



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

THUNDRIDGE



Location: 2 miles north of Ware. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL3517. **Postcode** SG12 0SY.
Access: north off A1170, off A10. **Bus:** Route 331 Hertford – Thundridge – Buntingford – Royston. **County:** Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts. **Population:** 1,406 in 2011.



Thundridge parish, just north of Ware, includes the adjacent villages of Thundridge and Wadesmill, separated only by the River Rib, and High Cross, a little further north. These three villages grew up beside the Old North Road (until recently the A10) which, in this area, followed the path of the Roman Ermine Street which ran from London to Lincoln.

Travelling north from Ware, you may have been intrigued to see a sign to the right indicating 'Cold Christmas'. What miserable history could have led to such a place name? If you follow that road, Cold Christmas Lane, you will pass close to all that now remains of the original village of Thundridge, lying down in the valley, close to the River Rib. Those vestiges are the 15th-century church tower of the "Thundridge Old Church" of All Hallows and Little Saint Mary, and a few bricks from the chimney stack of the manor house, Thundridge Bury, which was built alongside during the reign of Henry VII and demolished in the early

1800s. The original church was built on the site of a chapel that existed at least as early as 1086.

It was the improvement of the road in the early 19th century which began a movement of the settlement further to the west and the abandonment of the original village. In 1854 a new Thundridge church was consecrated. In the years that followed most of the old church was demolished and the surrounding area seems then to have acquired the name of Cold Christmas - perhaps by association with the supposed death of a number of young children of the parish in mysterious circumstances around Christmas time. In the way of these things, that legend together with the isolated nature of the old village remnants has given rise to abundant tales of haunting, strange noises and ghostly manifestations, including a phantom 4x4 car, around the old churchyard. The locals will tell you that such tales can be explained by mundanities like an outbreak of scarlet fever, the wind whistling through crumbling stonework and the local farmer doing his rounds, but among adherents of the supernatural the tales persist and still attract intrepid ghost hunters. The local history books say that Christmas was the family name of 18th-century residents. Today the ruin of the tower is in a precarious and dangerous state and demolition has become a real possibility.

The 'new' church, built at a cost of £9,000, occupies a commanding position at the top of the hill south of the River Rib. It is dedicated to St Mary and All Saints.

Wadesmill has an interesting place in history as the site of the first toll gates in England, installed in 1663 and effectively establishing a tax on the large quantities of grain and other foodstuffs that passed through on the Cambridge Road on their way to London.



On this same road, just north of Wadesmill, Thomas Clarkson, the anti-slavery campaigner and William Wilberforce's closest associate, took the decision to devote his life to the abolition of slavery.

An obelisk was erected in 1879 to mark the spot. This is located on what became the busy A10 road. When the new A10 was opened in 2004, the old one reverted to a relatively quiet country road.



High Cross was the home of Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Martin-Leake, the first man to be awarded the Victoria Cross twice. He lived to the age of 79 and is buried in High Cross churchyard.

In a field to the north of the parish, near Standon Green End, a monument marks the spot where Vincent Lunardi landed in 1794 after completing the first manned balloon flight in England, having taken off from London beneath a balloon filled with hydrogen.

With so many parishes having been denuded of their pubs, Thundridge had an embarrassment of riches, with four, all along the old main road, until 2017 when two closed. There are still two, both at Wadesmill. The Anchor, dating from the 16th century, is shown here. The Feathers has stood almost opposite since the 18th century. Thundridge is also home to Hanbury Manor, built in the 1890s as a country mansion and now a prestigious hotel and golf complex. Its 18-hole course, designed by Jack Nicklaus, was the venue for the English Open Championship from 1997 to 1999.



The countryside here is lovely and Thundridge is rich in attractive public rights of way. They include stretches of the Hertfordshire Way and Harcamlow Way and others that pass though the ancient Youngsbury estate, once home to a Roman villa, or follow the River Bourne that runs in a deep canyon from the northwest of the parish down into Wadesmill.

Hospitality:

Anchor – 01920 462861 - www.anchorpubherts.co.uk

Feathers, Wadesmill – 01920 462606 –

Thundridge Village Store & Tea Room – 01920 462670 – www.thundridgevillagestores.co.uk

Hanbury Manor Hotel – 01920 487722 - www.hanbury-manor.co.uk

Included in Hundred Parishes walk:

18: Between Ware and Stansted Mountfitchet stations (17 miles).

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: Wareside, Standon, Much Hadham.

Links:

Community website: <http://thundridge-wadesmill.co.uk>

History: www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=43629

Further reading:

Around Cold Christmas: A Personal History, compiled by Emma Blowers.

Four Ermine Street Villages, Thundridge & High Cross Society.

Thundridge & Wadesmill in Hertfordshire: A Brief History, Eileen Lynch.