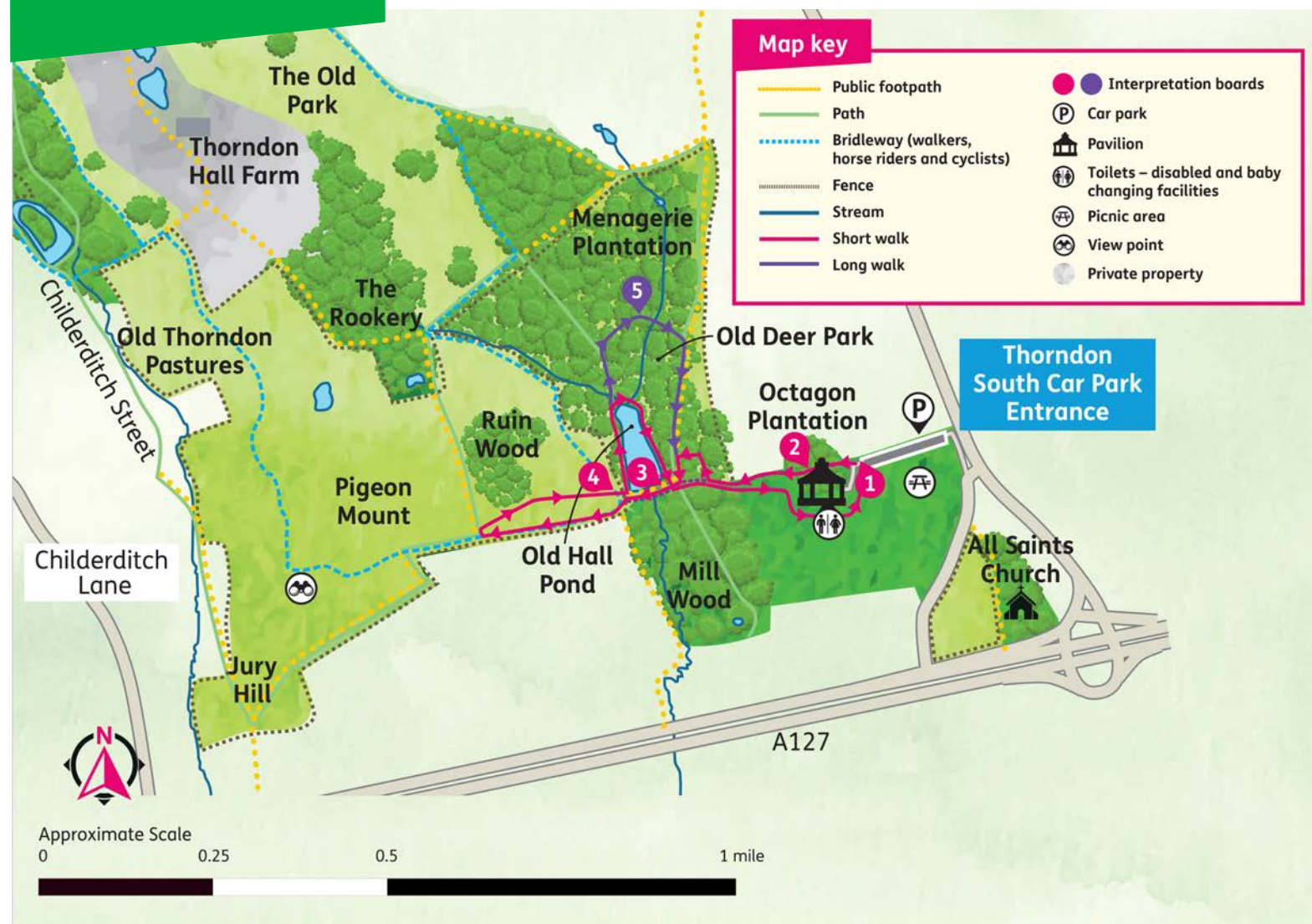


Choose from two walking routes and discover hidden gems about this enchanting park and its rich heritage.

The short walk is 3km and will take about 50 minutes easy walking with stops to read further information boards and look at the landscape.

The long walk is 4km and will take about 70 minutes, mostly easy walking but with short stretches on rougher paths, which may become muddy after rain.



1 Start at the Welcome board situated at the end of the car park

Follow the surfaced track into the Octagon Plantation.

2 Octagon Plantation

The 8th Lord Petre created a nursery here to shelter his trees and seedlings imported from America. As you enter the plantation look to the left where you can see part of the bank which surrounded it. On your right there is a fine Cedar of Lebanon tree which dates back to between 1860-1890. Lord Petre planted a young Cedar of Lebanon in the 1730s on a mount next to Thorndon Hall where it can still be seen from the public footpath running past the golf course towards Ingrave village. On the left are several mature oak trees, both native English Oak and Turkey Oak.

From here continue downhill on the track until you reach woodland.

On your left is Mill Wood (named after the water mill which was here in the 16th century), and on the right is the Old Deer Park. In the Old Deer Park trees were pollarded: low hanging growth was removed to keep the canopy of the tree above the head height of deer. Many pollarded hornbeams can be seen in the Old Deer Park which were planted in the 1700s.

Continue for 30 metres until you reach a little bridge over the ditch on the right and follow the path to a huge dead oak tree.

This tree is over 400-years-old. Go past the tree and look at the bank and ditch which are believed to be what is left of a moated medieval house. This area was until recently, overgrown with invasive cherry laurel, which has been cleared to re-create the open woodland.

Continue on the path until you come out on a larger track, then turn left and follow this until it re-joins the main track, turn right and continue down to Old Hall Pond.

3 Old Hall Pond

Here you can see a dam which controls the flow of water down into Mill Wood. A map dated 1589 shows a mill on this site, the lake would have been used as a fishpond.

Follow the main track across the dam through the gate to arrive in Old Thorndon Pastures. During the summer there will be cattle grazing this field.

Follow the main track.

4 Old Thorndon Hall

Imagine how busy this now quiet landscape would have been in the 1700s. The site of the old parish church is to your left behind a fence (where the path has a kink).

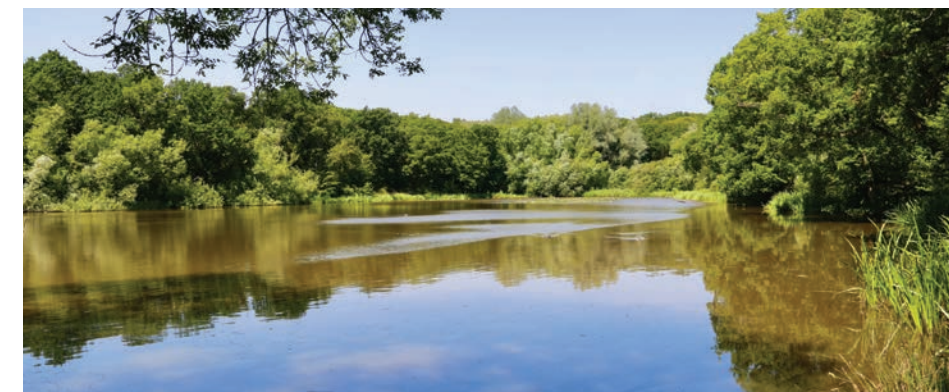


Old Thorndon Hall in 1669

Follow the main track up the slope to the interpretation board which shows the layout of the estate from this viewpoint.

Retrace your route, this time using the path cut through the grass.

Look across to Pigeon Mount and head towards Ruin Wood. Take time to look across at the views to the Thames Estuary. This was the view which the 8th Lord Petre enjoyed.



Old Hall Pond

Capability Brown did retain some of the 8th Lord Petre's landscaping, but the estate changed orientation with Thorndon Hall now in the northern part looking south onto the landscaped gardens, lakes and menagerie.

When you arrive at Ruin Wood you can see that this site is now covered with trees and provides a good, safe habitat for wildlife.

Walk across the field back to the gate you came through.

You are passing through the stables area.

Go through the gate and turn left. Walk alongside the pond watching out for wildlife and mature oak trees.

As you head right around the top of the lake you can see the land rising like a hill on your left; this is in fact a man made feature. When the lake was extended to provide more water for the 8th Lord Petre's nurseries and gardens, the excavated soil was piled up and contoured into a 'Ziggurat', which would have provided a raised platform with views over the lake. This is now obscured by trees.

The short route now follows on round the top of the lake. See right for the Long walk.

Cross a raised walkway over the stream, turn right and then continue along the side of the lake back to the main track.

Look out for a huge horse chestnut tree trunk and an ancient oak tree.

Turn left to re-join the main track and return uphill to come out into the open with Octagon Plantation above and ahead of you.

From here you can see how tall some of the oaks are. Take a route to the right, round the hillside where you can see part of the original bank of the plantation. You will come out by South Pavilion, which is Octagon shaped to reflect the shape of the 18th century plantation. The view here contrasts the old with the new; brick built All Saints Church, which dates to the late 15th century and the 21st century wind turbines and cranes on the Thames. You can visit the redundant church on one of its open days.

Long walk

At the top of Old Hall Pond head up the slope and come out in the open area and head right.

This area forms part of menagerie plantation and is now being cleared of conifers to restore wood pasture. The area is grazed by goats and sheep to keep it open and prevent regeneration of scrub. They are contained behind an electric fence so do not touch the netting. The small fenced enclosures contain trees such as hawthorn and dog rose to provide nectar for beetles.

Follow the path which then turns right into the woodland area.

5 Menagerie Wood

You are looking at the site of the menagerie which was designed by the 8th Lord Petre in the 1730s.

Continue along the track looking out for ancient hornbeam trees.

These have twisted trunks and you can see where they were pollarded (cut back at head height). It is believed that some of these trees are 300-years-old and were planted by the 8th Lord Petre. At the culvert you will cross the stream that comes down from New Hall Pond on the golf course and continues down to Old Hall Pond.

Head right and come out into the open wood pasture of the Old Deer Park. Follow the path back to the main track and turn left.

Look out for more veteran trees; pollarded hornbeams, oak and sweet chestnut. These ancient trees can contain dead wood which supports rare beetles.

Return uphill on the main track to come out into the open with Octagon Plantation above and ahead of you.

From here you can see how tall some of the oaks are. Take a route to the right, round the hillside where you can see part of the original bank of the plantation. You will come out by South Pavilion, which is Octagon shaped to reflect the shape of the 18th century plantation.



Horse chestnut

For more information about the church go to The Churches Conservation Trust www.visitchurches.org.uk

And The Friends of All Saints, East Horndon www.all-saints-east-horndon.co.uk

Discover other Essex Country Parks www.explore-essex.com



Acknowledgements: Thorndon Country Park Conservation Plan by Land Use Consultants. The Old Park, Thorndon Park, Focussed Parkland Management Plan for the Woodland Trust by Dr Twigs Way and Fiona Wells. Barbara and Paul Beckett, Grade II* List Entry Number 1000314 on the Historic England Register.

Heritage Trail

Thorndon South

