

Standon Nr. Ware Walk 13:

A walk through the history of Puckeridge

This walk should take about half an hour. The route is completely on the level, and, apart from the narrowness of the pavement in one or two places, could easily be undertaken with a pushchair or wheelchair. Because of the narrowness of the High Street, the walk has been designed so that all the buildings are viewed from the opposite side of the street, from where they can be better appreciated.

1 On leaving the car park in Huntsman's Close, walk back to the High Street. What you see facing you is a row of modern houses, and nothing to give you a clue as to the extraordinary history of the village. But if you take a little time to look more closely and wander the full length of the village, it will reap great rewards. Turn left and walk up the street a short way and the whole character of the buildings changes abruptly. The old red tiled roofs start appearing, together with the tell-tale shop-fronts.

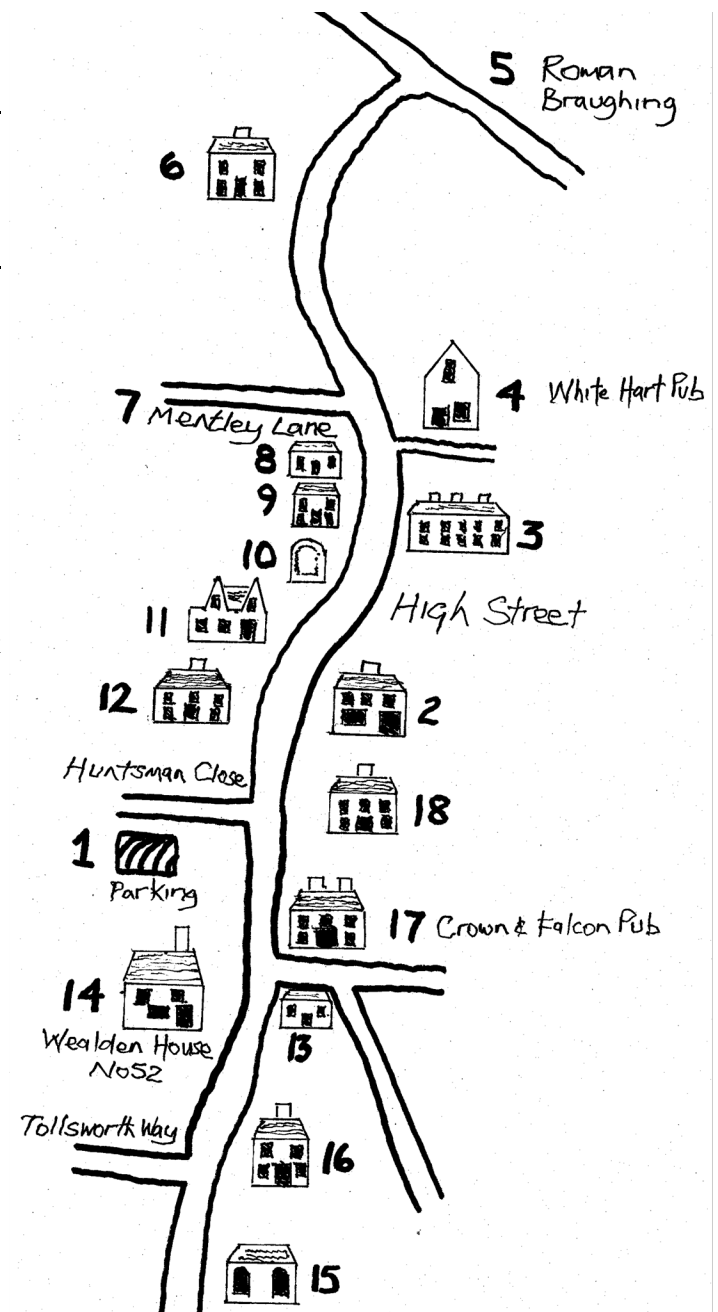
2 Number 19 is a good example of a house which encapsulates the history of the village in one go. Its early Tudor origins are almost hidden by the Georgian frontage that is so common in the High Street. It then incorporates the high archway for wagons and carriages, going through to the yard at the back, that show its history as an inn. And finally it has the 19th century shop-front from where the local clock and watch maker and his son, plied their trade for nearly a century.

Walk on a few more yards and you get the sense of the narrowness of the street and the fact that the houses are all set right on the pavement, making them ideal as shops in the bustling days of the 19th century. Apart from butchers, bakers and candlestick makers, there were straw hat makers, tailors, plumbers, ironmongers, coopers, grocers, and anything and everything to do with the horse and carriage – collarmakers (not shirt collars but horse collars), saddlers, carpenters, wheelwrights and blacksmiths.

3 Shortly you will get to a long white building with a number of sash windows, which was once the Crown Inn. Divided into cottages in the 18th century, the main dwelling housed the local doctors for most of the 19th century.

A short way further on is where the road used to divide – the left hand fork going, as now, to Buntingford, Royston and Cambridge, and the right hand fork also going to Cambridge, when the other way became hopelessly impassable during the Winter months – a source of constant misery (and expense) for the locals.

4 Dating from the end of the Tudor era, the White Hart Inn certainly had a prime site on the junction of two busy roads.



Another fascinating walk, this time by Kathryn Shreeve, showing you Puckeridge from Roman times via its coaching days to the early 20th century.

5 Now continue walking up to the T-junction, and look straight ahead. What do you see? Well not a lot except for a field with a hill behind – Wickham Hill. Now imagine yourself back nearly 2000 years, and what you would have seen up that hill and beyond would have been a thriving Roman town, and to the left and right of you the on-going occupation of a late Iron Age settlement. Although Puckeridge itself was not known to exist until early medieval times, there has been occupation here for several thousand years. The area round Wickham Hill had become an enormously important trading centre by the late Iron Age and many important artefacts were found here in the 1970s archaeological digs, which show trade with Europe even before the Romans arrived. In Roman times the prehistoric trackways were upgraded into a road from London to York (Ermine Street) which crossed a road from Colchester (Stane Street) here at Puckeridge.

6 Returning to the present day, walk back the way you have come and you will pass, on your right, Chequers Cottage – one of several houses still retaining their inn names.

7 You will shortly arrive at the turning off to the right called Mentley Lane. Before the advent of the by-pass this lane used to lead up to Mentley Farm, where in Medieval times there was a manor house in the vicinity housing the lord of the Manor of Mentley, or Milkley as it was then known. The majority of Puckeridge came within this Manor, and the lord held the rights to the market and fair which were held annually in the village to take advantage of the thriving passing trade.

8 At the White Hart, cross the road in order to appreciate the buildings on the West side. Alpha House and Dormers are further good examples of Tudor houses that hide a multitude of secrets from later centuries. This is followed by Everett Hall – a house of quite a different character. Built around 1840 it is named after the local vet, Robert Everett, who apparently had the reputation of being able to cure hydrophobia, or rabies, by “a lotion and a violent cathartic”! Around the front door you can see where there was once a beautiful stained-glass Victorian porch.

9 Anchor House, was also an early inn which closed in the early 1900s. According to a late resident, Puckeridge’s very last Fair was held in the yard of The Anchor Inn in 1894. On the other side of the entranceway, and attached to number 12, there used to be a blacksmith.

As you walk on, take a moment to notice the extraordinary bend in the road ahead. Quite why it should be so is something of a mystery, but one theory is that, as the origins of the village lie somewhere in the 12th century, probably with people starting to sell their wares to passers by, as competition between stallholders grew they edged further and further forward. The stalls would then have become more permanent structures and the main street’s fate was sealed.

10 Outside number 16 is a milestone which was put there when the road was first made a turnpike road. It was one of the first turnpikes in the country, set up around 1742, and in the heyday of the 18th century coaches passed through here on the way to Cambridge, Stamford, York and even Edinburgh. Add to these the mail coaches, the private carriages, the wagons carrying barley to the maltings in Ware – some drawn by teams of eight horses, the drovers herding animals to the London markets, etc., you get a good idea of how busy the High Street must have been. And all of this traffic passing through this narrow street with its tight bend!

