



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

GREAT AMWELL



Location: 2 miles south of Ware and about 20 miles north of London.

Ordnance Survey grid square: TL3712. **Postcode:** SG12 9SR.

Access: The village has no railway station, the nearest being Ware or St Margarets, both of which are on the Hertford-London Liverpool Street line which passes through the parish. Road A119. A number of bus routes serve the village from Ware and elsewhere: Route 310 Hertford–Waltham Cross, 351 Hertford-Stansted Airport, 524 Harlow-Hertford, 724 Harlow-Heathrow.

County: Hertfordshire **District:** East Hertfordshire **Population:** 2,353 in 2011.



The village dates back to at least the ninth century when it was known as Emmeswell. Legend has it that it was named after Emma, the wife of King Canute. Below the churchyard is an ancient spring known as Emma's Well. At the entrance to the now often dried up hollow, pictured here, there is a stone inscribed with the Quaker poet John Scott's poem 'Emma'.

The spring was one of the sources for the New River. This was an artificial waterway, an extraordinary undertaking for its time, opened in 1613 to carry fresh water to the Clerkenwell area of London. It took its water from the River Lea and a number of other

springs, including Emma's. The river still exists and can be walked for almost its entire original length to its modern day terminus in Stoke Newington. The moving force in its construction was Sir Hugh Myddelton, a memorial to whom can be seen on a small turfed island in the river basin.

The church is dedicated to St John the Baptist. It has a Norman apse, rare in Hertfordshire, and an 11th-century window. Other features are of the 14th century and later. A number of literary figures famous in their time are buried in the hillside churchyard, notable for its abundance of snowdrops in the early spring. These include the Elizabethan poet William Warner. They were joined in 1978 by Harold Abrahams, the Olympian of 'Chariots of Fire' fame who won a gold medal in the 100 metres at the Paris Olympics of 1924.



A famous former resident of the village was Izaak Walton, the renowned 17th-century author of *The Compleat Angler*. In 1610 Richard Warren, a passenger on the Mayflower in 1620, married Elizabeth Walker in the church. They are ancestors of two American Presidents, Ulysses S. Grant and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The River Lee Navigation, a popular route for narrow boats, passes through the parish.



Close to the village is Amwell Nature Reserve, former gravel pits which have been restored to a diverse wetland environment which is now internationally important to nature conservation. It is home to large numbers of wintering wildfowl, together with outstanding communities of breeding birds and of dragonflies and damselflies. There is a walk around the reserve which takes 1-2 hours. This is just one of a number of interesting walks in the area (see below).

For many years a summer concert has featured the Haileybury Madrigal Society from the Haileybury public school a mile southwest of Great Amwell. The choir sings from one of the New River islands, pictured here, to the audience gathered on the banks.



Great Amwell is proud of its annual flower festival and the parish is home to the extensive Van Hage nursery, garden centre and animal garden on Pepper Hill, the A1170. The Van Hage cafe is also a popular daytime eating place. Close by is Choppy's Restaurant at the Wagon and Horses.

In the older part of the parish, close to the church, the popular George IV offers a good selection of lunchtime and evening meals.

Hospitality:

George IV public house/restaurant: 01920 870039 www.george-iv.co.uk/

Choppy's Restaurant: www.choppysrestaurant.com

Van Hage garden centre and cafe www.vanhage.co.uk/garden-centres/great-amwell/

Included in Hundred Parishes walk: 19: Between St Margarets and Ware stations (4 miles).

Links:

Amwell Nature Reserve: www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/NatureReserves/Flagship/amwell

Amwell Society: www.hertfordheath.gov.uk/wpfiles/?page_id=95

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: Wareside, Stanstead Abbots.

Further reading:

Amwell and Stanstead's past in pictures by Stephen Doree and David Perman (1997).

Hertfordshire by W.Branch Johnson (1970)

Hertfordshire by Nikolaus Pevsner (1953)

For a comprehensive history of Great Amwell:

www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=43635
