



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

FELSTED



Location: 3 miles southeast of Great Dunmow, 6 miles west of Braintree.

Ordnance Survey grid square: TL6720. **Postcode:** CM6 3DQ. **County:** Essex

District: Uttlesford **Access:** B1417 off A 120. National Cycle Route 16 (Flitch Way).

Buses: 133 (each day) between Stansted Airport, Great Dunmow and Braintree; 16 (Mon – Sat) between Chelmsford and Wethersfield.

Population: 2,843 in 2001, 3,051 in 2011, 3,200 in 2021.

Felsted is a delightful Essex village, roughly equidistant from Braintree and Great Dunmow. However, the village is just part of a large parish, also called Felsted. The most obvious delineators of the parish boundary are the old A120 (now B1256) in the north and the River Chelmer in the southwest as it makes its way south and east towards Chelmsford.

The parish embraces not just Felsted village but also numerous small hamlets, most of which take the name Green, as in Bannister Green, Bartholomew Green, Cobblers Green, Cock Green, Crix Green, Frenches Green, Gransmore Green, Molehill Green, Priors Green, Pyes Green, Thistley Green, Watch House Green and Willows Green, not forgetting two Ends: Causeway End and Hartford End. The Hundred Parishes area as a whole is particularly rich in Greens and Ends.

Felsted village itself is medieval in origin although excavations for both the old and new A120 (roads which follow the Roman Stane Street between Braughing in the West and Colchester to the East) have uncovered Bronze Age and Iron Age sites. The name Felsted, deriving from fell (hill) + stede (place) seems something of a misnomer, since Felsted, like most of Essex, has no dramatic gradients. Nevertheless, its typically gentle East Anglian inclines are sufficient to break up the skyline and please the eye with a diverse canvas.

History is all around in Felsted and the community has clearly endeavoured to convey to the visitor the richness of its heritage. It doesn't matter if you have left the history book at home, for at every point of interest throughout the village there is a well-kept interpretation board offering glimpses of times gone by. Incorporated into the boards are photos, records, references, reminiscences, many of which have been retained in hand-written form. This community wants you to know about its past. For the casual visitor it is all you need to garner a compelling, albeit rudimentary, mind-map of Felsted across the centuries. And for the serious historian, there is much to guide your further research.

On entering the village for the first time, it is immediately evident that Felsted revolves around education. It has three large schools which, for a village of fewer than 3,000 inhabitants, seems to the uninitiated rather excessive. But this is just the beginning of the history lesson.



The origins of Felsted School (two schools in fact – preparatory and senior) can be traced back to the mid-16th century. They were founded in 1564 by Baron Rich of Leeze, formerly Sir Richard Rich and one time Lord Chancellor under King Edward VI. Since then, Felsted has gone through many transformations, restorations and additions and school properties dominate the village, but the original building, Grade I-listed and shown here, is still in use as the prep school music department. Notable alumni (not least the sons of Oliver Cromwell) have excelled in the arts, medicine and sport – particularly cricket.



The parish church stands immediately behind the original school building. The flint-rubble church is a Grade I listed building, its oldest part being the Norman tower, built around 1120 AD. Major restorations were carried out during the 1870s and in the early 1900s.

The Church of The Holy Cross has an attractive clock face: rhombus-shaped and with traditional gold lettering on a blue background.



Inside the church, Lord Rich's tomb, complete with his effigy, occupies an enclosed chapel, and is regarded as one of the finest sepulchral monuments in England.

Whilst Rich has a grand monument and founded Felsted School, he is generally regarded by historians as a nasty piece of work. He was closely involved in torture and in the ruination or death of some of the leading men of his day, including Sir Thomas More.

Baron Rich also founded the almshouses, shown here.

Rich served Henry VIII as Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations, dealing with the revenues from the dissolution of the monasteries. That role enabled him to acquire Leez Priory which he rebuilt and extended as his own home.



Today, Leez Priory is smaller than in Rich's day, but it is still a splendid set of Grade I-listed buildings, regularly used as a wedding venue. It straddles the boundary between Felsted and the parish of Great and Little Leighs, outside the Hundred Parishes.

Shown on the right is the Inner Gate House, one of two Grade I listings within Leez Priory on the Felsted side of the parish boundary.



Back in Felsted village, around 50 listed buildings are clustered around the centre. Most are pre-18th century and many medieval; seven are listed at Grade I or II* ("2 star"). A stroll along the main thoroughfare will introduce you to many of these.

The various school buildings are set in over 80 acres of attractive, private green space. The Pavilion, shown on the right, was renovated in the 1930s to form part of the school complex. The building pre-dates the school, having started life as a house in the late 15th or early 16th century.



Unofficially 'listed' by Felsted residents, is the elephant in the front garden of The Folly. The house itself dates from the 15th century; the elephant is somewhat younger.

Felsted has a well-stocked village store and a choice of venues for those seeking refreshment.

The listed buildings in Felsted village represent only part of the total heritage of the whole parish, with another 140 dispersed around the various hamlets or in isolated locations.



There are plenty of opportunities to explore beyond the immediate environs of the village with more than 40 miles of public rights of way and a network of minor roads, many designated as Quiet Lanes. These paths and lanes lead to some of Felsted's lesser-known heritage.

The two houses immediately below can be seen at Molehill Green, towards the East of the parish. Hatleys (on the left) and Pyes Farm Cottage each date from the 17th century or earlier.



Towards the South of the parish, Glandfields, on the left below, dates from the 16th century or earlier, while red-brick Hartford End Mill dates from around 1800 AD. The mill straddles the River Chelmer, which here defines the parish boundary, so the left portion is in the adjacent parish of Great Waltham.



A more accessible mill stands a little southwest of Felsted village, also beside the Chelmer. A public footpath (on Hundred Parishes Walk number 102) crosses the river right beside Felsted Mill which is now a private residence.

Below is 16th or 17th-century Breadlands in Cock Green.



17th-century Cromwell House, pictured on the right, can be found in Willows Green.

The Flitch Way is a 15-mile trail between Braintree and Bishop's Stortford that uses the track of the old railway line that once linked the two towns. Around 2 miles of the trail run through Felsted parish. Here, it passes the former Bannister Green Halt.



We will complete this introduction with a look back to the start of the 20th century and a less hurried way of life at the road junction in the centre of Felsted. [This image may not print clearly]



The school building and church seem little changed from today apart from a lick of paint. A hanging sign is just visible to indicate that The Swan Inn on the left has borne that name and served that purpose for a long time. The building on the right is Boote House, "made" in 1596 by George Boote according to the inscription boldly carved onto an external bressumer beam. In recent times, Boote House served as a popular Chinese restaurant.

Around 1900, nobody had yet felt the need to paint yellow lines on the road, to instal a lamppost or keep-left bollard, or point the way towards Parking. The children and sheep appear to have no urgent appointments.

USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT FELSTED

Hospitality

Swan Inn, Station Road, CM6 3DG; 01371 820003; <https://www.the-swan-inn.co.uk/>
B&B: Laurels, Chelmsford Road, CM6 3EU; 0791 864 2463; <https://www.laurels-bnb.com/>
Chequers, Braintree Road, CM6 3DL; 01371 820226
Razza Restaurant, Braintree Road, CM6 3DL; 01371 821414; <https://razzarestaurant.co.uk/>
Wood Cottage Tea Room 01371 820996 - <https://www.facebook.com/WoodCottagePastries?fref=ts>

Hundred Parishes Society walks include a 7.5 miles circular countryside walk, number 102, which passes through Felsted village. The route can be joined in Felsted from the top of page 3.

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: Little Dunmow, Stebbing, Great Saling, Great Waltham.

Links

Parish Council: <https://www.felsted-pc.gov.uk/>
Holy Cross Church: <https://www.felstedchurch.org.uk/>
The Recorders of Uttlesford History: <http://www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/felsted-old/felsted01.html>
Saffron Trail, stage 3, which passes through Felsted:
<https://www.visitessex.com/routes/saffron-trail-stage-3-great-dunmow-to-great-waltham-p1575011>

Further reading:

A Guide to the Parish Church of Felsted in Essex. Michael Craze/Robert Stone. Available from Holy Cross Church
A History of Felsted. John Drury. 1999. ISBN 0953615405
Felsted: History and Houses. Andrew Telfer. Bury Press. 1999
The two latter publications are available from local libraries.

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