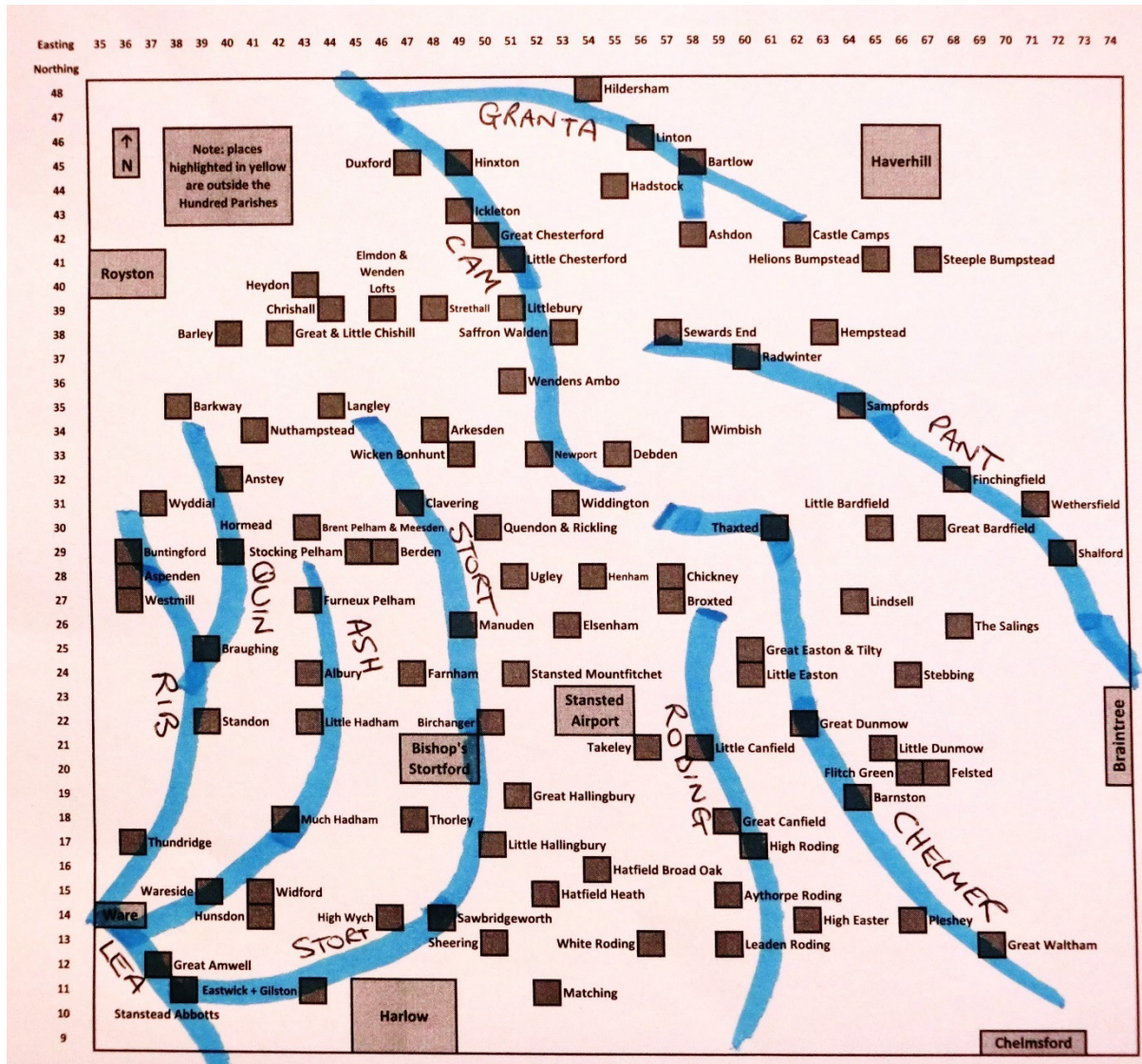




The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about RIVERS

Our area is one of the driest in England, with relatively low rainfall and no major lakes or rivers. There are, of course, lots of small rivers whose valleys contribute to the beauty of our countryside. The crude diagram below gives an approximation of their routes. The diagram is followed by a brief description of each route.



Three rivers have their source on the relatively high ground in the Henham and Debden area, near the centre of the Hundred Parishes . . .

The Chelmer flows generally south-east through many parishes including Thaxted, Great Dunmow and Great Waltham on its way to Chelmsford. The Chelmer eventually flows into the Blackwater and reaches the sea at Maldon;

The River Roding flows generally south-eastwards through the Canfields and the Rodings, then to the east of London to join the Thames at Barking.;

The Cam flows generally northwards, through Newport, past Audley End House and then through the Chesterfords, Ickleton, Hinxton and Duxford. South of Cambridge, the Cam is joined by the River Granta which flows west from Castle Camps, through Bartlow, Linton and Hildersham. The Granta is itself joined by the short River Bourn which flows north through Ashdon. Once the Cam and Granta meet, they flow north through Cambridge to join the Great Ouse and discharge at the Wash.

Towards the northeast of The Hundred Parishes, the River Pant rises to the east of Saffron Walden, flowing through Wimbish, Radwinter, the Sampfords, Wethersfield and Shalford to become the River Blackwater near Braintree and thence flow into the North Sea at Maldon.

Further to the west, on the high ground near where Essex, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire meet, the River Stort rises in Langley. It initially flows south through Clavering, Manuden, Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth. It then heads west, through Eastwick and Gilston to Stanstead Abbots where it joins the River Lea.

Other rivers flow south through Hertfordshire . . .

The River Ash rises near Brent Pelham and flows southwest through Little Hadham, Much Hadham, Widford and Wareside to meet the River Lea at Stanstead Abbots.

A few miles further west, the River Rib flows south-westerly through Buntingford, Braughing, Standon and Thundridge, to flow into the River Lea near Hertford. En route, the Rib is joined by the River Quin which rises near Barkway and flows south through Hormead to join the River Rib at Braughing.

The River Lea, having been joined by the Rib, Ash and Stort, flows through Great Amwell and Stanstead Abbots and then heads generally south to join the Thames at Bow Creek in East London.

The diagram and these descriptions refer only to the waterways called River. The rivers are all fed by lesser streams, bourns, brooks, slades and other watercourses.

The absence of water has been a key factor in allowing this area to remain relatively unspoilt, with insufficient natural water supply to service major industrial or residential developments. However, man's ingenuity has enabled a growing population to survive, with a variety of manmade devices to supplement natural water sources. Water is pumped from rivers or from deep artesian wells; farms have invested in reservoirs; and our waste water is recycled.

One of the most remarkable man-made devices for increasing water supply is the so-called New River which is actually an aqueduct. It passes through the far southwest corner of the Hundred Parishes at Great Amwell. Water is pumped from springs and the River Lea near Ware into the New River and it flows south for nearly 30 miles, through London's northern suburbs to Hackney.

What is perhaps most surprising about the New River is that it was constructed over 400 years ago. At that time, it took desperately-needed clean water into the heart of London. It still serves that purpose.



Our selection of walks from railway stations includes number 19 whose easy 4 miles from St Margarets

Station to Ware station incorporates an interesting stretch along the New River, pictured here. The route can be downloaded from our website, www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

The New River is now the responsibility of Thames Water which has published an informative leaflet recounting the history and also describing the long-distance footpath that Thames Water has created to follow the New River's route. Its 28 miles is only partly within the Hundred Parishes. Details can be downloaded from <https://shelford.org/walks/newriver.pdf>

The New River's construction was managed by Sir Hugh Myddelton, a successful businessman. He was the brother of Sir Thomas Middleton (1550 – 1631) who lived at Stansted Hall, Stansted Mountfitchet (their surname was not spelt consistently). Sir Thomas was one of several residents of the Hundred Parishes who served as Lord Mayor of London. He is commemorated by a splendid memorial in Stansted's St Mary's Church which is open daily.

The New River never seems to dry up, unlike the upper reaches of many of our natural rivers.

Most of the rivers are not navigable in our area; the exceptions are the Stort south of Bishop's Stortford and the Lee Navigation (a canal that runs beside the natural River Lea for a short distance within the far southwest corner of the Hundred Parishes).

Another man-made device ensures that the River Pant continues to flow. This came about in the 1960s when the Ministry of Housing and Local Government identified that the anticipated population increase in southeast Essex could create a shortage of water. Following the Ely Ouse – Essex Water Act of 1968, surplus water is pumped from the Fens to two Essex reservoirs at Abberton and Hanningfield. As part of the scheme, some water is discharged into the River Pant at Great Sampford.

This photo shows water flowing from the reservoir at Great Sampford into the River Pant.



Rather surprisingly, some of this water will have originated just 7 miles away at the source of the River Cam before making a round trip of more than 100 miles, north via Cambridge and the River Great Ouse to Denver in Norfolk, only to be pumped back south!

You may also wish to see our article on Water Mills.

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Any comments or suggestions for improvement may be submitted by using the Feedback form on the website. The website has many short articles on various aspects of The Hundred Parishes, as well as introductions to individual parishes and to a number of local celebrities, and an extensive What's On section. More than a hundred walk route descriptions can be freely downloaded, with each of the hundred parishes featuring in at least one walk.