



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

WESTMILL



Location: 1 mile south of Buntingford. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL3627.

Postcode SG 9LG. **Access:** West off A10.

Bus: 700 (every day) between Baldock, Buntingford, Bishop's Stortford and Stansted Airport.

County: Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts. **Population:** 305 in 2011.

Westmill straddles Ermine Street (originally the Roman highway from London to Lincoln and nowadays better known as the A10), a mile south of Buntingford. It is a rural parish with little habitation outside the village of Westmill itself. The village is a peaceful oasis that lies just west of the A10. Its quiet lanes, small village green, tea room and pub make it a popular stopping place for cyclists, walkers and photographers. But please don't expect afternoon tea here on a Monday or Tuesday, for the tea room will be closed unless it is a Bank Holiday.



On the green stands a water pump, dating from around 1900. It carries the inscription "Traverse the desert and then you can tell what treasure exists in the cool deep well". This is an extract from the poem "Water" by 19th-century London poet Eliza Cook. As far as we know, she had no connection with Westmill, unlike essayist Charles Lamb (see a short profile in our People section). In 1812 he inherited a 17th-century thatched cottage in Cherry Green, about a mile southwest of the village. Lamb sold "Button Snap", shown here, after only three years but his ownership is marked by a medallion in the grass verge.



Not far from the village green stands the parish church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin. It dates from the 12th century, with substantial additions in the 15th. Although it was substantially rebuilt in 1876, elements of its early history are still visible. On the external south-east corner of the nave, Saxon "long and short" stones can be seen and there are re-used Roman bricks in the gable. Its bells include a very early one from the 14th century. Hung on the wall, beside the door, is what is believed to be the oldest gravestone in Hertfordshire – it commemorates Sir Nicholas de Lewknor, Lord of Westmill, who died in 1296.

Westmill has a total of 48 listed buildings, including all those pictured in this introduction. However, there is no photo of Wakeley, a medieval village that was mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 but which has long since disappeared. The site of the village and its church



dedicated to St Giles is in the west of Westmill parish and is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

The majority of the parish's listed buildings are in the village of Westmill. They include the red brick 18th-century Westmill Bury, pictured on the right, and the village hall and adjacent tea room, shown below. The village hall was originally built in the 17th century as a barn. The tea room has a Regency-style shop front dating from 1864 with a bow window.



The River Rib flows from north to south between Westmill village and the A10. It is assumed that the west mill which gave the parish its name was sited somewhere along the Rib. Once, the Buntingford railway line also ran along the valley from Buntingford to St Margarets where passengers could change for London. There was a station at Westmill, which always seems to have been called "West Mill". The line operated for over 100 years before closing in 1965.



The village pub, the Sword in Hand, dates from the 16th century and was converted into an inn in the 19th. Its name may have come from the crest of the Greg family who lived at Coles Park in the south of the parish. The house at Coles Park was demolished in the 1950s after the deaths of Thomas Greg and his wife Mary Hope Greg who were major benefactors of the parish and also significant donors of artefacts to many museums. They owned several properties in Westmill and these were given to charities or trusts that today own and administer significant parts of the village including the village hall, almshouses, allotments and the recreation ground.

Hospitality:

The Sword in Hand (pub, restaurant and rooms) – 01763 271356 – www.theswordinnhand.co.uk
Westmill Tea Room - 01763 274236 - www.westmilltearoom.co.uk

Adjacent Hundred Parishes: Braughing, Aspenden, Buntingford, Hormead.

Links:

Parish Council: No website

History: www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/links/westmill.htm

Friends of Westmill Church, including history: www.friendsofwestmillchurch.org.uk/history.html

Mary Hope Greg: www.marymaryquitecontrary.org.uk

This page was last updated 20 June 2015.