



# The Hundred Parishes

## Walks between railway stations – number 19

### St Margarets to Ware - 4 miles (7 kilometres)

*Part of this walk is along the valley of the River Lea and the associated canal, Lee Navigation. The route passes a variety of water features including a nature reserve that is home to a number of interesting species. Most of the walk is in the parish of Great Amwell; there is an opportunity to extend the route a little to explore Stanstead Abbots near the start; the latter part of the walk is in the parish of Ware. The route has no stiles but there are several sets of steps. There are places to eat near the start and finish and along the way at 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 visit a pub or church.*

*Start: St Margarets Station (Grid Reference: TL381118). Finish: Ware Station (GR: TL360140).*

*Limited parking near St Margarets Station; car parks near Ware Station (e.g. postcode SG12 9HS). The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194. A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the 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 St Margarets Station by the only exit and turn left onto the main road. Cross the road when safe and continue past the Jolly Fisherman pub. Immediately afterwards, turn right and pass through Riverside Green, a small memorial garden that commemorates VE Day in 1945. The set of obelisks celebrates the fact that the Greenwich Meridian passes through Stanstead Abbots.

On reaching the towpath, turn sharp left. This is the River Lea, also called Lee Navigation. With the canal on the right, follow the towpath towards where it passes beneath the road bridge. Before we reach it, a few words about parishes may help our orientation. Just here, we are in the parish of Stanstead St Margarets. On the other side of the canal is Stanstead Abbots parish. Beyond the road bridge, our side of the canal will be in the parish of Great Amwell, with Stanstead Abbots continuing on the right.



Our route goes straight ahead, passing under the road, but a short diversion may be taken to walk up and back along Stanstead Abbots High Street. This diversion is described in the text box below. To ignore it, skip to the paragraph beyond the box.

To take the diversion, rather than pass under the road bridge, take the ramp on the left, up to the road. Turn right (crossing the canal to enter the parish of Stanstead Abbots) and follow the High Street, largely 19th century, for about 300 yards. Today, it is hard to imagine that this was once the main A414 with heavy traffic. It was bypassed in 1988.

At the far end of the High Street, facing us, is the Clock House, built in the 17th century as a school and now a private house. Also at the far end, the Red Lion public house started life in the 15th century and mostly dates from the 17th. Between the pub and the Clock House, a millstream passes beneath the main road. Since we crossed the canal, we have effectively been walking across an island. Much of the island of Stanstead Abbots was home to a substantial malting industry from the 18th century, processing barley from nearby farms into malt which was mainly shipped down the Lea to London's breweries. Many of the buildings have now been converted into apartments or offices, but you may still smell malt as part of the industry survives.

At the end of the High Street, with care cross to the pub side of the road and retrace.

After re-crossing the canal, turn immediately right onto the towpath.

We are now in the parish of Great Amwell. Continue along the towpath, probably past many moored boats, heading North with the canal on the right, walking in the direction of Ware.

What appears to be a church tower on the left is actually part of a residential development. On the right, a swing bridge provides access across the canal as it enters Stanstead Lock number 4.

Keep ahead on the Lee Navigation towpath. After about ten minutes, turn right on a bridge across the canal to a viewing point overlooking Amwell Nature Reserve. This was once a quarry and is now a haven for birds. Retrace over the canal bridge. Do not rejoin the towpath, but keep straight ahead. With great care cross the railway line at the pedestrian crossing, and continue ahead to reach a road.

Turn left onto the road and almost immediately cross with care and climb the steps. These lead up to 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, keeping the New River on the left, passing the memorial to the men of Great Amwell who fell in the two World Wars and then 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. A few paces further on, turn right and descend some overgrown steps for a view of Emma's Well, which gave its name to Amwell.



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 river.



Very soon, 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.

The church dates from Norman times but is rarely open. The hillside cemetery has an interesting selection of gravestones and is usually carpeted in snowdrops around February. Behind the church is the Mylne family vault. It holds the remains of several members of the family, two of whom were civil engineers and surveyors of the New River.

