



The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about ROMAN HERITAGE

After almost 2,000 years, there is still considerable physical evidence of Roman occupation of this area.

Several churches include repurposed Roman bricks within their construction

The doorway of Wendens Ambo parish church, shown here, illustrates the re-use of typical thin Roman bricks.



Roman bricks can also be found in the walls of more churches: Great Canfield, Great Hallingbury, Great Waltham, Little Hallingbury, Sheering, Takeley, Westmill and White Roding – and probably others.

One of the finest Roman burial sites in Europe can be visited at Bartlow, shown below. The intrepid explorer can climb a wooden stairway to the top of the largest surviving barrow, some 40 feet high. You can read about the “Bartlow Hills” within the introduction to Bartlow parish on our website www.hundredparishes.org.uk. If you would like to combine a viewing of the Bartlow Hills with a short walk, please try Walk number 114 which can be downloaded from the website and printed.



The chief legacy from the Romans is their roads. It was not until their arrival in 43 AD that a national network of all-weather roads was built. The first were constructed between the capital, London, and bases used by the Roman legions. The network was maintained and extended through almost 400 years of Roman occupation. Main highways were either gravel or paved with stone. They were so well constructed that they could be used in all weathers.

The main roads were originally built by the Roman army. Those in our area included Ermine Street (which ran north from London and in the 20th century was designated A10) and Stane Street (later A120) between Braughing, a substantial Roman fort on Ermine Street, and Colchester, which served as Rome's first English capital until that role was transferred to London.

A less-known Roman road today forms the northern parish boundaries of Hildersham and Linton, thereby also defining the northern boundary of the Hundred Parishes. That road appears to have run between Colchester and Chester, another major Roman settlement, crossing Ermine Street at Godmanchester. The road was given the name Via Devana in the 18th century, Deva being the Roman name for what later became Chester. 'chester' was later used as an anglicized suffix for many towns that started life as a Roman fort or army camp - or "castrum" in Latin.

A substantial Roman fort-cum-town developed at Great Chesterford.

A straight road heads south-west from Chesterford to Braughing. Sections are still visible in places, both on the map and on the ground. A short stretch through Langley parish, now a byway, is shown on the right.

A review of local Ordnance Survey maps will soon reveal tell-tale straight lines that often indicate a route of Roman origin. At least twenty of today's Hundred Parishes were served by a Roman road.



High Roding, pictured here, sits on 4 miles of unwavering, straight Roman road, heading north to Great Dunmow which evolved at the intersection of three Roman roads.



The presence of many Roman roads and several Roman settlements within the Hundred Parishes, with usage over hundreds of years, means that we have a rich source of Roman remains, some of which are displayed at Saffron Walden Museum.

The Romans not only introduced us to straight roads and thin bricks. They brought us Roman numerals that we still use on most of our church clocks (see Church Clocks article). They are also credited with bringing rabbits and snails to the UK and possibly the sweet chestnut.

The photos below were all taken on Hundred Parishes walk routes: the rabbit was hiding in a burrow in Saffron Walden parish; the sweet chestnut is in Hatfield Forest.



Roman snails are the UK's largest, about twice the size of a regular garden snail. They are a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 2008 and should not be handled. By way of contrast, in France this species is what is served up as escargot. This Roman snail was spotted in the parish of Standon. They usually live in chalky areas and may be seen on several of the Hundred Parishes' upland walks.



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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.