



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

LITTLE CHESTERFORD



Location: 3 miles northwest of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5141.
Postcode: CB10 1TS. **Access:** 1 mile from Great Chesterford station on London Liverpool Street to Cambridge line. B1383, B184. **Buses:** 7 (regular, each day) between Saffron Walden and Cambridge; 132 Sunday to S Walden & Cambridge; 101 Tuesday to S Walden.
County: Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** 205 in 2001, 215 in 2011, 210 in 2021.

The Domesday Book of 1086 identifies Little Chesterford quite separately from its larger neighbour, Great Chesterford, and the two parishes have remained independent. Little Chesterford has an active parish church and a village hall which previously served as the village school from 1862 until the beginning of the 20th century.

Little Chesterford village sits beside the River Cam (also known as the River Granta) between two roads that run South-North, the B1383 and B184. The parish also includes a small hamlet at Springwell, a little further south, and on the high ground a mile west of the village a substantial research park has been developed around a 19th-century mansion within Chesterford Park.

The parish church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, dates from the 13th century. It is unusual in having the nave and chancel under a single roof without a division.



Beside the church stands The Manor which also dates from the 13th century and may pre-date the church. It is a private house, listed as Grade I, and is one of the oldest surviving domestic buildings in Essex. Alterations were made in the 14th and 16th centuries, but much of the original roof structure remains, as do elements of 13th-century windows.

The parish has several more listed buildings, dating from the 16th to the 18th centuries. These include the red-brick bridge over the Cam, built in 1791, and the Old Cottage, pictured below, which dates from 1590.



The narrow lane through the village is known as the High Street. Many of the 20th-century dwellings here were built following a disastrous fire in 1914 that leapt from thatch to thatch and destroyed two public houses and nine homes.

The number of residents has changed little since the Domesday survey, increasing from perhaps 100 then to 200 now after a thousand years. Perhaps this is what is meant by “sustainable development”.

Meanwhile, Chesterford Park in the east of the parish has grown to become a major employment centre. The Park is almost in another world, totally segregated and hardly visible from anywhere else in the parish. It is not open to the public but has an interesting history.

In the 16th century this extensive area of parkland, farm and woodland became part of the vast estate of Sir Thomas Audley, Chancellor to Henry VIII. Ownership passed down through his descendants until the 19th century and thereafter it changed hands quite often. The current mansion within the park was built in 1856 and since then it has been steadily extended.

The park itself has often been used for sporting purposes – a golf course was built by one owner in the 1870s and a racehorse training ground by another around the end of the 19th century. Lord Inchcape, best known as chairman of the P&O shipping line, owned the house for a few years before selling it in 1916.



The 1916 promotional sales literature illustrated the grandeur of that bygone age, reminiscent of nearby Audley End House or television's fictional Downton Abbey. The house was described as a beautifully appointed mansion in the Tudor style with a total of 27 bedrooms and 5 bathrooms; with electric light, electric bells throughout, telephone, central

heating, a modern-fitted laundry with six wash tubs, coal and wine cellars and a school room. The extensive servants' quarters included a servants' hall, maids' sitting room, butler's pantry and housekeeper's sitting room. The house was sold with 500 acres that included the "old pleasure grounds", a stud yard with 25 loose boxes, a smithy, forge, walled kitchen garden and ornamental lake. The estate was recommended for the availability of "game", the previous year's "bag" having included 2,358 pheasants and 772 hares. No wonder hares are now rarely seen!

The estate was duly sold and sold again, but Chesterford Park was little used except during the Second World War when the mansion was taken over by the Jewish Home and Hospital for Incurables which evacuated all patients from its home in Tottenham, London. The grounds were requisitioned by the army to store ammunition, some of which exploded in 1944, shattering windows for miles around.

In 1952 the mansion and 250 acres were purchased by Fisons, the fertilizer and agrochemical company, which established a research centre there. Ownership has continued to change as the research centre expanded, with Uttlesford District Council acquiring a 50% stake in 2017. Today, Chesterford Research Park comprises the refurbished mansion and an extensive array of purpose-built laboratories and research-and-development facilities that are occupied by a range of biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies within idyllic surroundings.

This is just a brief introduction to elements of Little Chesterford's story. Please see the website links below for more detailed history and a wide range of old photos.

Hundred Parishes Society walks include Station walk number 21 which covers 8 miles from Audley End Station to Great Chesterford Station. The route passes through Little Chesterford and can be joined here on page 6 of the description, later catching the train from Gt Chesterford to Audley End to complete the route by walking back to Little Chesterford.

Adjacent parishes: Great Chesterford, Saffron Walden, Littlebury.

Links:

Parish Council, including parish history: www.little-chesterford.org.uk

Chesterford History & Archaeology Society: <https://chesterfordhistory.org.uk/>

History: www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/littlechesterford/littlechesterford.html

Tribute to those who died in WWI including film of the fire in 1914:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksy44GVloVw>

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