



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

EASTWICK & GILSTON



Location: 2 miles north of Harlow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4311.

Postcode: CM20 2QT. **Access:** north off A414. **Rail:** 1 mile from Harlow Town station.

Bus 347 Tues & Thurs only – single bus each way to/from Sawbridgeworth & Harlow.

County: Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts. **Population:** 350 in 2001, 422 in 2011, 960 in 2021.

Eastwick and Gilston are adjacent Hertfordshire villages whose fortune has been shared for around 400 years. In 1637 Sir John Gore bought Eastwick and added it to his Gilston estate. Two hundred years later, the villages were purchased by a wealthy shipbroker, John Hodgson, who instigated major changes. In 1917 the two churches were entrusted to the same rector and in 1955 the two villages were formally united as a single administrative parish.

Records for Eastwick are earlier than those for Gilston. It appears in the Domesday Book of 1086 AD, but there are signs of an early settlement, perhaps going back a thousand years, on a hilltop just outside modern-day Eastwick. The area is fenced off in the hope that someone will one day conduct a thorough archaeological survey.

In the 1850s John Hodgson set about modernising the estate and very few buildings pre-date this purge. One that does is Gilston's pub, the Plume of Feathers, probably 17th century despite the "1350" inscribed on its northeast gable. Before the arrival of John Hodgson, it was called the Plumer-Ward's Arms after his predecessor at Gilston Park, Robert Plumer-Ward.



Following John's death in 1882, the work of modernising was continued by his brother William. They built solid homes which still stand, displaying the date of construction and the initials of one of the brothers, either IH (not JH) or WH. Two examples, shown below, are the almshouses in Eastwick and the pub opposite (built as a farmhouse in 1852).



The Hodgson brothers are buried in Eastwick churchyard. John paid for the church to be rebuilt in the 1870s, although it retains the tower and chancel arch from the 13th century.



Gilston church, left, escaped modernisation but is greatly altered from the 13th century, with a Tudor tower and Victorian "Hertfordshire spike". It is not surprising that it has a Grade I listing, but that recognition has also been bestowed upon this small memorial in the churchyard. Erected in 1923, the Johnston family monument is described in the official listing as "an outstanding monumental group with distinctive relief figure-carving and fine lettercutting".



John Hodgson built himself an imposing Tudor-style country house in Gilston Park, somewhat reminiscent of a Scottish castle. In the 20th century, the multinational pharmaceutical group Smith & Nephew acquired the house and the park. They established a major research centre there, retaining the mansion's grand Victorian interiors. More recently, the house was converted into 14 apartments.



From his home, John Hodgson looked out over open countryside in all directions. Today he would be able to see the high-rise buildings of Harlow, two miles to the south, across the county boundary in Essex. He might perceive them as the watchtowers of an army amassing its forces on the southern shore of the Stort, threatening to cross the river and change his view beyond recognition. Proposals to expand Harlow to the north have been around for a while. In 2006 the Stop Harlow North campaign group responded to the urbanisation proposals by promoting an alternative long-term vision, the creation of a Gilston Great Park on the northern slopes of the Stort Valley, an area of 10 square miles including Eastwick and Gilston. Evolving local development plans include massive urbanisation but not the country park.

Many of the parish's current features can be seen on Hundred Parishes walk number 10. Much of the historical information for this introduction has come from the parish website, which also includes walks (see below for further details).

Hospitality:

The Plume of Feathers, Gilston - 01279 424154 - <http://www.theplumeoffeathersgilston.co.uk/>

The Dusty Miller, Burnt Mill Lane, CM20 2QS – 01279 424180 – www.thedustymiller.co.uk

The Lion, Eastwick, CM20 2QY – 01279 434388 - <https://www.mcmullens.co.uk/lion>

Hundred Parishes walks:

Station Walk number 10 is a 6 mile circular route from Harlow Town Station, mostly in Eastwick and Gilston parish.

Adjacent parishes: Hunsdon, Widford, High Wych,

Links:

Parish Council, including history and walks: www.eastwickandgilston.org.uk

Eastwick church history: <https://www.stjameshighwych.org.uk/2-uncategorised/20-st-botolph>

Gilston church history: <https://www.stjameshighwych.org.uk/2-uncategorised/19-st-mary>

Gilston Park Estate – proposed new town: <https://gilstonparkestate.com/>