



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 176

Thorley – 5.2 miles (8 kms)

NOTE: The footpath crossings over the railway line at Thorley are being closed in March 2026 and the footpath diverted. Please email hundredparishes@btinternet if you find the route description needs changing – please don't assume someone else will tell us !!

This extremely varied walk, mostly in the parish of Thorley, uses a mixture of paths and lanes. The route occasionally strays into Bishop's Stortford, usually where the parish boundary has been moved in recent years to reflect the expansion of Bishop's Stortford. Some paths may be muddy. There is an opportunity for refreshment a little after midway at the Coach and Horses. The walk passes Thorley parish church. If you hope to stop for refreshment or to visit Thorley church, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. There are several stiles and some steep steps. There are several seats after a mile or so and also in Thorley churchyard.

Start and finish: The route description starts and finishes at the large car park for Thorley's parish church and the nearby St Barnabas Centre.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL475189 - What3words: coach.audio.cook - The postcode is CM23 4BE but this includes a wide area. SATNAVs will bring you to the Barnabas Centre and then the parish church on the left; continue past the church to enter the car park at its southern end.

An alternative starting point is the Coach and Horses, where you may be able to park by arrangement – 01279 710991 - <https://www.mcmullens.co.uk/coachandhorses> - joining the route description halfway down page 5.

We leave the car park from the southern end, where we entered it. From here, we go into the churchyard, passing the church on the left and bearing round to the left to the main porch.

Thorley's 13th-century parish church, dedicated to St James the Great, is normally open only on Sundays, but we should certainly visit if it is open as it contains much of interest. Please either cover or remove boots if they are muddy. Entry to the church is through a Norman archway.

Leaving the church porch, we turn right and then right again round the church tower. After just a few paces, we turn left along a tarmac path, passing a small, brick building, a meeting room, on the right. Take care along this path, watching out for tree roots and for steps down just after a massive beech tree.

Soon after the beech tree and steps, we pass through a metal kissing gate to leave the churchyard.

We turn left on a path for about 50 yards to meet a concrete roadway. Here we turn right onto the roadway which is a bridleway and part of the long-distance Hertfordshire Way. The surface soon becomes more gravelly. We continue along this well-surfaced track for about half a mile, heading west.

The open countryside to our left is part of Thorley parish and then High Wych parish. On the horizon, we may be able to see the water tower that stands beside the M11 at Church Langley, about 6 miles to the South.

To our right, less than half a mile away, is the southern boundary of Bishop's Stortford. The town is excluded from The Hundred Parishes as its urban character is in stark contrast to the surrounding, essentially rural, area. Later, this walk will pass through some of the urban area and we will see how Thorley parish is experiencing further residential development and is under threat of having more land re-assigned to Bishop's Stortford.

After a while, the track bears left and right, crossing over a ditch. We continue ahead, ignoring the path that goes right over a footbridge.

Our track becomes concrete again and climbs gently.

The climb levels out as we approach an old large metal farm building. Just before it, we turn sharp right onto a gravel public footpath.

We descend for about 80 yards passing Moor Hall on our right. The house dates from the 16th century or earlier and was originally constructed as a hall house, the manor house of Moor Hall Manor. Originally, the main hall living area would have had a fire in an open hearth and no chimney, with smoke rising to the roof. A chimney was inserted in the 17th century and a second storey created.

We ignore a footpath that goes off to the right, through the garden, and follow the main path as it skirts around a wooden barn,.

Our path soon comes to the drive for Moor Hall. We turn left, away from the hall, onto a lane, Moor Hall Lane. Soon, we ignore a footpath that goes off to the right, back towards Thorley Church, just visible in the distance. We continue along the lane, passing two houses on the right.

We follow the lane round to the right, ignoring Public Footpath 19 on the left, signposted to Butler's Hall ¼.

The large white, thatched building over to our left is Meadow Cottage which dates from the 17th century or earlier. This may have been the original Butler's Hall although a newer building, just out of sight, now has that name.

The lane turns left and soon becomes a road with a roundabout in sight just ahead - but we turn right onto a tarmac roadway, very soon reaching a long, thatched house on the right, appropriately named The Olde Thatch. This building dates from the 16th century and was once three cottages.

Opposite The Olde Thatch, we turn left onto a tarmac footpath, following its twists and turns until it reaches a main road, St James Way, part of the Bishop's Stortford bypass. The

roundabout we saw just before The Old Thatch appears again just to our left. With care, we cross this main road and turn right onto a tarmac footpath / pavement.

Within 50 yards, we follow the path round to the left.

We soon reach a road, facing the entrance to The Shearers opposite. We have reached Moor Hall Lane (yes, a continuation of the lane we were following since Moor Hall, now diverted and divided by the ring road). With care, we cross Moor Hall Lane and turn right along the pavement. By crossing the road, we have left Thorley parish and will be in Bishop's Stortford for the next 200 yards. We will pop in and out again a few more times.

We cross a junction with Brook Farm Close, then ignore Footpath 16 on the right. Just before a mini roundabout, when safe, we cross the lane to an information panel.

The panel explains that we are now in Southern Country Park, one of a series of parks in southwest Bishop's Stortford, providing walking trails. The two maps are rather confusing: the large, detailed one goes against convention, with North at the bottom, whilst the inset overview map is up the 'right' way with North at the top. Doh !!

Facing the board, we turn right (retracing a few yards) and bear left on a gravel path into Southern Country Park. We have now returned to Thorley parish. We are on a man-made path and for about 200 yards we will head south, beside a lake on our left and passing several seats. We may see folk fishing beside the lake.

After about 200 yards, our path bears right and right again, rising to meet another gravel path. We turn sharp left but for only about 10 yards and then we turn right, heading away from the lake and crossing a small green, still on a gravel path.

Soon, at the far side of the green, we follow the path round to the left, ignoring a gateway ahead. We now have hedgerow on the left. Over to the right, we can see Thorley church whose thin "Hertfordshire spike" rises up from the tower.

We pass a gap in the hedgerow on the left and continue straight ahead.

When we reach the end of the field on the right, we turn right, off the gravel track onto a grassy, field-edge public footpath with hedgerow on the left and heading towards Thorley church.

After only about 50 yards we turn left off our field onto a new grass and gravel path.

In another 70 yards, the path comes onto a large recreation field where we keep straight ahead for some distance with hedgerow on our right, passing a playground over to the left.

At the end of the field, we keep straight ahead, beneath trees and then beside housing on the right. We pass an old red-brick building on our left and soon find that this is the 1st Thorley Group Headquarters (of the Scouts). This was once the village school, opened in 1875.

Just afterwards, the path meets Church Lane and, with care, we turn left. We immediately pass a Victorian postbox in the wall on our left (evident from its "VR" cipher) and then the entrance to the former school. Pupil numbers were once in excess of 50 but they dwindled

until the school closed in 1947. The building is now used by Scouts and Guides. The building to its left was the schoolmaster's house, built at the same time as the school.

We should cross Church Lane to the right hand side to face any oncoming traffic. Straightaway, we join Thorley Lane East which comes in from the left. We keep straight ahead on the road, soon passing The Old Rectory on the left, behind metal gates and with a very tall chimney stack. It was built in the 1850s.

When pavement starts on the left, we should cross to it, with care. We stay on the pavement, which is designated as a public bridleway for a very short distance as it leaves our lane and then joins a road that comes from the right.

We continue beside this road for only about 30 yards and then, with care, cross via a pedestrian island to turn left and immediately right onto a wide tarmac public footpath with trees on the left and new housing to the right.

Soon, in about 40 yards, we leave the tarmac path and turn sharp left – in 2025 it was not signposted. Now, immediately to our right, a fence marks the perimeter of a large building site for houses and a school. The path follows this fence / building site on the right for about half a mile, soon with new houses on the left. The path, part of the Hertfordshire Way, can be muddy at times, although it has been somewhat improved as part of the redevelopment.

In 2025 this footpath, for much of its length, marked the parish boundary, with Bishop's Stortford on the left and Thorley on the right – but Bishop's Stortford Town Council has proposed taking over the extensive newly-developed area on our right. The footpath was widened as part of the development and a line of trees has been planted along it.

When the sturdy green wire fencing on the right comes to an end, we continue straight ahead along the path with new housing behind the shrubs and trees on our left and an open field on our right.

We pass a balancing pond on the right and about 150 yards after the sturdy green fencing we go straight across Moore Walk.

