



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

LITTLE EASTON



Location: 2 miles northeast of Great Dunmow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6024.

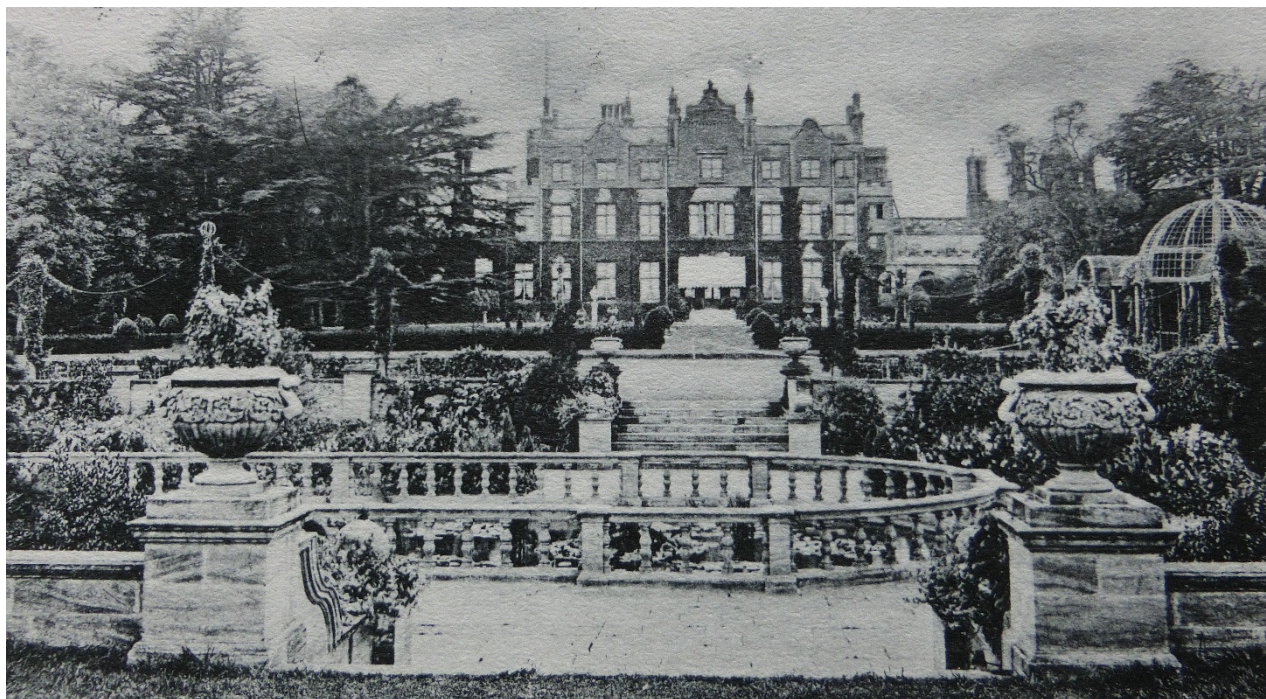
Postcode CM6 2JR. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Access:** west off B184.

Bus: (Mon – Sat): 313 between Saffron Walden & Great Dunmow.

Population: 401 in 2001, 437 in 2011, 430 in 2021.

Little Easton was recorded in the *Domesday Book* in 1086 as *Estaines Parva*, a hamlet in the Great Forest of Essex which stretched from the northeast of London almost to Thaxted. The early Manor of Little Easton was occupied by the family de Windsor for several generations passing by female descent to one Eleanor de Louvain who married Sir William Bouchier in 1365. The Bouchier family had many distinguished members over the decades who fought in the Crusades and served in various positions of high office including Henry Bouchier, who became Lord Treasurer of England in 1454, and his brother Thomas who became Archbishop of Canterbury and crowned Edward IV in 1461.

In 1590, Queen Elizabeth I granted the manor of Estaines to Henry Maynard. He built Easton Lodge and his descendants lived there until the 20th century. Easton Lodge no longer exists but this view from an old postcard gives some idea of its grandeur. In the foreground is the Italian Garden which has been restored in the 21st century and can be seen on a visit to the Gardens of Easton Lodge.



The Maynard estate covered most of what is now Little Easton parish. The last Viscount Maynard died in 1865 and his sole heir was his grand-daughter, Frances Evelyn Maynard, then aged three. At the age of 21 she married Francis Greville, Lord Brooke, who became the Earl of Warwick in 1893. “Darling Daisy”, as she was affectionately known, entertained lavishly at Easton Lodge. The Prince of Wales (who was crowned King Edward VII in 1902) was a frequent guest.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Little Easton was the centre of a creative community that included the Countess of Warwick's notable tenants - composer Gustav Holst and author H G Wells - and several neighbours who were successful writers and newspaper editors. Close to the parish church, a theatre was created in a 16th-century barn, opening in 1913 and shown here. Such notables as George Bernard Shaw, Ellen Terry and Darling Daisy contributed to the Barn Theatre's regular productions.



The parish church and the barn lie about half a mile east of the site of Easton Lodge. Also close to the church, the Manor House (not to be confused with Easton Lodge) dates from the 17th century. In 1925, Lady Warwick's daughter married a well-known theatrical and film producer, Basil Dean, and they were given the Manor House, pictured on the left. Dean often filmed locally and film stars of the day, including Gracie Fields and George Formby, would stay here.

For many years, the present owners of the Manor House, or Little Easton Manor as it is now called, have generously opened their grounds and the Barn Theatre during the August Bank Holiday weekend to accommodate the Countess of Warwick Show which attracts thousands of visitors. In recent times, Little Easton Manor has been transformed into a wedding venue and the Barn Theatre into a café with outdoor seating in summer months. On special occasions, the barn reverts to its use during Darling Daisy's time with musical or theatrical productions.

The house and grounds of Easton Lodge were requisitioned during the Second World War. Ten thousand trees were uprooted from the former deer park, to the south of Easton Lodge, and the US Army Air Force laid three runways to create "Great Dunmow" airfield. This was the base of the 386th USAAF Bombardment Group, "The Crusaders". Three thousand men served here; 193 were killed. The base was subsequently used by the RAF and then the British Army. Occupation of the house rendered it uninhabitable and it was demolished in 1950. The airfield was reinstated as farmland, but the runway layout can still be seen from the air.

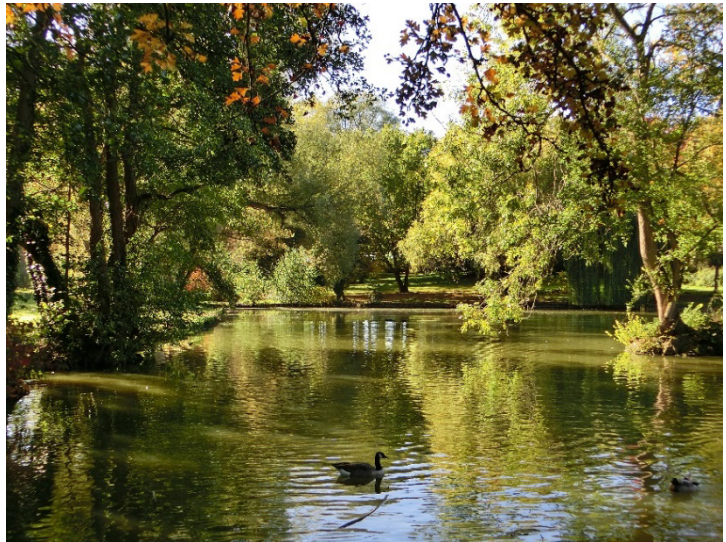
Much of the extensive gardens of Easton Lodge was left untended for many years, but from 1995 an area of around 20 acres has been progressively restored and maintained by a sizeable group of volunteers.

The gardens, recognized by Historic England as a Grade II registered garden, are now regularly opened to the public.



The quiet lane between Little Easton Manor and the Gardens of Easton Lodge passes beside ponds that were once a feature of the estate.

The beautiful church of Little Easton is Norman in origin, with additions in several subsequent centuries. It was built on the site of a Saxon structure. Some medieval wall paintings still survive. A chapel and two interesting stained-glass windows honour the many American air crews who lost their lives in the Second World War.



The church is usually open and also has several superb memorials to the Bouchiers and the Maynards, including the two shown below: a charming bust of Darling Daisy and a rather busy memorial to William, second Baron Maynard who died in 1698, and family.



The parish of Little Easton extends somewhat beyond the former Easton Lodge estate. Overall, the parish has 35 listed buildings, spread around the rolling countryside and attractive lanes of this rather scattered community. Some are pictured on the following pages.



The two buildings above stand near the parish church: the former almshouses on the left were built in 1895; Church Lodge on the right dates from the 17th century.

Below, Mawbyns on the left dates from the 16th century and was converted by the Countess of Warwick into a laundry, employing many local girls. Easton Glebe, the 18th-century red-brick house behind the gateway, was at one time the home of HG Wells, a prolific author whose best-known novel *War of the Worlds* was written before he came to Little Easton. Another novel, *Mr Britling Sees it Through* was set in Little Easton.



Brookend Farmhouse, pictured on the right, dates from around 1500 AD. Its extensive stable block, shown below, was added during the time of Darling Daisy.



The Maynard family symbols, either an M with a crown or a stag, appear on many properties that were once owned by the estate.



Away from the immediate influence of Easton Lodge, the majority of Little Easton's residents live along Duck Street which stretches for about a mile close to the parish's northeastern boundary. Some of their varied residences are pictured below.

The left column shows, in order of appearance: Elmbridge Farmhouse and Little Martins, each dating from the 16th century, and then the Stag Inn.

The right column starts with Elmbridge Mill on the bank of the River Chelmer, followed by heavily-pargetted Bushwood House and finally The Thatch which dates from the 16th century or earlier.



The Stag, of course, takes its name from one of the Maynard family emblems.



Little Easton is one of five rural parishes that pool their resources within the "Five Parishes", initially an ecclesiastical body that was formed in 1983, long before the "Hundred Parishes" evolved. The Five Parishes publish a joint monthly magazine and for the Millennium produced a book of walks and a brief history of the parish.



Much of the former Easton Lodge estate was purchased in 2004 by Land Securities Group plc (Landsec), a major UK property developer. The company has since been promoting the site for the development of up to 10,000 houses, facing determined opposition from the local community.

USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT LITTLE EASTON

Hospitality:

The Stag Public House, CM6 2JE – 01371 870214 - <https://www.thestaglittleeaston.co.uk/>

Little Easton Manor - <https://www.littleeastonmanor.co.uk/>

Little Easton Manor Tea Room, CM6 2JH – 07900 394110 -

<https://www.littleeastonmanor.co.uk/tea-room>

Hundred Parishes Society walks include . . .

Circular walk 163 which covers 4 miles around the parish, plus a little of Great Easton.

Adjacent parishes: Little Canfield, Takeley, Broxton, Great Easton & Tilty, Great Dunmow.

Links:

Parish Council: www.littleeastonpc.co.uk

The Five Parishes: <http://thefiveparishes.org.uk/>

The Countess of Warwick Country Show: <http://countessofwarwickshow.org/>

The Gardens of Easton Lodge: www.eastonlodge.co.uk

Films:

Easton Lodge in 1923: <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/labour-partys-chequers-1/query/dunmow>

Another film, in 1926, includes brief footage of the Countess herself, right at the end:

<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/to-be-labours-university-aka-to-be-labours-univers/query/easton+lodge>

Further reading:

www.hundredparishes.org.uk has a People section that includes short introductions to the Countess of Warwick and HG Wells.

Guide Book to Little Easton Church – available in the church.

Several more history booklets, written by the Countess of Warwick's granddaughter, Felice Spurrier, are usually available in the church.