



The Hundred Parishes

Walks between railway stations – number 20

St Margarets to Sawbridgeworth - 12 miles (19 kilometres)

This mainly rural Hertfordshire walk generally avoids centres of population except at the beginning and end, where we will give a little commentary on the history and heritage. The route is mostly along well-surfaced paths, much of the first half following the Hertfordshire Way. It touches seven of the Hundred Parishes (Great Amwell, Stanstead Abbots, Wareside, Widford, Much Hadham, High Wych and Sawbridgeworth) and passes some of Henry Moore's large outdoor sculptures. The route includes two stiles and steep steps. There are places to eat near the start and finish and **possibly** three places along the way: the Henry Moore Centre café (01279 843333 - <https://www.henry-moore.org/visit>) and Hoops Inn (www.hoops-inn.co.uk and 01279 843568), both at Perry Green, and the Queen's Head at Allen's Green (07961 812529 or 01279 723393). Each has limited opening hours. Pre-booking is always advised if you are relying on a pub to be open and serving food.

Start: St Margarets Station (Grid Reference: TL381118).

Finish: Sawbridgeworth Station (GR: TL490151).

Limited parking near St Margarets Station; none at Sawbridgeworth Station.

Note: The two stations are on separate branches of the West Anglia line. The line splits just north of Broxbourne station.

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194. It is illustrated in 3 diagrams 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 usually suggested that you park at the finish and catch the train to the start, thereby avoiding the possible pressure to finish the walk at a certain time.

St Margarets Station, despite its name, is just inside 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.

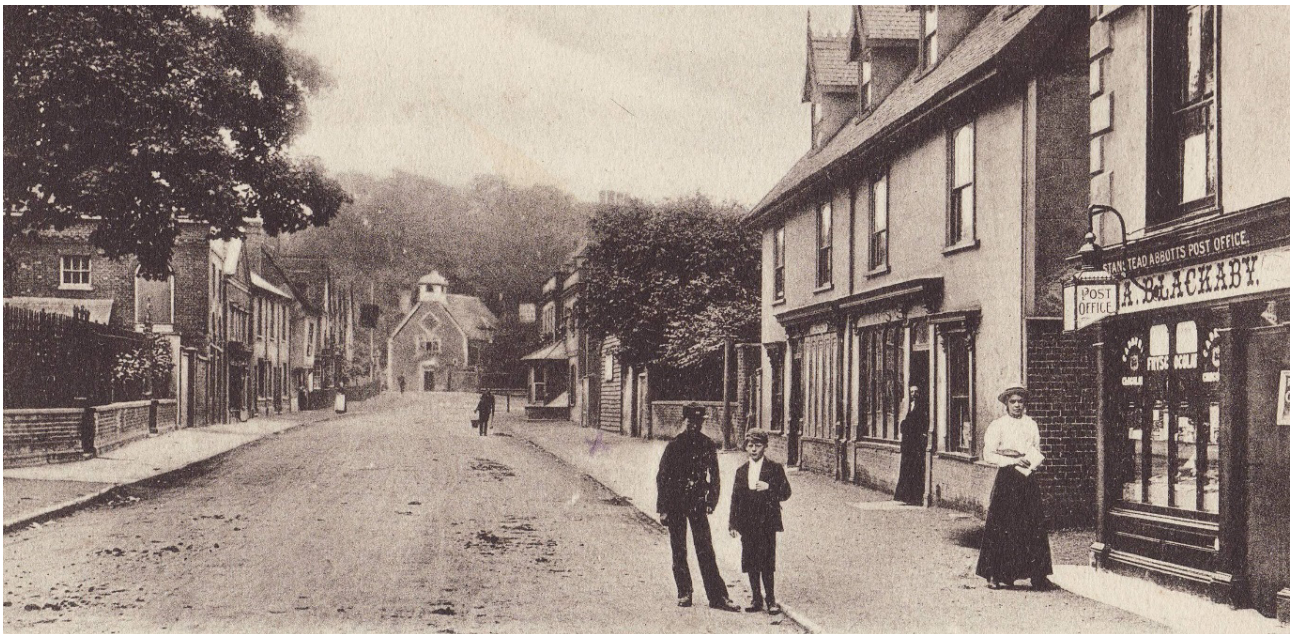
Continuing ahead, we cross Lee Navigation, a long, navigable stretch of the River Lea, and enter the parish of Stanstead Abbots (on both sides of the road). Just after the bridge, house number 77 on the left, with three gabled dormer windows, dates from the 16th century or perhaps early 17th.

We are now in Stanstead Abbots 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 Lea 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 Abbots 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.

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.

At the far end of the High Street, on the left, 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.

On the right, we pass the war memorial and the parish church, dedicated to St Andrew. If the church is open, you may like 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.

Continue along the pavement on the right.

About 200 yards after the church, soon after the houses restart on the left, turn right onto the public bridleway signposted *Wareside 2¼*. This is also the Hertfordshire Way, a long-distance route of almost 200 miles in total that we will follow for much of the next five miles.

The route climbs steadily for about half a mile. Nearing the top of the climb, we cross bridleway 18.

About 300 yards further on, at the top of the hill, we pass a pond on the left. Immediately after the pond, look back over the pond. On a clear day, a tall communications tower can be seen on the horizon, and to its right the green dome of Haileybury College in Hertford Heath is visible at Grid Reference 358108, around 2.5 miles distant.

Continue ahead. The route runs parallel with the edge of Easneye Wood, over to the left. Within the wood, out of sight, is Easneye College, a Christian missionary training college whose rather grand premises were built in the 19th century as a home for Thomas Buxton, a wealthy member of the brewing family. He also built St Andrew's Church that we passed shortly before leaving Stanstead Abbots. Our route moves imperceptibly from Stanstead Abbots into the parish of Wareside.

On reaching the corner of a wood on the right, ignore the bridleway that goes off to the right (the Harcamlow Way) and continue ahead on the Hertfordshire Way, keeping the wood on the right.

In about 300 yards, at a second gap in the wood, we turn right beside a small triangular green onto another signposted bridleway, leaving the Hertfordshire Way for a while. We descend on a clear path, with woodland on the right, into the valley of the River Ash.

Pass a cottage on the right and almost immediately keep straight ahead onto a narrow bridleway through shrubs. In 40 yards, we cross a wooden footbridge over the River Ash. Continue ahead and in 100 yards turn right onto a track.

After a short climb, turn left for a few yards along a metalled road onto a bridge. Below is the trackway of the old Buntingford branch railway line, a 13 mile stretch of steam railway that operated between St Margarets and Buntingford from 1863 to 1965.

Retrace the last few steps and continue ahead, downhill along the lane to re-cross the Ash.

Almost immediately after the river bridge, turn left through a gate onto a wide grass bridleway. The bridleway continues for more than half a mile, never far from the River Ash on the left, passing through a series of fields in which cattle may be grazing. The cattle are usually of the Jersey breed, friendly and curious; they tend to meet walkers at the gate and then follow them most of the way to the next gate. Please don't let them through the gate and don't spook them – if you have a dog, it should remain on the lead.

After about half a mile on this field path, we ignore a stile on the left which seems to lead nowhere but down to the river. Keep straight ahead and, soon afterwards, climb over a stile onto a gravel track, the route of the old railway line. To the left the track crosses the Ash and continues in a straight line, but we must turn right onto the track, which is another section of the Hertfordshire Way.

The track climbs gently, leaving the Ash behind. We also leave Wareside and pass into the parish of Widford.

After a quarter of a mile, the track kinks right and left and starts to climb more steeply. After another 100 yards, bear left off the track to follow the bridleway into the trees. Now, below to the left is the cutting that the railway once followed; beyond that is the road.

The bridleway emerges onto the road, which here turns sharply over the bridge above the railway cutting. Keep straight ahead on the road, initially on the right facing oncoming traffic until it is safe to cross to the pavement on the left.

After 200 yards, as the road turns right, cross the entrance to a storage depot and turn left onto Byway 18 signposted *Widford 1* and *Hertfordshire Way*. Continue along this path for about half a mile, passing through several gates and with trees on the left.

Over to the right, the spire of Widford church appears at the top of the hill.

Pass through a metal gate where the path crosses the River Ash. Here, just a few yards to the left, the old metal railway bridge survives. Continue straight ahead.

After a while, cross a stile and immediately bear half right. In 100 yards, bear right again to cross the Ash on a wooden footbridge.

Continue along a field edge with the hedgerow on the left. At the corner of the field, pass through the metal gate and turn left along the bridleway, soon following the River Ash on the left.

When the path reaches a road, go straight across onto a concrete approach road to a waterworks. At the entrance gate, bear left to keep a high fence on the right. When the fence ends, keep straight ahead on the field-edge path with hedgerow on the left.



The path emerges onto the sometimes busy Widford Road, B1004. Cross with care. Here, the route leaves Widford and enters the parish of Much Hadham. Go straight ahead on Bourne Lane, signposted to Green Tye and Perry Green.

After 200 yards pass Bourne Lodge and, just after the metal gates, fork left onto public bridleway 28, signposted *Stansted Hill 1¼*.

Soon, keep left on the well-defined Hertfordshire Way. This bridleway can be muddy at times. It runs between the River Ash on the left and a wooded hillside on the right. This wood, Mill Wood, is usually the site of a spectacular and extensive bluebell display in springtime and the bridleway is then particularly popular.



About a mile after crossing the B1004, we reach a crossroads of paths, with a seat beneath an oak tree and a wooden footbridge to the left. Turn right onto the path which climbs steeply with a low fence on the left and then woodland.

Near the top of the climb, bear left to follow the edge of the woodland. Soon, at the top of the rise, still with woodland on the left, turn right onto a path between fields, heading towards a telegraph pole and then a communications tower in the distance.

Before reaching the communications tower, turn right immediately before a large oak tree.

In 200 yards turn left onto a track and follow this past farm buildings on the left. Continue with hedgerow on the left and go through a gate into a meadow, keeping hedgerow on the left.



At the end of the field, the path turns left along a driveway which passes through the site of the Henry Moore Foundation with several large bronze statues on each side.

Henry Moore (1898 – 1986) was an acclaimed sculptor who was famed for his giant semi-abstract figures. He was commissioned to create many public works around the world. He lived and worked here at Perry Green, a hamlet of Much Hadham, for over 40 years and is buried in nearby Perry Green churchyard. His commissions brought considerable wealth, with which he endowed the Henry Moore Foundation. Today the Foundation supports education and promotes the arts. See www.henry-moore.org for further information.

The path passes beside the Visitor Centre on the right. Its café is open to non-visitors when the Centre is open (in 2022 this was from April to October, Wednesday to Sunday plus bank holidays, 11am to 5pm).

When the driveway reaches a road, look back and to the right. This house, Hoglands, was Henry Moore's home. It dates mostly from the 17th century.

Cross the road with care to a small green with a telephone box.

Just beyond the green to the right is the Hoops Inn (contact details above). If you visit the pub, to re-join the route turn right out of the pub, retrace the short distance and turn right across the green

Diagonally cross the small green, passing Chestnuts on the left and then Ash Tree Cottage on the right. Leave the green at the far-right corner. Bear right and almost immediately turn left along a field-edge path, keeping the fence of a Visitor Centre car park on the left. Continue along this path with hedgerows on the left.

Approaching farm buildings, follow the path to the right, passing a pond on the left. At the end of the pond, turn sharp left. Follow the path round to the right, ignore the path that soon goes off to the left, and continue on this byway open to all traffic, heading towards a clump of tall trees about 100 yards away.

The byway passes between the trees and continues as a well-surfaced, mostly tree-lined path for around half a mile. After about 200 yards, we ignore a byway that goes off to the left and not long afterwards we cross the parish boundary from Much Hadham into High Wych (pronounced "wyche").

When the tree-lined path ends, turn right and very soon continue ahead on a tarmac lane. We stay on the lane as it turns left.

After 200 yards, just before the first house, turn right onto Footpath 17, signposted *Allen's Green* ¼. Keep the hedgerow on the left, bearing left and then right.

In another 100 yards, turn left across a wooden footbridge over a ditch. Continue with the hedgerow on the left until it reaches a road. This is the hamlet of Allen's Green, part of the parish of High Wych.

