



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

WESTMILL



Location: 1 mile south of Buntingford. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL3627.
Postcode SG 9LG. **Access:** West off A10. **County:** Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts.
Buses (Mon to Sat): 331 between Hertford & Buntingford – bus stop outside village on A10.
Also, HertsLynx on-demand service: <https://www.intalink.org.uk/booking-hertslynx-trip>
Population: 264 in 2001, 305 in 2011, 290 in 2021.

Westmill straddles Ermine Street (originally the Roman highway from London to Lincoln and nowadays better known as the A10), a mile south of Buntingford. It is a rural parish with little habitation outside the village of Westmill itself. The village is a peaceful oasis that lies just west of the A10. Its quiet lanes, small village green, tea room and pub make it a popular stopping place for cyclists, walkers and photographers. The tea room's opening times vary with the seasons, so please check before relying on it for refreshment.

On the village green, a water pump dates from around 1900 AD. Its ornate oak casing bears the inscription "*Traverse the desert and then you can tell what treasure exists in the cool deep well*". This is an extract from the poem "*Water*" by 19th-century London poet Eliza Cook. As far as we know, she had no connection with Westmill, unlike essayist Charles Lamb - about whom there is a short profile in the People section of www.hundredparishes.org.uk. In 1812, Lamb inherited Button Snap, a 17th-century thatched cottage at Cherry Green in the southwest of the parish, about a mile from Westmill village.



Lamb sold Button Snap, shown on the left, after only three years but his ownership is marked by a medallion in the grass verge, pictured below.



The River Rib flows from north to south between Westmill village and the A10. It is assumed that the west mill which gave the parish its name was sited somewhere along the Rib. The Buntingford railway line also once ran along the valley, coming south from Buntingford to St Margarets where passengers could connect with a train to London. There was then a station at Westmill, which always seems to have been called West Mill. The line operated for over 100 years before closing in 1965.



Not far from the village green stands the parish church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin. It dates from the 12th century, with substantial additions in the 15th. Although it was largely rebuilt in 1876, elements of its early history are still visible. On the external southeast corner of the nave, Saxon "long and short" stones can be seen and there are reused Roman bricks in the gable.

Its bells include a very early one from the 14th century. Hung on the wall, beside the door, is what is believed to be the oldest gravestone in Hertfordshire: it commemorates Sir Nicholas de Lewknor, Lord of Westmill, who died in 1296.

The majority of the parish's listed buildings are in the village of Westmill itself. They include the red brick 18th-century Westmill Bury, pictured on the right. The adjacent Westmill Bury Farm has a range of barns dating from the 16th or 17th century. The barns, the Bury and the church are all listed as Grade II*.



Listed as Grade II is not only the red-brick, 18th-century Sissons, shown on the right, but also the adjacent cast iron, red K6 telephone kiosk, once humble but now recognised for its iconic presence.



Westmill has a total of 47 listed buildings, including most of those pictured in this introduction. However, there is no photo of Wakeley, a medieval village that was mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 but which has long since disappeared. The site of that village and its church dedicated to St Giles is in the west of Westmill parish and is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

To the south of the parish, the former rectory, shown on the right, has been extended and updated from its 17th-century origins.



Some of the houses in the High Street, in the centre of the village, are shown immediately below. On the left is Pilgrims Row on the north side of the High Street. It includes two almshouses which were originally built as four houses early in the 18th century for Samuel Pilgrim.

On the right, on the south side, is thatched Woolpack Croft and then Church Cottages beyond. Both date from the 17th century.



The photographs below feature Westmill's village hall on the left and tea room on the right.



The village hall started life in the 17th century as a barn. The tea room has a Regency-style shop front dating from 1864 with a bow window.

Westmill's pub - The Sword Inn Hand - dates from the 16th century and was converted into an inn in the 19th. Its unusual name may have come from the crest of the Greg family who lived at Coles Park in the south of the parish.



The house at Coles Park was demolished in the 1950s after the deaths of Thomas Greg and his wife Mary Hope Greg. They were major benefactors of the parish and also significant donors of artefacts to many museums. They owned several properties in Westmill and these were given to charities or trusts that today own and administer significant parts of the village including the village hall, almshouses, allotments and the recreation ground.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT WESTMILL

Hospitality:

The Sword Inn Hand, SG9 9LQ – 01763 271356 – <https://www.theswordinnhand.co.uk/>
Westmill Tea Room (usually open Thursday to Sunday between March and early December),
SG9 9LG - 01763 274236 - www.westmilltearoom.co.uk

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: Braughing, Aspenden, Buntingford, Hormead.

Hundred Parishes Society walks, free to download and print from this website, include . . .

Circular walk 136 starting in Westmill and covering 5 miles around Westmill and Aspenden.

Quiet Lane Walk 311 starts in Westmill and avoids footpaths during its 4.2 mile circular route.

Hundred Parishes article on Charles Lamb:

<https://hundredparishes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CHARLES-LAMB.pdf>

Other links:

Parish Council: <https://westmillpc.org.uk/>

History: www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/links/westmill.htm

Friends of Westmill Church, including history: www.friendsofwestmillchurch.org.uk/history.html

Mary Hope Greg: www.marymaryquitecontrary.org.uk

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