



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

THUNDRIDGE



Location: 2 miles north of Ware. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL3517. **Postcode** SG12 0SY.

Access: north off A1170, off A10. **County:** Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts.

Bus: Route 331 (Mon to Sat) between Hertford and Buntingford.

Population: 1,321 in 2001, 1,406 in 2011, 1,600 in 2021.



Thundridge parish, just north of Ware, includes the adjacent villages of Thundridge and Wadesmill, separated only by the River Rib, and High Cross, a little further north. These three villages grew up beside the Old North Road (until 2004, classified as the A10) which, in this area, followed the path of the Roman Ermine Street which ran from London to Lincoln.

Travelling north from Ware, you may have been intrigued to see a sign to the right indicating 'Cold Christmas'. What miserable history could have led to such a place name? If you follow that road, Cold Christmas Lane, you will pass close to all that now remains of the original village of Thundridge, lying down in the valley, close to the River Rib. Those vestiges are the 15th-century church tower of the "Thundridge Old Church" of All Hallows and Little Saint Mary, and a few bricks from the chimney stack of the manor house, Thundridge Bury, which was built alongside during the reign of Henry VII and demolished in the early 1800s. The original church was built on the site of a chapel that existed at least as early as 1086.

It was the improvement of the road in the early 19th century which began a movement of the settlement further to the west and the abandonment of the original village. In 1854, a new Thundridge church was consecrated. In the years that followed most of the old church was demolished and the surrounding area seems then to have acquired the name of Cold Christmas - perhaps by association with the supposed death of a number of young children of the parish in mysterious circumstances around Christmas time. In the way of these things, that legend together with the isolated nature of the old village remnants has given rise to abundant tales of haunting, strange noises and ghostly manifestations around the old churchyard. The locals will tell you that such tales can be explained by mundanities like an outbreak of scarlet fever, the wind whistling through crumbling stonework, but among adherents of the supernatural the tales persist and still attract intrepid ghost hunters. The local history books say that Christmas was the family name of 18th-century residents.

Today the ruin of the tower is in a precarious and dangerous state and demolition has become a real possibility.

The 'new' church, built at a cost of £9,000, occupies a commanding position at the top of the hill south of the River Rib. It is dedicated to St Mary and All Saints.

Wadesmill has an interesting place in history as the site of the first toll gates in England, installed in 1663 and effectively establishing a tax on the large quantities of grain and other foodstuffs that passed through on the Cambridge Road on their way to London.



On this same road, just north of Wadesmill, Thomas Clarkson, the anti-slavery campaigner and William Wilberforce's closest associate, took the decision to devote his life to the abolition of slavery.

An obelisk was erected in 1879 to mark the spot. This is located on what became the busy A10 road. When the new A10 was opened in 2004, the old one reverted to a relatively quiet country road.



High Cross was the home of Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Martin-Leake, the first man to be awarded the Victoria Cross twice. He lived to the age of 79 and is buried in High Cross churchyard.



In a field to the north of the parish, near Standon Green End, a monument marks the spot where Vincent Lunardi landed in 1794 after completing the first manned balloon flight in England, having taken off from London beneath a balloon filled with hydrogen.



Thundridge has lost several pubs in recent years but still has three good eating places, all along the old main road. These include The Feathers at Wadesmill, shown here, dating from the 18th century.



Further south is Malton's (previously called The Sow & Pigs) and also Hanbury Manor, shown below. It was built by the Hanbury family in the 1890s as a country mansion on their estate called Poles. From 1923 to 1985 it served as Poles Convent and a boarding school for girls. The girls moved out and joined the boys a few miles north at St Edmund's College in Standon.

Poles was extended further and renamed as Hanbury Manor, a prestigious hotel and golf complex. Its 18-hole course, designed by Jack Nicklaus, was the venue for the English Open Championship from 1997 to 1999.



The countryside here is lovely and Thundridge is rich in attractive public rights of way. They include stretches of the Hertfordshire Way and Harcamlow Way and others that pass though the ancient Youngsbury estate, once home to a Roman villa, or follow the River Bourne that runs in a deep canyon from the northwest of the parish down into Wadesmill. Hundred Parishes walk number 178 explores much of the parish and its narrative recounts some of its history. The top photos were taken on that route; bottom right is the public path through the Youngsbury estate.



Hospitality:

Feathers, SG12 0TN – 01920 462606 - <https://www.greeneking-pubs.co.uk/pubs/hertfordshire/feathers/>

Hanbury Manor Hotel, SG12 0SD – 01920 487722 –

<https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/stngs-hanbury-manor-marriott-hotel-and-country-club/>

Malton's restaurant (formerly The Sow & Pigs), SG12 0SG – 01920 464020 –

<https://maltonsrestaurant.co.uk/>

Ermine's café, Thundridge village, SG12 0SY - <https://www.facebook.com/Erminescafeandstores/>

Hundred Parishes Society walks include . . .

Circular walk 178 - covers 4.6 mile entirely in Thundridge parish.

Circular walk 124 - covers 6 miles from Wareside and includes some of southern Thundridge.

Station walk 18 covers 17 miles from Ware station to Stansted Mountfitchet station. It could be joined at Cold Christmas at the bottom of page 1 of the description.

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: Wareside, Standon, Much Hadham.

Links:

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

History: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol3/pp377-380>

Thundridge Old Church Action Group: <https://thundridgeoldchurch.org/>

Further reading:

Around Cold Christmas: A Personal History, compiled by Emma Blowers, available by email to aroundcoldchristmas@coldchristmas.net

Four Ermine Street Villages, Thundridge & High Cross Society.

Thundridge & Wadesmill in Hertfordshire: A Brief History, Eileen Lynch.