



The Hundred Parishes

Walks from railway stations – number 9

St Margarets Station circular route – 4.7 miles (8 kilometres)

This route includes an informative stroll through Stanstead Abbots before exploring the countryside around the Easneye estate and then part of Great Amwell before returning to the station. The circular route could be joined anywhere along the way. The route has several stiles and seats. There are places to eat or drink near the start and the George IV restaurant in Great Amwell. There may be mud in places, so please be prepared to remove dirty boots or cover them with boot covers or plastic bags if you wish to dine indoors or visit a church.

*Start: St Margarets Station (Grid Reference: TL381118; postcode SG12 8DS).
Parking options in Stanstead Abbots: limited capacity at St Margarets Station; Stanstead Abbots car park 200 yards east of the station (SG12 8AT), in which case join the walk near the top of page 2; or along Cappell Lane just north of Stanstead Abbots parish church (TL386122; postcode SG12 8AR), joining the walk halfway down page 3.
The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194.
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.*

We will start from the station with a brief explanation, or perhaps confusion! Stanstead Abbots and Stanstead St Margarets are separate parishes. St Margarets Station is actually located in the parish of Great Amwell. The station buildings probably date from the 1840s when this branch line was opened to Hertford.

On leaving the station, we come to the main road, Station Road, where we turn left, heading east. We will stay on the left, in Great Amwell; the other side of the road is in Stanstead St Margarets which lies outside The Hundred Parishes - boundaries have to be drawn somewhere!

We soon pass the Jolly Fisherman pub on the right. It dates from the 18th century when it was called The George and Dragon. With the coming of the railway, it was renamed The Railway Tavern; the present name was adopted in 1948.

Continuing ahead, we cross Lee Navigation, a long, navigable stretch of the River Lea, and enter the parish of Stanstead Abbots. Just after the bridge, house number 77 on the left, with three gabled dormer windows, dates from the 16th century or perhaps early 17th.

We are now in the High Street. Today, it is hard to imagine that this was once the main A414 with heavy traffic. It was bypassed in 1988.

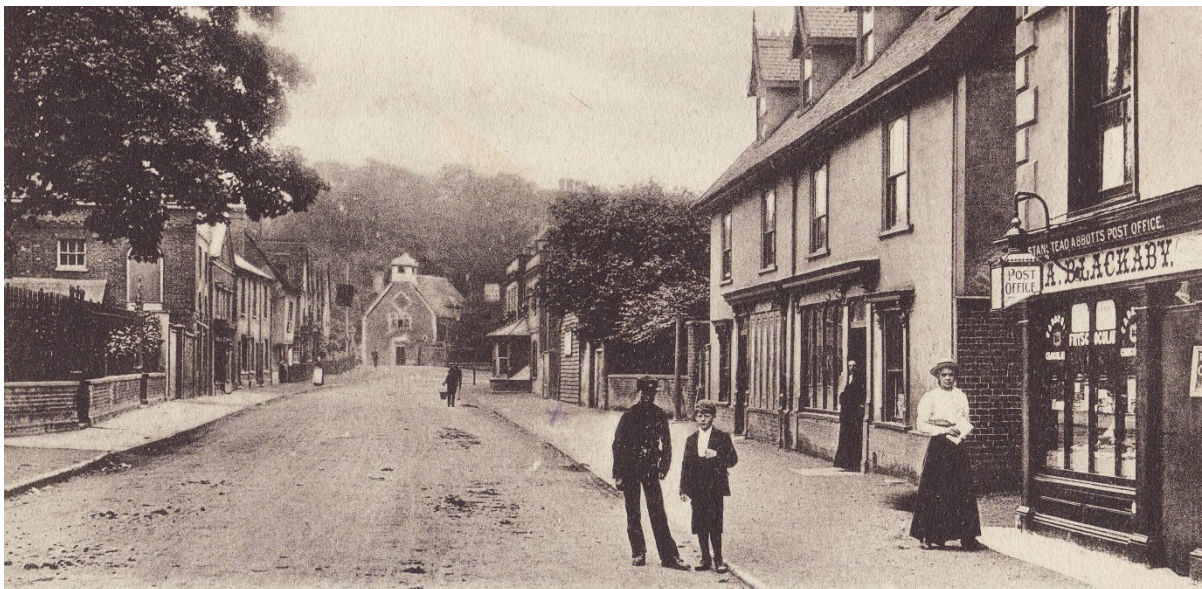
Having crossed the river, we are now effectively on an island that was created around 700 years ago when a millstream was dug to divert water from the river to pass through a water mill. The millstream rejoins the river about a mile further south. Much of the island of Stanstead Abbots became home to a substantial malting industry from the 18th century.