Turn right and soon pass the Queen's Head pub on the left (contact details above).

Continue with the green on the right. The road turns left round a former church, now a private residence and pictured here.

Keep to the right of the road and immediately after the bend, opposite the former church, turn right beside a gate into a meadow, signposted as public footpath 14. The path is not always evident, but it bears left to diagonally cross this small meadow.



At the far corner, cross a wooden footbridge and turn left along the field edge. In 20 yards, follow the hedgerow round to the right, keeping the hedge on the left.

Continue straight ahead, beside a wood on the left for 300 yards. At the end of the wood, go straight ahead into a new field, now keeping a ditch on the left.

Pass a thatched cottage on the left and soon bear right along the field edge for about 25 yards, to drop down onto a track. Turn sharp left along the track (Chandlers Lane), passing the front of the thatched Chandlers Cottage on our left. The cottage was built in the 16th century as a hall house. The floor which separates today's ground floor and first floor was inserted in the 17th century, probably at the same time as the chimney was installed to remove smoke from the fire.

We keep straight ahead on a public restricted byway with a field just to the left. After a while the track becomes a gravel drive.

We follow the byway for some 600 yards altogether until it reaches a road. Turn right for 200 yards, crossing to the left side before the road bends to the right. Turn left at the bend onto a narrow lane.

Follow the lane for nearly half a mile.

Pass Tharbies Farmhouse on the left, and 50 yards later turn right onto a footpath signposted *Sawbridgeworth 1*.

Follow the lane as it winds past a tall 17th-century barn and other farm buildings, then the 21st-century Old Dairy residences on the left.

We pass through a gate and continue straight ahead on a path between fields toward distant buildings on the edge of Sawbridgeworth.

After descending for some distance, at the bottom of the hill, we follow the path to the right, keeping the hedgerow on the left. After 130 yards, fork left into the trees and soon follow the path left over a wooden footbridge. At this point, the route leaves High Wych and enters the parish of Sawbridgeworth.

Continue with the stream / ditch on the right for about 130 yards, and then follow the path left, climbing for some distance with high chainlink fences on either side, shielding the footpath from 21st-century housing developments.

The narrow path reaches the busy main road, Cambridge Road, A1184. Turn left on the pavement, cross the entrance to School Lane and soon cross the main road at the pedestrian crossing. On the far side, continue in the same direction, along a shared cycle and pedestrian path, passing the school and the Bull public house (01279 722777) on the left.

200 yards past the Bull, turn right onto Footpath 5, signposted *River Stort ¼*. Descend along this wide, stony track for some distance, passing beside boat yards and then between trees to reach Kecksy's Bridge. Cross this footbridge over the River Stort, with the river crossing for the London – Cambridge railway line immediately on the left.

On the far side, after descending the steps, we go straight ahead, keeping the canal on the right, and follow the towpath for more than half a mile. This navigable waterway was created in 1769 when the river was canalised for 14 miles between Hoddesdon to the south and Bishop's Stortford to the north. The canal facilitated the development of industry and trade; today it is used only by pleasure craft.

We pass Sawbridgeworth Lock, one of 15 that were installed along the canal. Just beyond the lock, on the right, is a white weather-boarded former grain store, dating from the 18th century. It once was part of a small industrial area that included a water mill. The mill was destroyed in a fire in the 1970s. A photo from a 1908 postcard is shown here.



When the towpath reaches a road, turn left and in 200 yards reach Sawbridgeworth Station. If you arrive here before 3pm, the Shed café may still be open. It is situated before the station, on the right, about 100 yards down the road beside the old maltings building - 01279 723853 - www.theshedcoffeehouse.co.uk

At the station, the nearside platform serves north-bound trains heading for Bishop's Stortford and Cambridge. Cross the track by the level crossing or the footbridge to the southbound platform for trains heading towards London. Trains do not 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 21 June 2022, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk where you can find many more walks and further information about each of the seven parishes through which this walk passes.

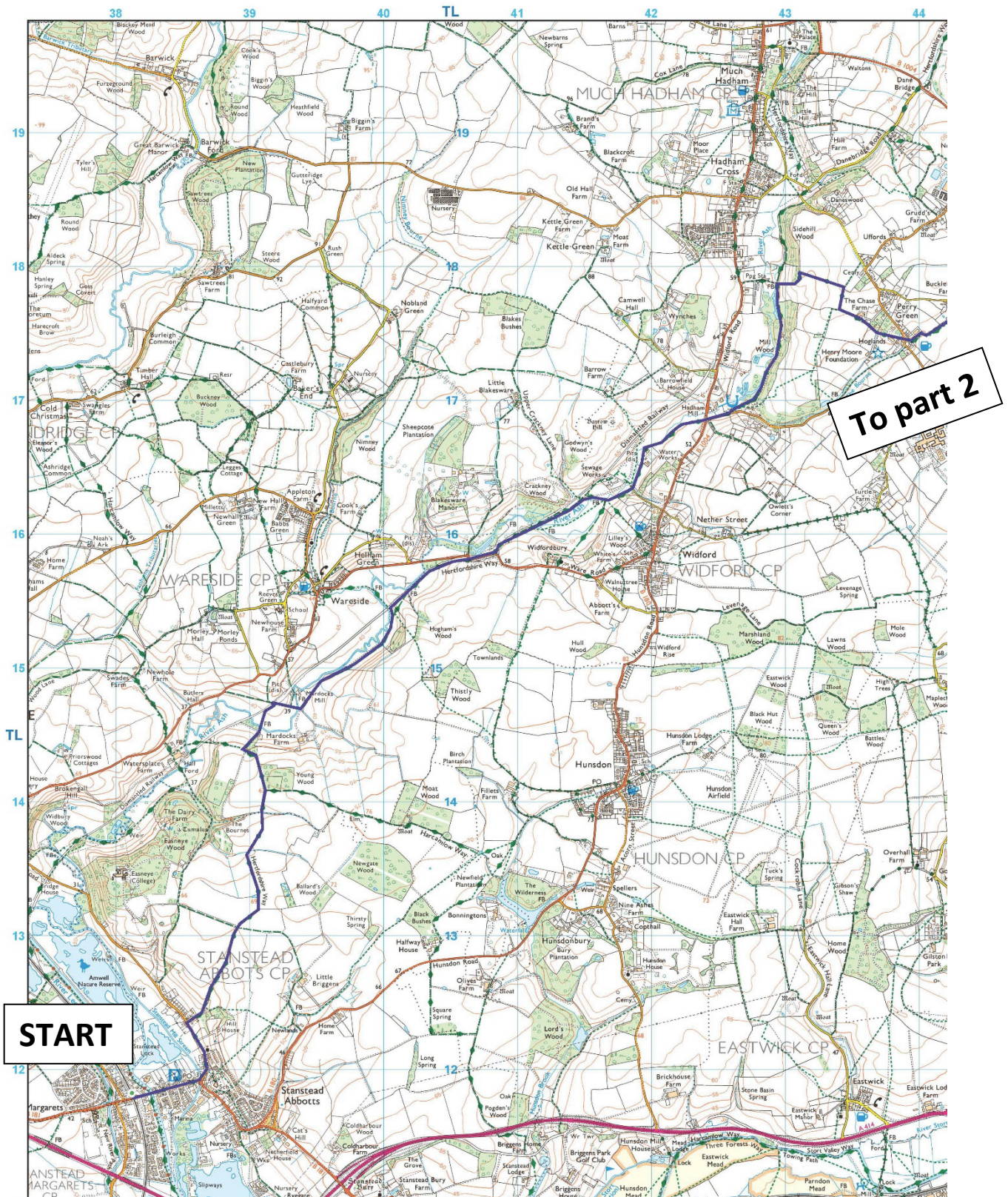
Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to hundredparishes@btinternet.com

The route map on the next page was drawn by Glyn Kuhn for The Hundred Parishes Society. Please note that the map does not have North at the top but, instead, shows the direction of travel, from West to East, from the bottom of the page to the top.

The two pages that follow are based on the Ordnance Survey map, one for each half of the walk.



A diagram of the first half of the route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.



A diagram of the second half of the route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