We pass a children's play area on the right and soon reach a road. Bear left on the pavement and in only 10 yards turn right to cross the road with care. Continue straight ahead on the path – briefly tarmac and then rough, keeping just left of a lamppost and descending past flats on the left.

Soon, keep straight ahead on a narrow footpath with trees and shrubs on each side. Soon afterwards, we get past the construction site and the path continues with a more traditional feel, albeit somewhat overgrown, now with older houses rather hidden to the left.

Behind the wooden fence on the left, the large house with multiple gables and chimney stacks is Thorley House, built around 1901 by architect Eustace Frere as his own residence. We are now entirely in Thorley parish, in the hamlet of Thorley Street.

After a short descent, the footpath reaches a busy road, London Road, the B1383. This was once part of the A11 before the M11 motorway was opened in the 1970s.

Here we turn left for a short distance. In about 30 yards we come to the entrance on the left to Thorley House. Just inside the entrance, on the right, is 17th-century Sparrow Nest.

With care, we cross the main road and turn right (to retrace), immediately passing number 5 London Road, Old Post Office Cottage. This was the village post office from 1854 to 1933. The building dates from the 17th century.

Soon, we come to a signposted footpath on the left, signposted to Pig Lane 1/4. Here we could shorten the route and avoid 300 yards of this main road. This option is described immediately below and would reduce the total walk distance to 4.8 miles. The full route continues along the road for 300 yards, passing or pausing at The Coach and Horses, a pub and restaurant that opens 7 days a week from noon (in 2025).

WHILE NETWORK RAIL MAKE CHANGES TO THE PEDESTRIAN CROSSING, IT WOULD BE SIMPLEST TO USE THE "SHORTENED ROUTE" BELOW, THEN SKIPPING TO THE NEXT PAGE. HOWEVER, IF YOU WISH TO STOP FOR REFRESHMENT AT THE COACH AND HORSES, CONTINUE ON THE FULL ROUTE AND, AFTER REFRESHMENT, RETRACE TO THIS LOCATION AND TAKE THE SHORTENED ROUTE. [SEE TOP LEFT OF MAP ON FINAL PAGE]

Shortened route

Turn left onto the footpath. In about 100 yards we cross a railway line by means of a high footbridge with 30 steps up on this side and 36 down on the far side. At the other side of the bridge, we continue ahead, with a path (the full route) joining our route from the right in about 10 yards. The route description continues towards the bottom of this page.

Full route

We continue along the pavement beside the main road.

On the left, we pass allotments and later a row of houses, set back on a slip road off the main road. Opposite the far end of this slip road, on the other side of the main road, we pass The Old Police Cottage. This was where the village bobby lived until the Second World War.

Soon, we reach The Coach and Horses on the left. This has been an inn for many years but was originally built as a hall house in the 15th or 16th century. In the mid-16th century, the roof was raised, a chimney installed and an upper floor created. The pub is open for food 7 days a week (in 2025).

The pub car park is an alternative starting point for this route - you may be able to park here by arrangement.

The houses immediately opposite the pub, Moorlands and Glen View, date from the 17th century. They were once a single dwelling.

From The Coach and Horses, turn left to continue along the pavement on the left of the main B1184 road, heading south, but only for a very short distance. . .

Immediately after the grounds of the pub we turn left onto a footpath, number 7, signposted to Twyford Lock ½. The path goes through bushes (including blackberries in late summer) and scrub and soon reaches a stile.

We must climb the stile and take extra care to cross the railway line. This is the main line from London Liverpool Street to Cambridge and Stansted Airport. On the far side of the tracks, we climb another stile and continue along the footpath, bearing round to the left.

There appear to be several options for this meandering path, but when in doubt we keep towards the left, not far from the railway, passing fruit-bearing blackberry bushes and oak trees.

After about 300 yards we come to a high footbridge on the left. The shortened route comes over the footbridge. We turn right onto the footpath.

This is where the two route options merge

The footpath heads East, away from the railway line, heading gently downhill.

In about 100 yards, we reach an unusual footbridge. We climb the steps, cross over the River Stort, and descend on the other side - we may find it easier to descend backwards, like a ladder. Take care on the bottom step.

Now, we turn right along the towpath with the river on our right. The River Stort defines the boundary between Hertfordshire and Essex. By crossing the river, we have left Thorley and Hertfordshire and are now in the Essex parish of Great Hallingbury.

After about half a mile, we reach another bridge over the river. Here we turn right, over the Stort and back into Thorley parish and Hertfordshire.

Just over the bridge, an interpretation panel tells us that we have entered Thorley Wash Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest ("SSSI"), designated as such because of the range of wild flowers that can be found here. We are also informed that water voles flourish here, having been reintroduced in 2015.

We continue along a grassy path with wilderness on either side of the path, passing another interpretation panel about water voles.

After another 100 yards, we cross a footbridge with wooden handrails.

Just afterwards, we cross a metal stile and then, with great caution, we cross the railway line and another metal stile. The next hundred yards can be particularly overgrown and boggy at times

Soon, we reach the main road, the B1184. When safe, we cross this busy road and turn right along the grass verge. In just a few yards, we turn left onto a tarmac drive which is also a public bridleway with a sign pointing towards Thorley Church.

Within 100 yards, the drive turns left, but we go straight ahead beside a gate and continue ahead along a field-edge path with hedgerow on the left. In 2025, Ordnance Survey maps had not caught up with a change of path alignment, occasioned by the opening of a quarry that lies ahead.

The path climbs steadily. At the end of the field, we keep straight ahead, past woodland on the right and now with a fence and quarry on the left.

Soon, we turn right to follow the wide gravel track beside woodland on our right. Quite soon, we keep on the track as it bends left, still beside the woodland. This is Thorley Wood, where an infamous criminal, Harry Roberts, is believed to have camped out for three months after murdering three London policemen in 1966. He may have been familiar with the area as he was evacuated from London to Thorley as a child during World War II. He was eventually captured nearby and served 48 years in prison before his release in 2014.

We continue to climb beside Thorley Wood. Ahead, we may see the spire of Thorley Church. Over to the left, we may see and hear the sounds of quarry workings.

When the wood on our right ends, we continue straight ahead along a track between fields.

Soon, our track joins a concrete road and we keep straight ahead, beside a row of fairly young trees, heading towards several warehouse buildings. Ahead and to the right is Thorley Hall, faced in red brick on this side.

We go past Thorley Hall and then the entrance on the right that leads to a 16th-century barn. We soon reach a yard, just before the large warehouse buildings. We should read the next two paragraphs before we enter the yard and warehouse area.

We should be most careful and alert here as there are likely to be several moving vehicles. We should not dawdle, but be patient to ensure we cross the yard safely. We reach this yard at a crossroads with a little concrete hut on the right. There is a post on our left that confirms we are at a junction of public footpaths and that we are entitled to go through the yard.

With great care, we will turn right onto this busy yard and then keep straight ahead, past several warehouses on our left, towards the church.

After passing the warehouses, we go straight ahead through a gateway into Thorley churchyard. The churchyard has many fine, ancient specimen trees.

Keep ahead to the porch. The church is unlikely to be open, but we can at least go into the porch to admire the decoration around the Norman doorway.

Leaving the church porch, we turn left to pass beside the church with churchyard on our right. We pass through the lychgate to leave the churchyard. This brings us to the lane we drove along to reach the car park, so beware of traffic.

Immediately on the right is Thorley Hall which dates from the 13th century and is believed to be the second-oldest house in Hertfordshire.

Thorley Hall has been extended over the subsequent seven centuries, but the building's listing refers to its importance as an example of the development of early domestic architecture and timber-framing techniques. Dick Whittington, the famous 14th-century mayor of London, once owned the house although there is no evidence that he actually lived here.

We keep straight ahead with a pond on the left.

Next on the right is the St Barnabas Centre. This was constructed almost 500 years ago in the 1530s. It was beautifully renovated in the 1990s and now functions as an extension of the parish church and a well-used community building. It was given its present name after St

Barnabas who sold his wheatfield two thousand years ago and gave the proceeds to the Apostles. In a similar way, a member of the church congregation was forced to sell her farmland for the expansion of Bishop's Stortford. She donated much of the proceeds to fund most of the £1 million cost of redeveloping the barn.

Just as we reach the entrance to the St Barnabas Centre, we turn left, with care, into the car park where we started this walk. This is the car park exit which we must use to drive away.

If you started elsewhere along the route, please go to page 1 to complete the circular walk.

This route description, last updated 17 March 2026, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk There, you can read more about the parish of Thorley and you will also find many more walks to download.

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

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

