



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

WIDFORD



Location: 4 miles northwest of Harlow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4115,
Postcode: SG12 8SH. **Access:** B180, B1004. **County:** Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts.
Buses: route 351 (Mon to Sat) between Bishop's Stortford and Hertford.
Population: 568 in 2001, 534 in 2011, 660 in 2021.



Situated between Ware and Much Hadham, above the Ash Valley, the village of 'Wideford' is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as the site of a battle between the Saxons and the Danes in 895 AD. By the time of the Domesday Book the land was held by the Bishop of London. The first record of a church in the village is in the early 12th century, west of the village centre. In 1118 the Manor of Widford was gifted to the Cluniac Priory of Bermondsey who held it until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. It was then gifted to the Southwell family who held it until 1660 when it was sold – the first of many subsequent changes of ownership until the 19th century.

Widford today is a perfect example of the tranquil beauty which characterises so many of the Hundred Parishes. There are over 8 miles of maintained footpaths and bridleways within the parish and 250 varieties of wildflowers can be found within its boundaries. Most of the agricultural land is devoted to arable farming.

The church of St John the Baptist dates to the 14th century but includes fabric and arch fragments from an earlier church on the site. Saxon bones, found here a few years ago, suggest a much older original church. The most notable features today are wall paintings dating to the 13th century.

The original manor house Widford Bury stood next to the church. The only remnant of it is the red brick wall next to the churchyard. It contains an ornate Tudor moulded door surround which was probably one of the external doors to the original Bury. The wall is in fact a listed building as are 54 other buildings within the parish.





Behind the church, a footpath passes through a gateway and descends steeply to the foot of the hill where it meets the long-distance Hertfordshire Way bridleway. The path runs beside the route of the old Buntingford Branch railway line. After 101 years of service, the line and Widford station were closed in 1964. Although most of the track was dismantled long ago, this old bridge survives, crossing the River Ash adjacent to the footpath bridge.



The Old Rectory, shown here, stands just north of the church.

Widford was the birthplace of John Eliot in 1604. He was a renowned Puritan missionary to America known as 'the Indian Apostle' for his missionary work among the native American tribes. In 1661 he produced an edition of the Bible in the language of the Massachusetts Indians with the catchy title '*Mamusse Wunneetupanatamwe Up Biblum God*'. He is feted to this day with a feast day in the calendar of the Episcopal Church.

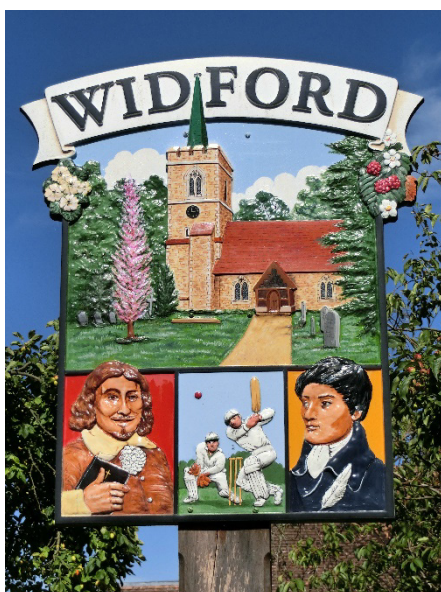


Widford is home to one of the few privately-owned cricket grounds in the country, pictured on the left. To the left of the photo is Ash View Nursing Home. This was previously called Walnut Tree House and was the home in the late 1800s and early 1900s of a wealthy stockbroker, George Strachan Pawle (1855 – 1936) and his family. They established a cricket field at the back of the house and then built The Lodge, on the right, as an ornamental dairy with studio above. Since 2005 the ground has been the home of Ware Cricket Club. GS Pawle was influential and generous in Widford affairs. In 1910, he built the village hall,

originally as a drill hall for the local Territorial Army unit. It has since been extended and is a focal point for village activities.

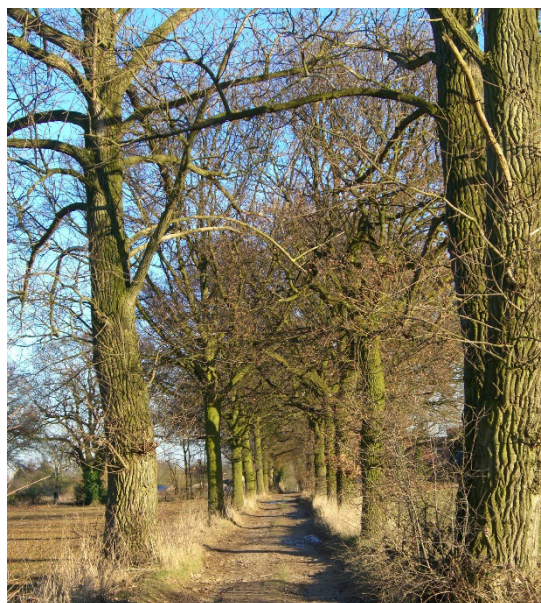
The 19th-century essayist Charles Lamb knew the village well as a child and made many visits in later life. He spent much time with his grandmother Mary Field who was the housekeeper at Blakesware Mansion. She is buried in the churchyard and her grave bears an epitaph written by her grandson. He is commemorated by a blue plaque on a house that was formerly the Bell pub, one of his regular haunts. Widford once had 5 public houses. The last to serve the community, the Green Man, closed in 2017.

Among Widford's listed properties are the two shown below: on the left is 16th-century Swan House. It was once the White Swan, an inn which also functioned as a laundry in the early 1900s. On the right is 17th-century Wheelwrights at the junction of Widford's two main roads.



On the left is Widford's village sign. It features the church, John Eliot, the cricket ground and Charles Lamb.

On the right, Nether Street is a byway that runs east from the village.



The parish council maintains a comprehensive website (see link below) giving further information about all aspects of the village and its amenities.

Hospitality: Currently none – please see adjacent parishes.

Hundred Parishes Society walks include . . .

Circular walk 166 starts near the church and covers 5.6 miles of Widford and Hunsdon parishes. Station walk 20 covers 12 miles between St Margarets and Sawbridgeworth stations. The route passes through Widford where it could be joined from page 2 of the description and followed to Sawbridgeworth. From there, the train could be taken to St Margarets to allow completion of the walk back to Widford.

Adjacent parishes:

Hunsdon, Wareside, Thundridge, Much Hadham, High Wych, Gilston & Eastwick.

Links:

Parish Council: <https://www.widford.org.uk/>

Further reading:

Widford, a Portrait, Bunty Smith.

This page, last updated 02 November 2023, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk