



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 168

Much Hadham and Standon – 7.8 miles (12 kms)

This countryside walk is largely on higher ground between the Ash valley at Much Hadham and the Rib valley at Standon. The walk should not be attempted during the annual Standon Calling festival as some of the paths will be closed. The route uses public roads only briefly, in Much Hadham and Standon. It mainly follows good paths, with just a limited exploration of the villages at each end. If you would like a more thorough exploration of either settlement, please see the note towards the end of this route description. There are no stiles. The route starts near Much Hadham parish church and also passes Standon's church and potential eating places, so please be prepared, before entering, to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. If you plan to dine in Standon, please book in advance: The Star (01920 823725) seems to get well booked; other dining options have limited opening times; Days bakery offers takeaway rolls, etc. There are several seats in Standon. In Much Hadham, refreshment may be obtained at the Bull Inn (01279 841100) about a quarter mile south of the walk start and finish.

Start and finish: There is usually ample space to park at the northern end of Much Hadham on the east side of the main road, High Street, near the church. The route starts from there.
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL429197 - Postcode: SG10 6DB.
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 parking area, we head South along the pavement, with Much Hadham's church over to the left with its tall "Hertfordshire spike" rising above the tower. On the right is the red-brick house called North Leys, built in 1720 AD.

Further along on the right, Ye Olde Red Lion Hotel dates from the 16th century. Once a substantial coaching inn, it was converted around 1980 into six homes.

We cross Church Lane on the left that leads to the church. You may wish to divert a little from today's route to visit this lovely church, either now or after the walk.

Continuing along the High Street, almost every building is listed for its architectural and/or historical value. This walk passes just a few of the listed buildings before we turn off; we will mention only a selection.

Just after Church Lane, Manor House on the left is one of the newest buildings in the High Street, having been erected in 1839 to replace one that burnt down. Most of the buildings we will pass are from either the 17th or 16th century.

The pavement on our side ends after a little while so, when safe, we cross the street to continue on the pavement on the right.

Motts Cottage, on the right, dates from the 16th century. It has a fire insurance sign above the window. This was issued in the early 1800s by Royal Exchange of London to identify a

building covered under its insurance policy and therefore entitled to the services of the fire brigade.

Soon, our pavement becomes cobbled as we pass 16th-century Gaytons. Opposite, on the left, both Batemans and adjacent The Old House also date back to the 16th century. Batemans was once a grocer's shop and The Old House a wheelwright's workshop.

At the end of the cobbled pavement, we turn right onto a bridleway, immediately passing Tudor Cottage on our left. This obvious tree-lined path climbs gently for about a mile. It only rises about 100 feet, leaving behind the valley of the River Ash.

Ignore a footpath to the right.

Further along, a track joins us from the right; we continue straight ahead on this wider track, initially with hedgerow on the left and field on the right.

The track bends to the right and almost immediately left to pass through a gateway towards Brand's Farm – but we do not turn left through the gate. We leave the track, passing the gateway on our left and continuing straight ahead on the public bridleway, now a relatively narrow, grassy path with hedgerow on each side.

After about 200 yards, a path joins us from the left. At this junction, there is an ancient, wooden fingerpost sign on the right, almost hidden by shrubs. We keep straight on, heading towards Latchford (just visible on the sign).

After about 300 yards, we pass through a gate, leaving the wooded path and now following a field edge with hedgerow on the left.

After another 100 yards our route joins a wide, stony farm track and we keep straight ahead.

Our track descends for 200 yards before reaching a sign on the left (number 5) which tells us we are on the Chaldean Estate. Immediately afterwards, we turn right on a wide, gravel track with a ditch and woodland on our left.

After another 250 yards, we turn left off the wide track, crossing a wooden footbridge with wooden handrails. On the far side we go straight ahead on a field-edge footpath with a ditch and a thin strip of trees on our left. As we crossed the bridge, we passed from Much Hadham parish into Standon parish.

After 100 yards or so, the strip of trees on the left becomes a wood, Bartram's Wood. For some distance we walk beside a wild flower strip on our right, planted to encourage bees and other pollinators.

When the wood ends, we go straight ahead over a ditch on a wooden bridge with no handrails. On the far side, we continue straight ahead, still on a field-edge path with a strip of woodland on the left.

Straight ahead, at the top of a hill, we may be able to see a white water tower – this is at Old Hall Green in Standon parish, about 2.5 miles away. The buildings in front of the tower are part of St Edmund's College and the building on the right is the College's Grade I-listed chapel.

When the woodland on our left ends, we turn left and in only about 10 yards we turn right, to continue along the field edge with ditch and hedgerow on the left.

About 120 yards after we left the woodland, we come to a gap in the hedgerow. Here, we turn left through the gap and then immediately right along the footpath, now following the hedgerow on our right.

At the end of the field, we keep straight ahead, now on a public bridleway with hedgerow on each side. Our route will be straight for some distance, descending gently. We are now following the course of a former railway, the Buntingford branch line, which ran for 13 miles from St Margarets Station, near Stanstead Abbots, to Buntingford. It operated for a hundred years until its closure in 1964.

