



The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about ALMSHOUSES

Almshouses were built to enable the poor, old or disabled who were no longer able to work and pay rent to remain in the community. The first recorded was in the 10th century, founded in York by King Athelstan. The oldest still in existence is at Winchester. They were often a result of a gift from a wealthy benefactor, consisting of a terrace of houses to accommodate a number of residents.

The Hundred Parishes has some fine examples – here are just a few. . .

In the High Street, Buntingford, the almshouses were founded by Bishop Seth Ward in 1684. He was a mathematician and astronomer who was born in Aspenden and educated in Cambridge. He became Bishop of Exeter in 1662 and of Salisbury in 1667. The almshouses are now run by a charity to provide homes for the elderly of the town.



Lord Richard Rich, Lord Chancellor under Edward VI, founded Felsted School and nearby almshouses in 1565. They were rebuilt in 1878. Rich is buried at Felsted Church which has an elaborate memorial to him. More information about Lord Rich can be found within the People section of the Hundred Parishes website.



Radwinter's almshouses were designed by the Arts and Crafts architect William Eden Nesfield in 1887 as part of a rebuilding programme after a disastrous village fire. The exterior walls are decorated with pargeted patterns. Nesfield's work included other buildings in Radwinter and also in London.



From Thaxted's churchyard, the path to the windmill passes between two buildings. One with a thatched roof was built as a priest's house and later became a four-dwelling almshouse. The building opposite was constructed approximately 1714 and incorporates eight tenements. In 1830 it housed sixteen aged persons, 13 widows, a man, a wife and a maid.



In Saffron Walden, an extensive range of almshouses, part shown on the right, date mostly from the 19th century. They replaced earlier almshouses.

Eastwick's almshouses, shown below, also date from the 19th century, erected as part of the extensive re-development of the village by the Hodgson brothers who owned the villages of Eastwick and Gilston.



All the almshouses mentioned above are protected through their listing on the Historic England register. You will find others as you explore and enjoy our rich and diverse area.

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Any comments or suggestions for improvement may be submitted by using the Feedback form on the website. The website has many short articles on various aspects of The Hundred Parishes, as well as introductions to individual parishes and to a number of local celebrities, and an extensive What's On section. More than a hundred walk route descriptions can be freely downloaded, with each of the hundred parishes featuring in at least one walk.