



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

ICKLETON



Location: 5 miles northwest of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square** TL4943. **Postcode** CB10 1SS. **County:** Cambridgeshire. **District:** South Cambs. **Access:** 1 mile from Great Chesterford station on London Liverpool Street to Cambridge line. Off B1383. **Buses:** 7 (frequent, each day) between Saffron Walden and Cambridge; 101 (Tues) to Saffron Walden; 132 (Sun) to S Walden & Cambridge. **Population:** 655 in 2001, 709 in 2011, 750 in 2021.



Ickleton developed where one of the tracks of the ancient Icknield Way crossed the River Cam. Subsequently, Romans were here and later the village acquired a Saxon name, Inchelintone, meaning Icel's or Ikel's Farm, and this was recorded by the Normans in the Domesday Book of 1086. The name appears to be unrelated to the Icknield Way. Today, the village of Ickleton is at the eastern end of the parish of the same name, with open arable farmland stretching 2 miles to the west.

Ickleton's principal claim to fame is the Church of St Mary Magdalene, which is noteworthy for any one of several quite different features.

Firstly, it dates from around 1100 AD and, according to Nikolaus Pevsner in his *Buildings of England*, this early Norman church has "few equals in the country". Pevsner also recorded that the pillars of the church arcades were re-used Roman columns, but he was writing in 1954 before this theory was disputed because they were made of a different stone from that used in a nearby Roman villa.

Pevsner was also writing before an arsonist set fire to the church in 1979. During the subsequent restoration and cleaning, builders discovered an extensive set of 12th-century wall paintings on the nave walls, a rare and fine example of such early imagery. Another picture, a 14th-century "Doom" painting (depicting the day of judgement) survives in part above the chancel arch, and is a rare survival of nudity in a church, with the Virgin Mary baring her breasts to Christ, apparently as a gesture of supplication.



Another unusual feature is the bell which hangs outside the tower. This is a "Sanctus" bell which traditionally was rung during a Catholic Mass to tell those not inside the church that an important element of the service had been reached, specifically the moment of consecration of the bread and wine. Whilst such a Sanctus bell is rare in an Anglican church, there is another in the next parish, Hinxton.

A Roman villa was excavated in the 19th century and was found to include at least 17 rooms and under-floor ("hypocaust") heating. Nearby was a basilica, or court building. After the excavation, the site was covered over again. It was situated not far from the extensive Roman fort whose site now lies within the adjacent parish of Great Chesterford.

Ickleton had a small priory of Benedictine nuns from the 12th century until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in 1536. It is thought to have been situated where Priory Farm is today, near the west end of the village. The prioress was a powerful lady and held the manorial rights of the village, settling disputes and dispensing justice. She instigated an annual fair which was held from the 12th century until 1875, long after the demise of the priory. In its later years, the fair specialised in the trading of horses and cheese.

Today, there is little trade in Ickleton, save for the Ickleton Lion which has been an inn for over 200 years and in 2025 was bought by the community. Many inhabitants work in Cambridge or London which are both easily reached from nearby Great Chesterford station on the London Liverpool Street – Cambridge railway line that was opened in 1845 and now forms part of the parish's eastern boundary.

Ickleton has many fine listed dwellings. Several date from the 15th century, with the oldest probably being Hovells, shown on the left below. It took its name from that of its owner in the 17th century. Norman Hall, on the right, also dates from the 15th century. During World War I it was used as a Red Cross hospital for wounded soldiers. The nearby war memorial records the names of 16 men from Ickleton who died in that conflict, together with three in the Second World War.



The people of Ickleton have done much to preserve their heritage and make it accessible. The village website (see below) has links to a huge collection of photos and documents that have been gathered by the village's amenity group, the Ickleton Society, whilst an excellent small guidebook on the church and the village is usually available in the church. Highlights of Ickleton's history are also recorded on the exceptional collection of kneelers to be found in the church.

Hospitality:

Ickleton Lion, CB10 1SS – <https://www.thelionatickleton.co.uk/> - 01799 494365

Café Riverside, CB10 1SH – 07542 188541 - <https://www.facebook.com/Cafe-Riverside-160802227969917/>

Hundred Parishes Society walks can be freely downloaded and printed. They include . . .

Circular walk 173 covering just 1.3 miles around the village.

Quiet Lane Walk 329 – 6.2 miles on higher ground, avoiding busy roads and footpaths.

Station walk 14 covers 5 miles between Great Chesterford and Whittlesford stations.

This route can be joined in Ickleton on page 2, then catching the train from Whittlesford to Great Chesterford to complete the route back into Ickleton.

Adjacent parishes:

Chrishall, Duxford, Hinxton, Great Chesterford, Strethall, Elmdon & Wenden Lofts.

Links:

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

Village website: <http://ickleton.org.uk/wordpress/> . . . including . . .

Ickleton Society: <http://ickleton.org.uk/wordpress/about-the-society/>

British History Online: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol6/pp230-246>

Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ickleton>

Further reading:

Welcome to Ickleton, Cambridgeshire, published by Ickleton Parish Council.

This page, last updated 25 July 2025, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk.