



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

BARKWAY



Location: 4 miles southeast of Royston. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL3835.
Postcode: SG8 8EF. **Access:** B1368. **County:** Hertfordshire. **District:** North Herts.
Buses: 18 (Mon-Sat) between Royston and Buntingford; 27 (Mon and Weds) to Royston.
Population: 656 in 2001, 775 in 2011, 850 in 2021.



The visitor to Barkway is greeted by a sign that proclaims it to be a “historic coaching village”. The claim is well evidenced by this linear settlement, strung out for almost a mile on either side of what was once a main thoroughfare. Today, this is largely a forgotten route between London, Ware and Cambridge, but the village gives the appearance that it has been freshly painted and is just waiting for today’s influx of stage coaches.

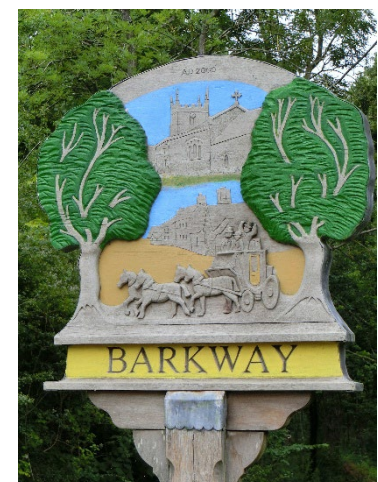
the same time subtly suggesting it is too far to complete the journey today on this dusty or muddy road, so why not spend a pleasant night here? The milestone was installed in 1728, one of a series of stones along the route between Ware and Cambridge. They were funded by a trust established in 1586 by a former master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. The shields are of Trinity Hall (on the left) and, curiously, the benefactor’s 18th-century executor (on the right).

The milestone in the centre of the village declares distances – at



Barkway, in the far northwest of the Hundred Parishes, sits towards the eastern end of the Chiltern chalk hills and is the highest of the Hundred Parishes with a few spots more than 150 metres above sea level. A motte and bailey castle once stood at Periwinkle Hill, to the west of the village, its location no doubt chosen for its strategic position. On a clear day it is still possible to see Ely Cathedral, 30 miles to the North, well beyond the city of Cambridge. Nearby is what was once called “RAF Barkway”. There were never any aircraft here, but a very tall radio mast erected in 1941 was part of the RAF communications network until 2011. Also near here is the 2014 installation of 35 acres of solar panels – enough to power 2,000 homes.

Barkway parish, which is 4 miles long from North to South and only about a mile wide, comprises the village of Barkway, the hamlet of Newsells and a few outlying estates. The village evolved where the route from London to Cambridge crossed a pre-historic East - West trackway that followed the ridge of the Chiltern escarpment. The village sign reflects this element of Barkway’s history.



During the coaching era, spanning a period of around 200 years until the middle of the 19th century when rail provided faster alternatives, many hostleries, inns and shops catered for passing travellers, making Barkway a relatively wealthy place. These services have all but disappeared, leaving just the Tally Ho at the southern end of the village with limited opening hours and no meals, at least in 2025.

The pub's name reflects a significant aspect of the parish's past and present – horses. Much of the north of the parish is the Newsells Park estate which has been a stud farm for almost 100 years. A fondness for horses goes back even further - an obelisk in the grounds has no inscription but is understood to have been erected in the 19th century by the then owner, Baron Strathnairn, a retired general, in memory of his favourite mount who had carried him during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. A 1770s map shows an obelisk, casting some doubt on the Strathnairn story – is it fiction or did he replace the old obelisk?



The original 17th-century Newsells House was destroyed in an accidental fire during World War II. The house shown above, close to the obelisk, is a replacement. The then owner, Sir Humphrey de Trafford, bred several successful racehorses here, including winners of the St Leger and Epsom Derby in the 1950s.

Barkway's main war memorial, in the High Street, is supplemented by this unusual monument, dedicated to the seven men from Newsells who died in the First World War.



On the East side of the B1368, Barkway has another substantial estate belonging to Cokenach House which dates mostly from the 18th century. The house, shown below, is listed, as too are its extensive park and gardens that incorporate a series of canals and are little changed since the 18th century.

Cokenach Estate is not open to the public but it is crossed by public footpaths. A previous owner, Douglas Crossman, was an enthusiastic supporter of cricket and he established a high-quality ground which has been home to Cokenach Cricket Club for almost a hundred years. The estate side played against other estates and for many years estate staff were recruited only if they played cricket. Today, the Cokenach estate is owned by the Holch Povlsen family, Danish owners of the international "Bestseller" clothing chain. The house's gardens and parkland cover some 200 acres and are protected as a Grade II listed park and garden. Should you think that this is a big and spectacular estate, please bear in mind that Anders Holch Povlsen has another 200,000 acres as Scotland's largest landowner – that's about two-thirds the size of the Hundred Parishes.



While Newsells and Cokenach are private, there are good footpaths across each estate – some are included in Hundred Parishes Walk 131. The long-distance Hertfordshire Way path also passes through the parish and includes a section along the High Street.

Barkway High Street, despite its designation as the B1368, is now a relatively quiet road, a pleasant place to stroll and view the many varied and attractive buildings that date from the coaching era or even earlier. The parish has a total of 65 listed buildings and the majority stand along or close to the old coaching route. Walk 133 explores the High Street. Over half the listings date from the 17th century or earlier. Pictured below are views of the High Street. The two thatched houses were built in the 17th century, the larger one having been three or more dwellings at one time. In the photo on the right, Red House dates mainly from around 1720.



Gables, below on the left, dates from about 1620, while Old Forge on the right is slightly older, from late 16th century. It used to function as two houses and a forge.



Barkway's only Grade I listed building is the parish church, dedicated to St Mary Magdalene. Its chancel dates from the 13th century but most of the church was extensively rebuilt in the 19th century.

The church tower can just be seen in the centre background of this old postcard picture that focuses on the wagon wash which survives beside Church Lane. Coaches would be driven through here to clean their wheels and perhaps bide a while to allow wooden spokes to swell and fit tighter into their wooden rims (as depicted in John Constable's "Haywain" painting).



Coaches would be driven through here to clean their wheels and perhaps bide a while to allow wooden spokes to swell and fit tighter into their wooden rims (as depicted in John Constable's "Haywain" painting).

In 2025, the parish council is seeking to raise sufficient funds to ensure the wagon wash survives for many more years.

This is a more recent photo of the parish church.

Towards the northern end of the High Street, the main war memorial stands opposite a road junction.



Almost opposite the war memorial, is the unusual-shaped number 2, High Street. It was built originally around 1500 AD as a hall house – a property with a central hall and high ceiling that was used as a communal room.

It would have been heated by an open fire in the centre of the communal room. Smoke from the fire would escape through vents in the roof.

Fireplaces with chimneys came into fashion later and, like most hall houses, this one would have been adapted to cater for the modern fashion.

The Parish Council website (see link below) includes many old photos, shown alongside today's view of the same location.



The overall impression is of relatively little change to the buildings, although fashions have altered and parked cars are now everywhere.

On the next page we show a photo taken by a photographer who stood on the corner opposite number 2 and opposite where the war memorial now stands.

The image below of Barkway High Street comes from an early picture postcard, sent in 1904. Perhaps it was taken on a Sunday as everyone seems smartly dressed. There is not a vehicle in sight, either horse-drawn or motorised.

Note the earth bank and steps up to most properties – probably due in part to keeping above the road when it flooded from time to time and perhaps partly due to erosion of the road level by centuries of passing traffic. The view is readily recognisable more than 120 years later – you are encouraged to stand on the corner opposite the war memorial and look south!



A regular market was held in Barkway from the 13th century. It ceased long ago but was revived in 1977. Since then, the market has been held annually, usually in early May, attracting thousands of visitors from miles around. If you need an excuse to visit, maybe that is it.

Hospitality:

Tally Ho pub (no food, limited opening) – <https://www.facebook.com/TheTallyHoBarkway/>

Hundred Parishes walk routes:

Walk 131: Circular route of 6.5 miles to the north, through Newsells, Cokenach and Barley.

Walk 132: Circular route of 7 miles through Barkway, Nuthampstead and Anstey.

Walk 133: Short stroll of 1.7 miles through Barkway village.

Walk 322: Circular quiet lanes walk of 6.5 miles including Barley and Nuthampstead.

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: Wyddial, Barley, Nuthampstead, Anstey.

Links:

Parish Council: <https://barkwayparishcouncil.gov.uk/>

Hertfordshire Genealogy, etc:

www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/data/places/places-b/barkway/!-barkway-frame.htm

Newsells Park Stud – history: www.newsells-park.com/stud/history

Barkway Chalk Pit nature reserve: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barkway_Chalk_Pit

This page, last updated 30 December 2025, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk