



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 178

Thundridge – 4.6 miles (7 kms)

This walk is entirely within the parish of Thundridge. The route is mostly on clear paths and tracks and visits three hamlets: Thundridge itself, Wadesmill and High Cross. Much of the first half of the walk runs beside the extensive Youngsbury estate, a listed park and garden. Parts of the route can be muddy at times. There are opportunities to stop for refreshment near the start/finish. The walk passes three churches. The first, near the start and finish in Thundridge village, is usually open only on Thursdays and Sundays from 10am to 4pm. If you hope to visit a church or pub, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. There are no stiles. There are several seats along the route.

Start and finish: The route starts and finishes just off Cold Christmas Lane, near the beginning of the road called Ducketts Wood where there is ample room to park, ideally on the left, not on the field side. Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL360169. Postcode SG12 0SR.

What3words: covers.asserts.today

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

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

Having turned off Cold Christmas Lane to park in Ducketts Wood, we leave the car and continue along Ducketts Wood, initially passing houses over to our left and countryside on the right. Just before the road bears left, we should look to the right. In the distance, we may be able to see the ruined tower of Thundridge Old Church although it is surrounded by trees and may be in shadow – we will visit it later.

We continue along the road past relatively new houses, probably all built in the 20th century.

At the end of the road, we keep straight ahead down a very narrow alley between wooden fences. At the end of the alley we turn right, now following the low brick wall of a churchyard on our left. This is Thundridge's 'new' church, built in 1853 and dedicated to St Mary and All Saints. When we draw level with the church, we turn left into the churchyard. If this interesting church is open (usually on Thursday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm), we are encouraged to visit. If our boots are already muddy, we should remove them or don plastic boot covers.

The church was designed by Benjamin Ferrey (1810 – 1880) who trained under A.W.N. Pugin, the architect who led the Gothic Revival movement. Ferrey's design reflects the style of churches built in the 14th century.

The church was built at the expense of Robert Hanbury (1807-1888) who lived nearby at Poles, which today has become Hanbury Manor hotel and golf course. His memorial can be seen inside. There are further memorials and stained-glass windows commemorating members of the Hanbury family, including Sampson Hanbury who purchased Poles around 1800 AD.

Of particular note are the two memorials on the left wall of the chancel: they were sculpted by William Theed the younger (1804 – 1891) whose works can be seen in Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle. The first depicts a willow weeping over a tomb. It commemorates Caroline Hanbury, wife of Robert Hanbury, MP, son of the church-builder. She died of scarlet fever in 1863 at the age of 36, along with two of her eight children. To its right is a memorial to her husband who died aged 44 just 4 years later. Robert and Caroline are further commemorated by the two funerary hatchments in the nave: diamond-shaped boards that depict the deceased's coat of arms and lifetime achievements.

The church tower has four ancient bells that were moved from Thundridge Old Church. Other treasures were also relocated, including the memorial tablet to Sampson Hanbury and the 3-dimensional royal coats of arms which dates from the Hanoverian period preceding Queen Victoria. The church has an extensive set of kneelers which were embroidered in the 1980s.

After our visit, from the church porch we turn left to retrace a short distance up the path and exit through the metal gate. We turn left to continue along the narrow path which soon reaches a flight of steps that go down – take care! - the steps may be slippery. Before descending, we may be able to see High Cross church, high up on the horizon ahead, on the far side of the Rib valley.

The steps descend to the heart of Thundridge village but, before the path reaches a road, we turn sharp right onto public footpath number 25, signposted to *Thundridge Old Church ½*. We will pass through Thundridge village towards the end of the walk, so we can leave a detailed review until then.

This is another narrow path. After about 60 yards, we pass through a kissing gate into a field (dog owners are requested to put the dog on a lead). We go straight ahead along the left of the field, passing Willowhayne House on the left.

At the end of the field, we go through another kissing gate and continue ahead on the clearly-defined grass path between fields.

At the end of the field, we turn right onto a tarmac path, signposted as Hertfordshire Way. This is part of a circular, waymarked route of almost 200 miles around the county.

After just a few yards, our path bears left to go beneath the A10, signposted to *Cold Christmas 1 ¼*.

At the entrance to the underpass beneath the A10, there is a mounting block on the left, helping equestrians to dismount so they can lead their horse through this strange 'tunnel'. There is another mounting block at the far end.

On leaving the tunnel, the path bears right. Soon, we reach a T-junction of paths where we turn left onto a clear, gravel bridleway, still following the Hertfordshire Way and now heading away from the noise of the A10. For much of the next two miles we will be walking with Youngsbury estate on our left, a large listed park and garden whose layout was partly designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in the 18th century.

