



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 166

Widford and Hunsdon – 5.6 miles (9 kms)

This walk explores parts of the villages and countryside of these two adjacent parishes. We will pass through the conservation areas of Widford and Hunsdon and learn just a little about their history. We will see how each village still feels the influence of a particular family: the Pawle family in Widford and the Calvert family in Hunsdon. The walk is mostly on good paths although some stretches can be muddy at times. There are no stiles. The route passes Widford parish church (usually open only on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons between 2pm and 5pm) and a restaurant and a pub in Hunsdon so please be prepared, before entering, to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. There are several seats beside the route.

Start and finish: The walk starts from a lay-by on the North side of the B1004, 150 yards west of Widford Church. Should the lay-by be full, there is a similar lay-by on the opposite side of the road just a little further west. These lay-bys were once part of the winding road and were retained when the road was straightened.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL411159 - Postcode: SG12 8RL (the postcode relates to a long stretch of uninhabited road).

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

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

From the lay-by, we head east along the pavement, towards the church. We soon cross an entrance on our left to Church Barns and pass the Widford village sign. A metal gate in the hedge on the left leads into a private cemetery which seems to occupy ground where a manor house once stood. Through the gate we get a glimpse of 17th-century Widfordbury House.

Soon after the gate, we turn left through the lychgate into the churchyard of St John the Baptist, Widford's parish church. We keep to the left of the church, passing beside a red-brick wall that separates the churchyard from the private burial ground. The listed wall, which may have been part of the manor house, a predecessor of the present Widfordbury, dates from the 16th century.

Just past the church, a stone marker beside the ancient wall records the re-interment of a tenth-century Saxon woman whose remains were disturbed during an archaeological dig in 2004.

Just afterwards, we come to a gate. Today's route does not use the footpath that passes through the gate; we have come here just to see the view across the valley of the River Ash. [On another day, you might like to try Hundred Parishes Station Walk number 20 which passes along the valley below on its 12-mile journey between St Margarets and Sawbridgeworth stations]. Having admired the view, we turn around and retrace to the church porch.

The church is normally open only at limited times; if we have come at such a time, we should take the opportunity to go inside. The church dates mainly from the 14th century but incorporates earlier elements. Ancient wall paintings include a depiction of Christ with a sword. The paintings on the chancel ceiling were the work of a young lady in the 1880s. A memorial window, made by Tiffany's of New York, commemorates John Eliot, the "Indian Apostle" who was born in Widford in 1604 and went to America as a missionary, translating the Bible into one of the native American Indian languages.

On leaving the church porch, we go straight ahead and retrace through the lychgate onto the road. The lychgate was erected in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's golden jubilee. Across the road is an extension to the cemetery. Its lychgate was erected to commemorate those who died in World War I. The names include Captain Bertram Pawle (1892 – 1915), the son of GS Pawle who we will learn more of later.

From the church gate, we turn left to continue along the road towards Widford village. We soon pass The Old Rectory on the left. It was built in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Further along, we stay on the pavement which rises above the level of the road. We stay on the pavement as we pass Abbots Lane on the right. Just before the lane is the entrance to The Coach House. Now a house, it was built in 1899 as a coach house for GS Pawle.

Immediately after Abbots Lane, on the right, is Ash View Nursing Home. This was previously called Walnut Tree House. In the early 1880s it became the home of a wealthy stockbroker, George Strachan Pawle (1855 – 1936) and his family. They extended the house beyond its early 18th-century centre section, became influential in village life and established a cricket field at the back of the house,

Just after the big house is The Lodge, built around 1900 AD for the Pawle family as an ornamental dairy with studio above.

Further along on the left, we pass Wilmoor, formerly the Victoria Inn, 1842 to 1957.

On the right, the symmetrical block of four dwellings, numbers 3 to 6 North View Cottages, dates from the 18th century.

We pass Field House Cottages on the right and then Field House. Just after, we need to turn right, but **not** onto the lane. When safe, cross the road and take the footpath between Field House and the lane. The footpath is signposted to the cricket ground.

The gravel track soon reaches the ground on our right. This is a rare privately-owned cricket ground. The first match was played here in 1882. One of GS Pawle's grandsons, John Hanbury Pawle (1915 – 2010), played cricket, including three games for Essex, but achieved greater success as the British rackets champion from 1947 to 1950. Since 2005 the ground has been the home of Ware Cricket Club.

Across the playing area to the right is another view of The Lodge and, to its left, the former Pawle family home. Across the ground to the left is an impressive two-storey pavilion with verandah.

We pass a parking area and continue straight ahead, now on a grass path until we reach a lane.

This is Abbots Lane and we turn left, passing Abbots Farm on our right. The house with four chimney stacks dates from around 1600 AD and was altered and extended for GS Pawle's son Francis on his marriage in 1913.

At the end of Abbots Lane, we meet Hunsdon Road, the B180. When safe, cross the road and turn left on the pavement. After about 150 yards, we pass 17th-century Yew Tree Cottage on our right.

On the left, we pass 18th-century, red-brick Goddards which in the early 1800s functioned as The Young Gentlewomen's Academy, a fee-paying boarding school for girls. It hosted frequent visits by author Charles Lamb (1775 – 1834), a well-known essayist who spent much time in Widford. Next, Little Goddards and the adjoining Little Goddards Cottage date from the 17th century, the latter with an unusual chimney stack. The pavement will soon end so, when safe, we will cross to the left.

We cross the entrance to Lambs Gardens on the left. Opposite, on our right, is Adam's Farmhouse, dating from the 16th century.

The appearance of the house on the corner immediately before Bell Lane disguises its 17th-century pedigree and its long history as an inn. A blue plaque commemorates Charles Lamb, who was a regular visitor to this building when it functioned as the Bell Inn. Lamb's association with Widford began when, as a boy, he would visit his grandmother, Mary Field, who was housekeeper at Blakesware, just outside the parish. Lamb wrote the epitaph that appears on her worn gravestone in Widford churchyard. His essays often featured people and places that were modelled on his observations in Widford.

Beyond Bell Lane, on the left, are 17th-century Swan's Barn, now a house, and 16th-century Swan House, formerly The White Swan, an inn which also functioned as a laundry in the early 1900s.

On the right, opposite Swan House, we pass The House of Orange which dates from the 16th century.

We pass a small, modern close on the left. On the right, the long flint and brick wall is the side of a barn.

Before we reach a road junction, if we look to the right, over the wall is the tall, red-brick, 17th-century Priory Farmhouse. When safe, we should cross back to the right where the pavement has just restarted.

We can now look back to the building just before the junction, Oak House. In the early 1900s it was the Royal Oak public house.

We continue along the pavement beside the brick wall. The B1004 road comes in from our left (it comes from where we parked). On the far side of the junction, thatched Wheelwrights dates from the 17th century.

We continue ahead, now on the B1004 and signposted towards Much Hadham. On the left, part of the building beside the telephone kiosk was a shop not many years ago. Immediately afterwards is what was Widford's last pub, the Green Man - it closed in 2017.

On the right, we go past Priory Row, an 18th-century row of seven houses, each with an individual porch.

When the pavement comes to an end, we continue straight ahead on Nether Street, passing The Old Forge on the right and two 17th-century thatched dwellings on the left: The Old Cottage and Bourne Cottage.

As we follow the lane round to the right, we pass 18th-century Bardon.

After 100 yards, we come to a T junction where we turn right, continuing on Nether Street.

On the left, Hawthorn Cottage has black weatherboarding and, a little later, Honeysuckle Cottage has contrasting white weatherboarding.

17th-century thatched Endways Cottage also has a neatly thatched shed. Next we pass an 18th-century terrace, commencing with Elm Cottage. We then walk beside a flintstone wall; behind it is 16th-century Nether Hall with two barns of similar vintage.

Little Cozens on the left is followed by the thatched Elia Cottage which dates from the 17th or 18th century. The cottage no doubt took its name from Charles Lamb's best-known works, *Essays of Elia*, in which the author used the pseudonym Elia.

The tarmac lane comes to an end at a crossroads and here we turn right onto a permissive path which is not signposted at this point. The gravel track descends between wooden fencing and is soon joined from the right by footpath number 6. We keep straight ahead.

We ignore footpath 6 when it forks to the left, keeping ahead on the permissive path.