Leave the churchyard by the gate you entered, turning left past the George IV pub and restaurant.



Almost immediately, cross another road and go straight ahead into Church Path, signposted to Amwell Hill. Keep on this path until it meets a busy main road.

Turn left, gently uphill, for about 100 yards. On reaching Ravenscourt on the left, cross the main road with great care to enter Walnut Tree Walk, a public bridleway. If you were to keep on the main road you would soon reach the entrance to Van Hage garden centre (with a large café) and then the Wagon and Horses.

At the beginning of Walnut Tree Walk, the gatehouse on the right was built in the early 19th century to serve the Amwellbury estate which we are just entering.

Walnut Tree Walk rises gently, initially passing Van Hage's car park on the left.

After a quarter of a mile, we reach a staggered crossroads of paths. Here, we turn right onto Public Footpath 1, signposted to Amwell Hill. In springtime, the next stretch of the walk can be rich with bluebells.

After about 200 yards, we pass a group of buildings on the right. This is Amwellbury. At one time, the mansion had 50 rooms but it was reduced to a manageable size in the 1950s. The substantial property that remains includes a 16th-century brick barn that was incorporated into 17th-century Amwellbury Farmhouse.

The tall octagonal, brick-built dovecote with steep red-tiled roof dates from around 1700 AD.



Our route continues along this track, descending back to the river valley and the road.

At the main road, our route goes straight ahead, but please use the pedestrian refuge to cross this busy road with great care. Take the 1824 footbridge over the New River. Bear right and very soon turn left on Public Footpath 9, heading towards the Lee Navigation.

After about 400 yards, go through a kissing gate, cross the railway line with great care, and pass through another kissing gate. Keep straight ahead.

On reaching the Lee, turn left on the towpath, passing Hardmead Lock. At this point the route leaves the parish of Great Amwell and enters the outskirts of the town of Ware. Whilst the generally urban character of Ware puts it outside the Hundred Parishes, the towpath route is full of interest and Ware's town centre retains many interesting buildings.

Continue along the towpath for more than half a mile, passing moored narrow boats.

As the path approaches the centre of Ware, we continue past more boats and modern canal-side apartment blocks until the path rises sharply to meet Viaduct Road.

Carefully cross this busy road and then bear right across another road. Pass through a small park to descend back to the towpath of the River Lea. We soon cross a metal bridge over a stream that flows from the left into the river.

On the opposite bank are Ware's famous riverside gazebos. They were mostly built in the 18th century in the gardens of properties in the High Street that were, at that time, mainly coaching inns.

Continue for about 200 yards and fork left from the towpath up onto the iron footbridge to cross the canal. Pass through a small car park to emerge onto Ware High Street.



You will need to turn right to head towards the station, but do take time to explore this historical part of the town. Ware Museum and tourist information point is just to the left, and opposite are the war memorial, Ware parish church and a striking statue of a maltster. He commemorates nearly 600 years of malt-making in Ware. The Hundred Parishes area was for centuries a major producer of barley for London's breweries, and Ware was an important centre for turning that barley into malt, prior to shipment down the Lea.

Along the High Street, note the many entrances on the right, some still with cobbled roadway. These would have allowed horse-drawn wagons and carriages to pass through to commercial premises, to stabling and to inns with gazebos on the river at the end of their gardens. Several buildings now have plaques describing their former activities.



At the end of the High Street, bear right, following the main road, and cross the canal into the road called Amwell End. Continue along this road, crossing our earlier route, past a parade of shops.

Immediately before reaching the railway level crossing, turn left to Ware Station (or turn right down Broadmeads to the car park).

Ware is a single-track station, with trains going in both directions. Before boarding one, please check that it is scheduled to stop at your intended destination.

This route description, last updated 12 March 2023, was downloaded from [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk) where you will find many more walk routes and further information about the parishes of Stanstead Abbots and Great Amwell.

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 below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