A little further along, a footpath crosses our route and it becomes more obvious that this was once a railway line, for a while on an embankment and then in a deep cutting. We might even imagine the distant whistle of an approaching steam train coming towards us from Standon.

After quite a long stretch, the rail route comes to an abrupt end as we meet a track. Here we turn left.

In about 100 yards, our route crosses another path, part of the long-distance Harcamlow Way. We keep straight ahead.

In another 100 yards, our track bears right and almost immediately crosses the River Rib on a bridge with brick walls on each side. It is believed that a chapel once stood on the bridge. We pass through a wooden gate and continue ahead. We are now in the grounds of Standon Lordship. This is where an annual music festival – *Standon Calling* - attracts thousands of people, many camping out for a long weekend.

The main red-brick house of Standon Lordship, with very tall chimneys, is over to our right, only partly in view. It was built in the 1540s for Sir Ralph Sadleir, a senior statesman. Queen Elizabeth I stayed here for 3 days in 1561 and James I spent 2 nights in 1603. One wonders what Sir Ralph and their majesties might have thought of the music and tented encampment that comes here in the 21st century – or of the mountain of paraphernalia that is stacked between our path and the house, ready for the next festival.

We leave the field through a metal gate and soon reach a drive. Here we will turn left, but first we will cross the drive and look right for another glimpse of the Lordship.

We turn left up the drive, climbing steadily.

In about 200 yards, we reach a lane and turn right at the T junction.

After about 200 yards, still gently climbing, there is a gap in the hedgerow on the right and from here we get a good view of Standon Church. We continue along the lane, descending to meet another lane where we bear right, signposted towards Standon.

In another 50 yards or so, we bear right again, signposted towards a ford that is impassable to traffic. This is Paper Mill Lane.

After 200 yards we reach the so-called ford which most certainly does look impassable. We keep to the right, on a footbridge over the River Rib and then along a raised footpath with a seat beside the river.

Soon, on the left, we pass 17th-century Paper Mill House. Behind it was a corn mill that was later converted to a paper mill. It probably ceased production in the 19th century. Just afterwards, the road rises a little to pass over the embankment that once carried the Buntingford branch railway line.

We go straight ahead and soon the Hertfordshire spike on the church tower comes into view.

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 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 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.

From the church 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. From here, we will turn right and pass further dining options on a short perambulation of Standon's High Street.

With The Star on our left and the church on the right, we will stroll for about 200 yards before turning to retrace.

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 we want a takeaway from Day's bakery opposite.

Just a little further along on our side, 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 a final option for refreshment.

When safe, we will cross the High Street and retrace to the church.

We continue past the church on the left and follow the road as it bends to the left beside a row of 17th-century houses on the right. We pass Knight's Court on the left and the green and Papermill Lane on the right. Now in Hadham Road, we soon go past the village hall on the right and then a row of single-story almshouses on the left. Just after the final almshouse, number 7, we turn right immediately after Rose Cottages on the right.

This concrete drive leads to the sewage works. It climbs fairly steeply for a short distance and we soon have extensive views.

After a while, the concrete drive turns left into the sewage works, but we keep straight ahead, gently climbing on a gravel track through woodland.

At the end of the woodland, we reach a field and turn left to follow a field-edge footpath.

At the end of the field, our path follows the field edge round to the right (ignoring a footbridge on the left that leads to the next field), still with hedgerow and trees on our left.

After a while, the land to the right slopes down to the Rib valley and Standon Lordship, only half a mile away but hidden behind trees.

At the end of the field, we go straight ahead through the hedgerow and on the far side we turn left. We are now on a clear gravel track. To our right, on the far side of the valley, are buildings at Arches Hall, Latchford, a small hamlet within Standon parish.

Later, after a short downhill stretch, our track bears right, now lined with trees on each side and climbing beside a large lake on the right.

At the end of the lake, we turn right onto a concrete drive. Soon, we pass the entrance to Standon Lodge on the right, then lots of farm buildings to the right and a row of farm cottages on the left.

We keep straight ahead, now quite flat for about a mile.

When the wide track ends, our route continues straight ahead, still on a well-surfaced path between fields.

As we reach woodland, we go straight ahead through the hedgerow and continue ahead, now with the woodland on our left. At the start of the woodland, we passed imperceptibly from Standon parish back into Much Hadham parish.

In another quarter mile or so, we reach a small group of buildings on the right including Bluebell Farm and then New Barns Farmhouse. We are now on a surfaced lane, New Barns Lane, and this descends steadily for half a mile into the Ash valley, passing occasional houses, mostly relatively new, and frequent animal diggings in the roadside banks.

At the bottom of the hill, New Barns Lane reaches a crossroads with Much Hadham High Street. To the left is a long 17th-century wall and then the red-brick, 18th-century stable block of Much Hadham's Lordship, complete with an imposing clocktower and weather vane.

When safe, we should cross the High Street and turn right on the pavement for a short distance to where we parked and started this walk. The first two buildings on the right date from the 16th century.

If you wish, there is now another opportunity to visit Much Hadham's parish church.

You can read more about the parishes of Much Hadham and Standon on www.hundredparishes.org.uk. Shorter Hundred Parishes walks explore each in more detail: number 122 for Much Hadham and 105 for Standon.

This route description, last updated 03 September 2021, 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.