After a quarter of a mile, this well-surfaced gravel path reaches the ruined tower of Thundridge Old Church on the left.

The Church of St Mary and All Saints (also referred to as All Hallows) dates from Norman times and its tower was added in the 15th century. The church roof collapsed shortly before the new church was opened in 1853 and the main building was dismantled. Some elements were incorporated into this tower, including the Norman doorway and some windows, while other contents were transferred to the new church. Today, just the tower stands. In 2019, an action group was established with the objective of preserving the structure – www.thundridgeoldchurch.org.

The churchyard is surrounded by mature yews and horse chestnut trees. Burials continued here until 1882. A manor house, Thundridge Bury, once stood behind the church but it was demolished in 1811.

We continue along the gravel path and in another quarter of a mile we pass a private area on the right and then cross a private drive. Gates on the left allow access, via a bridge over the River Rib, to 15th-century Fabdens which is the oldest house in Thundridge but out of sight. In the past, this has been a hideaway for pop musicians and actors.

We cross the drive and continue along the path, bearing to left and right. We soon pass a weir and ford on the left and just afterwards we turn left, leaving the Hertfordshire Way to cross the River Rib on a cast iron bridge.

On the far side, we continue ahead, now heading north on a wide track, climbing steadily for some distance, initially with hedgerow on the left. We are now on the Harcamlow Way, another long-distance trail that forms a figure of 8 between Harlow and Cambridge.

We should pause from time to time to enjoy the view back to the south. The houses on the far side of the Rib valley are in Cold Christmas, a small scattered hamlet of Thundridge parish.

We continue climbing with woodland on the left and eventually our track levels out. Ahead and to the left is Home Farm, a collection of farm buildings dating from the 17th to 19th centuries. At one time, but probably no longer, Home Farm would have been part of the extensive Youngsbury estate that lies beyond it and out of sight.

We continue past all these buildings, ignoring the track (and Harcamlow Way) which departs to the right.

Our track now has hedgerow on the left and descends gently. We pass beside a metal gateway and then an entrance on the left to Youngsbury.

[If we were to go left, we could soon fork right and continue along a driveway right through the landscaped grounds of Youngsbury (without seeing the 18th-century house), all the way to Wadesmill. This would shorten the walk by about a mile and is a pleasant option for another day.]

Our route continues ahead, past the entrance to Youngsbury and effectively now on Youngsbury's driveway. The road soon climbs.

At the top of the climb, our road crosses over the A10 which was opened in 2004. Looking left, southwards, from the bridge, the new road bisects the extensive grounds of Youngsbury estate. We have been walking around the estate's perimeter since we passed beneath the A10 soon after the start of this walk.

About 200 yards beyond the bridge, we at last leave the Youngsbury estate as we enter the Thundridge hamlet of High Cross.

We are in North Drive. We pass Poplar Close and Chestnut Close on the right and soon afterwards, just before we reach High Cross Village Hall on the left, we turn right down a gravel drive.

We pass new houses and then a small parking area on the right and, immediately before the entrance to the 19th-century former rectory on the right, we turn left into the churchyard of High Cross Church, dedicated to St John the Evangelist.

We immediately turn right to the far right (north east) corner of the churchyard where we will find gravestones and information about the Martin-Leake family, including Lt-Colonel Arthur Martin-Leake (1874-1953), a double VC, and his brother, Vice-Admiral Francis Martin-Leake (1869-1928).

We retrace along the path and turn right to the church porch. If the church is open, a visit is encouraged, as usual removing or covering muddy boots.

Like the church in Thundridge village, St John's also dates from the middle of the 19th century, having been built in 1846 at the expense of Dame Louise Giles Puller of Youngsbury. She was the widow of Sir Christopher Puller and niece of Daniel Giles, the owner of Youngsbury. The church tower was added in 1906.

Inside, there are stained glass windows commemorating members of the Puller and Martin-Leake families. In the nave, an 8-foot war memorial cross has the names of 25 men from High Cross who died in World War I. A brass plaque commemorates the single High Cross soldier who died in WWII.

In 1959, the vicar of High Cross also became vicar of Thundridge, uniting the two ecclesiastical parishes.

On leaving the church porch, we turn right and exit the churchyard through the lychgate onto the road. This is the former A10 which was bypassed in 2004. We turn left and pause immediately. In the wall beside the lychgate is a special memorial to Lieutenant Arthur Martin-Leake. He was the first person to be twice awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest military honour. On each occasion, it was awarded for his bravery in tending wounded men in the face of the enemy, firstly in the Boer War and then in World War One.

