



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

DUXFORD



Location: 7 miles Northwest of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4745.

Postcode: CB22 4XT. **County:** Cambridgeshire. **District:** South Cambs. **Rail:** Whittlesford Parkway Station on Cambridge – London Liverpool Street line; A505; **Buses:** 7 (daily, frequent) between Saffron Walden & Cambridge; 7A (Mon to Fri) to Whittlesford Station; 101 (Tues) to S Walden; 132 (Sun) to Cambridge. **Population:** 1,836 in 2001, 2,099 in 2011, 2,200 in 2021.

Duxford is most widely known for its aircraft museum and air displays, but the parish also has an interesting and attractive village with the unusual distinction of two 12th-century parish churches, each of which is Grade I-listed. Hundred Parishes walk number 129 explores the village.

The parish appears in the 1086 Domesday Book as Duchesuuorde, meaning Ducc's Enclosure. Although apparently not named after a river crossing, Duxford village is on the west side of the River Cam and has a number of places where travellers on the ancient Icknield Way could have forded the river. Archaeological finds have demonstrated man's presence for several thousand years, including an Iron Age settlement and Roman encampment on Pepperton Hill, which has commanding views, especially to the north, to the more low-lying parts of the parish and beyond.

The basic layout of the village is thought to be from Saxon times, with two parallel roads that were strands of the Icknield Way leading to separate river crossings. Although these routes were only about 300 yards apart, they evolved into separate communities, each with a lord of the manor and a Norman church. St John's Church, in the north, closed in 1874 when the benefices were united and its bells were transferred to St Peter's. St John's is now cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust which carried out repair work that revealed wall paintings from as long ago as the 12th century.



The photo above shows the village green with St John's in the distance. St John's is pictured again on the left.

The parish is rich in listed buildings, including many on the airfield, although the majority are around the conservation area in the centre of the village.

Duxford is also rich in hospitality. Each of its public houses is thatched and listed: The John Barleycorn dates from the 16th century and The Plough from early 18th.

Duxford's older properties include Old Lacey's, shown on the left below, and pink-painted Robynet House, probably both dating from the 16th century.



College Farmhouse, pictured on the right, is older still. It stands next to St John's Church and is believed to have started life around 1500 AD as a guildhall.

It was converted to a farmhouse around 1560 and probably acquired its name during the two centuries that it was owned by Caius College, Cambridge. College Farmhouse reverted to private ownership in 1825.



Duxford's war memorial stands on a small green opposite the parish church, St Peter's. Close by, there is yet another place to eat, Graystone's Café.

Also close to St Peter's, there is another open space, The Biggen, a small area of woodland beside the River Cam. It is popular with younger children who enjoy outdoor classes here. The Biggen is a former medieval moated site, protected as a Scheduled Monument, and with its own interpretation panel.

Duxford Chapel is another well-known heritage building. A hospital was established here in the 13th century beside the wooden Whittlesford Bridge that then spanned the River Cam. In 1961, the A505 road was opened, by-passing the old road. Fifty years later, in 2010, a boundary change shifted the parish boundary away from its original alignment with the old road to now line up with the new road.

As a consequence, Duxford Chapel, pictured here, was re-assigned to Whittlesford parish, outside the Hundred Parishes! English Heritage cares for the simple 14th-century “Chapel of the Hospital of St John the Baptist”, still better known as Duxford Chapel. It is located close to Whittlesford Parkway Station, the nearest railway station to Duxford village.



Duxford's airfield lies beside the A505, about one mile to the west of the village. It was built towards the end of the First World War, many of its buildings being constructed by German prisoners of war. Those WWI buildings include the 1917 hangar, pictured below.



In 1938, as the Second World War approached, Duxford was the first airfield to take delivery of the British-built Spitfire fighter planes that were to play a major part in the airfield's activities and for the RAF generally during the war.



The airfield offices, shown here, were built in 1942. The hangar and offices are amongst 14 listed buildings on the airfield.

RAF Duxford played an important role during WWII, and was one of thirteen wartime airfields within the Hundred Parishes. From 1943 to 1945 it was assigned to the American Air Force.

One of the squadrons based here in 1940, including the period known as the Battle of Britain, was commanded by Douglas Bader, an ace pilot. He was famous for the fact that he shot down many enemy aircraft despite having lost both legs in an air acrobatics accident some years beforehand. His story was told in the 1956 film *Reach for the Sky*.

Shortly before the war, Frank Whittle flew regularly from Duxford whilst studying at Cambridge and developing his ideas which culminated in the invention of the turbojet engine. This was adopted late in the war and dramatically re-defined the design of military and, later, civil aircraft.

After the war, Duxford reverted to the RAF until its closure as a military base in 1961. Its runway was shortened in 1977 to make way for the M11 motorway. Today, the airfield is the home of Imperial War Museum Duxford and the American Air Museum, with over 200 aircraft included within their displays.



Despite its fine heritage, the parish is certainly not stuck in the past. The parish rejoices in two recent major projects: a Community Centre and Brewery Field, a wildlife haven and recreation area. The Community Centre, shown below, includes a café, open every day except Monday, changing rooms for the adjacent sports field and two general-purpose halls.



Duxford attractions:

Imperial War Museum, Royston Rd, A505 – 01223 835000 - www.iwm.org.uk/visits/iwm-duxford
Duxford Chapel, Station Road - <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/duxford-chapel/history/>

Hospitality:

The Lodge Hotel, Ickleton Road, CB22 4RT – 01223 755677 – www.thelodgeduxford.com
John Barleycorn pub, Moorfield Road, CB22 4BP – 01223 832699 - www.johnbarleycorn.co.uk
Plough pub, 57 St Peter's Street, CB22 4RP – 01223 833170 - <http://theduxfordplough.co.uk>
Graystones Café, 4 St Peter's Street, CB22 4RP – 01223 836200
Cafe19 in the Community Centre, Hunts Road, CB22 4RE – 07519 846144 – www.cafe19.co.uk

Hundred Parishes walks include the following:

Number 14: from Great Chesterford to Whittlesford stations (5 miles) passes through Duxford.
Number 129: a 1.8 mile stroll entirely within Duxford village.

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: Chrishall, Hinxton, Ickleton.

Links:

Parish Council: <https://duxfordparishcouncil.gov.uk/>
Duxford Community Centre: <https://www.duxfordcommunitycentre.co.uk/>
Duxford History Society: <https://www.duxfordhistorysociety.org/>
Friends of Duxford Green Spaces: <https://friendsofduxfordgreenspaces.org/>
Brewery Field Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Duxfordgreen>
British History Online: www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=66724
1939 film: <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/duxford-squadrons-of-planes-take-off/query/Duxford>