At the end of the field, keep to the right of the oak tree, into the next field, and turn sharp left beside the oak. We are still on a permissive path, a straight, field-edge path with hedgerow on the left.

After about a quarter mile, and having passed several individual oak trees, we reach a seat on the left. Here, we turn right onto footpath 6, a cross-field path heading towards the left end of a wood.

On reaching the wood, Marshland Wood, go across a wooden footbridge with no handrails and soon come to a junction of several paths. We should **not** go sharp right into the wood, **nor** straight ahead across the field. Our route goes half right on a field-edge path with the wood immediately on our right.

We are heading towards large buildings, way in the distance, around 3 miles south of here – the largest is the Poundland National Distribution Centre on Elizabeth Way, to the west of Harlow on the former BP site near the greyhound racing stadium.

In about 200 yards, we reach the end of the wood and a crossroads of paths. Here, we turn right onto a gravel track, continuing with Marshland Wood on our right for about a quarter mile. The edge of the wood marks the parish boundary, with Widford on our right and Hunsdon on our left.

We pass a bench.

Some white-painted houses appear ahead in the distance – these are at the northern end of Hunsdon village.

For a while, our path runs just inside the wood

On our right, a path goes across a wooden footbridge over a ditch - but we ignore this and keep straight ahead. In only another 50 yards, we turn left, initially with trees on both sides but soon on a field-edge path with hedgerow on our right. We are now entirely in the parish of Hunsdon.

Our route soon becomes a path between fields, sometimes rather overgrown but fairly clear and straight.

After about a quarter mile, at the end of the field, we keep straight ahead through the hedgerow on a wooden footbridge with no handrails. At the other side of the footbridge, we come into a new field and go straight ahead on a cross-field path for about 200 yards, heading roughly towards the corner of a wood on our left: Black Hut Wood.

As we draw level with the wood, we reach a crossroads of paths. We have been travelling on number 11 and we turn right onto path number 17, ignoring the unusual building now on our left – presumably a leftover from wartime. We are now heading towards distant houses on a cross-field path which is quite clearly defined.

To our left is Hunsdon Airfield. It was used by the Royal Air Force from 1941 to 1945. A memorial on the site commemorates the 126 ground and air crew who lost their lives while flying from here or serving here during the Second World War. The airfield is still used by light aircraft and we may see some if we glance back to the left. Around the airfield, there are 14 defensive positions which are protected as Scheduled Monuments.

The path continues towards Hunsdon village, passing a quarry and landfill site and Hunsdon Lodge Farm on the left.

Further on, we pass through a gate and go straight ahead, soon passing the entrance to Amiens Close on our left. This new housing estate is named after the most notable bombing raid carried out by the RAF from Hunsdon. On 18th February 1944, they carried out a precision bombing raid on a prison in Amiens, northern France, where the occupying German forces held captured members of the French Resistance. Word had reached London that the prisoners were to be executed but the hastily-scrambled bombing raid enabled most to escape.

After Amiens Close, we join Drury Lane which is part of the conservation area that encompasses the historic centre of Hunsdon and most of that part of the village through which we will walk.

Drury Lane has several houses that date from the 17th or 18th centuries.

On the left we pass The Old Bakehouse whose date of origin is stated as circa 1690.

On the right, number 9, Orchards, with white weatherboarding, was until 1836 the home of the master of the parish workhouse.

At the end of Drury Lane, we reach a junction with High Street, the B180. At the centre of the junction, metal railings protect the early 19th-century village pump, described in the official listing as “a fine architectural public pump in the Gothic style”.

After inspecting the pump, we turn right along High Street, keeping to the pavement on the right and passing The Pump House on the corner, a large timber-framed house that probably dates from the 16th century. Over the centuries it has served as an inn, a smithy and a coachbuilders. Today it is a private house.

As we continue slowly ahead, we encounter a distinctive feature of Hunsdon’s architecture: its white-painted buildings, whether they be weatherboarded or plastered. This style was established in the early 19th century by the Calvert family to bring uniformity to their estate which included Hunsdon village. The Calverts came from a wealthy London brewing family and lived at Hunsdon House (about a mile south of the village) for around a hundred years until 1858 when they sold Hunsdon House and the manor of Hunsdon.

