



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 124

Wareside and Thundridge: a countryside walk of 6.0 miles (10 kms)

This countryside walk is mostly in the parish of Wareside with about a third in the parish of Thundridge. The route is a mixture of footpaths, tracks and fairly quiet lanes, with no stiles. There are two pubs in the hamlet of Wareside, after about 3 miles. If you hope to visit a church or a pub, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags.

Start and finish: The walk starts from a quiet stretch of Fanhams Hall Road, a fairly quiet lane that runs between the north-east of Ware and Babbs Green in the parish of Wareside. The walk starts to the east of Fanhams Hall and just south of Noah's Ark, about 200 yards west of where the Harcamlow Way crosses Fanhams Hall Road. There is ample room to park along this lane (and there are few suitable parking alternatives along the route).

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL378158

Postcode: SG12 7PW (the postcode covers about half a mile of mostly uninhabited roadway).

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194.

A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

We head east along Fanhams Hall Road, gently uphill, away from Ware and Fanhams Hall, keeping to the right so as to face any oncoming traffic. We pass a drive on the left that leads to 18th-century Noah's Ark Farmhouse and then a bungalow on the left. After another 100 yards, we turn left onto a bridleway signposted to "Cold Christmas 1". This is part of the Harcamlow Way long-distance route.

Follow this wide track for some distance – with time to read a little background to this area.

The administrative parish named Wareside was created only in 1991. For the previous hundred years the parish was called Ware Rural. It is still rural, having a population a little above 700 in 2011. This contrasts with the 19,000 who live in adjacent Ware. Ware has an interesting historic centre but its urban nature meant that it was excluded when the boundary was established for The Hundred Parishes.

After a gentle rise, the track reaches a crossroads of bridleways. Not far back, we crossed the invisible parish boundary between Wareside and Thundridge.

At this point, our preferred route is straight ahead on a grassy path, but in January 2021 this bridleway had been badly rutted by inconsiderate vehicle users. You may decide that the path is not comfortably negotiable – if so, please skip to the framed description on the next page. Otherwise continue with this description and ignore the framed text when you get to it.

Go straight ahead on a grassy bridleway, now with high wire fencing on each side. When the fencing ends, notices explain that we have been passing Kirsty's Wood on the left and James's Wood on the right, two of the Diamond Woods planted to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. Ignore the footpath on the left and continue straight ahead.

Ahead of us, we now see the valley through which the River Rib flows. All the woodland on the other side of the valley is part of the extensive Youngsbury estate.

After a short descent we reach the end of more fencing on the left – and an explanation that we have been passing another Diamond Wood, Eleanor’s Wood.

The path soon descends to a lane. Our route goes right but first please turn left for a few yards to delight in the view across the valley and perhaps photograph the sign for Cold Christmas.

Turn right along the lane, through the Thundridge hamlet of Cold Christmas, passing Swangles Farmhouse on the right – a hall house dating from the 15th or 16th century. Soon afterwards pass a Greenwich Meridian marker that was installed in 1984.

On the left, Fox Cottage is part of what was once a single house that originated in the 17th century. The building is now divided into numbers 76 to 79, part of which was once the Fox Inn. Continue along the lane until it turns to the left. Our route goes straight ahead along a drive to Timber Hall. We have now joined another long-distance path, the Hertfordshire Way, signposted to Sawtrees Farm 1. Keep ahead, ignoring a wide gravel track that goes off to the right.

Pass a large house, Timber Hall, on the left. Immediately afterwards, bear left and right and pass beneath a willow tree.

This is the alternative route to avoid the bridleway if it is impassable.

At the crossroads of paths, turn right onto the wide track. We will stay on this clear route for about half a mile. Over to the left is the meandering valley of the River Rib. Below us on the left is Swangles Farmhouse, a hall house dating from the 15th or 16th century. Ignore footpaths signposted to left and right.

When the track reaches a junction with another track, turn left and descend.

