



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## HADSTOCK



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**Location:** 5 miles north of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5544.  
**Postcode:** CB21 4PH. **Access:** on B1052, south off A1307. **Bus:** None through the village.  
**County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** 320 in 2001, 332 in 2011, 320 in 2021.

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Hadstock is a relatively small parish and has never had a wealthy resident or squire, yet the past has handed down evidence of a variety of interesting historical events. The population peaked at 575 in 1851 before declining during the agricultural depression. Hadstock has avoided any significant development and today is home to around 300 people, of whom very few work on the land. Hadstock's Anglo-Saxon church, dedicated to St Botolph and pictured below, holds the key to the parish's ancient history.



It was built in the first half of the 11th century, before the Norman Conquest. Its northern door is believed to be the oldest door still in regular use in England, having been dated to the middle of the 11th century. It is made of oak planks with iron straps outside, riveted through to wooden bars on the inside.

The inside of the door is shown immediately on the right and the outside of the door on the extreme right.



Standing behind the church is Hadstock village hall, pictured on the right. It was built in the Victorian era as the village school and has recently been refurbished. It is used regularly by several village organisations including yoga and dance clubs and the Hadstock Silver Band.



The Domesday Book of 1086 recorded that Hadstock, with 27 households, came under the control of the Abbey of Ely, now Ely Cathedral. The monks may have believed that either St Botolph, the patron saint of travellers, was buried here or that some of his relics had been held here for some time. Botolph was a 7th-century Benedictine monk who founded a monastery at a place called Icanho in 654 AD and was buried there after his death in 680 AD. There is some circumstantial evidence that Hadstock church may have been the minster church built by King Canute to commemorate those who died at the decisive victory of his Danish army over the English in 1016 at the Battle of Assandun, which may have taken place here or in adjacent Ashdon.

A thousand years after the Battle of Assandun, the occasion was celebrated by a team of ladies from Hadstock whose needlework skills produced the four "Hadstock Millennium Banners" which were completed in 2016. One is pictured on the right. The banners are a mixture of embroidered stitches and 'scraps' of materials, in the style of the Bayeux Tapestry which depicted the invasion of England 50 years after Assandun. The banners are on display in the church.



It must be said that there are other claims for the locations of Icanho, Assandun and the minster. The Hadstock theories led to two major excavations, inside the church in 1974 and outside in 2005. The 1974 investigation found Roman and Saxon pottery fragments beneath the many layers of flooring and also a large empty grave. It was established that the church's structure had been altered several times during its thousand years and the northern doorway with its Anglo-Saxon door had been reconstructed during the early Middle Ages. The 2005 dig, organised by the Hadstock Society, found evidence of Roman farming. Neither investigation was able to confirm the theories about Icanho or Assandun, but they left both possibilities open.

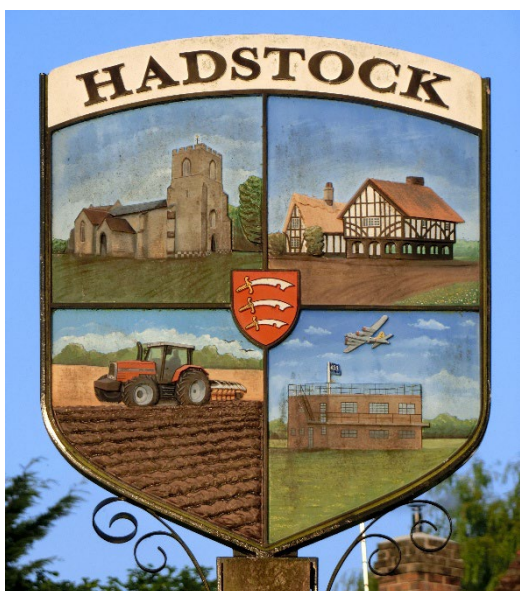


St Botolph's is listed as Grade I. Hadstock has 37 further listed buildings, mostly in the centre of the village which has been designated as a conservation area since the 1970s.

The photo on the left was taken from the churchyard. It shows 16th or 17th - century Beam Ends and the countryside beyond, looking north towards Linton.

On the right is Kings Cottage which stands at Hadstock's only real road junction, where the B1052 heads off to the right toward Linton or to the left toward Saffron Walden. The photo was taken from the small village green, beside the lane which leads to Hadstock's main residential area and on to Bartlow.

Kings Cottage dates from the 15th century and was once a shop. The village sign is shown in more detail below.



Most of the parish is on higher ground than Hadstock village itself. In particular, the land rises in the south to a plateau where the parish shares boundaries with Great Chesterford, Saffron Walden and Ashdon. This plateau was converted to an airfield in World War II. Known as RAF Little Walden, it was one of twelve wartime airfields in the Hundred Parishes area. It was an important bomber and fighter base for the United States Army Air Forces from 1944 to 1945 and then used by the RAF to store surplus military vehicles. It was decommissioned in 1958 and returned to agricultural use. An original T2 hangar survives and is used for industrial purposes.

The airfield's 1942 control tower features at the bottom right of the village sign. It is a listed building because it is one of only a few that have survived largely intact, albeit that it has now been converted into a private residence.



Part of the airfield, an unimproved area of boulder clay grassland, is cared for by the Essex Wildlife Trust as the Harrison Sayer Nature Reserve, named after its previous, now-deceased, owner.

The reserve retains two circular brick structures that once protected fuel storage tanks. One is shown on the left. The nature reserve is more than 100 metres above sea level and offers extensive views over southern Cambridgeshire.

Part of one of the three wartime runways now forms a section of the B1052 road to Saffron Walden, while another old runway provides a firm surface for a stretch of the long-distance Icknield Way Path that crosses the parish and passes through Hadstock village.

A separate branch of the Icknield Way defines Hadstock's western boundary, while the northern parish boundary follows the line of the old railway that ran between Cambridge and Haverhill from 1865 to 1967. Hadstock is just inside the county of Essex, its northern and western boundaries constituting the county boundary between Essex and Cambridgeshire.

Other interesting buildings around the parish include those pictured below. Dormer Thatch, on the left, dates from the 17th century and has been renovated with brick nogging between the exposed timber framing. On the right is 18th-century Roundhill Cottage.



Great Bowsers, shown below, is close to Hadstock's southern boundary and can be seen from Hundred Parishes walk number 150 which is entirely within the adjacent parish of Ashdon.



Like so many of the Hundred Parishes, Hadstock is steeped in history and well worth a more detailed look, if possible off the beaten track on one of the many footpaths.

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## MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HADSTOCK

**Hospitality:** There is nowhere to eat or drink in Hadstock.

**Hundred Parishes Society walks** include . . .

Circular walk 109 which covers 6.3 miles from Hadstock to Linton and back.

**Adjacent parishes:** Ashdon, Saffron Walden, Great Chesterford, Linton.

**Further reading:** Two booklets, possibly available in the church:

*Under Hadstock Church.*

*The Story of the Assandun Millennium Banners at Hadstock.*

**Links:**

Parish Council including community archive established by the Hadstock Society:

<https://www.hadstock.org.uk/>

RAF Little Walden: [https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/RAF\\_Little\\_Walden](https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/RAF_Little_Walden)