



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

GREAT CANFIELD



Location: 4 miles southwest of Great Dunmow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5918.
Postcode: CM6 1JS. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Access:** west off B184. Regional Cycle Route 50. **Bus:** No regular buses serve Great Canfield.
Population: 364 in 2001, 414 in 2011, 470 in 2021.

Great Canfield is a rural parish with no significant centre of population, its hamlets being scattered about the parish. It has no classified roads except 500 metres of Roman road, now the B184, which defines its most easterly boundary. The attractive winding lane that runs through the parish, from Takeley in the northwest to High Roding in the southeast, is part of Regional Cycle Route number 50. It passes through several of Great Canfield's hamlets: Hope End Green, Puttock's End, Green Street, Hellman's Cross and Great Canfield itself, pictured here. Another lane from Great Canfield links with the other hamlets of Bacon End and Baconend Green.



Canfield appeared in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Canefeldæ*. This meant a field of canes or reeds and was probably associated with the River Roding which defines the parish's southeast boundary. Canfield's lord in 1086 was Aubrey de Vere, a man who held many estates throughout East Anglia. The de Vere family (later the Earls of Oxford) continued as lords of the manor of Great Canfield for five centuries. It is likely that de Vere built Great Canfield's motte and bailey castle around 1200 AD. A motte was a conical-shaped mound of earth or rubble, on top of which stood a timber or stone tower surrounded by a wooden palisade. Some motte castles, such as the one here, also had a bailey – an adjoining embanked enclosure with additional buildings. Any buildings disappeared long ago and the mound is thickly wooded and rather hidden, but the Mount, as it is now called, still stands around 50 feet tall and is a fine example of this type of Norman fortification, being largely undisturbed and protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.



The Mount stands behind Great Canfield's parish church which is mostly Norman from the early 12th century, with 15th-century additions. It has a smattering of recycled Roman bricks, carvings from Norse mythology in the porch, fine richly-carved Norman columns, archways and doorways and a noted 13th-century wall painting of the Virgin and Child.



For many years the church clock has had only an hour hand. Like many of our churches, it is usually kept locked, but there is a gallery of photos on the parish website – see the link below.

The church of St Mary is listed as Grade I. The parish is particularly rich in historic buildings, with a total of 67 that are listed. Of these, no fewer than 50 date from before 1700 AD, most originating as farmhouses, farm cottages or barns. Great Canfield is a thriving agricultural area. Whilst very few people are now engaged in farming and most residents work outside the parish, almost every house sits adjacent to farmland – a reflection of the fact that when the house was built it would have been for people who worked on the land. These photos show two attractive thatched cottages in Bacon End and Green Street.



Hellman's Cross was where punishments were carried out. A roadside notice records the spot where Elizabeth Abbot from nearby Helmans was burnt as a witch in 1683. The stocks here were last used in 1860 for a case of drunkenness but in 2000 AD the parish council replaced them and refurbished the whipping post. Are they expecting trouble? Drunkenness is perhaps not so likely today as there is no longer a public house.



Like most rural communities, Great Canfield gradually lost many of its amenities over the last century. It has no shop, school or pub, but there is a village hall and an active cricket club, whilst some more unusual equestrian pastimes are catered for at Ashfields Carriage and Polo Club.

A thriving community spirit is evident from the most informative parish website – see the link below. The website includes descriptions of a number of local walks and a copy of the Village Design Statement which incorporates a thorough summary of Great Canfield's history as well as the parish's aims for the future. The main aim is to retain its tranquil rural character.

Accommodation:

Bullocks Field Barns, CM22 6TA – 07956 428508 - <https://www.bullocks-farm.com/holiday-cottages>

Bury Farm Cottages, CM6 1JS – 01371 873403 - www.buryfarmcottages.co.uk/

Little Bullocks Farm B&B, CM22 6TA – 01279 870464 –

<https://little-bullocks-farm-guest-house-bishop-s-stortford.hotelmix.co.uk/>

Hundred Parishes Society walks include circular walk number 127, covering 4.7 miles through High Roding and Great Canfield parishes. The route may be downloaded from this website and can be joined at Great Canfield church on page 3.

Adjacent parishes: Hatfield Broad Oak, Takeley, Little Canfield, Great Dunmow, High Roding.

Links:

Parish Council: www.greatcanfield.org.uk

Design Statement: <https://www.greatcanfield.org.uk/village-design-statement.html>

Great Canfield conservation area appraisal: link from www.uttlesford.gov.uk/caa

Ashfields Carriage and Polo Club - www.ashfieldscarriageandpoloclub.com/

Further reading:

At the Courts of Great Canfield, George Eland, 1949, published by Oxford University Press.

A Hermit Disclosed, Raleigh Trevelyan, 1985, published by Xanadu Publications Ltd.

This page, last updated 31 October 2023, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk.