



The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about VILLAGE PONDS

The pond by the village green in Finchingfield is a much photographed and much painted example of an idyllic view of the English village. A variety of village ponds can be seen around the Hundred Parishes.

Finchingfield's pond, shown on the right, is fed by Finchingfield Brook, whose flow has occasionally caused flooding. In recent years, a controlled introduction of beavers upstream is part of an experiment to test alternative ways of reducing flood risk.



Doctor's Pond in Great Dunmow is shown on the right. It is believed that the first unsinkable lifeboat was developed with trials of models on this pond by Lionel Lukin in 1784.



Pleshey's pond, pictured below on the right, is actually part of the moat around the remains of Pleshey castle.



Most of our ponds evolved long ago, usually as a result of man's activities. Those alongside roads and tracks were often formed from ancient extraction pits for clay or gravel; others appeared where earth had been extracted for building work.

Some are surviving medieval fish ponds or the remnants of moats around isolated old farm houses. Ponds on farms provided water for livestock but, following the reduction in cattle and sheep-rearing, many have been filled in.

Below, we show a selection of ponds, always an attractive feature of a village setting. Immediately below, on the left, Debden's village pond is close to the community shop; while the idyllic spot on the right is one of several ponds in Little Easton.



The former water mill in Felsted stands beside the mill pond and is shown below on the left; on the right, Matching Cricket Club's pavilion stands close to the pond at Matching Green.



Barkway's pond, below on the left, was used for many years as a wagon wash for horse-drawn farm vehicles and passenger coaches. The vehicles would stand awhile to allow wooden spokes to swell and fit more tightly into their wooden rims. The old postcard below shows such an occasion in the pond beside Heydon parish church. The pond has since dried out and horses must go elsewhere to quench their thirst.



The contrasting scenes below are of a pond at Patmore Heath in the parish of Albury, on the left, and one of several that line the road through the village of Henham.



Ponds do not just provide nice views for humans; they are usually home to a variety of creatures that depend on such bodies of water for their survival.

Fortunately, in addition to the more public stretches of water, a number of private gardens have ponds where aquatic plants provide a haven for pond dwellers. Dipping a net into a pond will reveal snails, the assorted larvae of dragonflies, water beetles and midges. Larger ponds may support fish and ducks.

Amphibians such as frogs, toads and newts need to lay their eggs within water but will spend much of their adult lives on land, eating a range of garden pests if there is some dense vegetation and a rockery nearby. These creatures have become quite scarce in the wider countryside with the reduction in suitable habitats. During March, the croaking of male frogs hoping to attract a mate is one of the sounds of spring.

Many of the Hundred Parishes walk routes go beside a pond. When you see one, you might like to contemplate how it came to be there and consider who now calls it home.

Local records of any adult amphibians and locations of spawn provide valuable information about their distribution and behaviour. If you are fortunate to see frogs, toads or newts in a local pond, then please do pass this information to either the Essex Field Club or the Freshwater Habitats Trust. Details are on their websites:

www.essexfieldclub.org.uk and www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk.

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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.