



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

STANSTEAD ABBOTTS



Location: 2 miles southeast of Ware. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL3811.

Postcode: SG12 8AG. **Access:** St Margarets station. Roads B180 and B181.

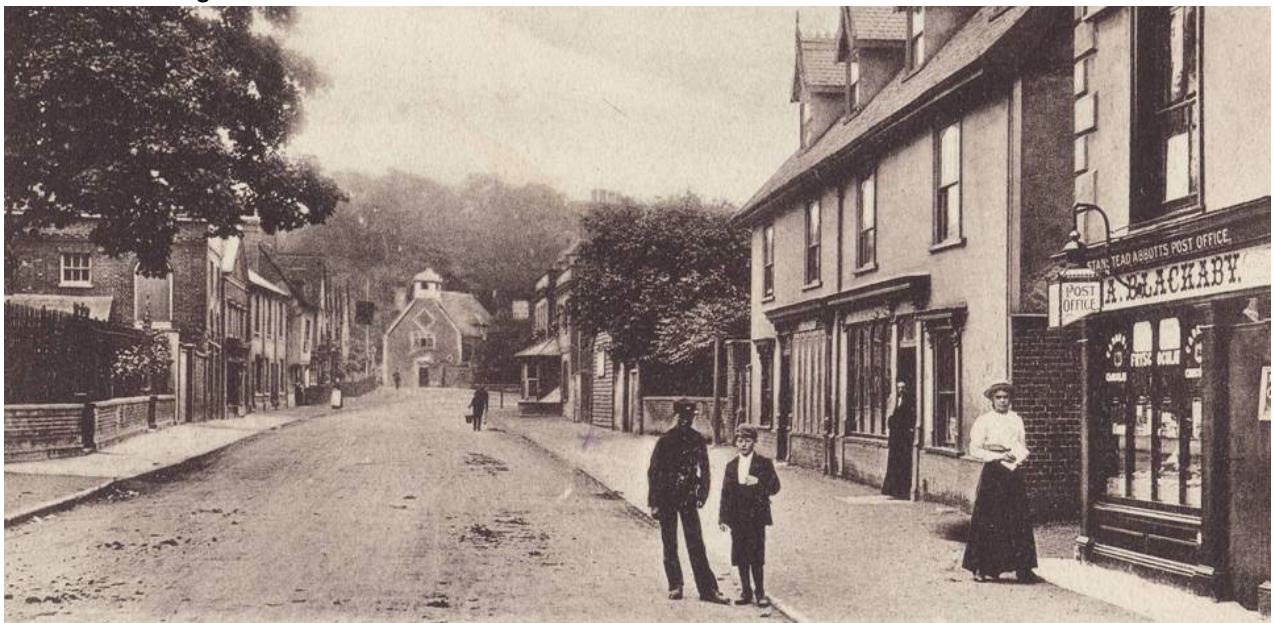
County: Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts. **Buses** (Mon to Sat): 351 between Hertford and Bishop's Stortford and 410 between Cheshunt and Harlow.

Population: 1,983 in 2001, 1,950 in 2011, 2,000 in 2021.

Stanstead Abbots marks the south-western extremity of the Hundred Parishes. Just beyond, to the west of the River Lea which here forms the parish boundary, lies the urban area of Hoddesdon. The River Lea has been the dominant factor in the establishment and evolution of the parish of Stanstead Abbots. The name seems to be spelt with a double T in all popular literature but a single T in more formal documents. For example, the parish council and Ordnance Survey use two Ts, but heritage and census listings use only one! At least they are all consistent in their spelling of Stanstead.

There is evidence of man in this area from Roman times and earlier. "Stanstede" appears in the Domesday Book of 1086 – with a water mill, although that mill's location is no longer known for certain. "Abbotts" was added by the 14th century, recognising that the manor was controlled by the abbot of Waltham Holy Cross.

The millstream, to the East of the River Lea, is thought to have been dug around 1300 AD to control the flow of water through the mill. The millstream rejoins the river about a mile further south, thereby creating an island. Stanstead Abbots High Street crosses this island from the bridge over the Lea to the mini roundabout outside the Clock House. The millstream is no longer visible there, having been piped beneath the roadway in 1934. These views, from postcards 100 years ago, show the former bridge over the millstream close to the Clock House and, below, the High Street looking towards the distant Clock House, with the Post Office on the right.





The most recent corn mill to be served by the millstream dates from 1881, having been rebuilt after a fire. It was converted from water power to steam before ceasing to operate as a mill around 1926. It has since been converted for use by other businesses.

Opposite the Clock House stands the Red Lion, shown here. This public house dates from the 15th century, when it was apparently built as a monastery, but it was much altered in the 17th century.



The Clock House, now a private residence, was built in 1636 as a grammar school and continued in that role until the late 1800s. The school was built by Sir Edward Baesh, the lord of the manor at that time. He also built the almshouses in 1635 on Cats Hill. They still serve as such and are shown here on the left.

Baesh lived at Stanstead Bury, about half a mile southeast of the village at the top of Cat's Hill. His grandfather had acquired the house, along with the manor of Stanstead Abbots, in 1559 after its removal from the control of the Abbey of Waltham as part of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries.

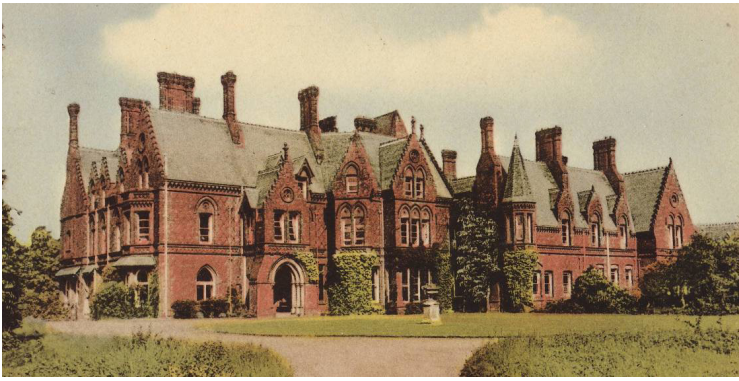


Stanstead Bury, pictured above, dates from the 15th century but has been much altered through the centuries. It was Stanstead's manor house until the 1820s and is still privately owned.



Beside the Bury is the former parish church, dedicated to St James and dating from the 12th century. It is listed at Grade I and is now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. Its porch is from the 15th century. The whitewashed interior is little changed from the 18th century with high box pews, a double-decker pulpit and a 1587 wall monument to the first Sir Edward Baeshe.

The church is usually open to visitors every Sunday from June to September from 2:30pm to 5pm.



St James's lost its role as parish church when Thomas Buxton, the wealthy son of a brewing magnate, moved into the parish in the 1860s, building St Andrew's Church, shown here with the parish war memorial, and also Easneye Mansion, pictured above. The Mansion was designed by Alfred Waterhouse, a prolific Victorian architect whose works include London's Natural History Museum and Manchester Town Hall. Easneye served as an orphanage during and after the Second World War and since 1964 has been the home of a Christian missionary training college. Easneye, like Stanstead Bury, stands somewhat aloof and out of sight from the village.

Stanstead Abbots' strategic position between two waterways - the River Lea and the mill stream - was an ideal location for the development of a successful malting industry that thrived from the 18th century. Several substantial malting buildings were erected. Barley was brought from the surrounding area and processed here into malt. It was then transported by barge down the Lea to the London breweries for use in the manufacture of beer.

The malting industry thrived until the 20th century when a gradual decline was met by a diversification of use of some of the maltings for use by manufacturing and other businesses. One maltings continues to serve its original purpose, the family business of French & Jupps having operated here since 1885.

From the middle of the 20th century, the growth in car ownership and increasing size of lorries brought great strain to the Victorian High Street, especially when the level crossing gates were closed just west of Stanstead Abbots by St Margarets railway station. There were frequent accidents at the foot of steep Cat's Hill. After two fatal accidents and a concerted campaign by residents, a bypass was built and the A414 road was diverted away from the High Street in 1988. Stanstead Abbots has a total of 92 listed buildings and those along the main thoroughfare can now be seen in comparative peace and safety.

South of the village, and now south of the bypass, Rye Meads can be reached from Rye House railway station or along the toll road that runs from near St James's Church. Here, on this marshy land, close to where the River Lea is joined by the River Stort, once stood Rye House, built in the 15th century. Today, just part of the house survives, the red brick gatehouse, but it is splendid in its own right and has a Grade I listing. In the 16th century, Rye House was the home of Joyce Frankland who founded the school in Newport that now bears her name. In 1683, this was where the Rye House Plot was hatched to murder King Charles II. The plot was foiled and Rye House's tenant, Richard Rumbold, fled. He was eventually captured and executed, his remains being displayed on the roof of the gatehouse. Later, in the 18th century, the gatehouse served as the parish workhouse. Today it houses a small museum.



Rye Meads is now a Site of Special Scientific Interest (“SSSI”) and has nature reserves where kingfishers can be sighted. The extensive Rye Meads area is shared between nature reserves and, in complete contrast, a very large sewage works that processes waste that is piped from Stevenage, ten miles away.

Rye Meads is part of the Lee Valley Regional Park, a 26 mile-long, 10,000-acre recreation area that opened in 1967 and extends from London to Ware. The Park includes Stanstead Marina and the River Lee Navigation which was opened in 1769. The natural river is spelt Lea, whilst the man-made navigable waterway is spelt Lee. The Lee is seen here looking north towards the bridge that leads into Stanstead Abbots High Street, just off to the right. The photo was taken from the west bank which is in the adjoining parish of Stansted St Margarets.



The towpath here forms part of the Hertfordshire Way long-distance path that crosses the bridge, passes along the High Street and then heads northwards cross-country. Hundred Parishes walk number 20 (see below) follows the Hertfordshire Way for the first few miles en route to Sawbridgeworth. Walk number 19 is a much shorter option, finishing at Ware station. Each walk starts from St Margarets Station which is well used by Stanstead Abbots residents to commute towards either London or Ware.

This is but a brief introduction to Stanstead Abbots. There is excellent detailed coverage in the books and websites listed below. Furthermore, visitors are made welcome with a small car park just off the High Street and a variety of places to eat.

Hospitality:

Khunnai by Elle, Thai restaurant, SG12 8AS – 01920 870032 – <https://www.khunnai.uk/>

Maltings Coffee House, SG12 8HG - - <https://www.themaltingscoffeehouse.com/>

Red Lion and Amico di Amici, SG12 8AA - 01920 410056 - <https://www.redlionamicodiamici.co.uk/>

Taste of Raj, SG12 8AA - 01920 871333 - <https://tasteofrajonline.com/>

Village Café, SG12 8AS – 01920 871144 –

<https://www.facebook.com/Village-Cafe-Stanstead-Abbots-584375368343234/>

Hundred Parishes Society walks include . . .

Station walks as follows:

09: Circular route from St Margarets station (4.7 miles)

19: From St Margarets station to Ware station (4 miles).

20: From St Margarets station to Sawbridgeworth station (12 miles).

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: Great Amwell, Wareside, Hunsdon.

Links:

Parish Council: <https://www.stansteadabbottsparishcouncil.gov.uk/>

Stanstead Abbots Online: <https://www.stanstead-abbotts-online.co.uk/>

Stanstead Abbots Local History Society: <http://www.salhs.org.uk/>

History: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol3/pp366-373>

Lee Valley Park and Rye House Gatehouse opening times:

<https://www.visitleevalley.org.uk/gardens-and-heritage/rye-house-gatehouse>

Further reading:

A History of Stanstead Abbots, Rye House & St Margarets, Ron Dale, published 2013 by Stanstead Abbots Local History Society.

Amwell and Stanstead's Past in Pictures, Stephen Doree and David Perman, published 1997 by Rockingham Press.