



The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about LANDSCAPE and LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

LANDSCAPE

The overall population of the Hundred Parishes grew by 25% between the censuses held in 2001 and 2021, much faster than the UK average of 14%. If this rate of local population increase of over 1% per annum were to continue, there is concern that our familiar landscapes will undergo significant change.

We may be able to take comfort from the European Landscape Convention, a convention of the Council of Europe (not the EU), to which the UK is a signatory. This encourages local authorities to introduce exemplary, long-lasting policies or measures to protect, manage and plan landscapes. The overall aim is to achieve sustainable landscapes that are as visually biodiverse and as culturally rich as possible, thus meeting society's social, economic and environmental needs.

The character of our villages and small towns, and their setting within the wider landscape, are fundamental aspects of what gives the Hundred Parishes its sense of place. Responsibility for keeping it special is vested in our elected representatives.

What makes the wider countryside of the Hundred Parishes so attractive is its tapestry of hedges, arable fields, copses and small woods which are a testament to successive generations of landowners whose activities have shaped this landscape. This view is in the parish of Hormead.

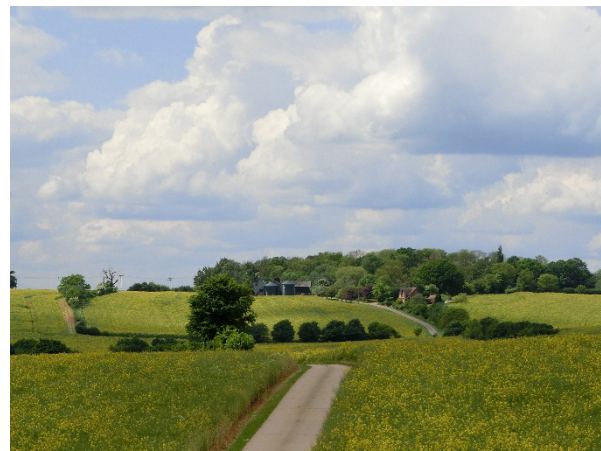


The more recent additions of pylons, major roads and railways together with spreading urbanization demonstrate that this landscape continues to evolve to meet the varied needs of people, while still retaining some considerable space for wildlife.

We are able to compare today's town or village scenes with images preserved through old postcards and books of old photos. However, nobody seems to send postcards today, so how will future generations compare their rural and urban landscapes with how their grandparents lived?

Even small and subtle changes can be easily overlooked. For example, have your street lamps been converted to LED bulbs? Are there additional items of street furniture, fresh location signage or enhanced floral displays within your settlement? Gathering an archive of such photographic images is a useful way of monitoring such changes.

We also encourage you to observe, enjoy and perhaps photograph the seasonal changes within your surrounding countryside. Sown crops germinate, flourish and are harvested. Trees mature or are felled. Fresh leaves soften bare twigs in spring and fall again in autumn.



The images above reflect the seasons:
top left: spring in Langley,
top right: summer in Saffron Walden,
bottom left: autumn in Debden, and
bottom right: winter in Broxton.

This cyclical rhythm has inspired many local, notable artists and examples of their work can be viewed in the Fry Art Gallery in Saffron Walden.

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Successive generations of humans have modified the appearance of the landscape through the creation of fields, enclosed parks, roads and settlements of varying sizes while leaving areas of woodland here and there.

During the 18th century, those with extensive estates developed a passion for large scale landscape improvement. This work was often guided by Lancelot "Capability" Brown who lived from 1716 to 1783. He is remembered for his involvement in over 170 parks across the country, many of which still survive. An astute project manager, he was nicknamed "Capability" because he would convince his clients that their estate had capability for improvement.

Brown had an effective team of contractors who were able to implement his recommendations, many requiring reconfiguration of lakes and substantial plantings of trees. Brown's skill was to reshape these parks and gardens from formal geometric plots (which had previously been in fashion) into more natural pastoral scenes, creating the vision of the English countryside we know today.

Brown's commissions included the wonderful grounds at Audley End House. He was also involved at Hatfield Forest, pictured on the right, and is believed to have contributed to the landscaping of the estates at Newsells in Barkway, Shortgrove in Newport, Pishiobury in Sawbridgeworth and Youngsbury in Thundridge. Hundred Parishes walks go through or beside each of these estates. The view below on the left shows the obelisk at Newsells and can be seen on Walk 131. On the right, the view across the Cam valley towards Shortgrove can be seen on Station Walk number 6.



The photo below on the left was taken on Walk 178 as it passes through the Youngsbury estate in Thundridge; the path on the right goes through Pishiobury in Sawbridgeworth on Station Walk number 7.



Following the death of Capability Brown, the leading landscape architect was Humphry Repton who lived from 1752 to 1818. For many years, Repton lived near Romford in southwest Essex. While Brown had provided a complete service encompassing design and construction, Repton limited his role to consultancy.

Within the Hundred Parishes, Repton is believed to have contributed to landscaping at Spains Hall in Finchingfield, Hallingbury Place in Great Hallingbury, Saling Grove in Great Saling, Down Hall in Hatfield Heath, Wyddial Hall in Wyddial and Stansted Hall in Stansted Mountfitchet.



The photo on the right was taken on Station Walk 2 as it passes through the Stansted Hall estate.

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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.