In about 200 yards, we reach a junction with another track. Turn left and almost immediately right towards a farmhouse, Timber Hall.

Just before the house, turn right and then bear left and right to pass beneath a willow tree – and re-join the intended route below

This driveway soon becomes a footpath with a ditch on the right. Continue with fencing on the left, ignoring a path that forks to the right into trees. Just after the fencing ends, turn right onto a gravel path. After about 10 yards turn left, joining a wide bridleway, the Hertfordshire Way.

In about 200 yards the bridleway reaches the corner of a wood, Buckney Wood. Continue ahead into the wood, following a clear bridleway for nearly half a mile. After a while, pass substantial fencing on the left which is around a reservoir.

After some distance, the woodland path crosses a wooden footbridge with wooden handrails and almost immediately turns right onto a public restricted byway.

After 50 yards, at a crossroads of paths, keep ahead on the main track ignoring a footbridge on the right.

When the tree-lined path comes to an end, we bear left and in another 20 yards turn left. Just here we leave the parish of Thundridge and return to Wareside. We pass Legges Cottage on the right. This was built in the 18th century as a gamekeeper's cottage.

Continue on this track until it turns sharp right to reach a road with a small green at the junction. Turn left onto the lane which brings us into a mostly modern Wareside hamlet called Babbs Green. Pass Abbotsfield Cottages and Kingham Road on the right and a bus shelter on the left.

When the road reaches a junction, keep to the left of a small green with telephone kiosk. Immediately ahead is Crooked Chimneys, a house with interesting appearance, dating from the 16th century. Turn sharp right around the green to continue along the main road, signposted towards Much Hadham. Soon, after number 12, we should keep right to follow the surfaced footpath that runs beside but just above the road.

Pass a lychgate on the left which marks the entrance to a cemetery and then pass a most unusual church, Holy Trinity. It was built in 1841 and soon afterwards became the focus of the new ecclesiastical parish of Wareside. Its thin bell tower once supported a cross, but this fell during an air raid in World War II. The church is rarely open except for services so continue along the high path, soon with a field on the right.

At the end of the field, where the path turns to follow the field edge round to the right, we go left and descend steep wooden steps to the lane. Turn right, passing a row of cottages on the left and immediately turn left into a narrow lane, signposted to Ware and Much Hadham. To our right, opposite the junction, is Wesleyan House, originally built as a Wesleyan chapel in 1890.

Ignore a lane on the left and soon arrive in the centre of Wareside itself, a tiny hamlet on the B1004 with a choice of pubs for refreshment, the Chequers to the left and the White Horse to the right. Both pubs date from the 17th century, as do nearby Overhill House and Hermitage Cottage.

After taking in the sights of Wareside hamlet, and perhaps refreshed, return to this corner between the pubs, as if to retrace up the lane signposted to Babbs Green. However, almost immediately, just after Overhill House on the left, turn left onto a footpath and soon pass Bourne Cottage on the left. The bourne or ditch is immediately on the left.

After about 200 yards of uphill path, reach a lane and turn left, passing Reeves Green and Wareside Primary School on the right. School House, displaying the date 1843, is the original element of the school and now partly residential.

Continue along the lane to emerge onto the B1004, immediately opposite the war memorial which stands overlooking the Ash Valley beyond. It commemorates 21 men from this parish who perished in the two World Wars.

Turn right onto the main road and continue with care on the right for a short distance before pausing. In the garden of Glengarrie on the right is a cream and green railway signal box that has been relocated and lovingly preserved. It came from nearby Mardock Station on the

former railway, the Buntingford Line, which ran along the Ash Valley down to our left. To the left of Glengarrie, another cream and green building may also have come from Mardock railway station.

From Glengarrie, cross the road with care and join a concrete bridleway heading downhill. This used to be the approach road to Mardock Station. Before the hedge starts on the left, please look to the left, along the Ash valley. The straight, tree-lined route that was once the bed of the railway track is clearly visible, heading north-east.

At the bottom of the hill, our bridleway crosses the line of the railway. Mardock Station used to be just to the right.

Go straight across on a tarmac road and pass a red-brick house on the right. Very soon reach a bend where we go right, but pause at the corner to look through the beech hedge to a field and footbridge over the River Ash. Partially visible to our left is Mardocks Mill, a house that has been formed from former watermill cottages that dated from the 17th or 18th centuries.

Continue along the lane, initially with beech hedge on the left. In 100 yards, turn right at a junction onto a stony track with hedgerow on the right. The track soon turns left, but first, go straight ahead for just a few yards onto the bridge that passes over the old railway track. Steam trains ran along this branch line between Ware and Buntingford from 1863 to 1964.

Retrace a few yards and turn right, back onto the gravel path, heading downhill with a hedgerow on the right. After around 100 yards, leave the gravel path and turn half left, between two small fields, heading towards a telegraph pole and a building. Just after the pole, cross a wooden footbridge with handrails over the River Ash and soon emerge opposite 17th-century Ash Cottage. Go straight ahead, uphill, along the gravel track with woodland on the left.

At the end of the field, fork right up a short climb and then turn right onto another clear track. Enjoy the view across the valley on the right before descending past red-brick cottages on the right.

Turn left onto the route of the railway. This stretch of the former rail route, about 200 yards, is now a public right of way. Ahead, on the right, a former 16th-century manor house stands on the other side of the River Ash. Cross the river.

At River Cottage, ignore the path that goes left through a ford, but here turn right. Soon pass two houses attached to a Mission Hall that was built in the 1860s. It is now used as an estate office for Watersplace Farm but retains the coat of arms above the door with the motto "DO IT WITH THY MIGHT". This is an abbreviated quote from the King James Bible (Ecclesiastes 9:10) which in full says, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." A cheery little thought!

Continue uphill, passing a parking area on the left shortly before reaching the road, the B1004. Cross with great care.

On the far side, turn right and, almost immediately fork left off the main road, heading north up Public Restricted Byway 25, signposted to Morley Ponds 1¼.

As we walk along this stony track, it is hard to imagine that the town of Ware is less than a mile away, just beyond the slightly higher ground to our left.

When the track divides, we fork to the right, following waymarks for Harcamlow Way and GMT (Greenwich Meridian Trail) and soon turn right, passing Newhole Farm on the right and Swades Farm and The Grange on the left. The track becomes a footpath with a hedgerow on either side.

Immediately after an abandoned wooden footbridge (which may be useful in very wet weather), turn left, still waymarked for Harcamlow Way and GMT. The path has a deep ditch on the left.

After about 200 yards, at the end of the field, turn right, ignoring a substantial footbridge on the left. Follow the path with hedgerow on the left for about 150 yards. At the corner of the field go straight ahead for a few yards and then turn left onto a bridleway.

The bridleway is fairly straight and clearly defined, climbing gently for some distance. As the route flattens, Fanhams Hall appears ahead and somewhat to the left.

When the bridleway reaches the road there is a private entrance opposite signposted to Fanhams Grange. Not far down this drive is Home Farm, slightly to the right and with a cupola clock tower. This was built as a 'model farm' around 1900 for the Croft family who owned Fanhams Hall, over to the left.



Fanhams Hall itself dates from the 18th century and was extended in the early 1900s when a Japanese garden was added. Whilst our route does not pass that way, Fanhams Hall is an interesting place and nowadays serves as a hotel and events venue, usually offering afternoon tea for that special occasion. Here is a photo taken of the Hall from the garden.

Now, back to the walk . . .

Turn right along the road, Fanhams Hall Road, and after a short while we return to where we started.

You can read more about Wareside and Thundridge on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 05 January 2022, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to hundredparishes@btinternet.com.

A diagram covering this route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

