



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

CHICKNEY



Location: 4 miles northeast of Stansted Mountfitchet. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5728. **Postcode:** CM6 2BY. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Access:** north off B1051. No bus service. **Population:** 38 in 2001, approx 34 in 2011, 44 in 2021.

Chickney and the City of London have one thing in common: they each cover one square mile. But there all similarities end, for Chickney is a complete antithesis of a city – in fact it is perhaps the ultimate rural parish. Its main thoroughfare is an unsurfaced byway, its population of around 40 is thinly dispersed, and its few listed buildings are mostly well hidden.

Yet Chickney has one little gem – a remote Saxon church that is one of the oldest in the Hundred Parishes and listed as Grade I.

St Mary's closed in 1972 and is now cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust. It is hidden down a gravel track about 600 metres off the B1051.

The church was built of local flint and rubble more than a thousand years ago, sometime between 850 AD and 1000 AD. The nave and



part of the chancel still stand from that time. Outside, the churchyard is oval, which may indicate that the ground was sacred in pre-Christian times.



Two narrow slit windows, high up, date from the Saxon period, although they would not have been glazed then. One is shown on the left.

Their openings are narrowest where they are now glazed and they splay both outwards and inwards.



Larger windows were inserted into the nave around 1400 AD. The tower dates from the early 14th century.

The ornate octagonal stone font, pictured on the right, dates from the 14th century. Its cover is from the 16th century – at 500 years old it is the youngest element within the church's listing description.

The church has benefited from remedial work over the centuries, but its basic structure has stood the test of time. The building is an uneven shape, not quite rectangular. A fuller explanation of the building and its many fascinating features is given in a booklet which may be purchased inside the church.

Notwithstanding its tiny population, Chickney has retained its independence as an administrative parish. On the other hand, the local ecclesiastical parishes have gradually combined resources. Since 1987 five churches have been included within *The Parish of Broxted with Chickney and Tilty and Great and Little Easton*, generally referred to as the Five Parishes.



Despite its remoteness, Chickney once had a railway station in its northern extremity. The station, called Sibleys after the nearby farm, was on the branch line between Elsenham and Thaxted that operated for 40 years until 1952. It appears here in an old photo. Steam trains were run firstly by Great Eastern Railway (GER) and then by London and North Eastern Railway (LNER). Sibleys Station mainly handled farm produce, rather than passengers. Today, there is hardly any sign that the railway ever existed.



Sibleys, the 15th-century farmhouse, is pictured on the left, together with its 15th-century former dovecot.

Today, the area near the former station is distinguished by a view, shown on the right, of the giant microwave radio mast, just over the parish boundary in Debden.

While there is little sign of Chickney's present inhabitants, its paths and byways offer lovely views of gently rolling countryside so typical of the Hundred Parishes. The photo below was taken in Hawland Wood on Hundred Parishes walk number 106.



The panorama below is from the approach to the church, whose spire is just visible, peeping above the trees on the right.



MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CHICKNEY

Hospitality: See adjacent parishes.

Adjacent parishes: Broxted, Henham, Debden.

Walk: The Hundred Parishes Society's circular walk number 106 starts in Henham and includes Chickney. It can be downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk at no cost.

Links:

Parish Council: No website; see <https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/mgParishCouncilDetails.aspx?ID=483>

Chickney church: <https://www.thefiveparishes.org.uk/our-churches.html>

Further reading:

St Mary's Church, Chickney, published by the Churches Conservation Trust and available in the church.

The Five Parishes – a brief history, Claire Squibbs.