11 Arriving opposite a red brick house, you see another early Tudor building which used to be The George Inn. In the 1830s this also housed the kennels for the Puckeridge Hunt, which was a very famous Hunt in its day. Even after the kennels moved away from the village, and well into the 20th century it was always known as “The Puckeridge”. Houses in the village were even advertised as being “within easy reach of all the principal Meets of the Puckeridge Hunt, and well suited for any person requiring a hunting or shooting box”!

12 The next house, number 26, is one of the oldest in the village, and, at the same time, a very good example of the ‘Georgianising’ effect. The whole idea was obviously so popular that if you couldn’t alter the existing front of your house, you just stuck a whole new front on! As you walk on, note also the overhanging or ‘jettied’ building – one of only two such houses in the village.

Notice now the way the street widens out; this was probably where the local market was held in Medieval times, and where the only remaining shops are now.

13 In the first half of the 20th century there used to be a large shop, or more accurately a small department store, called Fordhams, on the corner of Station Road facing up the High Street. Many of the local residents

still remember it as selling “General Furnishings, Bedsteads and Bedding, Drapery, Hosiery and Outfitting”. Cross (with care) over the end of Station Road and continue on down the High Street for a short way.

14 Opposite you is the other jettied house. Built around 1500 it is of a type called a Wealden house – quite unusual for this part of the world. In its day it would have been very grand, and owned by a well-to-do yeoman farmer. By the end of the 17th century it too had become an inn – The Bull.

15 If you continue up to the end of the village, you find the Roman Catholic church on your left, and the Evangelical Congregational Chapel on the opposite side of the road past the school. At this point it may occur to you that what you haven’t seen anywhere is the lovely traditional old church so characteristic of most English villages. That’s because there isn’t one, and that is what strictly-speaking made Puckeridge a hamlet rather than a village – too large to be a hamlet nowadays! In Medieval times there was a chapel, but it had disappeared by the time of the Reformation and there is nothing now to say where it was.

16 Now cross the road and re-trace your steps back into the centre of the village, noticing the Old Woolpack House opposite the end of Tollsworth Way. If you add several alehouses to the number of inns in the village, it’s a wonder anyone was ever sober!

17 When you arrive opposite Station Road you get a good view of the Crown & Falcon. Prior to the 1800s it was just The Falcon Inn and was built around 1530. Samuel Pepys is supposed to have stayed here when he passed through the village, although he doesn’t actually say in his diaries where he stayed. He does, however, say that on one of his stays he “was forced to pay 4s for a pair of old shoes of my landlord’s” because his feet had swollen so much!

On the corner, outside the Crown & Falcon, there used to be a boundary stone which marked the boundary between the parishes of Braughing and Standon. Although this boundary has been changed now, it meant that the East half of the High Street was in Braughing parish and the West half in Standon parish. Nowadays parish boundaries are quite incidental to most people’s lives, but back in the days when church-going was part of everyday life, and then subsequently a legal obligation, one can imagine the people coming out of their houses on one side of the street and walking towards Braughing and on the other side heading for Standon. There was also strict adherence to their respective parishes as to where they were baptised, married and buried. There must have been enormous rivalry between the two sides of the street!

18 Finally, as you get back up towards Huntsman’s Close and those new houses opposite you, what you would have seen there, up to the end of the 19th century, was the biggest inn of all, The Bell. From drawings, we know it had a Georgian frontage right on the street and an archway through to a yard and stabling behind. It was the official stop given in timetables for the coaches and also became the posting house for the mail coaches. As an inn, it had 10 bedrooms and two ‘parlours’, and behind the Georgian façade it almost certainly dated back to the late Medieval period. It would have been the true heart of the village, and it must have been terribly sad to see it go.

This will bring you back to where you began. Hopefully you have enjoyed your potter round Puckeridge and this brief journey into the past.

Paths in Standon Parish are clearly waymarked. If you come across any problem with missing waymarks, please contact the Parish Paths Partnership: john@walkinginengland.co.uk.

This leaflet has been produced by Standon Parish Council working as part of the Parish Paths Partnership, a programme funded by Hertfordshire County Council’s Countryside Management Service (CMS). CMS helps communities across Hertfordshire to care for and enjoy the environment. www.hertslink.org/cms

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