



# The Hundred Parishes

## Circular Walks – number 136

### Westmill and Aspenden - 5.2 miles (8 kms)

*This walk is a mixture of countryside and an exploration of two attractive Hertfordshire villages. It is moderately hilly, mainly on quiet lanes and good paths. There are no stiles. Westmill has a pub and a tea room and there is a pub in Aspenden.*

**Start and finish:** The walk starts and finishes from Westmill Church where there is room for several cars to park in the road beside the wall of the cemetery.  
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL370272 - Postcode: SG9 9LJ.  
The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 194.  
A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

Before getting boots wet or muddy, you might like to visit Westmill's parish church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin. It dates from the 12th century with substantial additions in the 15th and much rebuilding work in 1876. One of the church's six bells is exceptionally ancient, dating from 1350 AD.

From the churchyard, return to the road and when safe cross to the "pavement" on the far side and turn right. On the left we pass an attractive series of cottages whose origins range from the 16th century to the 18th. Most are listed buildings.

On the right, the unusually-named pub, The Sword in Hand, dates from the 16th century. It was once a house but has been an inn for over 200 years. Its name comes from the coat of arms of the Greg family who lived at Coles Park in the south of Westmill parish. They were generous benefactors in the mid-1900s, leaving several properties in trust for the benefit of the parish including almshouses, the village hall and recreation ground.

Attractive properties continue on both sides of the road. The terrace of cottages on the right is called Pilgrims Row, named after Samuel Pilgrim who built them in the 18th century.

When safe, just after Pilgrims Row, cross the road and turn sharp right, passing almshouses on the right and then the village hall, a 17th-century barn that was converted into the hall and adjoining caretaker's house. Follow the lane round to the left, past Westmill's popular tea room (which in July 2022 normally opened for business from Thursday to Sunday).

On the green to our left, the water pump was installed around 1900 AD. We will return to it near the end of the walk.

The final house on the right, Dial House, has an unusual sun dial on the gable, dated 1793. Its Latin inscription appears to be *DUM SPECTAS FUCID*, possibly referring to the passage of time. Any educated suggestions would be welcome on the Feedback page of [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk).

Turn right and continue to pass interesting old buildings, including 17th-century Old Gaylors on the right. Pass a turning on the left and keep straight ahead. We will stay on this lane for nearly a mile until we reach Aspenden.

Beyond the village of Westmill and after a gentle climb, the road flattens out and we imperceptibly cross the boundary between Westmill and Aspenden parishes. Pause to look through at a gap in the hedgerow on the right. About 200 yards away a line of trees and shrubs runs parallel with our lane, denoting the route of the former railway branch line that ran for 14 miles from St Margarets Station in the south to Buntingford, about two miles north of here. It was known as the Buntingford Line and operated for a hundred years before closure in 1965.

Continue along the lane, soon descending along a sunken lane between high embankments.

When the road starts to bend left, and shortly before reaching an Aspenden sign, we turn right through the hedgerow on a signposted public footpath, number 005. Cross a wooden footbridge with handrails, passing over The Bourne, a popular name in Hertfordshire for streams that tend to flow only when there has been heavy rain. This Bourne flows south and joins the River Rib close to where we passed about a quarter mile back.

On the far side of the footbridge the path soon reaches Aspenden's recreation ground. Keep to the left of the field and pass a pavilion on the left. There are many benches around the field, popular when cricket is played here in summer months.

At the end of the field, bear slightly right to come onto a road beside Aspenden's village sign, erected in the year 2000. If we were to turn right we would soon leave Aspenden, passing beneath the A10 and reaching the much more populous parish of Buntingford. But today we will turn left and explore Aspenden whose population was counted as 242 in the 2011 census (Westmill had 305). So, we will turn left, passing the lane on the left by which we nearly arrived. Keep to the right, initially on the pavement, following the signpost towards Aspenden.

We soon reach thatched, 18th-century Dove Cottage on the right. Almost opposite, on the left, is the driveway to The Fox public house, built originally as a private house in the 17th century. Just after Dove Cottage, the telephone kiosk has the same level of listing protection as Dove Cottage – Grade II. It is a Type K6 kiosk, designed in 1935 by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott who also brought us Battersea Power Station and Liverpool Cathedral. The kiosk has now been re-purposed to hold a defibrillator.

Continue up the lane. A little further along, after crossing the entrance to Jubilee, Aspenden Cottage on the left was built in the 15th century as an open hall house. It retains many original features. All the properties on the left are approached by bridges over a ditch – it's actually the Bourne which we crossed earlier just before the recreation ground.

Street Farm on the right dates from the 16th century. It is, indeed a former farmhouse. Just beyond it is thatched Bourne Cottage, another 16th-century dwelling, built as a hall house.

A little further along on the right is imposing red-brick 19th-century York House. Almost opposite, set back on the left, is 16th-century Gorehambury with steep red tile roofs.

The unusually-named Shem Nichols on the right takes its name from a former owner. The house dates from the 17th century.

Malting Cottages on the left are thought to be from the early 20th century, reputedly built partly of materials from a former maltings.

The rather modern-looking Aspenden Lodge on the right probably dates from the 18th century. Just after is The Bell House, built as a school in 1714 and retaining a bell-cote on the ridge of the roof.

Set back on the left, the large building behind tall conifer trees is Aspenden Lodge, early 20th century and now divided into apartments.

After passing the entrance on the left to The Old Rectory (out of sight) the Bourne becomes quite deep. Follow the lane round to the right, ignoring the drive on the left. After a short climb we reach Aspenden's parish church. Ahead is a gateway to Aspenden Hall which we will see shortly. Turn right into the churchyard, passing the war memorial.

This Grade I-listed church is usually kept locked, but the outside is interesting. The building dates from the 11th century. There have been extensions and additions through the centuries. The stained glass in the porch was installed around 1913 by Morris & Co, a successor to the designer William Morris. There are several ancient monuments inside. The one shown here is of brothers Ralph and William Freeman, unusually depicted holding hands. They and their families lived next to the church at an earlier Aspenden Hall. Ralph served as Lord Mayor of London in 1633.



From the church porch, turn left to continue past the church. At the end of this wall, high up, is a memorial to Seth Ward. He was born in Aspenden in 1617, became a mathematician, astronomer and bishop, and endowed the splendid almshouses that still serve that purpose in Buntingford.

Continue on the footpath round the back of the church and then bear right to leave the churchyard. After a few yards, pause and look back to the left for a good view of the present Aspenden Hall, built in 1856. The house was gutted in the 1960s and grain driers were installed. In recent years the house reverted to residential use. We will turn here and retrace our steps back through the churchyard to the road.

Turn left and walk back down the lane for about 300 yards to turn right opposite The Bell House onto public bridleway 006. After crossing the Bourne, look back for a good view of The Bell House. Continue ahead, climbing gently on this well-defined bridleway, passing Aspenden House on the right. Ignore a footpath to the right and continue uphill.

For some distance, this tree-lined path defines the parish boundary between Aspenden on our right and Westmill to the left. The path climbs gently for about three-quarters of a mile from the road. At the top of the climb, more than 400 feet (130 metres) above sea level, a track goes off to the left. Opposite this junction there is often a large haystack. We are now definitely in Westmill parish. Looking back, we can see the roofs of Buntingford in the distance.

Continue on the track, along a ridge with distant views over the surrounding countryside. This stretch, on a chalk surface, can be wet and slippery after rain.

About a quarter mile after the haystack area, the track bears somewhat left to pass around woodland on the right. In another 300 yards we reach a concrete drive. Ahead and to the right there was once a medieval village called Wakeley, complete with a church dedicated to St Giles. Nothing visible remains but the site of the village is protected as a Scheduled Monument. The drive to the right leads to Wakeley Farm, but we turn left.

We stay on the concrete drive for about 500 yards. The concrete surface changes to tarmac when we leave Wakeley Farm.

About 200 yards later we reach a 17th-century single-storey thatched cottage on the left called Button Snap. This cottage was inherited in 1812 by well-known essayist Charles Lamb. He lived here for only three years before selling the property. It was later acquired by the generous Mrs Greg who gave it to the Royal Society of Arts. It was acquired by the Charles Lamb Society in 1949 but the cost of maintenance led them to sell it in 1985. It is now privately owned. Its former owner is pictured on a plaster medallion in the grass verge.

Continue along the lane and in 50 yards turn left onto a grass field-edge footpath signed Westmill path 003 with hedgerow on the left and power cables directly overhead.

About 500 yards along this path, 15 yards before a single telegraph pole carrying the overhead power cables, there is a concrete triangulation pillar, or 'trig point', standing 125 metres above sea level and almost completely hidden in the hedge on the left. This was installed by Ordnance Survey as part of its work in accurately mapping the UK. A surveyor would have positioned a theodolite on the top and with it take angular measurements to neighbouring trig points positioned, like this one, on high ground. Today its use has been superseded by global positioning systems, GPS.

Keep on the field-edge path to reach a road where we turn left, passing an electricity substation and then later an attractive tree-lined driveway on the left to distant Whatbarns Farm. Continue along the lane, gently downhill, for about half a mile back towards the village of Westmill.

After a while, ahead and to the left we can see the red roofs of new houses that have been constructed in the 21st century on the site of a former Sainsbury distribution depot at the southern end of Buntingford.

Pass Gaylors Farm on the right and then descend past former council houses on the left to reach a road junction. We are now in the village of Westmill. Turn right, signposted to Nasty and The Mundens (not a Sixties pop group but hamlets just outside The Hundred Parishes).

Soon we return to the small green with pump. Before turning left, we will go straight ahead for a short distance, keeping to the right. On the right we pass 18th-century Sissons, then Westmill's listed telephone kiosk, also now housing a defibrillator. Next on the right are the two School Cottages, followed by the former school.

We will turn here, crossing the road with care and retracing past Minstrel Cottage with its dragon-friendly chimney pots. At the junction, turn right, signposted to Puckeridge and Ware.

Take a closer look at the water pump on the green. The inscription around the top of the wooden casing comes from a 19th-century London poet who is understood to have had no connection with Westmill. The well and its canopy make a fine and distinctive feature to include in any photo of this attractive village.

Continue down the road and soon return to where we parked and started the walk.

You can read more about Westmill, Aspenden and Charles Lamb on [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk) where you will also find many more walks.

This route description, last updated 21 July 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).

