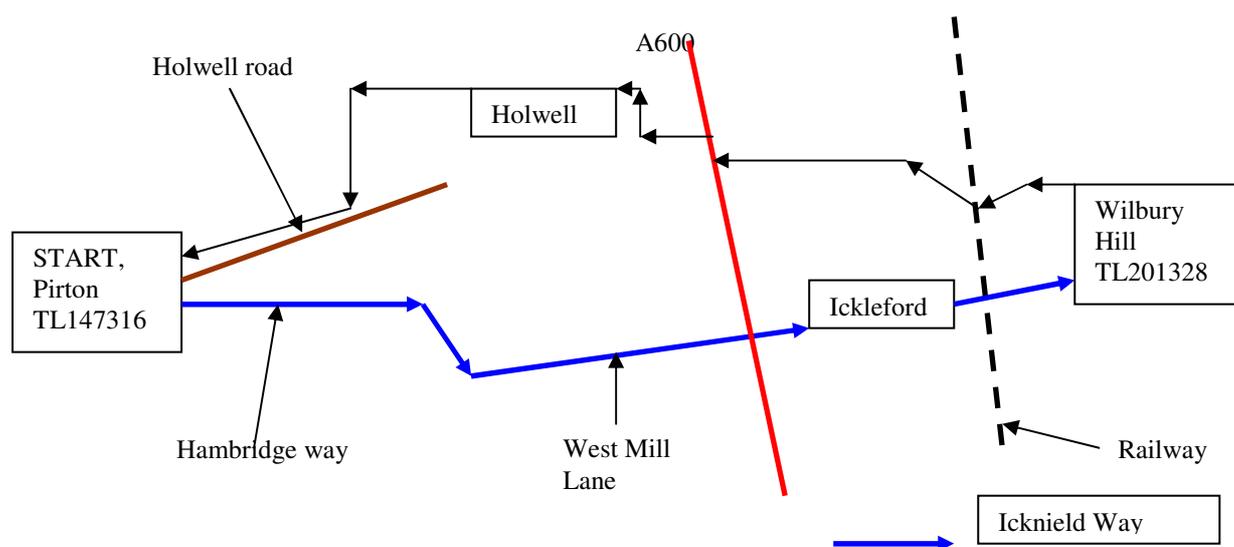


## The Icknield Way. Part 8 from Pirton to Wilbury Hill, Letchworth. 17 April 2010

*Map OS Explorer 193. An interest-packed stroll through farmland, river valleys and Bronze Age remains, this route strikes out E from Pirton and passes through Ickleford following the Way to reach Wilbury Hill. The return route is via Cadwell and Holwell before reaching the starting point by taking the Holwell Road to Pirton. 14 km.*



This circular route starts out on the Way and returns to the starting point in Pirton. From the parking place by the green outside the Motte and Bailey pub (just a hoot from Toot Hill) the path takes you past the restored Blacksmith's Pond and E on the Hambridge Way. This was forecast to be the warmest weekend day and so it seemed from the butterflies that busily searched for nectar and mates along the hedgerows of the Way. They will (mostly) soon be gone leaving their eggs to start the next generation (and the caterpillars for the birds which are about to hatch and will be hungry). The orange tips are freshly emerged, but the brimstones, green-veined whites, peacocks, commas, and small tortoiseshells are still shaking off the winter cobwebs as they spiral above the blackthorn in dizzy pairs. Green veined whites are easily confused with female orange tips – so watch out for the tell-tale under-wing patterns.



The birds are now in an almost cacophonous state with robins fiercely announcing their presence and the surprisingly vociferous wrens trilling from deep in their tangled webs of bramble cover. A linnet sang from a hawthorn bush and a green woodpecker looped away after its maniacal laughter had subsided.

Hambridge Way merges into Mill Way and Westmill Lane leading into Ickleford and across the river Hiz at Cadwell Crossing. The water of the Hiz is remarkably clear (after the impenetrable opacity of the Great Ouse) and supports a healthy array of

water weeds. Gerry seems, unfortunately, to have drowned in [Gerry's Hole](#) which is now a nature reserve and home to some rather fine crack willows (*Salix fragilis*). It was formed from digging to provide material for the, now defunct, Hitchin-Bedford railway. (Pause for thoughts on Beeching.) From the London-Edinburgh railway line the Way climbs gently through arable fields to the Stotfold Road on the western edge of Letchworth and the end point of this stretch of the Icknield Way which will be resumed another day after leapfrogging the (doubtless) urban delights of Letchworth and Baldock.



**R. Hiz**



**Bridge on the Hiz**



**Crack willow at Gerry's Hole**



**Wilbury Hill**

Wilbury Hill is a Bronze Age hill fort dating from 1000 to 750 BC. There's not much to see except for lines in the wheat crop and they are only visible from the air.



(Bronze Age and Iron Age artefacts that have been found are in Letchworth museum.) But one part was mysteriously excavated and not made good after the dig.

From the Hill, the return takes a westerly track, with views back towards the Chilterns, under the railway at Cadwell Farm and to the A600 before passing through dandelion invaded pasture to arrive at Holwell with its rebuilt (but nevertheless very attractive) church. A dog leg from Holwell takes the return path first E then S to emerge on the road at New Wrights farm which leads back to Pirton and the Motte & Bailey.