enjoy & explore the paths of
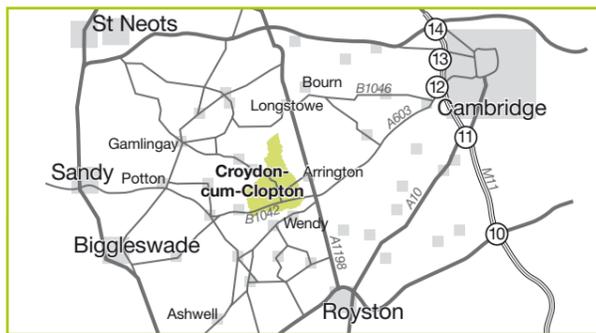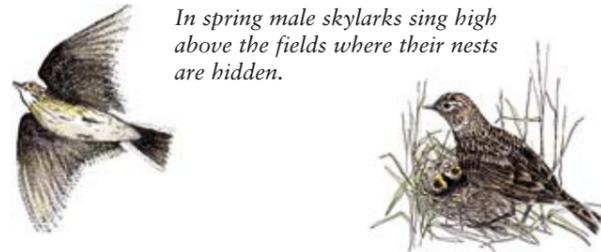# CROYDON-CUM-CLOPTON

How to find Croydon parish

The network of paths and byways in Croydon offer many routes for relaxing walks or longer expeditions to explore the landscape and history of the parish. Originally separate parishes, Croydon and Clopton, the two were combined when Clopton village was declared 'extinct' in the 16th century. Still visible under grassland to the west of Croydon Hill, Clopton is now the most famous deserted medieval village in Cambridgeshire.

Other people hope to enjoy the footpaths and wildlife of the parish, so please clean up after your dog, and in spring and early summer please keep dogs on leads to avoid disturbing ground-nesting birds in the fields and hedgerows. Leave gates and property as you found them. And please take your litter home!

If you have questions about the footpaths, or wish to report problems on the network, contact Croydon Parish Council via www.croydon-village.co.uk

This leaflet was published by Croydon-cum-Clopton Parish Council

In spring male skylarks sing high above the fields where their nests are hidden.

Croydon geology and wildlife

The north of the parish lies on a flat-topped ridge of Greensand, Gault Clay and Chalk, all covered by a thick layer of *till* (clay, sand and gravel) deposited by a glacier half a million years ago. To the south the ridge drops sharply to the Cam valley, carved wide and deep by water from the melting ice. Both Clopton and Croydon villages sit on the spring line where water flows from the exposed chalk. The lower slopes of the ridge and the valley floor lie on the Gault Clay.

Early farmers found it difficult to clear and plough the till clay, and even when drained it remains cold and wet well into spring. The till is still relatively well-wooded today, with several famous ancient woodlands including Hayley Wood, just north of the parish, and bluebells and other woodland plants in the hedges and secondary woodland. Hedges of common hawthorn and blackthorn were probably planted during the 19th century. The deep ditches are a reminder of the work needed to raise crops on this heavy clay.

common hawthorn

Cowslip, knapweed, scabious and other wildflowers preferring neutral, chalky soils grow in the verges and beside footpaths in Croydon. The flowers attract bees, butterflies and other insects, which in turn attract birds and other animals.

Watch – and listen – for birds as you walk! Buzzards feed on rabbits and other small animals, and have a long drawn-out *mewww* call.

cowslip

gatekeeper butterfly

Buzzard showing pale underside of wings and short, broad tail.

Croydon history

The parish paths and byways record the ways that people moved across the landscape to places where they lived and worked. Walking Croydon's footpaths will take you through some dramatic moments in the lives of the people who lived here centuries ago.

Prehistoric and Roman

Croydon High Street and the bridleway through Clopton village to Tadlow and beyond follow what was probably the main route through the parish for many centuries. A Mesolithic axe and scatter of Bronze Age finds from sites in Croydon village show that people were living here at least 5000 years ago, long before the Romans arrived. The Romans left more evidence of their stay in the parish, including pottery, and other evidence of a small villa near the river on **Valley Farm**. Excavations from 1961–4 on the site of Clopton village found Romano-British pottery, a brooch and ditches.

Saxon and Medieval

There is little evidence (five fragments of pottery from Clopton) that people lived here from the seventh to ninth centuries, but by 1066 there was a thriving Saxon settlement at Clopton. Domesday Book records 18 peasants living in the village, farming most of the land in the parish. With 28 peasants Croydon was a larger village, extending from the **High Street** up the hill, near the manor house that stood near modern **Manor Farm**. There were probably other houses to either side of **Croydon Lane** (now a footpath) leading past two moated sites towards the river.

The rise and decline of Clopton

In the twelfth century Clopton expanded further, perhaps into East Hatley (grouped with Clopton for taxation and administration until the 15th century). By 1377 it was a large village, with 104 taxpayers, a church and a rector. There were three manors: **Bury Mount,** which was 'fit to receive a Bishop'

stood on the moated mound in centre of the village; Wakefield was one of two enclosures on the outskirts of the village. **Rowses Wood** now covers the site of Rouses Manor and another moat lies under the trees of **Gilrags Wood**; neither wood existed before the 18th century.

In the 15th century wool prices rose, spurring wealthy landowners to convert farmland to pasture and replace peasant farmers with sheep. In 1489 William Clopton sold much of the village to John Fisher who, with his son, began to use their considerable legal skills to force the villagers and other landowners off the land. By 1525 only five labourers lived at Clopton; in 1561 the village was declared extinct and combined with Croydon. Some houses remained: 'Clapton Cottages' on the site of Bury Mount survived until the early 20th century.

Croydon

Less is known of the history of Croydon; some of the medieval village survives as earthworks north of the High Street (no public access), but other sites have been ploughed out or lie under more recent buildings. Like Clopton, Croydon was a farming village. The medieval open fields produced crops of wheat, oats and barley, while cattle and sheep grazed pasture and the uncultivated north of the parish, the Wald or Wilds where in 1285 a corpse had been hidden. The ridge-and-furrow created by early ploughs can be seen near Manor Farm. Some modern field boundaries follow the edges of the medieval fields; the species-rich hedge beside the bridleway from **Holbeins Farm** is probably very old.

Croydon was divided into two manors. Tailboys Manor House may have stood in the two moats south of the

village, or another at Manor Farm, none of which can be seen today. Francis Manor held land in the north of the parish. In the 16th century it was bought by Anthony Cage of Longstowe, whose son built **Croydon Wilds**. By 1639 the Cages had acquired almost all of Croydon, and enclosed the parish.

By 1750 the parish had become part of the Downing Estate. Over the centuries the farms were reorganised; cattle and then arable became more important than sheep. In 1830 a new road, **Croydon Hill**, was built to connect East Hatley to the turnpiked valley road, bypassing Croydon.

In 1831 81 out of 87 families in the parish relied on agriculture for their living. It was a hard life: in 1832 16 labourers destroyed a threshing machine that threatened their livelihood, and four were transported to Australia. In 1843 30 people emigrated to Canada, and others left for Australia; by 1871 farmers had difficulty finding enough labourers in the parish. Many men preferred well-paid but dangerous work digging coprolites (phosphatic nodules found in the Gault clay). Some were employed by a builder working out of the Downing Arms public house (known as The Scratching Cat), others in the brickworks opened in 1861 by William Turrell (which closed in 1920). In the 1950s about 45 men still worked on the farms; by 1977 only about 20 did so.

Today most people who live in Croydon work outside the parish, returning home to enjoy the magnificent views across the valley of the Cam and the fields created by centuries of agriculture.
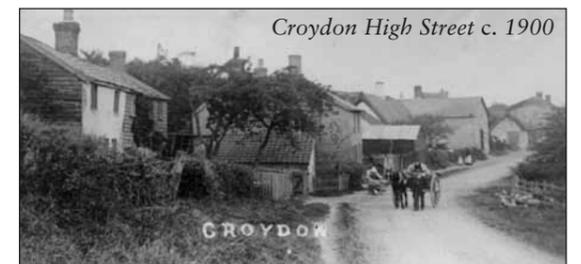
Croydon High Street c. 1900

Image courtesy of the Cambridgeshire Collection

Early woodblock illustrations of the farming year: ploughing, sowing, harvest and threshing.

Legend
- Public footpath
- Public bridleway
- Permissive path
- path to be reinstated
- Parish boundary
- Public house
- Romano-British site
- Medieval moated site or manor house.

to A1198

ROUND SPINNEY

to HAYLEY WOOD

to HAYLEY WOOD

CROYDON OLD LANE

TADLOW TO BOURN.

THIS WAS ONCE PART OF THE ROAD FROM

THIS WAS BRICK KILN CLOSE IN 1747.

THIS AREA WAS KNOWN AS CROYDON WILDS, FIRST MENTIONED IN 1285.

to A1198

THIS MOAT SURROUNDED THE 17TH C HOUSE & GARDEN KNOWN AS CROYDON WILDS.

H A T L E Y

A R R I N G T O N

PARCERS FARM

EAST HATLEY

HOLBEINS FARM.

to BUFF WOOD & EAST HATLEY

E A S T

THIS WAS HART'S OLD FARM IN 1956.

CROYDON HILL FARM

THIS ROAD DID NOT EXIST BEFORE 1820.

CROYDON HILL

A MOATED HOUSE, GARDEN & THE ORIGINAL MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT OF 'CROWS DENE' MAY HAVE STOOD HERE.

to ARRINGTON

THE RIDGE & FURROW OF MEDIEVAL PLOUGHING MAY STILL BE SEEN IN THIS PASTURE.

CROYDON ROAD

HIGH STREET

THE EARTHWORKS OF MEDIEVAL HOUSES & A STREET SURVIVE IN THIS FIELD.

SITE OF ST MARY'S CHURCH

BURY MOUNT HIGH STREET

LARKINS ROAD

THESE EARTHWORKS ARE THE REMAINS OF CLOPTON, A DESERTED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE

MILL POND

to TADLOW

to TADLOW

THIS WAS THE ORIGINAL ROAD TO TADLOW & BEYOND

TOP FARM.

VALLEY FARM.

OLD FARM

THE BEECHES

LOWER MANOR FARM.

TURNPIKED IN 1826.

CLOPTON FARM

UNTIL IT WAS B1042.

BRICKYARD FARM WAS A BRICKWORKS IN 1956.

THE MOAT OF LE ROUS MANOR (12C) LIES IN ROUSE'S WOOD.

THIS WAS A MINOR ROAD 'ROYSTON ROAD' LOWER ROAD

THERE IS A MOAT IN GILRAGS WOOD.

SIMKINS SPINNEY

CHURCH FARM

RIVER CAM or RHEE.

THIS WAS THE SITE OF THE ORIGINAL VILLAGE OF SHINGAY THAT DISAPPEARED AFTER ITS FIELDS WERE ENCLOSED BY THE KNIGHTS HOSPITALLER.

MANOR FARM.

THE LARGE MOAT & MANY EARTHWORKS MARK THE SITE OF THE PRECEPTORY OF THE KNIGHTS HOSPITALLER THAT STOOD HERE FROM THE 12TH C. UNTIL 1540.

to SHINGAY GATE FARM & SHINGAY ROAD.

S H I N G A Y - C U M - W E N D Y

T A D L O W

STEEPLE MORDEN

0 ½ mile

0 500 m