



The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about GUILDHALLS

Within the Hundred Parishes, there are several buildings which are described as Guildhalls. In their early days, they served as meeting places and some still function for that purpose.

Most of our guildhalls seem to have been built for a social purpose by some kind of benefit society, with members providing mutual support to other members, and usually with some association with the local church. They might be regarded as forerunners of today's village halls and community centres.

Others, most notably the Guildhall in Thaxted, pictured below, seem to have been constructed by a trade guild whose activities were similar to more modern trade associations. Trade guilds became established in the Middle Ages by groups of merchants to control standards and promote their particular craft or skill in the locality in which they operated. Some acquired sufficient funds and status to erect their own premises or Guildhall, generally in market towns. These buildings were used for meetings and other functions by the guilds. Some were designed to allow markets or trade on the ground floor.

The Hundred Parishes has some wonderful surviving examples of guildhalls.

Thaxted is probably the best known – three-storey, timber-framed and jettied, built in the 15th century. Thaxted was an important centre of cutlery manufacture and it is believed the cutlers helped to fund the building we now know as the Guildhall. Its original purpose is uncertain; it may have had broader uses as a moot hall or civic meeting place. In the 16th century, when the town was granted a charter by Queen Mary I and

became a borough with a mayor and 24 burgesses, it is thought that they met there. The building later became a school and today it is used for parish council and other meetings and incorporates a small museum of Thaxted's history.





The guildhall at Linton, pictured on the left, was built in 1523 close to the church and is now a private house.

It was once the home of Sir John Kendrew who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1962.

Finchingfield's 15th-century guildhall, shown on the right, stands beside the parish church. In the past it was used as almshouses and now the renovated building houses a library and excellent museum.

The first floor is used for courses and is available for private hire.



In Church Lane, Clavering, you will find the 15th-century timber-framed and plastered building pictured on the left.

Now a private dwelling, it was built as a guildhall and later served as a workhouse and then almshouses.



Ashdon's former 15th-century guildhall, behind the church, also later served as a workhouse before becoming a private house.

In the parish of Standon, a block of four houses in Puckeridge High Street dates from the 16th century or earlier and is thought to have started life as a guildhall.



Barley's Town House, shown on the left, dates from the 16th century and was apparently built by the Guild of St Catherine. It was formerly a guildhall or church house. It seems to have always served a community purpose, having been used at various times as a marriage feast room, school and almshouses before taking on its current role as village hall.



Another marriage feast room, at Matching, is of similar vintage and has a similar history of usage but is never described as a guildhall.



In Duxford, College Farmhouse next to St John's Church, dates from the 15th or 16th century and is described as a former guildhall or woodhall. It was converted to a farmhouse in the middle of the 16th century.

Its name derives from the fact that it was owned for nearly two centuries until 1825 by Caius College, Cambridge.

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