On the right, we pass a long run of weatherboarded houses: numbers 22 and 24 date from the 18th century; 26 to 32 were built by Hunsdon Charity in the 17th century for occupation by widows; number 32 was later a shop.

Number 34, Carpenters, breaks the mould being plastered rather than weatherboarded. Here, when safe, we cross the road to return on the other side, getting a closer look at the odd-numbered houses and a wider perspective of the even-numbered.

From here, we get an appreciation of the aged roofs opposite. And on our side, we have a similar terrace with white weatherboarding, dating from the 17th century. The first house we come to was once a shop.

As we pass the village pump to our left, on the right number 67, Netherhall, dates from the 19th century. This is followed by numbers 65 to 55, a block of houses constructed in the 17th or 18th century. The centre of Hunsdon has many buildings dating from the 17th or 18th centuries, thus between 200 and 400 years old.

On the left, red-brick Old Post Cottage is actually timber-framed and weatherboarded, but its 17th-century origins were disguised by the red brick face that was added in the 19th century.

Soon on the left is The Crown public house. This started life around 1800 AD as three cottages. They were combined and converted into a pub in the 1920s.

Opposite The Crown, on our side, is number 49, White Horses. It dates from around 1700 AD and is distinguished by the unusual carvings of winged horses that appear to support the upper floor.

Next on the right is Hunsdon Village Hall. The hall may have been converted from a medieval house, Harlowes. It served as the village / estate school from the early 1800s until 1924 when it was converted into the village hall. The house to the right, number 47, was the teacher’s accommodation and later for the hall caretaker.

The village hall stands opposite a road junction with Acorn Street. Close to the corner is a small car park, war memorial, seat and village sign. The sign features the village hall, a Tudor rose and a Mosquito aircraft. The Mosquito was the plane most associated with RAF Hunsdon, while the rose symbolises Hunsdon’s connection with England’s Tudor monarchs.

If we were to head South on Acorn Street, in about a mile we would come to Hunsdon's ancient parish church. Beside it, largely out of sight, is Hunsdon House. Just a little of the present building has survived from the 16th century when it was a much larger palace where Henry VIII spent considerable time. It was here that his three children grew up. They later became Edward VI, Queen Mary and Elizabeth I. The Calvert family generally reconstructed the house around 1805. The church is rarely open and we will not include it in today's walk.

Beyond the village hall are more terraces of white-painted cottages from the 17th to 19th centuries, all with attractive front gardens. Number 15, set back and sideways on to the road is somewhat older, probably from around 1600 AD.

Opposite is The Fox and Hounds restaurant and pub which has been regularly mentioned in the Michelin Guide in recent years. It was built in the 17th century as a house and was converted to a pub in the 1830s.

On the right, we pass the post office and convenience store.

Just afterwards, numbers 7 and 5, were once a single farmhouse, Tanners, built in the 16th century or even earlier as a hall house. The first floor and chimney were added later.

A little further along, numbers 3 and 1 were built in the mid-19th century and mark the end of Hunsdon's conservation area.

Just as the road bears left, we turn sharp right to leave the High Street and join a public footpath, signposted to Stanstead Abbots 2½. We pass an under-cover seating area on our right and go straight ahead through a small park.

When we reach the end of the park, we pass through a kissing gate and go straight on along a short section of tarmac road. At a road junction, we turn right, passing Tanners House on the left. Soon, the road turns right but we go straight ahead and almost immediately turn left onto a footpath, Public Restricted Byway number 12, heading towards Widford Church.

We pass the backs of houses on our left. Initially, this is a well-surfaced and clearly defined path with hedgerow on each side.

The path becomes a wider gravel track with hedgerow on the left. We ignore a path that goes off to the left and pass another seat.

Further along, the path narrows as it passes woodland called Townlands immediately on the left. After this short stretch of woodland, the view ahead opens up and we can see the green spire of Widford Church. The clear path continues until we reach the road with Widford Church just to our right.

When safe, we cross this road and turn left. In only about 100 yards we return to the lay-by where we parked.

You can read more about the parishes of Widford and Hunsdon on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 26 August 2021, 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.

