



# The Hundred Parishes

## An introductory article about PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS

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Hundreds of prisoner of war camps were set up in the UK during the two World Wars, with several in The Hundred Parishes. Camps varied in design and size. Some started as rows of tents with the prisoners engaged in constructing huts. Most have disappeared but we would like to tell you about a few.

In 1917, during the First World War, a camp was established at Great Dunmow's workhouse, initially taking about 100 German POWs. Capacity was later doubled by moving women elsewhere and closing the infirmary. The German prisoners worked on local farms but gained a reputation for obstruction and destruction. Dunmow workhouse never reopened and was converted to the housing that today is called The Close – a small part shown here.



There was a similar story in Linton where the house and grounds of the workhouse in Symonds Lane were repurposed in WWI as a POW camp. The building was then turned into a hospital and today it serves as a nursing home, pictured on the right.



Bower Hall in Steeple Bumpstead was used as a POW camp in The First World War but it fell into ruin and was demolished in 1926.

Wynches POW camp in Much Hadham was situated in forty acres of parkland and in the Second World War housed both Italian and German prisoners.

Ickleton Grange housed a camp for both Italian and German men. Nothing now remains.

Radwinter North POW rehabilitation camp was situated in the grounds of Radwinter Rectory, now known as Radwinter Manor. German soldiers were allowed to visit local families. Karl Weschke was one; he became an artist and his clay sculpture of a weeping mother and child titled "Deutschland 1946" is held in Saffron Walden Museum.

In Mill Lane, Hatfield Heath, the remains of POW camp 116 were still clearly visible until recently – see photos below. Up to 2024, this was the most complete POW camp surviving in Essex, Hertfordshire or Cambridgeshire. The camp was set up in 1941 to house Austrian and Italian prisoners; later, German men followed. They worked on local farms and even played football against a Hatfield Heath team who were beaten by 11 goals to Nil. In 2024, against the wishes of the local community, planning permission was granted for the demolition of many buildings and conversion of others for new uses. It is hoped that some may survive and that an appropriate interpretation panel will record the site's former use.



The Ickleton Society has carried out research into two local POW camps, in Ickleton and Duxford. You can read their article here:

<http://www.ickleton.org.uk/ipsgallery2/index.php?a=POWCamp2020>

The article is the first item on this page, D1398. Within the article, clicking on the thumbnails of photos will enlarge them.

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Any comments or suggestions for improvement may be submitted by using the Feedback form on the website. The website has many short articles on various aspects of The Hundred Parishes, as well as introductions to individual parishes and to a number of local celebrities, and an extensive What's On section. More than a hundred walk route descriptions can be freely downloaded, with each of the hundred parishes featuring in at least one walk.