We continue along the pavement, heading south, passing a garage/shop and soon reaching the junction with North Drive [we were close to here eight paragraphs ago]. Opposite the junction, on the right, is 17th-century Farm House.

We stay on the main road, crossing North Drive and soon reaching the former 17th-century White Horse Inn on the left. The pub closed in 2017 and the pub and its car park have been converted into housing.

Just after the former pub, when safe, we cross the road using the pedestrian-controlled traffic lights. On the far side, we turn left for just 10 yards and pause. Opposite, The Old Waggon started life as a medieval hall house (with an open hearth in the middle of the floor and no chimney to extract the smoke). The buildings to its right are also ancient.

We turn around and retrace. Just past the pedestrian crossing, we turn left into Marshalls Lane, signposted towards Sacombe Green and Sacombe. Immediately on our right is a small sitting area with a map and photos of Thundridge parish. We continue along Marshalls Lane, heading west.

After a while, we pass Marshalls on the left and Marshalls Farm on the right. Marshalls was the family home of the Martin-Leake family for 200 years and it was to here that Arthur Martin-Leake, VC, retired after working overseas for many years. The lane then descends quite steeply, a sunken lane far lower than the ground on each side.

At the bottom of the hill, we cross a deep ditch and very soon turn sharp left onto Public Footpath 40, signposted to *Wadesmill* ¾. We will follow this grassy path until we reach Wadesmill, closely following The Bourne on our left, and mostly with a field on our right. Bournes are usually waterways that flow only after heavy rain and this one is particularly deep. We should take care never to get too close to the edge!

Just before we reach the end of our first long field, we follow the path to the left and descend steep steps. We cross a wooden footbridge with wooden handrails over a ditch that flows into the Bourne and then climb steps to a new field. We continue ahead beside this field with trees and the Bourne to our left.

At the end of this second field, we descend quite steeply for a few yards beside the Bourne before crossing it on a metal footbridge with metal handrails. We continue ahead, now with the Bourne on our right.

We have now come into the Thundridge hamlet of Wadesmill. After a few houses, our route continues along a drive before it reaches a road where we turn left on the pavement. We are again on the former A10. Almost immediately on the left is an ancient milestone, telling us that we are 23 miles from London. This was installed around 1742 for the Wadesmill Turnpike Trust and upgraded around 1804 with the cast iron plate.

We continue along the pavement for 100 yards or so, gently uphill, until we reach an obelisk on the left. This marks the spot where Thomas Clarkson paused on his journey in 1785 and resolved to devote his life to the abolition of slavery. He was a close associate of William Wilberforce and they did indeed succeed, after many years, in securing the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and then the freeing of slaves in 1833. The obelisk was erected in 1879 by Arthur Giles Puller of Youngsbury. Just a few generations before, the Giles and Puller families, like so many with wealth, had invested in plantations in the West Indies which almost certainly had slaves.

When safe, we will cross the road and retrace back down the hill, passing the milestone on the right and then two 18th-century blocks of red brick houses, some of which were once almshouses, on the left. The last of these displays a sign to advise that it was once the tollhouse for the Wadesmill Turnpike. This was the very first English road to be designated as a "turnpike". An Act of Parliament in 1663 empowered the local justices of the peace to erect a tollgate, or turnpike, at Wadesmill to collect tolls from road-users for use in maintaining the heavily-used road.

This has been a main highway since Roman times when Ermine Street ran from London to Lincoln and York. It was also known as the Old North Road. It was only after persistent

campaigning that the new A10 was built in 2004, giving relief to the local population – and providing a faster route for through traffic.

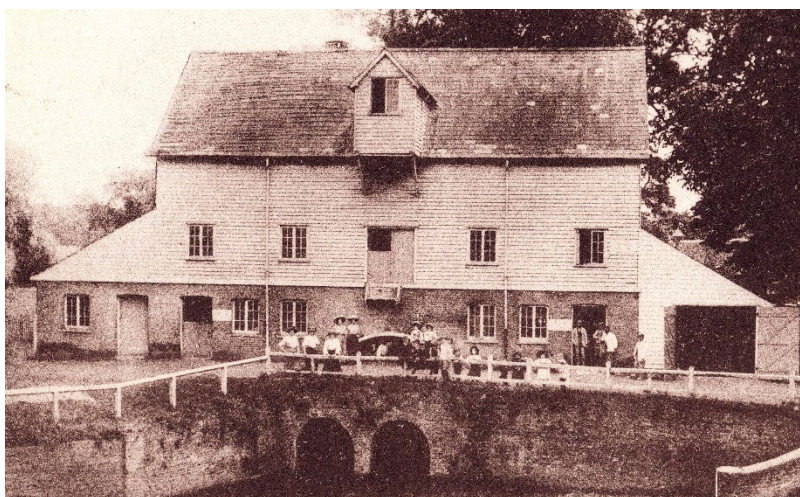
Just after the former tollhouse, we cross Youngsbury Lane – this is where we would have emerged from the Youngsbury estate if we had taken the short cut a couple of miles back. Next on the left is the Feathers Inn. This has been a welcoming sight for weary travellers for more than 400 years.

