



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## WENDENS AMBO



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**Location:** 2 miles southwest of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5136. **Postcode:** CB11 4GT. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Rail access:** Audley End Station on London Liverpool Street to Cambridge line is in Wendens Ambo. **Roads:** B1383 and B1039. **Buses:** From Mon to Sat, many buses call at Audley End Station including 301 between Saffron Walden and Bishop's Stortford; 319 and 321 for Saffron Walden and Haverhill. Also, 59 and 590 run Mon to Fri to Saffron Walden. **Population:** 436 in 2001, 473 in 2011, 450 in 2021.

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The Domesday Book of 1086 recorded two adjacent parishes – *Wendena Magna* and *Wendena Parva*. These later became known as Great Wenden and Little Wenden. *Wendena* is probably a Saxon word meaning a winding valley. In 1662 the Bishop of London approved the merger of these two small parishes under the name Wendens Ambo. Ambo means “both” in Latin. Little Wenden probably had its own church, but it had disappeared by 1700.

This view along Church Path of Wendens Ambo parish church has changed little since it appeared on a postcard in 1905.

The nearest cottage dates from the 16th century and may have been a priest's house.

The church tower is Norman, almost a thousand years old, although its Hertfordshire spike was added later.



In the postcard image above, trees hide the church doorway which is surmounted by Roman bricks. They were probably taken from a villa whose remains have been excavated nearby.

Evidence of an Iron Age settlement and flint tools from the Bronze Age indicate that this fertile valley has been inhabited for several thousand years.



This is a lesser-known view of the Grade I-listed Church of St Mary the Virgin.

The photo below was taken from the churchyard, looking back towards the cottages along Church Path.

The unnamed stream that flows through the village passes beneath the London – Newmarket road, B1383, to join the River Cam (also known here as the River Granta).

The river crossing is no longer obvious, but at one time the roadway crossed the stream at what was called Udel's Ford. Udel was probably a local landowner. The name was adopted by the local Saxon administrative area, the Uttlesford Hundred, and today the parish is in Uttlesford District.



In addition to the church and the cottages in Church Path, the parish includes many additional listed buildings, dating back to the 15th century. They are scattered along several narrow, meandering roads, including Duck Street and Rookery Lane.

Most listings refer to buildings, but they also include a 3-metre-high wall that follows the bend in the B1039 close to Church Path. It is built of red brick, flint and puddingstone. The largest puddingstone is at the base of the wall on the left of this photo.

Flint has been used as a building material for centuries throughout much of the Hundred Parishes area.

Puddingstone (often called Hertfordshire puddingstone) is found only occasionally. It is a natural rock composed of flint pebbles and believed to have been formed around 50 million years ago.



The parish has one remaining pub, The Bell, which dates from around 1600 AD.

Both the M11 motorway and the London Liverpool Street to Cambridge railway line pass through the parish. The motorway was opened in the 1970s and its closest exit, junction 9, lies five miles north at Stump Cross.

Wendens Ambo's railway station serves a wide area. When it opened in 1845 the station was called Wenden, but it was soon renamed Audley End in deference to Audley End House which lies just a mile or so to the north in Saffron Walden parish.

Audley End House was built in the early 1600s by Lord Howard de Walden who became Earl of Suffolk and owned the majority of Wendens Ambo parish. Please see the chapter on Saffron Walden for further information about Audley End House.



The railway station buildings date from around 1845 and were designed by Francis Thompson. The unusual and grand porch was built for the comfort of guests of Baron Braybrooke, the Victorian owner of Audley End House. The porch provided shelter as they boarded horse-drawn carriages.

A branch line to Saffron Walden and Bartlow operated from 1865 to 1964 and its former alignment and platform are still clearly visible in what is now the car park.



In the mid-1800s, Lord Braybrooke built a terrace of flint-faced dwellings near Audley End station to fulfil some of the housing demand created by the arrival of the railway and its associated activities. Their striking style contrasts with most mature residences within the parish, not least Wenden Hill Cottage, about 300 yards west along the road and shown below.



This is Wenden Hill Cottage, surprisingly not listed but presenting an attractive face onto the B1039.

Just a small strip of the parish sits on the eastern side of the B1383, including a short stretch of Wenden Road that heads northeast into Saffron Walden. Just before Wenden Road crosses over the River Cam or Granta it passes a remnant of World War II, one of many pillboxes erected along the river. Fortunately, they were never put to the test.

Despite being bisected by three major transport corridors (the railway, the M11 and the former A11, now B1383), Wendens Ambo retains its charm and remains relatively peaceful, nestling just off the beaten track and with footpaths heading into open countryside with fine views from higher ground over the valley of the River Cam.



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### Hospitality

The Bell Inn, Royston Road, CB11 4JY – 01799 540382 - <https://thebellatwenden.co.uk/>

**Hundred Parishes Society walks** include several Station walks that either start or finish in Wendens Ambo at Audley End Station:

- Walk 6 covers 3.5 miles from Newport to Audley End stations.
- Walk 11 covers 11 miles from Newport to Audley End stations.
- Walk 13 covers 8 miles from Audley End to Great Chesterford stations.
- Walk 15 covers 5 miles from Newport to Audley End stations.
- Walk 21 covers 8 miles from Audley End to Great Chesterford stations.

### Adjacent parishes:

Arkesden, Elmdon & Wenden Lofts, Littlebury, Saffron Walden, Newport, Wicken Bonhunt.

### Links

Parish Council: <https://wendensamboparishcouncil.org.uk/>

Wendens Ambo Church: <https://www.wendenheritage.org.uk/>

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

Audley End Ho: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/audley-end-house-and-gardens/>

### Further reading:

*Wendens Ambo: the history of an Essex village* by John J. Mackay (1982) ISBN 0-9508532-0-8, from which some of these historical notes have been extracted.

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