Barley from nearby farms was processed into malt which was then mostly shipped down the Lea to London's breweries. Many of the maltings buildings have since been converted into apartments or offices, but you may still smell malt because part of the industry survives.

Most of Stanstead Abbotts High Street dates from the 17th to 19th century. A good number of the buildings were originally constructed with a timber-frame and plastered, but were subsequently faced with brick or encased in brick in the 19th century. We will mention just a few properties. From time to time, we will see panels that have been hung by Stanstead Abbotts Local History Society to recognise local people who died in the First World War.

Further along, we pass the entrance to a car park on the left (with limited capacity and limited waiting time). On the corner, a helpful display panel from the Local History Society provides information about "this ancient riverside settlement".

Continuing ahead, we should look out for the row of shops with four gabled, dormer windows on the right. You might like to compare today's scene with this old postcard image from the early 1900s. Surprisingly little has changed, although the old post office building on the immediate right appears to have been replaced in the 20th century by a fish and chip shop.



Just ahead, behind the railings on the left, is Stanstead Hall where we might pause. This 3-storey mansion dates from 1752 and has an unusual external circular stair tower which allowed servants to access rooms without passing through the house.

The next building on the left, The Stables, is also 3-storey and constructed of red brick. It was built at the same time as Stanstead Hall as a stable block for the big house.

A few houses further along, plastered number 3 has the upper storeys jettied over the pavement. This building dates from the 16th century or earlier.

Finally, at the far end of the High Street, the Red Lion public house started life in the 15th century and mostly dates from the 17th.

Ahead of us, across the road, is the Clock House, built in the 17th century as a school and now a private house. Between the Red Lion and the Clock House, the millstream passes beneath the main road and the mini roundabout, flowing from left to right. We may just see the millstream through the railings and fence on the left as we turn left into Cappell Lane. Over to the right, beyond the roundabout, the millstream passes beside the large 4-storey mill, now mostly offices.

We continue along Cappell Lane, when safe crossing to the pavement on the right.

Immediately after Abbots Way on our right, there is an interesting terrace of houses on each side of the road. On the left, Middleton Villas, dated 1902 and with bay windows and railings, look like they have been transported here from a London suburb – they are presumably named after Hugh Middleton who we will encounter later on this walk. On the right, the trio of houses – numbers 13, 15 and 17 – date from 1812 and once functioned as The Prince of Wales public house.

On the right, we pass the war memorial and the parish church, dedicated to St Andrew. If the church is open, you are encouraged to look inside, but first please remove or cover your boots if they are dirty. The church was built in 1881 to a design by Alfred Waterhouse whose many works include the Natural History Museum in London. The church building was largely financed by Thomas Fowell Buxton (1821-1908) who lived in the parish for the last 40 years of his life at Easneye, which we will pass soon.

On leaving the church, turn right and continue along the pavement on the right.

[Just beyond the church is a straight stretch of road where we could park if not starting from the railway station].

The houses along Cappell Lane are generally not especially old, but are interesting in their variety.

After a while we ignore the public bridleway on the right, signposted to Wareside. *[On another day, you might like the extra challenge of 12 miles offered by Hundred Parishes station walk number 20 which heads up this path en route to Sawbridgeworth Station].*

Further on, Halving Cottages (numbers 112 to 116), on the left, were probably built by Alfred Waterhouse. We will see more houses of this style, red brick with a facing of red tiles on the upper floor. They were built in the late 19th century for workers on the Easneye estate.

On the right, just after a cockerel above a clock on the roof of a garage, two houses set back from the road, numbers 129 and 131 with a central chimney stack, date from the 17th century. We pass another estate building and then come to a row of single-storey dwellings called Wilberforce Cottages, built in 1933. Outside, on the pavement, an Edward VII post box is housed rather splendidly.

Just afterwards, we fork right, leaving the main road. Just ahead is another estate building. This is the lodge house at the entrance to the Easneye estate. Our route does not proceed up the drive, but it is time to pause for an explanation before we press on.

First, there is not total agreement on the meaning of Easneye, whose name has existed for hundreds of years. The most plausible appears to be that it is from Anglo-Saxon and means something like *island between rivers*. This theory is consistent with the fact that the rivers Ash and Lea each flow near the estate's boundary.

