



The Hundred Parishes

Circular walks – number 105

Standon & Puckeridge town & country walk – 3.5 miles (6 kms)

***Preview:** This walk starts and finishes in Puckeridge in the parish of Standon. It explores the more historic parts of these two adjoining settlements and also includes some stretches of footpath that follow the route of the long-abandoned railway as far north as the old station in the parish of Braughing. It is a fairly flat walk, with about 1.5 miles of footpath and 2 miles along residential roads. There are no stiles but there are some steps. Some stretches of footpath may be muddy at times. The route passes Standon's parish church and several potential eating places, so please be prepared, before entering, to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags.*

Start & Finish: Puckeridge, Hertfordshire: there is usually room to park in the small car park in Huntsman Close, just off Puckeridge High Street (Grid Reference: TL385233; Postcode SG11 1RD). The route starts from here.

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194.

A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

From the car park, we turn right. We are in the rather new Huntsman Close, no doubt named after the numerous men who once gathered here on horseback with dogs as part of the Puckeridge Hunt. We soon reach Puckeridge High Street. Before leaving Huntsman Close, we should look up to the first floor of the building we are about to walk beside – here is an intriguing door! The building dates from the 16th century, like many in the High Street. We continue ahead, passing beneath the jettied upper floor.

For centuries, the High Street was a major thoroughfare, having evolved along the route of the Roman highway, Ermine Street, which ran from London to Lincoln and York. In the early twentieth century the High Street formed part of the newly-designated A10. In the 1970's, when the High Street could no longer cope with the ever-increasing volume of motor traffic, Puckeridge was bypassed by the present A10. Today the High Street is usually peaceful.

Continue south, soon passing The Crown & Falcon on the left. This is possibly the Puckeridge inn frequented by seventeenth-century diarist Samuel Pepys. He did not specify which of Puckeridge's many inns provided him with hospitality.

Just beyond the Crown & Falcon is Station Road. Facing us on the corner, the symmetrical red-brick building with central doorway was once called London House. For many years, it was home to a small department store, W.S.Fordham: draper, outfitter and purveyor of general furnishings. The store probably closed in the 1980s after the bypass removed the passing trade.

Continue ahead, passing Station Road on the left. When safe, cross to the left pavement and continue up the High Street for a short distance. Number 52 on the right, with steep steps, dates from the 16th century. Next, the red-brick building with tall chimneys dates from the 16th century or earlier and was probably a guildhall. Now it is divided into several homes.

Here, we turn and retrace to the junction, passing buildings on our side that mostly date from the 18th century.

When we reach the corner with Station Road, before turning right, please reflect on the fact that we are standing at the junction of the former A10, with the A120 joining from the right. We are standing beside Fordhams, facing The Crown and Falcon. It is hard to imagine how busy this corner must have been before the Puckeridge bypass opened in the 1970s.

Continue round to the right along Station Road, soon bearing right again. Our route passes buildings mainly from the 19th and 20th centuries, reflecting the changing fortunes of this once-busy through route.

After crossing Roundhaye on the right, look out for numbers 22 and 24, set back on the right. These houses were once Standon School, built in 1862.

After another hundred yards or so, we keep left along Station Road, crossing South Road to the right. We continue along Station Road for another quarter mile or so.

It is interesting to note that Puckeridge has no parish church so was never an ecclesiastical parish in its own right. It was a hamlet of Standon parish and still is, now being part of Standon administrative parish, albeit that Puckeridge is more populous than Standon and has tended to feature on long-distance road signs rather than Standon.

We pass Ralph Sadleir school on the left. The school is named after Sir Ralph Sadleir who was a senior statesman, serving Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. His family's home was Standon Lordship, to the south of Standon village and beyond today's route.

We go past Meadow Walk on the left and soon proceed into Standon, leaving Puckeridge. When safe, we should cross the road and continue along the pavement on the left

Regal Close, on the left, is a 21st-century residential estate built on the site of the former Standon railway station. It takes its name from the 600-seat cinema which once operated on the opposite side of Station Road. It opened in 1935 as The Gem but by the time it closed in 1961 it had been renamed The Regal.

Shortly before the major road junction, the combined Heron pub and China Garden restaurant on the right was built around 1870 as The Railway Tavern to serve customers from the railway which opened in 1863. The branch line ran from Ware in the south to Buntingford in the north, being generally known as the Buntingford line. It operated for 100 years before its final closure in 1964.

At the road junction, Station Road meets Stortford Road, the present A120. Until the 1970s, the A120 did not exist to the right – it came round this corner into Station Road. We cross the A120, using the pedestrian-controlled lights. We will return to this crossing later.

We turn left along the pavement and almost immediately turn right, down some steps, into a field. We go straight ahead on the path, close to commercial buildings on the left. The route of the old railway line once ran parallel with our path, just a little to the left.

At the end of the field, we turn left up steps onto a concrete bridge over the River Rib. The river flows to our right where it once powered a mill. The railway line crossed the river just here. At the end of the bridge, we turn right to continue along the footpath, again following the railway route for a short distance to reach a lane. Immediately opposite is a gateway. When the railway was operational it went straight ahead, crossing the lane and then through the gateway.

This is Papermill Lane. The paper mill stood just down the lane to the right, but we will not head in that direction. The mill was one of several in Standon, all powered by the River Rib. Today, we turn left onto Papermill Lane, soon heading towards the "Hertfordshire spike" that rises from the tower of Standon Church.

As we enter the village of Standon we pass barns on our left and Church End Cottages on the right – former almshouses that date from the 17th century and whose decorative features, including the elaborate bargeboards beneath the gable roofs, were added in the early 19th century.

Opposite Church End Cottages, we turn left beside a small village green. Here, there is a mounted puddingstone beside an oak tree planted in 1911. To our right, the long building with exposed timber-framing is Knights Court, dating from the 16th century or earlier. It was once a courthouse, then a school for around 400 years before conversion into apartments in 1974. The herringbone brickwork was added in the 19th century.

From the green, when safe, we cross the road and pass through a gate and up steps into the churchyard of Standon's parish church. Unusually, the tower was built separate from the church and was connected only in the 19th century. We will follow the path to the left and to the main church porch.

If open, we should take a look inside this Grade I-listed church, but if boots are muddy please remove them or cover them with boot covers or plastic bags.

St Mary's dates from the 13th century. From the entrance, the floor slopes up and a set of steps then leads up to the chancel. Of particular note are the fine archway between nave and chancel and the memorials in the chancel to Sir Ralph Sadleir and his son Sir Thomas Sadleir. The church welcomes visitors and visitors may welcome the opportunity afforded by the toilet on the left alongside the little kitchen. Even if you don't spend a penny, please consider making a donation as you leave.

On leaving the church, from the porch we will go straight ahead to leave by the main gate. When safe, we will cross the road, Standon's High Street, towards the Star Inn which dates from the 17th century or earlier. You may wish to dine here, but pre-booking is advised. We turn right on the pavement, and later pass more dining options along Standon's High Street.

On the right, immediately after the church, is Standon House, built around 1700 AD. Here, we can cross to the right and pass along a slip road. This wide part of the High Street is where a market was held from the 13th century until relatively recent times.

All the houses along the slip road date from the 17th century or earlier. Standon's former telephone kiosk has been imaginatively converted into a miniature version of a Kew Gardens plant house. Beside it, the Old Windmill was a pub until about 1960.

Further along, we pass seats which may be handy if you would like a takeaway from Day's bakery opposite.

Just a little further along on the right, we come to the white-painted Old Post Office with jettied upper storey, possibly as old as 14th century. Almost opposite is The Bell, 16th century and another option for refreshment. In any case, when safe, we should cross to the left before we reach the end of the High Street.

At the corner, we return to the A120. Straight ahead, down Mill End, you can see the chimney which is about all that remains of another of Standon's watermills.

Turn left onto the A120, keeping to this side. Cross over the River Rib. On the other side of the road stands a relatively modern mill, now converted to apartments. It proclaims its origin: Standon Flour Mills 1901.

With today's heavy traffic flows it is hard to imagine that the railway and A120 met here at a level crossing until the 1960s.

Continue ahead to the pedestrian-controlled traffic lights to cross the A120 and then go straight ahead, retracing for about 300 yards along Station Road and returning to Puckeridge.