After the Feathers, we continue heading South, staying on the left and soon passing a terrace of houses on each side of the road – each dates from around 1800 AD. Just beyond a mini roundabout, Anchor House on the right is another former ancient inn, The Anchor. It started life as a house in the 16th century and in the 2020s it reverted to residential use.

Now on the left we pass gates and a lodge house at the start of another drive into the Youngsbury estate.

We keep to the left on a metal footbridge that crosses the River Rib. Our bridge is a relatively modern addition compared with the adjacent road bridge that was constructed in the 1820s. The supporting structure of the road bridge is rather elegant and it was substantially built; we can just about see its supporting pillars. The bridge was constructed at the same time as the then 'new' main road. We will soon go along the old road.

To our left, we can see what appears to be Wades Mill which gave this village its name. Actually, this is a modern residential development, Watermill House, a remarkably similar replacement for the original corn mill that was demolished in the 1970s. This is how the original mill appeared on an old postcard.



For many years, the river marked the parish boundary between Wadesmill and Thundridge. Until 1952, Wadesmill was part of the administrative parish of Standon although Standon village is about 3 miles north of here. High Cross, about a mile north from here, also came under Standon until re-assigned to Thundridge in 1991.

Soon after crossing the River Rib, we turn left into Old Church Lane. Immediately on our right is a small café, Ermines. On the left, we pass the entrance to Watermill House.

We follow the road round to the right into Ermine Street. This was the main road before the 1820s. We should keep to the pavement on the right. The first house on our left, number 62, Mill House, was built in the 18th century.

A few doors further along, we come to The White Hind on the left, a former inn that dates from the 16th century according to its listing, or 1486 if the plaque on the front is to be believed. This pub closed in the 1930s.

The White Hind is followed by a long row of red-brick buildings. These were erected between 1864 and 1901 by the Hanbury family for workers on their Poles estate.

On our right, the tall Old Vicarage dates from around 1700 AD.

Further up, on the right, number 27 is The Old School House, erected in 1894 at the same time as the building that follows, Thundridge's primary school. The school still serves its original purpose.

As Ermine Street bears right, we can just see the start of the steps on the left that we descended earlier on this walk. Next to the steps, the large 16th-century house, 18A, The Windmill, used to be the Windmill pub until it closed in the 1980s.

On our right, beside the bend, we pass number 15, 18th-century Wooding Cottage.

Soon afterwards on the left, numbers 16 and 14, raised up on an embankment and the latter appropriately called Bankside Cottage, were built in the 19th century as almshouses.

At the end of Ermine Street, we cross to the left when safe and turn left, back onto the 1820s main road. Almost immediately on the left is Thundridge Village Hall, 1928.

On the right side of the road, number 21 with a large chimney stack dates from the 18th century and comprises two dwellings.

We pass Thundridge war memorial, unveiled in 1920 to commemorate twenty men from Thundridge who died in the First World War. The inscriptions were later extended to include the names of five who died in WWII.

Immediately after the memorial, we turn left, up the drive to the church. We follow the drive round to the left. Now we have a second chance to visit the church, if open, first removing or covering muddy boots. Otherwise, pass the porch, keeping the church on the left to leave the churchyard. Just before the perimeter wall, on the right, is the family vault of Robert Hanbury who built the church.

We leave through the gateway, turning right to retrace our earlier steps beside the churchyard wall on our right. At the end of the churchyard wall, we turn left into the short narrow alley between wooden fences.

At the end of the alley, we keep straight ahead, retracing along the residential road called Ducketts Wood.

When the road turns right, we may like to look left, across the valley to the tower of Thundridge Old Church, before returning to where we parked and started this walk.

This route description, last updated 18 October 2025, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk where you can read more about the parish of Thundridge and also find many more walk routes that can be freely downloaded.

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.

