



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

LANGLEY



Location: 7 miles southwest of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4435.
Postcode: CB11 4RU. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Access:** well off main roads.
Bus: 306 – Once a day, school bus Mon to Fri to and from Bishop's Stortford.
Population: 334 in 2001, 355 in 2011, 380 in 2021.



The parish of Langley is formed of two main parts, Langley Upper Green & Langley Lower Green, with some outlying settlements. It is one of the most northwesterly outposts of the county of Essex, adjoining both Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. This photo was taken on the southern boundary, coming north from Meesden in Hertfordshire.

The northern parish boundary with Chrishall passes through the highest point in Essex, 147 metres (482 feet) above sea level. This high point is also on the Harcamlow Way long-distance path, one of several good public rights of way that criss-cross the parish through quiet countryside. Langley is no stranger to long-distance routes, for the distinctive straight line of the Roman road between Great Chesterford and Braughing is clearly visible, some of it still used as a byway that also defines the eastern parish boundary with Clavering.

The name Langley occurs in many parts of England and probably originates from the Anglo-Saxon for *long clearing in the woodland*. Langley Upper Green is on high ground and Lower Green is in the valley where the River Stort begins. Each part of the village is a linear settlement with extensive areas of common land fronting most properties. The common land offered grazing to commoners and also to drovers taking their livestock to London in earlier times. This common land is now managed in different ways: some is mown, some managed for wild flowers, some for hay and other areas left naturally rough.

The village green at Langley Upper Green hosts the annual village fete on August Bank Holiday Monday and at other times is used by the village cricket club whose field of play includes the road that passes through it. The Langley Community Centre, pictured on the right, overlooks the green.



The row of thatched cottages on the right can be seen a little further south, also in Langley Upper Green.



The approaches to Langley, and through the village itself, offer views over undulating agricultural land. From the parish church in Langley Upper Green there are especially long views into Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, including the site of the World War II airfield one mile to the west in Nuthampstead. From this vantage point it is just possible to imagine how the land to the south and southwest, either side of the lane up from the Bull pub, was once farmed. Older maps show large common fields, up to 110 acres, divided into many strips of perhaps one or two acres each with narrow paths in between. These open or common fields evolved over centuries, probably starting from forest clearances in Saxon times. They were farmed like this for hundreds of years until the middle of the 19th century when this area was enclosed by the landowners, terminating the traditional practice whereby small farmers had shared the use of open fields and common land, and henceforth reserving that right for the landowner. Enclosure came relatively late to Langley, following the passing of the Enclosure Act 1773.



The soil in Langley is mainly chalky boulder clay (also known as glacial till) which is valuable agricultural land suitable for cereals. The chalk-influenced soils give rise to a wide variety of wildlife. There are two notable rare species that have been found in the village: crested cow wheat and the scarlet malachite beetle, the latter pictured here in a photo by Ted Ponting.

The parish is small in terms of population and so has limited amenities: playground, cricket club and a community centre on Upper Green and The Bull at Lower Green.



There are two churches: parish, shown on the left, and Baptist, dating from 1827 and pictured below.



The small parish church dedicated to St John the Evangelist and pictured on the previous page has 12th-century origins including its Norman porch, a 14th-century tower and noteworthy double hammerbeam roof from the 15th century.

It also has an unusually clear stained glass window, shown on the right. It depicts the royal coat of arms in the 17th century of the Stuart monarchs.

A third church (Methodist) closed in recent years, along with the school, shop and even a telephone box. Interestingly, three telephone exchange lines terminate in the parish, literally "the end of the line". The village does have electricity, although it came only in 1950.



The opening hours of the parish's only pub, The Bull at Langley Lower Green, are not regular, so it is advisable to phone before relying on it for sustenance (details below).

If you should become desperate, please heed the ancient sign on the cottage opposite the pub. The Magistrates give notice that *all persons found begging in this parish will be taken up by the Vagrant Act and punished* - presumably a reference to the Vagrancy Act of 1824.

As with so many of the Hundred Parishes, a high proportion of Langley's attractive properties are listed as being of special architectural and historic interest.

They include Langley Hall, beside the parish church, dating from the 17th century and shown on the right. There has been a manor house on this site since the Middle Ages.

Some of Langley's other listed houses are shown below.





It is not far to road and rail connections to London and Cambridge, so Langley is not as remote as it may seem, at least for someone with a car or cycle. Once here, it is possible to walk or ride for miles on quiet lanes, public rights of way and permissive routes over agricultural land with good hedgerows and woodland, often without meeting another person.

However, you might have the good fortune to see a herd of fallow deer or a solitary muntjac deer, even a fox, or signs of a badger, while buzzards and red kites are now almost common.

If you get to Langley Lower Green, you may be assisted by two detailed signs that were manufactured at Maldon Iron Works in Essex almost a century ago. Here is one.



MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LANGLEY

Hospitality:

The Bull, Langley Lower Green, CB11 4SB - 01279 777307 - <https://www.thebullpub.co.uk/>.

Hundred Parishes Society walks are free to download and print. They include 5 circular walks that can be joined in Langley . . .

Walk 123 – 8 miles of footpaths and lanes, starting from Chrishall church.

Quiet Lane walks 305 (10 miles), 306 (10 miles), 312 (5 miles) and 337 (12 miles) all avoid busy roads and footpaths.

Adjacent parishes: Meesden, Nuthampstead, Barley, Great & Little Chishill, Chrishall, Elmdon & Wenden Lofts, Clavering.

Links:

Parish Council: <https://www.langleypc.org.uk/>

History: www.recordingtuttlesfordhistory.org.uk/langley/langleyhomepage.html

Further reading:

Clavering and Langley, the first thousand years, E.M. Ludgate.

Clavering and Langley, 1783-1983, E.M. Ludgate.

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