



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

PLESHEY



Location: 5 miles northwest of Chelmsford. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6614.
Postcode: CM3 1HG. **County:** Essex. **District:** Chelmsford.
Access: well off main roads. Regional Cycle Route 60.
Buses: 10 (Mon-Fri) between Pleshey and Great Hanningfield via Great Waltham and Chelmsford. **Population:** 382 in 2001, 373 in 2011, 400 in 2021.

Bid him — ah, what? —
With all good speed at Plashy visit me.
Alack, and what shall good old York there see
But empty lodgings and unfurnished walls,
Unpeopled offices, untrodden stones?

Thus did Shakespeare in Richard II have the Duchess of Gloucester issue an invitation to the Duke of York to visit her at Pleshey. Clearly, she did not have much of an opinion of the place, but she was undoubtedly depressed after the death of her husband in 1397 while in the custody of his nephew King Richard II, who then seized the castle and all their possessions.

Today, there are no empty lodgings, unpeopled offices and untrodden stones - though there may still be some unfurnished walls. What an accolade for this parish - to be forever enshrined in the annals of Shakespeare; but it is perhaps an indicator of Pleshey's historical significance over past centuries. The manor of Pleshey was given to the Earl of Essex, Geoffrey de Mandeville by William the Conqueror and it was de Mandeville who built the motte and bailey castle, the remains of which can be seen today. The name Pleshey appears to derive from the Old French *plësis*, meaning an enclosed space or possibly from the *pleached* (intertwined) hedges around the castle settlement.

The castle itself fell into decline and was finally demolished in the early 17th century, but the motte (one of the largest in England) and the moat remain, as does the 15th-century red brick access bridge, now a Grade I-listed building. A view of the bridge can be gained from a small spot along the main street.



The castle mound is not generally open to the public, but in 2015 it was the site of celebrations of the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta, one of whose signatories was lord of the manor, a younger Geoffrey de Mandeville. A view of the motte can be obtained from the Pleshey Mount View Point in the centre of the village. This pleasant little green has seats to encourage a short stay, an information board with a basic history of the ancient monument, and an assortment of wildfowl to distract. The Mount is now well covered with mature trees and shrubs however and, though beautiful, it is difficult to imagine how it might once have been.



Pleshey village lies mostly inside the castle's outer bailey earthwork, which is still clearly visible along much of its length. The whole area is protected as a designated Scheduled Monument. Much of the village is also a designated conservation area and many buildings are individually listed for their historical or architectural significance.



Set on an incline with a gently winding main street, this community has a delightful 'chocolate box' appeal. Many of the residences are 15th or 16th century. Each is unique and there is a great variety of thatch and tile, weather-board and pargetting, harmonious nonetheless and in no way incongruous.

At the west end of the village is Holy Trinity Church. This flint and rubble listed building retains its 14th-century core and medieval crossing arches, but was almost entirely rebuilt in 1868 by the Chelmsford architect Frederick Chancellor.

In the first decade of the 20th century an Anglican order of nuns purchased a number of buildings adjacent to the parish church and founded a convent. The order eventually moved to London and in 1927 this became the first Diocesan Retreat House in the country, and it remains under the auspices of the Chelmsford Diocese today. The house has its own chapel built in 1933 and is open to both day and residential visitors who wish to make a retreat, or simply to take time out to re-charge batteries. The Retreat House is perhaps best known through the work of its benefactor the author and Christian mystic Dr Evelyn Underhill, after whom one of its buildings is named.



One of the things visitors to the Retreat House particularly value is the peace and the beauty of the countryside surrounding Pleshey village. There are many footpaths and byways around the parish and beyond. For serious walkers, the Essex Way passes just a stone's throw from the church on its way to Epping (or Harwich, depending on your inclination). But there are many shorter walks to be had. There are no shops in the immediate vicinity but The Leather Bottle at the other end of The Street from the church will be happy to provide you with traditional pub sustenance. And if you should happen to time your visit for a mid-summer Sunday, Pleshey Churchyard Teas are a treat not to be missed.

Hospitality:

The Leather Bottle, CM3 1HG - 01245 237291 - <https://www.facebook.com/theleatherbottlepleshey/>

The Retreat House, The Street, CM3 1HA - 01245 237251 - www.retreathousepleshey.com

Acreland Green B&B, CM3 1HP - 01245 231277 - www.smoothhound.co.uk/hotels/acrelandgreen

Hundred Parishes Society walks include Circular walk 110 which starts in Pleshey and covers 7 miles between Pleshey and Great Waltham.

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: High Easter, Great Waltham.

Links:

Parish Council: <https://e-voice.org.uk/pleshey-parish-council/>

Further reading:

Pleshey: The Village and Retreat House. Margaret Avery, 1973

Pleshey: The Origins and History of the Village. Michael Cuddeford, 1998