



The Hundred Parishes

Walks from railway stations – number 7

6 miles (10kms) circular walk from Sawbridgeworth station

Note: Walk 121 covers just 2 miles with a more focused look around Sawbridgeworth.

This anti-clockwise walk covers a varied route along footpaths, towpaths and roads. It starts with a journey through some of the older parts of historic Sawbridgeworth. There are pubs and cafes in Sawbridgeworth and a pub at Harlow Lock after 4 miles.

The route is gently undulating in places and parts can be muddy at times, so if you hope to stop somewhere for refreshment or look in a church, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or don boot covers or plastic bags. There are occasional seats but no stiles.

Start and finish: Sawbridgeworth station (Grid Reference: TL490151 – Postcode CM21 9LD) There is extremely limited parking at the station and no toilet. There is a public toilet in Bell Street after about ½ mile – in 2022 this required a 20 pence coin to gain access.

The route can be traced on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194. A diagram of the route is provided at the end of this description.

Leave Sawbridgeworth Station and turn right onto Station Road, crossing the road when safe. On the left, we pass an extensive range of former Maltings buildings, constructed in the 19th century when Sawbridgeworth had a significant malting industry. Barley from the surrounding countryside was processed into malt which was mostly transported by canal to breweries in London. The industry ceased here during the 20th century and the buildings have been converted to a variety of uses, the nearest being an antiques centre and another being a café.

Cross over the River Stort and take the second turning on the left, The Forebury, a residential road that is signposted as Public Footpath 50. We immediately pass red-brick, 17th-century Bridgefoot House on the left. We will see many older properties as we pass through Sawbridgeworth town. The parish has 150 listed buildings; we will refer to some of them.

Cross the junction with Forebury Avenue on the left and soon, before the road bears right, turn left onto the footpath. The path skirts the small green and passes a row of houses on the left. Note the inscription on number 8. This tells that these houses were constructed in the 1930s by a small band of craftsmen, mostly in their spare time. The prophecy that “their labour shall live for a hundred years” is well on its way to being fulfilled.

When the path reaches a road, Forebury Crescent, cross to the pavement and turn right, following the road round to the left. Soon, turn left onto a footpath (number 28). This soon leads to the churchyard of Sawbridgeworth’s parish church. Just before entering the churchyard we pass the parish hall on the right.

Having entered the churchyard, pass the church on the left and then turn left beside the war memorial to the church porch. The 13th-century parish church, dedicated to Great St Mary, is mainly faced in flintstone, with the exception of the brick stair turret that was added in the 16th century. Inside, there is an outstanding collection of memorials of the highest artistic quality. These indicate the wealth of some of Sawbridgeworth's former residents.

Many memorials have a modern explanatory notice nearby. Back in the 11th century, the Domesday Book indicated that Sawbridgeworth was at that time probably the richest town in Hertfordshire.

Leave the church porch and turn right, passing the 1899 Mann Memorial Almshouses on the left and then Sawbridgeworth's war memorial, both pictured here.



Leave the churchyard through the splendid gates and immediately pass Church House on the left. This dates from the 17th century and in the past served as a workhouse and then as a school. Before turning left, note the unusual building on the right – the Dulux Decorator Centre in 2022 - it was once Sawbridgeworth's fire station. Now, turn left into Vantorts Road – Vantort was the name of a Sawbridgeworth land-owning family from as long ago as the early 14th century.

Pass several interesting and ancient properties on the left, including the 17th-century King William IV pub and modernised 16th-century Fair Green House which stands opposite Fair Green on the right. The green was much larger in days gone by. From 1447 AD it was the site of regular hiring fairs, the medieval equivalent of today's recruitment agencies. We turn right at the road junction, keeping to the pavement with Fair Green on our right and passing more interesting buildings on the left and an unusual double-spouted pump, around 200 years old, on the right.

Almost immediately, we reach The Square, a tiny 'square'. With care, cross to the left, ignore the small courtyard on the left and then turn left into Bell Street.

Immediately on the right, on the corner, is The Market House, a 16th-century building with jettied upper storey. Its original purpose is unknown but in more recent times it has served as offices, carpet warehouse, nursing home and restaurant before becoming a private residence.

Bell Street is the retail heart of Sawbridgeworth with some residential properties and a variety of tempting shops and dining opportunities, mostly in listed buildings that range from the 15th to the 18th centuries. The age of the buildings tends to be indicated by the roofline rather than the shop windows. Please take your time. The Old Bell on the left dates from the 16th century and was once a coaching inn.

The oldest building is numbers 21 and 23 on the right: a 15th-century hall house with 19th-century brick front, now divided into two premises.

Immediately opposite, on our left, is the exit from a car park. There is a public toilet here – a few yards in on the left (access to the toilet required a 20 pence piece in 2022).

Before the end of Bell Street, cross to the pavement on the right. On the right, we pass red-brick 18th-century Red House, usually resplendent with wisteria blooms in springtime.

Pause at the corner with the main road, London Road. On the left is the White Lion pub which dates back to the 16th century. Our corner includes the free-standing town sign and Sawbridgeworth's coat of arms, high up on a wall. This road has been a major through route for hundreds of years and was recognised as such when it became a turnpike in 1744. Sawbridgeworth stands on three major north-south transport corridors: we have already seen two, the London-Cambridge railway and Stort Navigation canal, and now we have the road. The town's evolution has largely centred around activities which have taken advantage of these transport links.

At the junction, we turn right only briefly to immediately cross the main London Road at the pedestrian crossing. Turn left, passing the White Lion, now on the left on the opposite side of the main road.

The next building on the left, a large red-brick house called Eversley, was once the home of the parents of Lieutenant William Leefe Robinson, VC, a First World War pilot. In 1916, he was the first to shoot down a German airship - at Cuffley in Hertfordshire. Within 48 hours, he was awarded the Victoria Cross, the first to receive this highest military award for action in the UK.

Soon, we turn right into Hoestock Road. Keep straight ahead.

At the end of Hoestock Road, cross Gilders and turn left along the pavement. The road soon bears left, but we should follow the pavement round to the right.

Near the end of this cul-de-sac, turn left (after number 64) into an alley, along a footpath (number 16) signposted to High Wych.

The path descends and soon crosses a ditch. We continue straight ahead on the footpath with a field on the right and houses immediately on the left.

When the houses end, the path splits with a permissive path bearing left and the public footpath going straight on. Continue straight ahead on the footpath, uphill for a quarter of a mile.

Go straight ahead through a gap in the hedge at the corner of the field, into the field beyond.

After 200 yards, turn left to follow the path for 100 yards to a gateway at the edge of a small wood.

[For a very short diversion, we can go straight ahead through the gateway. In just a few yards we reach the edge of Rivers Orchard. This is a community-run area of orchard, a leftover from the 300-acre Rivers Nursery which operated here for 260 years until its closure in the 1980s. The nursery specialised in the cultivation of fruit trees, developing the Conference pear and the orange upon which California established its reputation as an orange producer. After closure of the nursery, part of the site became the Rivers Hospital.]

On leaving the orchard, go back through the gateway and turn left to follow the path uphill across open ground for a quarter of a mile. The path follows the line of overhead cabling suspended from wooden poles.

When we draw level with a row of houses over to the left, keep straight on along the path, still following the telegraph poles, until the path reaches a patch of woodland.

Turn left along the field edge and in about 10 yards turn right, keeping the wood on the right and then a private garden on the left.

The path soon reaches a road, where we turn left, keeping to the pavement on this side of the road. We are now in the parish of High Wych (the 'y' is sounded like the 'i' in 'high' and the 'ch' like the 'tch' in 'witch'). The road is High Wych Road.

On the left we pass two thatched houses, The Thatched Cottage and Beth Gilboa, each dating from the 17th century or even earlier.

On the right we pass the entrance to the Manor of Groves hotel and golf course and after another 100 yards we should cross the road by the pedestrian crossing. Keep straight ahead onto the footpath (number 43), passing through a children's playground. Follow the path which weaves between fences, and then keep right along the tarmac path, ignoring the car park on the left.

The path runs alongside a cemetery for a while. When level with the far end of the church, turn left through a gate and cross the cemetery. The flint stone church of St James the Great and the adjacent school were built in 1861, following an appeal which raised £5,000 for that purpose. Follow the path round to the porch at the front of the church.



If it is open, the church merits a visit (removing or covering boots if muddy). Its unusual interior decoration is stunning.

From the porch, go straight ahead and through the gate onto the road, turning right and staying on this side of the road. On the right, the school and schoolmaster's house are, like the church, faced in flint. They were built at the same time as the school. All were designed by George Edward Pritchett, an architect from Bishop's Stortford who designed or restored several local churches. He also designed the rather grand former vicarage which is set back on the opposite side of the main road and now called High Wych Grange. Unusually for this area, it is constructed of stone. It was built in 1862 for the wealthy vicar, Rev HF Johnson, who provided much of the funding for the church and school.

Continue ahead on the right, keeping to the outside of railings to avoid being shepherded into the school and crossing the road entrance to the school. The pavement ends but we should keep straight ahead, on the right, using the grass verge where possible, facing oncoming traffic and walking in single file. We have to stay on this road without pavement for about 200 yards, heading downhill.

With great care cross the road at the speed re-restriction sign. Immediately after the speed de-restriction sign on the left, leave the road and follow footpath number 1, signposted towards Redricks Lane ½. Sadly, this path is not always re-marked by the farmer after ploughing or sowing. It goes at right-angles from the road, straight uphill across the field, heading towards a gap in the hedge.

Do not go through the gap, but turn right for only 10 yards and then turn left over a wooden footbridge.

Keep straight ahead with the hedge and ditch on the left.

Cross a ditch on a wooden bridge into another field, keeping straight ahead and still with hedgerow on the left.

At the end of this field, turn right, now with a new hedge on the left.

Pass two tall trees close together and soon afterwards turn left, walking downhill with a hedge on the left and a church spire directly ahead on the horizon (the church is at Churchgate Street, around 2 miles to the southeast).

Keep downhill, later with a fence on the left, to emerge onto a service road.

Bear left onto the roadway and very soon turn right across a strip of grass to drop down onto a lane. Cross the lane with care to rejoin the path on the opposite side, still going downhill and with a hedge and ditch on the left.

At the end of the field, keep straight ahead and soon turn left onto a towpath beside the River Stort.

After 200 yards the path passes Harlow Mill Lock 8. A Beefeater restaurant lies just the other side of the canal. Continue straight ahead on the towpath.

The towpath soon comes to the busy A1184. Here, our route goes straight ahead to rejoin the towpath but you are advised to turn right, use the pedestrian crossing and retrace a few yards before turning right down steps to the footpath.



[If you would like refreshment at Harlow Mill Beefeater Restaurant, turn right along the road, crossing over the canal and then turning right into the restaurant car park.

From the restaurant, retrace through the car park, cross the A1184 by the pedestrian crossing, turn left over the canal, and immediately turn right down steps to join the footpath]

The narrow footpath passes beside a terrace of houses with the canal on our right.

With the canal on our right, continue beside it for about a quarter of a mile, crossing two footbridges.

The canal twists to the left and then the right, and here the path leaves the canal.

Soon, before reaching a stream, the path turns right through fencing and after another 100 yards it bears left, crossing the stream and following a high wire fence on the left.

The path reaches a long straight private road, Pishiobury Drive. Cross with care and continue straight ahead. Over to the right is Pishiobury House, an 18th century building on the site of a former house that was a home of Ann Boleyn in the 16th century. The path soon emerges, via a metal kissing gate, into Pishiobury Park which was part of the royal estate.

Keep straight ahead with a wood on the right. At the end of the wood bear slightly left to proceed along Oak Walk (shown here) for about 600 yards.



20 yards before reaching the gateway at the far end of Oak Walk, turn right and pass through a metal kissing gate to proceed along a clear path through woodland, running parallel with houses around 100 yards over to the left.

After about 300 yards, leave the woodland through a metal kissing gate, descend a few steps, cross a path, ascend a few steps and pass an information board. Go through another kissing gate and walk straight across a field, exiting by another kissing gate.

The path goes straight ahead on a boarded path before bearing to the left onto another stretch of boarded path.

On reaching the River Stort, turn left along the canal towpath.

When the towpath reaches a road, cross it carefully and look back to see the date 1799 on what was once the lock-keeper's cottage.

After crossing the road, continue along the towpath, immediately passing beside Sheering Mill Lock. The modern housing development on the opposite side of the river, Lawrence Moorings, was constructed on the site of the Walter Lawrence woodworking factory which had made wings and fuselages for Mosquito aeroplanes during the Second World War.



Continue along the towpath, taking extra care if muddy or slippery. Continue until the path rises to join what can be a busy road. We are back on Station Road. Cross with care and turn right for about 200 yards to Sawbridgeworth Station.

The first platform serves trains heading North, bound for Cambridge. Cross the track by the level crossing or the footbridge to the southbound platform and trains heading towards London. Not all trains stop at all stations so, before boarding one, please check that it is scheduled to stop at your intended destination.

This route description, last updated 15 May 2022, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk where you can find many more walks and further information about Sawbridgeworth, High Wych and Thomas Rivers.

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.

