



The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about WINDMILLS

Probably the earliest European windmill was a post mill. This had one large upright post on which the main body of the mill balanced. The whole mill rotated on this post to face into the wind.

Next came the tower mill with a masonry body on which only the cap rotated. This allowed the main structure to be larger and taller.

The smock mill came later and here the brick tower was replaced by a sloping, weather-boarded tower or “smock”. Again, only the cap rotated.

We have some fine examples of windmills in the Hundred Parishes, most of which are carefully looked after by dedicated volunteers.

Great Chishill’s windmill is an open trestle post mill; it was built in 1819 using timbers from an earlier mill. A very successful “sponsor a board” campaign by the Great Chishill Windmill Trust raised much money to help conserve the mill. After a long period of closure for conservation work, it reopened in 2019. The mill is featured on the cover of *“The Hundred Parishes: An Introduction”*, the Society’s book that was published in 2018. The re-opening (on the left) and the book cover are shown below.



Most of the windmills around the Hundred Parishes can be seen on at least one of the walk routes that can be downloaded from the website. The view on the right of Great Chishill Windmill can be seen, in the distance, from Barley – on Walk number 131.



Ashdon also has a post mill, shown on the right. It was built in 1757 by a carpenter, William Haylock. The mill ceased working in 1912. The mill was gifted to the village in 2000 and registered in the name of Ashdon Windmill Trust Ltd, a registered charity.

Another post mill can be seen in Finchingfield – and in the photo below. It was built in the mid-18th century.



Stansted Mountfitchet has a five-storey tower mill built in 1787 by Joseph Lindsell. It is pictured below.



The four mills mentioned so far – Chishill, Ashdon, Finchingfield and Stansted - open to the public on selected days during the year, usually starting from Easter. Open days can usually be found on the What's On page of the Society's website at www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

Thaxted's tower mill, shown below, was another popular visitor attraction until recent times but it has been closed for a number of years, awaiting essential repairs.





Here is a closer look at Thaxted's mill, also known as John Webb's Windmill after the local businessman and farmer who built it in 1804.

In 2023, the mill's trustees were awarded grants by National Lottery and Historic England. This funding should help to establish what must be done to conserve the building for future generations to enjoy and, hopefully, visit once again.

The ongoing cost of maintaining windmills is significant. Around £200,000 was spent on Stansted Mountfitchet's windmill a few years ago to ensure it remained watertight and safe.

Pictured below are the privately-owned windmills at Great Bardfield on the left and Aythorpe Roding on the right.



Several former tower mills no longer have sails and have been incorporated into private dwellings. Shown below are White Roding, on the left, and one of the two mills at Clavering which are known locally as the salt and pepper pots.



Other former mills, now repurposed, are pictured below. From the left, they are at Hildersham, Debden and Great Dunmow.



Former windmills are quite distinctive, despite a change of use; the four below are discernible, from the left, in Brent Pelham, Ickleton, Linton and Great Sampford.



If you spot any more surviving windmills, or take better photos, the Hundred Parishes Society would be pleased to hear from you, either through the feedback form on the website or by email to hundredparishes@btinternet.com.

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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.