



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

WIDFORD



Location: 4 miles northwest of Harlow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4115,
Postcode: SG12 8SH. **Access:** B180, B1004. Bus: 351 Hertford to Bishop's Stortford (Mon-Sat)
County: Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts. **Population:** 534 in 2011.



Situated between Ware and Much Hadham above the Ash Valley, the village of 'Wideford' is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as the site of a battle between the Saxons and the Danes in 895 AD. By the time of the Domesday Book the land was held by the Bishop of London. The first record of a church in the village is in the early 12th century, west of the village centre. In 1118 the Manor of Widford was gifted to the Cluniac Priory of Bermondsey who held it until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. It was then gifted to the Southwell family who held it until 1660 when it was sold – the first of many subsequent changes of ownership until the 19th century.

Widford today is a perfect example of the tranquil beauty which characterises so many of the Hundred Parishes. There are over 8 miles of maintained footpaths and bridleways within the parish and 250 varieties of wildflowers can be found within its boundaries. The parish council has strategically placed a number of benches on the paths for the footsore. Most of the agricultural land is devoted to arable farming.

The church of St John the Baptist dates to the 14th century but includes fabric and arch fragments from an earlier church on the site. Saxon bones, found here a few years ago, suggest a much older original church. The most notable features today are some fine wall paintings dating to the 13th century.

The original manor house Widford Bury stood next to the church. The only remnant of it is the red brick wall next to the churchyard. It contains an ornate Tudor moulded door surround which was probably one of the external doors to the original Bury. The wall is in fact a listed building as are 54 other buildings within the parish.



Down the hill, below the church, the long-distance Hertfordshire Way footpath runs beside the route of the Buntingford Branch railway line. After 101 years of service, the line and Widford station were closed in 1964. Although most of the track was dismantled long ago, this old bridge survives, crossing the River Ash adjacent to the footpath bridge.



Widford was the birthplace of John Eliot in 1604. He was a renowned Puritan missionary to America known as 'the Indian Apostle' for his missionary work among the native American tribes. In 1661 he produced an edition of the Bible in the language of the Massachusetts Indians with the catchy title '*Mamusse Wunneetupanatamwe Up Biblum God*'. He is feted to this day with a feast day in the calendar of the Episcopal Church.

The 19th-century essayist Charles Lamb knew the village well as a child and made many visits in later life. He spent much time with his grandmother Mary Field who was the housekeeper at Blakesware Mansion. She is buried in the churchyard and her grave bears an epitaph written by her grandson. Lamb wrote of Blakesware: "a strange passion for the place possessed me in those years". He is commemorated by a blue plaque on a house that was formerly the Bell pub, one of his regular haunts.

The village hall was built in 1910 as a drill hall for the Territorial Army but, adopted by the village since 1956 and thanks to several generations of local volunteers, it has been enormously improved and is now a focal point for village activities and functions.

Also notable is the fact that the village is home to one of the few privately-owned cricket grounds in the country. Owned by the Pawle family, it is now the base for Ware Cricket Club and is described on the parish website as "a picturesque haven of delight".



Widford once boasted 5 public houses. Alas now only one, the Green Man (shown here), remains.

The parish council maintains a comprehensive website (see link below) giving further information about all aspects of the village and its amenities.

Hospitality:

The Green Man, High Street, Widford SG12 8SR – 01279 843119

Included in Hundred Parishes walk:

20: Between St Margarets and Sawbridgeworth stations (12 miles).

Adjacent parishes:

Hunsdon, Wareside, Thundridge, Much Hadham, High Wych, Gilston & Eastwick.

Links:

Parish Council: <http://widford.org.uk>

Further reading:

Widford, a Portrait, Bunty Smith.