Thomas Fowell Buxton was a member of the wealthy brewing family which also had personal and business connections with the Truman, Hanbury and Barclay families. In the 1860s, he bought an estate believed to cover 3,000 acres (about 4 square miles) and commissioned Alfred Waterhouse to design an extensive family home. Our route will pass through the estate for the next two miles, but we will not see the mansion itself as it is surrounded by woodland. Below is a photo of the Gothic-style house. Thomas Fowell Buxton died in 1908 and the estate passed down through the Buxton family. During World War II, it became home to around 50 orphaned babies and 27 nurses and it continued to serve this purpose until 1963. After the death of John Fowell Buxton in 1970, the mansion was sold to pay death duties. The modest sale price of £31,500 seems to reflect the support which the Buxton family had long given to churches and humanitarian causes. The house and 9 acres were purchased by the All Nations Christian College and the accommodation was extended to provide academic facilities. The College now has capacity for around 200 students and its mission is to provide "training for mission in a multicultural world". Several thousand students have passed through the college. The wider Easneye estate is still controlled by the Buxton family who have been praised for their conservation work.



Now we can continue. Having forked right off Cappell Lane onto the drive, within about 10 yards we turn right onto public bridleway number 16, signposted towards Wareside. Almost immediately, we start a steady climb.

We pass a discontinued quarry on the right and continue ahead along a track with a view over the Easneye estate to our left.

At the top of the rise, another bridleway comes in from the right. We keep straight ahead, now on public footpath 16, signposted to Waterspace Farm (it should say *Watersplace*).

We pass through a metal gateway, passing a private lane that goes off to the left and up to the College. We immediately pass another lodge house and then a small brick building that appears to have been used as kennels.

The footpath continues, now along a wide track and gently descending.

We enter woodland with a deep canyon on our right, a bourne that has little water most of the time but can become a raging torrent after rain. After a while, the bourne passes beneath our track and continues on the left.

We can bypass a cattle grid by using the gate on the right. We leave the woodland. Now, straight ahead are the buildings of Waterspace Farm (some were designed by Waterhouse and came within the original Easneye estate). Just before them, a ford crosses the River Ash, but we turn left about 100 yards before the ford onto a new track. This is the most northerly point of our walk. We may well see red kites in this area.

Soon, we pass weatherboarded buildings on the left. The house dates from the 17th century. We pass through a gateway, where we get confirmation that we are now on the Hertfordshire Way.

We are still on the Easneye Estate, now walking parallel with a line of trees about 100 yards to our right; they mark the route of a former railway, the Buntingford branch line which ran from St Margarets Station to Buntingford for a hundred years before closure in 1964.

After about 200 yards, the track turns left to go uphill but we go straight ahead, climbing over a stile, to join a grass path along a long pasture. After about 200 yards, there appear to be two well-used, parallel grass paths: one stays close to the wire fence on the right and the other rises to somewhat higher ground, probably with slightly better views. They will meet again before long.

Both paths bear right above a bend in the meandering River Ash. They meet in the corner of the field by an exit that rises up to cross the old railway route – but we don't take that route. Nor do we go over the adjacent stile.

We turn to the left, continuing along the Hertfordshire Way and now with the railway route just to our right.

After about 300 yards, at the end of the wire fence, we turn right over a stile and immediately turn left to continue along the line we were following. We don't want to go up onto the railway track. The path is somewhat uneven for a short distance before reaching a solid wooden footbridge.

We cross the footbridge, over the River Ash. Immediately to our right we can see the supports that once carried the railway bridge over the river. By crossing the Ash we leave

the parish of Stanstead Abbots and pass into the parish of Wareside, albeit for only about 400 yards.

Immediately after crossed the footbridge, we bear slightly right to continue along the raised bed of the former railway track.

A path crosses our route, but we continue ahead on the railway track beneath the trees.

We pass beneath a road bridge (Hollycross Road) and then through a gateway where we are welcomed to the Lee Valley Park. We are now on the Amwell Walkway, soon passing an entrance on the left to Amwell Nature Reserve and then several interpretation panels.

We cross a long wooden bridge that takes our path over a marshy area and over the River Lea. The path is supported on pillars that once carried the railway line. By crossing the Lea, we leave Wareside and pass into the parish of Great Amwell.

The track emerges onto a tarmac road where we bear left. After about 100 yards, this road turns sharp right, but we go straight ahead and almost immediately bear right up a ramp with wooden handrails. This ramp curves to the right, taking the footpath over the Lee Navigation, a wide waterway with narrow boats moored against the banks.

Just at the end of the bridge, we will turn sharp right off the path. *[The main path curves to the left and continues along the raised bed of the former Buntingford branch line which is about to link up with the main line]*. Our route leaves the path immediately at the end of the curved bridge over the canal - we turn very sharp right to descend concrete steps down to the towpath of the canal. Here, we turn right onto the towpath and immediately pass beneath the footbridge we have just used. We are now travelling south-east, with the canal on our left, heading back towards Stanstead Abbots.

