



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

WIDDINGTON



Location: 4 miles south of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5331.
Postcode CB11 3SG. **Access:** east off B1383; 2 miles SE of Newport Station.
Bus: 301 (Mon-Sat) between Saffron Walden and Bishop's Stortford.
County: Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** 463 in 2001, 504 in 2011, 500 in 2021.



Widituna was mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, as also was *Amberdana*, a manor that is today at least partly within Widdington parish. The parish has a population of some 500, mostly residing in the village of Widdington, in the centre of the parish.

Widdington village sits on relatively high ground, mostly 100 metres or more above sea level, to the east of the River Cam which defines much of the parish's western boundary. Although the village is well connected by public paths and byways to

nearby settlements, it has no real through road, just four single-track roads that lead to a short High Street. Its relative isolation may help to explain why it is home to several very old buildings.



The best-known is probably Prior's Hall Barn, a very large 14th-century building whose construction is thought to have used 400 oak trees. It benefited from a major restoration project in the 1970s and is now in the care of English Heritage. External and internal views are shown here. The Barn is open free of charge at weekends from April to September.

The barn has a Grade I listing, as too does its neighbour, Prior's Hall, which is shown below. Not long ago it was found that the 14th-century elements of this private house were probably a remodelling of a 10th or 11th-century Saxon chapel, making it one of the oldest private houses in England.

After the Norman Conquest, Prior's Hall manor was owned by the Abbey of Saint-Valery-sur-Somme in Picardy.

In the 14th century, ownership of the manor passed to the newly-founded New College, Oxford. The manor was owned by the college until around 1920.





Widdington's parish church dates from the 12th century. It was largely rebuilt and a new tower constructed in the 1870s, but it retains some early features including individual windows from the 12th and 13th centuries.

The parish has had no dominant, resident landowner with grand manor house, but there have been a number of well-to-do landowners whose farmhouses have survived until today.

Widdington Hall, shown on the right in an early 20th-century photo, is today hidden from view behind the parish church. It dates from the 15th century and still retains part of its moat.



East of the village, there are several more Halls dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, mostly out of sight.

Swayne's Hall is shown on the right and Amberden Hall immediately below it.



Immediately below is a photo of 16th - century Mole Hall – with black swans on the moat. For around 40 years, until its closure in the early 21st century, Mole Hall was the home of a popular wildlife park that grew out of the owner's private animal collection.



Sir George Clausen, RA, a celebrated artist, lived in Widdington for 14 years until 1905. On his departure, he donated his studio to the village and it was used for many years as a reading room and men's club. The People section of www.hundredparishes.org.uk includes a short article on Clausen.

The Austrian-Jewish Tugendhat family settled here in the 1930s. Later, their politician son Christopher was granted a peerage - he chose the title Baron Tugendhat of Widdington.



Prior's Hall, Widdington Hall and the historic centre of the village are within a conservation area that incorporates more than half of Widdington's 45 listed buildings. They include the three pictured here.

On the left is the Old Post Office (which served as such until 1986) with its 19th-century bay shop window. Below it is thatched 19th-century Rectory Cottage.

Immediately below is the Fleur de Lys, Widdington's popular pub and restaurant. It dates from the 18th or early 19th century.

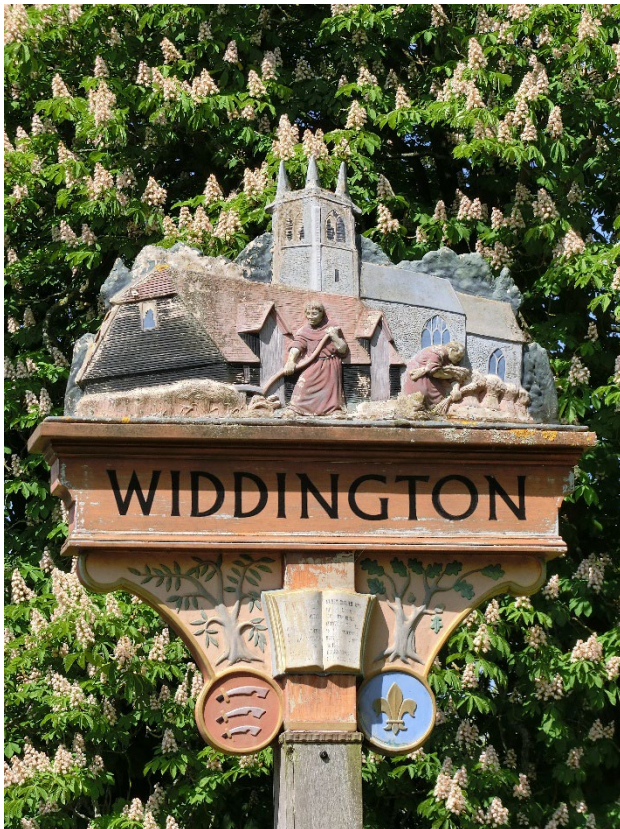


Two listed houses from just beyond the conservation area are shown below . . .

On the left, 16th-century Bishop's Cottage is believed to still have its original chimney stack. On the right, The Old Forge is a timber-framed and plastered dwelling that dates from the 17th century.



Widdington's three-dimensional village sign stands on a small green in the centre of the village, not far from the church. It is pictured below on the left. Below on the right is a photo of a colourful window in the church commemorating John Moore Dillon who died in 1903 and is buried in the churchyard.



There is a thorough online record of Widdington's history – see the link near the bottom of this introduction.

Hospitality:

Fleur de Lys, CB11 3SG - <https://www.facebook.com/thefleur/> or <https://www.fleurdelyspub.co.uk/> - 01799 543280

Hundred Parishes Society walks include . . .

Station walk number 5 between Elsenham and Newport stations (7 miles) which passes through Widdington and could be joined here at page 2 of the route description, catching a train from Newport to Elsenham before completing the first part of the route back to Widdington.

Circular walk 106 starts in Henham and covers 7 miles including the southeast corner of Widdington parish.

Circular walk 185 includes Debden and Widdington and could be joined near Waldegraves.

Adjacent parishes: Henham, Ugley, Quendon & Rickling, Newport, Debden.

Links:

Parish Council: <https://e-voice.org.uk/widdingtonparishcouncil/>

History, old photos, etc – a substantial record: <https://sites.google.com/site/garydwiddington>

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