



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

AYTHORPE RODING



Location: 5 miles southwest of Great Dunmow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5915.

Postcode: CM6 1PS. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Access:** B184.

Buses: 17 (Fri & Sat) to Chelmsford; 18 (Tues & Thurs) to Chelmsford.

Population: 201 in 2001, 214 in 2011, 260 in 2021.

Shown on this page are the two best known elements of this small parish, the windmill and the pub.

The windmill was built in 1779. It is a post mill, having one large upright post on which the main body of the mill balances. The whole mill rotates on this post to face into the wind.

Grade II* listed, it is the largest post mill remaining in Essex and was worked commercially until the 1930s. Following renovation in the early 1980s and in more recent years by its present owners, the mill is believed to be in working order but is not open to the public.



The Axe & Compasses was built in 1707 to serve the needs of stage coaches en route between Dunmow and London, now the B184. Refurbished 300 years later, the Axe (as it is called locally) has three times been voted the Best Pub Restaurant in the Essex Food and Drink Awards.



Aythorpe Roding is one of a cluster of eight settlements in west Essex that are collectively known as The Rodings.

The northern four Rodings fall within the Hundred Parishes.

The Rodings are believed to be the largest group of villages in England to bear a common name.

In Anglo-Saxon times the Rodings originated as a single community, the *Hrodingas*, named after a local chieftain called Hroda. The grouping appears in the Domesday record as *Rodinges* in the Hundred of Dunmow, but by the 14th century the main boundaries of the eight separate villages had become established. The River Roding, also named after Hroda, flows south from its source in Dunmow and meanders through most of the Rodings parishes on its way to the Thames.

The 20th-century Essex historian Peter Foley had this to say about the area: “This is indeed an enchanted place, this land of The Rodings, a place of sudden hills and unsuspected hollows, seldom flat but gently undulating. He who seeks contentment, here let him go. He will need no better company than his thoughts. Nor will he find reason to doubt the wisdom of a Saxon’s choice”.

Some three centuries earlier the author Daniel Defoe had taken a rather different view, describing the area as “famous for good land, good malt and dirty roads”.

There have been no communities of any real substance over the years and few buildings of great importance, and it is interesting to ponder if it might well have been the “dirty roads” which kept the settlements and villages small and inaccessible. The roads today are looking pretty clean – at any rate no dirtier than any other.

The land certainly looks good – verdant and fruitful There is a quiet charm about this place, and a certain timeless quality, evidenced by the post mill and by the pretty cottages in the hamlet of Keere’s Green, some of which are pictured below.



The lack of important buildings may be the reason for an absence of historic events of any major significance, although, Peter Foley again: "History has, to a great degree, passed Aythorpe by. Perhaps we may record one day of sensation. It is related that, in 1652, Mrs Day of Aythorpe Roding perished from spontaneous combustion". Is this true? Who would know? From this distance the notion, now humorous rather than tragic, adds a certain dramatic frisson to our perception of this otherwise other-worldly corner of The Hundred Parishes.



Arguably the most important building here is the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin. It was built largely of flint rubble in the 13th century, with the belfry and spire added later. The porch and lychgate are much more recent 19th-century additions. Sadly, along with so many very isolated churches, St Mary's remains locked during the week, but its later additions may be admired at any time. Shown below are the lychgate, porch, and the weather vane at the top of the spire.

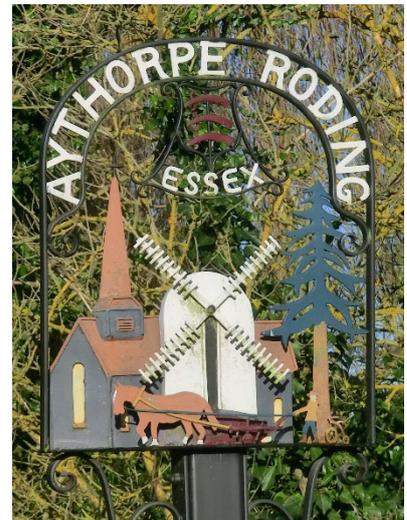


Aythorpe Roding has 36 listed buildings – a very high number for a parish whose population is less than 300. One of the oldest houses is Gunners Farm, pictured on the right. It dates from the 15th or 16th century when it was built as a hall house with an open fire and no chimney. It has since been brought up to date.



Collins Farm, below, is probably slightly younger, albeit around 500 years old.

The village sign is a much more recent addition, also shown below.



MORE INFORMATION ABOUT AYTHORPE RODING

Hospitality:

Axe and Compasses, CM6 1PP – 01279 876648 – <http://theaxeandcompasses.co.uk>

Included in Hundred Parishes walks:

Number 128 (9.2 miles) and
Number 333 (7.7 miles).

Adjacent parishes: White Roding, High Roding, High Easter, Leaden Roding.

Parish Council:

<https://www.aythorpe-pc.gov.uk/community/aythorpe-rodning-parish-council-20965/home/>

St Mary the Virgin: <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/6150/>

Church history: <https://www.regc.org.uk/aythorpe-rodning-church-history>

Further reading:

The Rodings: Eight Ancient Parishes of Essex and a Lost Hamlet. Peter Foley. Out of print but a copy can be downloaded from <https://therodings.blogspot.com/>