



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

THORLEY



Location: 1 mile southwest of Bishop's Stortford. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4718. **Postcode** CM23 4BE. **Access** A1184, B1529. **Buses** 508, 509, 510 between Harlow and Stansted Airport stop near The Coach and Horses. **Station** Bishop's Stortford - 2 miles
County: Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts. **Population:** 499 in 2001, 626 in 2011, 610 in 2021.

The Hertfordshire parish of Thorley has the shape of a crescent, curving around the southern boundary of Bishop's Stortford. Thorley has largely survived the seemingly inexorable expansion of its northern neighbour.

At the very end of the 20th century, the parish was bisected by the construction of the A1184, Bishop's Stortford bypass, but the new road seems to offer an opportunity to halt the advance of urbanisation and to leave the historic and spiritual core of Thorley unmolested.

Thorley's Grade I church, dedicated to St James the Great, is part of a small group of impressive buildings that have existed for many centuries. The church dates from at least the 12th century and its features include an ornate Norman doorway from the south porch, a font of the same period and a yew tree a thousand years old.



The adjacent 13th-century Thorley Hall is believed to be the second-oldest house in Hertfordshire. Its long line of distinguished owners includes the legendary Dick Whittington who was mayor of London in the late 1300s, although there is no evidence that he ever lived here.

A third building of note is the large barn, constructed in the 1530s and beautifully renovated in the 1990s to become an extension of the church premises. It was named the St Barnabas Centre after St Barnabas who sold his wheatfield 2000 years ago and donated the proceeds to the Apostles, just like a member of the St James congregation who was obliged to sell farmland for the expansion of Bishop's Stortford and donated much of the proceeds to fund most of the barn's £1 million redevelopment cost. Each Sunday, the St Barnabas barn hosts one of the church services with a congregation approaching 200. It also serves other community purposes and is in great demand for wedding receptions. There is a link below to an in-depth look at the barn's history.



This group of buildings stands just south of the Bishop's Stortford bypass at the end of a lane that passes over the new road. At one time the buildings were all surrounded by a moat, some of which is still in evidence.

In the Domesday Book of 1086, Torlei was slightly smaller than Bishop's Stortford and both were over-shadowed by their southern neighbour, Sawbridgeworth, which was far more populous.

Evidence of much earlier settlement was uncovered during construction of the St Michael's Mead estate, when archaeologists found Roman, Iron Age, Bronze Age and Neolithic remains, the last from around 5,000 years ago



Today's parish includes not only Old Thorley around the church, but also the hamlets of Thorley Street and Thorley Wash along its eastern boundary. Some of that boundary is formed by the River Stort, whilst nearby the 1842 London – Cambridge railway and 18th-century turnpike road (now B1529) run South – North through the parish. The Stort passes Twyford Lock and Twyford Mill, shown above, left. Beside the mill is Twyford House, above right, a 17th-century building whose interior was renovated in the 1980s by the local Elliotts Building Group for use as their offices. Both the mill and Twyford House have now been converted into apartments.



Thorley's history has been extremely well recorded. This brief introduction has drawn heavily on the excellent websites linked below. The St James website is a great source for anyone interested in family members who lived here, including transcriptions of gravestones and the parish records back to the 1750s.

Thorley is well served by footpaths, including the Hertfordshire Way which runs East – West, passing the church and 16th-century Moor Hall farmhouse, pictured here. Hundred Parishes walk 176 is very varied, contrasting the parish's rural element with recent residential expansion.

Hospitality:

Coach and Horses, Thorley Street, CM23 4AS – 01279 710991 - <https://www.mcmullens.co.uk/coachandhorses>

Hundred Parishes Society walks include . . .

Circular walk 176 - starts at Thorley Church and covers 5 miles of Thorley paths and lanes.
Station walk 8 covers 5 miles between Sawbridgeworth and Bishop's Stortford stations and goes through part of Thorley, passing Twyford Lock and Twyford House.

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes:

Sawbridgeworth, High Wych, Much Hadham, Little Hadham, Great Hallingbury, Little Hallingbury.

Links:

Parish Council: <http://www.thorleyparishcouncil.co.uk/>

History of Thorley including family history resources: www.friends-stjames.org

History of Thorley: www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/thorley/thorley-1

Friends of St James the Great: <http://www.friends-stjames.org/>

St Barnabas barn: historical and architectural insight: <http://www.stbarnabasbarn.co.uk/>

Further reading:

The Book of Thorley – Chronicles of a Century by the People of the Parish, published 2003.

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