



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

HIGH WYCH



Location: 1 mile west of Sawbridgeworth. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4614.
Postcode: CM21 0JJ. **Access:** west off A1184. **County:** Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts.
Bus 347 Tues & Thurs only – single bus each way to/from Sawbridgeworth & Harlow.
Population: 790 in 2001, 775 in 2011, 900 in 2021.

Let us start by explaining how to pronounce the second word in “High Wych”. The ‘y’ is sounded like the ‘i’ in ‘high’ and the ‘ch’ like the ‘tch’ in ‘witch’. It’s easy when you know ! The name seems not to have existed for very long. It appears in early 19th century maps, but before then was written as “Highwick”.

The parish of High Wych lies immediately west of the parish of Sawbridgeworth, of which it was part until its own church was built in 1861. Ecclesiastical independence was followed in 1901 by civil independence and since then it has been administered by its own parish council. The Parish Church of St James the Great was funded by public subscription, initiated by a generous donation from Reverend H F Johnson who became the first vicar and was later appointed Bishop of Colchester.



The church, designed by local architect George Edward Pritchett, has received a wide variety of critical comment – architecture historian Sir Nikolaus Pevsner calls it a “perversely ugly church, but as original in its handling of Gothic forms as anything in Art Nouveau of forty years later”. Others are attracted by the unusual design of its exterior of flintstone, its thin spire with clock, and its interior of white and red brickwork with painted decoration. If you would like to make your own judgement, please check first that the church will be open.

Pritchett designed the adjacent school, which continues to serve the parish.



Pritchett also designed a small mission church at Allen’s Green, the parish’s second largest centre of population, some two miles northwest of High Wych village. This building, shown on the left, has now become a private residence.

High Wych is a mostly rural parish, somewhat larger in area than Sawbridgeworth but with a much smaller population. A total of 69 listed buildings are scattered throughout the parish, more than half dating from 1700 AD or earlier. Most are farm buildings - farmhouses, barns or granaries. Of particular note are the 15th-century farmhouse at Blounts Farm and two barns at Shingle Hall that date from the 14th or early 15th century. Shingle Hall was the home of the wealthy Leventhorpe family who were prominent in the area from the 1400s to the 1600s and they also owned Blounts Farm.

Shingle Hall and Blounts Farm are in the north of the parish and were, during World War II, on the perimeter of the airfield that was generally known as RAF Sawbridgeworth. The airfield had been used on a much smaller scale since World War I when it took its name from Matham's Wood. The wood includes a medieval moat which is now protected as an Ancient Monument. The moat probably surrounded the manor house of the Matham family who lived here from the 13th to the 17th century. This woodland area provided a hiding place in 1966 for Harry Roberts, a criminal who killed three London policemen and then avoided capture for three months before being found in a barn at Blounts Farm.

High Wych has two pubs and a hotel - The Manor of Groves, which was built around a fine early 19th-century remodelling of an earlier house. The hotel stands in land that belonged to Reading Abbey until Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. The land has now been turned into an 18-hole golf course.



Both High Wych village and Allen's Green have pubs. Shown here is the one in High Wych village, the Rising Sun.

In High Wych village, opposite the little green traffic triangle, stands the listed single-storey, 17th-century thatched building shown on the right. It is now used as offices but was once a terrace of tiny cottages.



Just around the corner is a focal point of village social activity - the Memorial Hall - built in 1923 to commemorate those who died in World War I and also Revd Johnson. It stands beside the church on land given by Arthur Salvin Bowlby, who also donated the village hall in nearby Gilston.

In 2023, a village sign was unveiled, close to where the village windmill once stood.

For a more detailed history of High Wych please follow the link below to the website of local historian Theo van de Bilt. He also compiled the book listed below under Further Reading.

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT HIGH WYCH

Hospitality:

Manor of Groves Hotel, CM21 0JU – 01279 600777 - www.manorofgroves.com

Chandini Indian restaurant, CM21 0HY – 01279 600062 - www.chandinirestaurant.co.uk

Queen's Head (Allen's Green), CM21 0LS – 01279 723393 or 07961 812529

Rising Sun, CM21 0HZ – 01279 725892 –

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Rising-Sun-High-Wych-135908843157675/>

Hundred Parishes Society walks can be freely downloaded and printed. They include two routes that pass through High Wych and two entirely within the parish . . .

Walk 7: Circular route from Sawbridgeworth station (6 miles) – you could join the route in High Wych near the bottom of page 2 of the route description.

Walk 20: Between St Margarets and Sawbridgeworth stations (12 miles) – you could join the route on page 4 of the description, completing a loop by catching the train(s) from Sawbridgeworth to St Margarets.

Quiet Lane Walks, which avoid busy roads and footpaths, include two that are entirely within the parish of High Wych:

Walk 308 starts in Allens Green and covers 2.7 miles.

Walk 324 starts by the village sign and covers 4.3 miles

Adjacent parishes:

Sawbridgeworth, Eastwick & Gilston, Widford, Much Hadham, Thorley.

Further reading:

High Wych History in Pictures (published 2023 by Sawbridgeworth Local History Society)

Links:

Parish Council: <https://www.highwychparishcouncil.co.uk/>

High Wych history: <http://vandebilt.co.uk/history/>

Parish Church: www.stjameshighwych.org.uk/