



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## BERDEN



**Location:** 4 miles northwest of Stansted Mountfitchet. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4629.

**Postcode:** CM23 1AY. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Access:** South of B1038.

**Bus:** There is no general bus service other than school buses.

**Population:** 427 in 2001, 465 in 2011, 470 in 2021.



Two possible Old English language origins for the name Berden have been identified, giving a meaning of either swine-pasture valley or corn valley. Each option has been incorporated into the village's three-dimensional sign, with a piglet peeping out from a sheaf of corn. The sign stands on a small triangular green in front of 16th-century Ivy Cottage, pictured below.



Berden appears in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Berdane*. The parish comprises the village of Berden, the hamlet of Little London and a scattering of farmhouses and residential properties. Less than a hundred years ago almost every resident worked within the parish, but now there are limited local employment opportunities.

A book by Maurice Ancell (1926 to 2019), *The village where I was born: Recollections of Berden*, published in 1993, gives a vivid account of life in Berden in the first half of the 20th century – a story of man and horse working the land, of many craftsmen serving just their local area, and of tradesmen delivering their wares.

Ancell tells of the arrival of mains water and the public telephone in the 1930s and electricity in the 1940s, tractors replacing horses by 1955, and ploughing by steam engine ceasing by 1960. He tells of the village school, shop, post office and two pubs, all long departed.

Pictured on the right is the former shop and post office; to the left of the photo is Ivy Cottage (also shown above), and ahead in the distance the small green and then 17th-century Forge Cottage.



The Raven pub was demolished and replaced by houses in the 1970s, whilst the thatched, 17th-century King's Head pub, pictured on the right, has been modernised into a private residence.



Ancell's account of 20th-century social history could relate to almost anywhere in the Hundred Parishes, or indeed anywhere in rural England. It was a period of great change compared with the preceding hundreds of years.

Rather than regretting the demise of the past, Berden's residents are no doubt pleased to live more comfortable lives than their predecessors and to reside in a peaceful location, away from busy roads.

Whilst much of the physical evidence of life for the average labourer in the 1930s has vanished, we are fortunate to be able to see some of the sturdier buildings that have been handed down through the generations.

Life here has long revolved around Berden Hall, pictured below.



This substantial red brick house was built approximately 1580, probably on a site used since Saxon times. Its distinctive three gables are repeated on all four sides.

The house, and with it the lordship of the manor, appears to have had a series of absentee owners including members of the Calvert brewing family until it was

acquired in the mid-19th century by Christ's Hospital, a charity school also known as the Bluecoat School.

The coat of arms of Christ's Hospital, shown on the left, appears on several 19th century buildings including the vicarage and cottages that were presumably built for employees of the Hall.

The censuses for 1861 to 1881 give the head of the Hall's household as Edward Roberts. His domain expanded during that period so that in 1881 he farmed 1,000 acres (more than half of Berden), employing 36 men and 8 boys. Since then ownership of Berden Hall has changed several times.

Christ's Hospital sold its last land in Berden in 1919, but its governors continued to nominate the parish's vicar until at least 1943.





The parish church, dedicated to St Nicholas, has a Norman nave from the 12th century and is listed as Grade I.

In the cemetery is the weather-beaten gravestone of Henry Trigg, a shoemaker and the parish constable. He was shot dead in 1814 as he tried to stop burglars stealing leather from his workshop next to Berden Hall. His two murderers, from Bishop's Stortford, were arrested a year later for other crimes and admitted the Berden murder. They were hanged outside Chelmsford gaol.

Berden Priory, a Tudor house shown on the right, was built in the late 16th century. It replaced a priory that was founded around 1200 AD as a hospital and closed in 1536 as part of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. The present house is at the centre of a farm complex.

One of the farm's outbuildings is a 17th-century well house with a working treadmill. This is a listed building, but it is not open to the public. The upright circular treadmill is 15 feet (5 metres) in diameter and was probably operated by a donkey walking, thereby generating the power to lift water in buckets from the well which is 120 feet (40 metres) deep. This apparatus supplied water for the house and farm until 1940.



Berden has a variety of attractive houses including the two shown below: thatched Hedda's Cottage on the left and 16th-century Martin's Green on the right.



Others include the two 17th-century houses below: Rooks Farm in the hamlet of Little London, shown on the left, and Rose Cottage on the right.



The parish is well endowed with footpaths and quiet lanes, and also with seats for those who wish to rest and eat their picnic, but visitors who need to buy refreshment must look elsewhere.

Near the southwest corner of Berden, there is a rather unsightly, but important, installation that straddles the boundary between two of the Hundred Parishes: Berden in Essex and the Hertfordshire parish of Stocking Pelham. On the perimeter fence is the unusual sight of two county signs side-by-side and facing in the same direction. The fence guards a major National Grid electricity substation. It receives power and redistributes it throughout much of the Hundred Parishes along six high voltage overhead transmission lines whose pylons stride across the countryside.



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## MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BERDEN

**Hospitality:** There is no pub in the village – see adjacent parishes.

**Adjacent parishes:** Manuden, Clavering, Quendon & Rickling, Ugley, Furneux Pelham, Stocking Pelham, Brent Pelham.

**Circular Walks:**

Number 143, a 5-mile rural walk in Berden and Stocking Pelham

Number 180, 6.5 miles on quiet lanes and paths in Berden and Clavering

**Links:**

Parish Council: [www.berden.org.uk](http://www.berden.org.uk)

History: [www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/berden/berdenindex.html](http://www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/berden/berdenindex.html)

1921 Film: <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/village-elects-boy-bishop/query/Berden>

**Further Reading:**

*The History of Berden*, written and published by CI Cherry, 1980.

*The village where I was born: Recollections of Berden*, Maurice Ancell, 1993, Martinn Publishing.

*The Men of the Fields (memories of Priory Farm, Berden)*, Maurice Ancell.