Hundred Foot Drain, lies to the east and now takes the bulk of water from the Ouse, with some going into the Old Bedford if needed, controlled by the sluice (12.2). Between the two, is the **internationally important wetland**, the **Ouse Washes**, designated a Ramsar Site. The Bulwark, site of a Civil War fort, is on the far side of the river.

**13** The **memorial** (13.1) is to the victims of a crash involving a **Hurricane** from 61 Operational Training Unit and a **Stirling** from RAF Oakington with 7 Squadron (1942). All eight Stirling crew were killed as was the Hurricane pilot. Rammed by the Hurricane, the Stirling dived into the ground to a depth of 15 ft near the Haddenham Drain 1.5 miles north of Earith Bridge. The site burnt for several days and the crater filled with water making the task of recovering the remains of all of the crew impossible.

**14** The end of the walk, next to the sluice, gives views south over the **River Great Ouse** (14.1f) where it divides between the Old and New Bedford Rivers, both flowing north towards Denver Sluice in Norfolk, and the **Old West River**, flowing east to join the Cam then north past Ely. Beyond the southern (opposite) bank of the river lies **Ouse Fen**, a huge area of gravel extraction now being converted to a wetland nature reserve by the **RSPB**. Within it is Crane Fen, near where the **Bronze Age sea incursion** reached its furthest limit south.



*Photos: 7.4 House in Colne; 7.5 Green Man pub; 9.1 Take left track, Back Drove; 9.2 Footpath to right; 9.3 Path left following field edge; 11.1 Fishing lake; 11.2 View east across to the Isle of Ely; 12.1 View north along Old Bedford; 12.2 Sluice gates; 13.1 Memorial; 14.1 River Great Ouse.*

**Ordnance Survey (OS) Benchmarks (BM)s** are survey marks made by OS to record **height above Ordnance Datum (ODN)**. If the exact height of one BM is known, the exact height of the next can be found by measuring the difference in heights, through a process of spirit levelling. While the first systematic network of levelling lines and associated benchmarks was initiated in 1840, some benchmarks date back to 1831. The horizontal marks were used to support a stable 'bench' for a levelling stave to rest on, hence '**benchmarks**'. This design ensured that a stave could be accurately repositioned in the future and that all marks were uniform. Access to the national height reference is through the OS Net permanent **GPS stations**. [www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/newsroom/blog/25-years-since-](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/newsroom/blog/25-years-since-)



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