



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## THE SAMPFORDS



**Location:** 6 miles southeast of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6435.

**Postcode** CB10 2RG. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Access:** B1051, B1053.

**Bus:** no general bus service visits The Sampfords, only school buses.

**Population:** 765 in 2001, 837 in 2011, 850 in 2021.

The Sampfords is a large and single north Essex parish, combining what was once two: Great Sampford to the north and Little Sampford to the south. There is evidence of settlement here as far back as the Bronze Age, and the archaeological project Heritage Sampford, conducted in the early years of our new millennium by the Sampfords Society, suggests settled farming in the Iron Age period and increasing stability of community life through the Roman era. The name Sampford seems to derive from two manors which appear in the Domesday record, *Sanfort* and *Sanforda*, each meaning a sandy ford. A sandy ford still exists in Great Sampford today.

Much of the parish is picturesque and gently-undulating arable land, with the two villages lying alongside the River Pant. The river winds north to south from its source near Saffron Walden to Bocking in Braintree where it becomes the River Blackwater. Footpaths are plentiful and many cross, re-cross and run adjacent to the river along its meandering course between Great Sampford and Little Sampford villages and beyond.

Nature lovers should not miss the West Wood Nature Reserve in the southwest of the parish, just off the Thaxted road. This 58-acre wet woodland is owned by Essex Wildlife Trust, and is home to many species of fauna and flora, including the rare oxlip, pictured on the right, and wood barley.



The Sampfords were associated in medieval times with the Roman Catholic military order of the Knights Hospitallers. It is believed that in the 14th century they built the Great Sampford Parish Church of St Michael the Archangel, notably characterised by some 26 arched stone bays in the chancel, 11 on one side and 15 on the other, each said to have seated one of the knights.



Once described as “a church of the Essex cornfields”, St Michael’s is a Grade I-listed building, entry into which is through a remarkably woodwormed door. Presumably the bugs have departed, for the door has clearly been doing its duty for a very long time. The church interior is unusually light, owing to the large, five-light, traceried east window. The church has some excellent stone carvings.

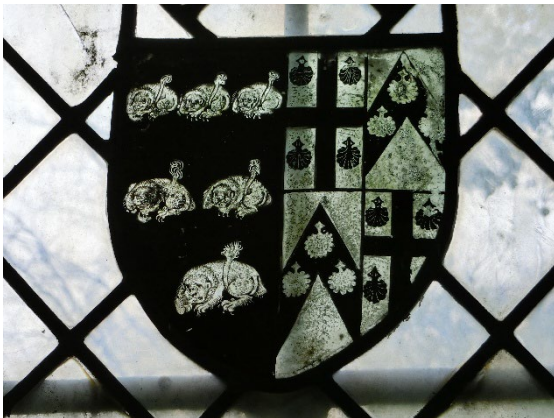


Great Sampford's sister church in the village of Little Sampford is dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, also 14th-century and also Grade I listed. It is delightfully set on a small hill and the tower, with its distinctive Hertfordshire spike (a small leaded spire), can be seen from some distance. There are beautiful views of the surrounding countryside, and benches have been thoughtfully placed for visitors to view it at leisure and at its best. However, the churchyard, which has been developed into a small nature reserve, does appear to have been fighting a longstanding (and losing) battle with moles. Mind your step!

Inside there are a number of ornate monuments, the largest and most noticeable of which is in memory of Bridget Peck of one of the noble families of Little Sampford Hall. Bridget has been reclining in marble for some 300 years, clearly long enough to have become rather bored with her book.



One of the windows has an inset medieval coat of arms with six rather odd lions.



Both St Mary's and St Michael's are open daily for those who wish to visit.

There is a third church in the parish, a Baptist chapel in Great Sampford, just across the road from St Michael's and shown below. The church was established originally in 1802; the present building



was erected in 1875.

The church is the larger building in this photo, with the former Baptist hall to its left.

There are a hundred listed buildings in the parish. Many are former farmhouses, accessible only along narrow, meandering lanes that lead nowhere else.

A few of the less remote are pictured here. All of these are thatched and all date from either the 17th or 18th century. Immediately below, on the left is Hawkes Cottage in Little Sampford and, on the right, Briars in Great Sampford. The wide photo below was taken in Great Sampford and shows Mill Thatch on the left and the nearer Windmill Cottage.



Below, Swallows Nest on the left is in Hawkin's Hill hamlet in Little Sampford and Burleys on the right is in Great Sampford.





The Manor House, shown on the left, has stood opposite Great Sampford Church since 1595. The village sign is rather more recent. It matches the one below for Little Sampford which also depicts a kingfisher.



Stow Farmhouse, on the left, is in Great Sampford and dates from the 16th century.

Portway, on the right, started life as two separate 18th-century cottages in Great Sampford.

The thriving commercial life which once saw a proliferation of shops, businesses and craftsmen is of course now long gone, as indeed it is across much of rural England. Here were the watchmaker, the draper, the wheelwright, the blacksmith and the straw plaiters, among many others. There were three hostleries too, of which just the 19th-century white-brick Red Lion Inn (below) remains in Great Sampford.



By way of architectural contrast, and just along the road, the primary school was constructed of red brick, around 50 years later, in 1878.



The Sampfords have been home, at one time or another, to a number of notable personalities. Sir James Nicholl McAdam, son of the inventor of tarmac and the man who put the material to great use locally, lived at Tindon End Manor House, Great Sampford. Between 1820 and 1850, James McAdam was the surveyor for many turnpike trusts in Essex and Hertfordshire.

More recent residents included composers Alan Rawsthorne and John Ireland. The latter gave the parish name to the tune *Sampford* which accompanies an Easter hymn. The artist and designer Olga Lehmann lived for many years in Great Sampford, painting landscapes of the lovely surrounding countryside. The photo below was taken on the footpath beside the River Pant.



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## MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SAMPFORDS

### Hospitality:

Red Lion, Great Sampford, CB10 2RL – 01799 586886

– <https://www.facebook.com/p/The-Red-Lion-Great-Sampford-100066770554622/>

Bush Farm B&B, Little Sampford, CB10 2RY – 01799 586636

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

Circular walk 145 covering 5 miles entirely within The Sampfords parish.

### Adjacent parishes:

Wimbish, Radwinter, Hempstead, Finchingfield, Great Bardfield, Little Bardfield, Thaxted.

### Links:

Parish Council: <https://www.thesampfords.co.uk/>

History: [www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/greatsampford/greatsampford.html](http://www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/greatsampford/greatsampford.html)

Great Sampford ford: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l45kGO8NglQ>

Great Sampford Conservation Area Appraisal - link from:

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/conservation-area-appraisals>

West Wood Nature Reserve: <https://www.essexwt.org.uk/nature-reserves/west-wood>

### Further reading:

*The Story of the Sampfords*, written and published by Gerald Curtis, 1981.

*Introducing St Michael the Archangel*, published by The Sampfords Society, 1992

*Introducing The Baptist Church*, published by The Sampfords Society, 1996

*RAF Great Sampford*, by Michael Southgate, published by The Radwinter Society, 2016.