



# The Hundred Parishes

## Walk between railway stations – number 8

5 miles (8kms) from Sawbridgeworth to Bishop's Stortford

*This peaceful, countryside walk follows the Stort valley, heading from south to north so hopefully with the sun behind for most of the way. About half of the route is along towpath and half on gently undulating country footpaths with several stiles. There are pubs and cafes in Sawbridgeworth and Bishop's Stortford, albeit not close to the stations, and the George Inn, Little Hallingbury, is just 100 yards off the route at about half distance.*

*There is an option to follow the towpath most of the way, a more straightforward and flatter route of similar distance and passing close to another pub.*

*Parts of the route can be muddy at times, so if you hope to stop somewhere for refreshment, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or don boot covers or plastic bags.*

*Start: Sawbridgeworth station (Grid Reference: TL490151) - limited parking at station and no toilet.*

*Finish: Bishop's Stortford station (TL492209) - ample parking and public toilet.*

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

*Tip: If travelling by train to and from the two stations it is usually cheaper to buy a return ticket for the most distant station, rather than two single tickets.*

*Tip: If travelling by car, it is suggested that you park near the finish and catch the train to the start, thereby avoiding the possible pressure to finish the walk at a certain time.*

Leave Sawbridgeworth Station and turn right onto Station Road. On the other side of the road, to our left, is 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.

Just 200 yards from the station, our route turns right onto the footpath beside the River Stort. We will stay on the towpath, with the river on our left, for the next 1.5 miles.

Just on the other side of the canal, Station Road continues into Sawbridgeworth town; we soon pass the back of a long yellow gault brick building between the canal and the road - this was once another maltings.

As we walk along the towpath, we can expect to see and hear a variety of water fowl and other wildlife, possibly even a water vole.

As we approach a lock, in days gone by we would have seen a water mill here, but it was destroyed in a fire in the 1970s. Some of the associated buildings remain. A photo from a

1908 postcard is shown below.



Just beyond the site of the mill, Sawbridgeworth Lock is one of 15 that were constructed when the river was canalised in 1769 for 14 miles between Bishop's Stortford and Hoddesdon. This navigable stretch of the river is officially called Stort Navigation.

Further along, we pass a boat yard on the left.

Just afterwards, we ignore a footbridge over the canal

and then we pass beneath the main London to Cambridge railway line.

We cross a long metal footbridge over a channel coming in from the right. Soon afterwards we reach Tednambury Lock. At the beginning of the lock, we take the footpath to the right.

*[For a flatter route of similar distance, continue along the towpath. This towpath option crosses a lane after a mile. (For a further diversion here, you could turn left along the lane for 200 yards to the Three Horseshoes pub at Spellbrook). After another mile of towpath, the flat option reaches a second road, Pig Lane, and rejoins the main route – on page 4 of this description - just before Twyford Lock]*



Having left Tednambury Lock and the river behind, the path heads towards the white-painted Hallingbury Mill, which functioned as a restaurant not long ago. After about 50 yards, bear right to cross a wooden footbridge over a stream, and then bear left towards the mill. This area can be quite boggy at times, so you may wish to try alternative paths to find the best way to reach the footbridge in front of the mill.

Cross the footbridge with metal handrails over a branch of the River Stort and pass the mill on the left. Hallingbury Mill is a restored watermill, built originally in 1874. Its exterior is unusual, firstly for having vertical weatherboarding rather than horizontal, and secondly for the contrasting grey slate tiles

which face the east wall, at the far end. Much of the interior machinery has been preserved and the large, 16-foot-diameter, water wheel can be seen through one of the windows.

Continue uphill on the lane into the hamlet of Gaston Green, part of the parish of Little Hallingbury.

At the junction, cross the road with care towards the pond and turn left to continue through Gaston Green, facing any oncoming traffic and using the grass verge where possible.



We pass some delightful thatched cottages, all dating from the 17th century or earlier, and then the 18th-century three-storey red-brick Gaston House on the left.

Just after the final entrance to Gaston House, cross the road to turn left onto a footpath. Keeping close to the hedge on the left, we pass beside the gardens of Gaston House on the left and alongside several small paddocks on the right. Cross several stiles – one of which has been made easier to cross with a rather neat hinged top ‘step’. Rabbit burrowing has made the path uneven in places.

When the path emerges onto a large field, turn right along the track, heading downhill with a hedge on the right.

At the bottom of the hill, we bear left for 30 yards before turning right over a footbridge with metal handrails. Keep straight ahead across a paddock (which may contain a horse or two), into a second field, heading uphill towards a red-roofed building.

We pass to the right of the building to join the pavement of a 21st-century residential road, Pond Fields Close. When safe, cross to the pavement on the right and soon turn right onto a through road, Dell Lane, keeping to the pavement on the right. We are now in the village of Little Hallingbury.

Keep ahead for about 200 yards until the road bends to the right. [*Here, there is an opportunity for refreshment at The George Inn, which lies about 100 yards further on, opposite the end of Dell Lane.*]

To continue on the route, we cross the road near the bend, with care, and turn left into a drive, signposted for Stansted Inn. We immediately turn right onto a path with a hedge on the right and fencing on the left.

The path goes through a small wood and then between smallholdings before becoming a lane. This meets another gravel lane, where we turn left and almost immediately right onto a downhill path across an open field. Ahead, in the distance and on the horizon, we may be able to see the tower and spire of St Michael’s Church in Bishop’s Stortford.



At the bottom of the descent, we pass through a double gate to follow the public footpath through what is otherwise a private garden. Keep straight ahead, passing close to thatched 17th-century Millers Cottage on the left. At the end of the garden go through another gate onto a footbridge over a stream.

We pass through two kissing gates and between paddocks before reaching a road. (The second kissing gate may be inaccessible because of mud caused by horses, but there is a wooden gate to the left of the kissing gate.)

The road is called Pig Lane. We bear left, keeping to the pavement, and after 50 yards cross the road to turn right onto a footpath signposted "Bishop's Stortford 1".

*[Anyone who chose to ignore the route through Gaston Green and stayed on the towpath would come from our left onto Pig Lane, turn left and almost immediately cross the road to rejoin the towpath beside Twyford Lock].*

We should pause for a moment before continuing along the footpath. Just a few yards further along Pig Lane, the building on the left was once Twyford Mill. It ceased operations in the mid-20th century and was converted into flats.

Now, we can continue along the towpath, immediately passing Twyford Lock on the left.

A long footbridge soon takes the path across a weir. An interpretation panel displays early photos of Twyford Mill.

This stretch of the River Stort is used by fishermen, so beware of fishing rods and lines that may be on the towpath.

After the canal bends to the left, we get glimpses of Taylor's Lake to the left, just beyond the canal. This was once a gravel pit and has now been re-purposed into a fishing lake.

We pass Rushy Mead on the right, a nature reserve managed by Essex Wildlife Trust. There are helpful interpretation panels here about Rushy Mead and Taylor's Lake.

Rowing boats sometimes use the next stretch of river and we pass the clubhouse of Bishop's Stortford Canoe Club on the right. To our left, we pass single-storey Lock Cottage and probably several moored boats.

Just afterwards, at Southmill Lock, we cross the river to continue now with the river on the right.

We cross another long wooden bridge above South Mill Weir. We soon pass beneath a railway line to enter the outskirts of Bishop's Stortford.

When the towpath meets a busy road, turn right and when safe cross the road, London Road. The road passes over the river. Immediately after the bridge turn left to rejoin the towpath, now with the River Stort on the left.

Immediately before the towpath passes under a spectacular white footbridge, we turn right into a large car park. Keeping watch for moving cars, we head half left, passing diagonally through the car park and heading towards the cream building which is Bishop's Stortford Station. In 2022, some taller buildings were being erected just beyond the car park.

We leave the car park and turn left onto a pavement. We are now on the bus loop road for the station. When safe, we should cross the road to continue along the pavement on the right, soon reaching the station entrance on the right.

This is the main entrance, with the booking office and access onto the platform for trains heading north, in the direction of Cambridge. From this platform, cross by the footbridge to the southbound platform and trains heading towards Sawbridgeworth and London.

Not all trains stop at all stations so, before boarding one, please check that it is scheduled to stop at your intended destination.

You can read more about the parishes of Sawbridgeworth and Little Hallingbury on [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk). Because of its urban character, Bishop's Stortford is not included within the Hundred Parishes.

This route description, last updated 22 March 2022, was downloaded from [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk). Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to [hundredparishes@btinternet.com](mailto:hundredparishes@btinternet.com).

A diagram covering this route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown on the next page. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