Before reaching the school, and opposite a play area on the left, we turn right into Meadow Walk. After about 40 yards, just beyond house number 9, we turn left onto a public footpath, signposted to Gatesbury and Braughing.

Cross a footbridge and continue straight ahead, joining a track that comes from the left. Follow the fence round to the right and almost immediately turn left, now with a school hedge and fence on the left and a field on the right. We are now following the route of the old railway and will stay on it for about half a mile. For this stretch we are also following part of the 273-mile Greenwich Meridian Trail, "GMT".

For a while, the path deviates from the rail alignment, passing through woodland and descending close to the River Rib on our right. Beware of the Giant Hogweed which grows here. It is dangerous so do not touch it. The path can sometimes be muddy.

Soon after the path leaves the woodland, we pass from Standon parish into Braughing parish (pronounced somewhere between 'braffing' and 'bruffing'). Here, too, we are crossing the probable original route of Stane Street. The area ahead and to our left was once the site of a Roman town which sat at the junction of Ermine Street and Stane Street. The area is now designated as an Ancient Monument, protecting it from unauthorised development or excavation.

The path crosses a private cobbled drive which leads to Gatesbury to the right. Just a few yards to the right you will notice the remains of a sluice gate. Our route goes straight ahead through a kissing gate to the left of a farm gate. Continue ahead with the river on our right. Ahead, a bridge soon appears; this is a road bridge over the line of the railway. As we draw closer, the former Braughing Station appears through the archway.

Bear slightly right, passing the archway on the left, and soon turn left through two gates to reach the road, B1368. Cross with care and turn left, passing the station (now a private house) on the right and passing over the railway route.

From the bridge there is a good view of the former station, now sympathetically restored by the owner. The platforms are original, the signal box was rebuilt in 2004 and replica signals have been added. Facing in this direction, we are looking towards what was probably the centre of the former Roman settlement. Probably a mixture of fort and town, it was built close to the meeting point of two of their major highways: Ermine Street (running North – South) and Stane Street (East – West). Little could the occupants have dreamed that their roads would still be in use 2000 years later (respectively the A10 and A120) – or that their Roman town would be bisected by a steam railway that would last only 100 years.

Continue ahead on the pavement for about 600 yards, passing imperceptibly from Braughing parish back into Standon. Shortly before a large road sign, just as the pavement ends and the road curves right, cross the road with care. Take a cinder path which almost immediately meets the old road which was abandoned when the road was realigned to meet the bypass.

Continue along the abandoned road, now somewhat encroached upon by foliage on either side. This old road ends beside the 17th-century White Hart pub. Until the Puckeridge bypass was built in the 1970s, this was a busy road junction. To our left is Ermine Street, the old A10, destined for Ware and London; to our right, Ermine Street continued north to Royston, Lincoln and York; the track we have just come down was once a busy coaching route through Barkway to Cambridge.

We turn left at the junction into Ermine Street, now just called Puckeridge High Street. It is suggested that we stay on the left in order to better appreciate the buildings on the right.

Immediately on the right, number 2, Dormers, dates from the 16th century. Number 4, 19th-century Everett House was named after the local vet. Number 8 was once the Anchor Inn and dates from the 16th century.

On our side, the long, white-painted building with many black sash windows dates from the 16th century and was once the Crown Inn. It was divided into cottages in the 18th century and is now offices.

A little further along, outside number 16, a milestone on the right reminds us that this was once the main road, indicating 27 miles to London. The milestone dates from about 1742 when this major highway was managed by the Wadesmill Turnpike Trust.

The buildings on the right, from number 20 to number 26, all date from the 16th-century or earlier, some disguised with a 'modern' front that hides the original timber-framing. Number 24 was yet another inn, The George.

When safe, we should cross to the pavement on the right. Soon, we turn right into Huntsman Close and return to the car park where we started this walk.

This has been just an introduction to part of the extensive parish of Standon which, in total, has 150 listed buildings. Please consider a return visit to explore Standon's other hamlets and the surrounding area. Hundred Parishes circular walk number 168 repeats a small section of this route but mainly explores the countryside to the south of Standon village. The route description commences in Much Hadham but could be started from Standon by joining the description at page 4.

This route description, last updated 18 July 2024, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk where you can read more about Standon and Braughing within the parish introductions.

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.