In about 300 yards, the towpath rises and comes to a crossroads of paths. We turn left for just a few yards, over the Lee, to reach a viewing point that overlooks Amwell Nature Reserve. This was once a quarry and is now a haven for birds. We should see many, many birds and there is an interpretation panel to help us identify some of them.

Having viewed the birds, we should retrace over the canal and then keep straight ahead, down a slope which soon brings us to a pedestrian crossing over the railway line (between Stanstead St Margarets to or left and Ware and Hertford to the right). Cross the track with great care and continue ahead on a wide track to soon reach a road.

Turn left onto the road and almost immediately cross with care, pass through a metal gate and climb the steps. These lead up to a path beside the New River, a wonderful feat of engineering that was completed in 1613. This aqueduct still fulfils its original purpose of carrying fresh water into London. It is gravity fed, albeit dropping less than 20 feet during its journey of more than 20 miles.

Turn right onto the path, keeping the New River on the left. We pass a memorial to the men of Great Amwell who fell in the two World Wars and later an interpretation panel about the New River.

Soon, the path meets the road and reaches a footbridge that crosses the New River. Do not use the footbridge, but at this point cross the road with care and peer through the railings to read the story of Emma's Well. The verse was written by 18th-century poet John Scott of Amwell. A few paces further on, turn right and descend a few steps for a view of Emma's Well, which gave its name to Amwell and which was one of the two original sources of fresh water for the New River when it was first built. Nowadays, this well is sometimes dry and much of the water for the New River is drawn from the River Lea.

Retrace up the steps to the road. With care, cross and turn right, with the New River on the left. Soon, the river widens around two small islands. On one, there is a memorial to Sir Hugh Myddelton who was the driving force for the construction of the New River. Continue along the road for a short way, turning left into Cautherly Lane and crossing the New River.

Almost immediately, we bear left onto a public footpath. This rises steeply, including steps, to reach a road, immediately opposite the entrance to Great Amwell church and cemetery. *[You might be tempted to stop for refreshment at the George VI pub / restaurant just a few yards to the right. If you do, please retrace and turn right into the churchyard]*

When safe, cross the road and enter the churchyard. The church, dedicated to St John the Baptist, dates from Norman times but is rarely open. If you are fortunate enough to find it open, please remove or cover dirty boots before entering.

Our route goes straight ahead through the churchyard, keeping close to the flintstone church on the left. The hillside cemetery has an interesting selection of gravestones and is usually carpeted in snowdrops in February. Just beyond the church, on the left, the Mylne family mausoleum dates from 1800 AD. It holds the remains of several members of the family, two of whom were civil engineers and surveyors of the New River.

Just after the mausoleum, we fork right and almost immediately fork left. Our path climbs gently and soon merges with another path coming from the right. We keep ahead, leaving the cemetery, soon with wooden fencing immediately on the left.

Not long after the wooden fencing ends, the view opens up somewhat and we have a view down to the left to the lane that we walked along earlier. Between us and the road, generally out of sight, is the New River.

Our route continues along this fairly straight, often narrow, but obvious path for more than half a mile, sometimes with a slope on our left down to the New River, for a while with a tall brick wall on our right and sometimes through open scrubland.

After a while, the view to the left opens up and we can see industrial premises and housing below.

Further over to the left, what appears to be a church tower is actually a 'feature' of a modern residential development beside the Lee Navigation.

We pass close to a 20th-century housing estate on our right, keeping straight ahead. Eventually, our unsurfaced path becomes tarmacked and we reach a busy road.

We turn left onto the road, the B181, Station Road, and immediately cross over the New River.

We soon pass a mini roundabout on the right. Just beyond, there is a village sign for Stanstead St Margarets. We are still in the parish of Great Amwell; Stanstead St Margarets is on the other side of the road. We soon get confirmation as we cross Amwell Lane with a Great Amwell sign.

Just afterwards, we reach the level crossing with tracks going into St Margarets station on the left. Before crossing the tracks, platform 2 on our left is for trains heading to Ware and Hertford East. For platform 1, heading south towards London, we must cross the tracks and turn left to the station booking office, etc. Before boarding a train, please check that it is scheduled to stop at your intended destination.

You can read more about the parishes of Stanstead Abbots and Great Amwell on www.hundredparishes.org.uk. The website has many more downloadable walks.

This route description, last updated 17 March 2022, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk. 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.

