



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

DEBDEN



Location: 3 miles south of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5533.
Postcode: CB11 3LW. **Access:** well off main roads. **Buses:** 313 (Saffron Walden – Great Dunmow) and 6 (Saffron Walden – Debden – Stansted Airport – Bishop's Stortford).
County: Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** 778 in 2011.

The name Debden is derived from a Saxon word meaning 'deep valley'. The Domesday Book of 1086 records it as Depeduna, whilst the most common spelling was Depden until around 200 years ago when it became settled as Debden.

After the Norman Conquest, Debden was given to Ralph Peverill and it passed down to succeeding generations including a grandson who fled the country after murdering the Earl of Chester in 1153. The Debden estate passed to King Henry II and then through generations of royalty and aristocracy. In 1715 the estate was acquired by Richard Chiswell, a wealthy London merchant who subsequently became a director of the Bank of England.



The Chiswells were prominent in the affairs of Debden for 150 years, progressively acquiring land so that their Debden estate eventually grew to around 5,000 acres (8 square miles or 2,000 hectares). Debden Hall was built close to the church in 1791, a large and handsome mansion in Grecian style with stately pillars, surrounded by extensive parkland.

Debden Hall was sold in the 19th century to William Fuller Maitland of Stansted Mountfitchet, and sold again before the First World War to the unusually-titled Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal. The later owners found the Hall expensive to maintain so it was demolished and the estate broken up and disposed of in the 1930s. Little remains of its parkland apart from Debden Water, a short way along the path beyond the church and pictured here.



Today, the parish of Debden consists of the main village and the hamlets of Debden Green, Purton End and Hamperden End. The main village is clustered around the school, village hall, community shop and pond. The parish church of St Mary and All Saints lies down a narrow lane 400 metres west of the centre.

The church dates from the 13th century and is built of rubble and flint. Much of what is visible today came from subsequent alterations and additions including 18th-century brickwork. The church once had a central tower with five bells, but this fell down in 1698. A new tower was constructed in 1786 and further work at that time included the addition of the 'battlements' which are now such an unusual and prominent feature all around the church. The Chiswell family was a major contributor towards the cost of the 18th-century works. Within the octagonal chapel they



added at the east end there is an elaborate 1797 memorial to RMT Chiswell, the third Richard Chiswell to own the estate. He lost much of the family fortune through speculative investments in the West Indies and committed suicide in 1797. His 1786 tower was taken down and replaced by the present one in 1930.

This fine distant view of the church can be enjoyed from the footpath that passes through Cabbage Wood in the south of the parish.



Modern Debden is surrounded by rich agricultural land. Local farming families have owned small to medium-sized holdings for many years. The village retains many of its older buildings, some with thatched roofs, although twelve houses in the centre of the village were destroyed in the Great Fire of Debden in 1907.

Debden has a strong community spirit typified by success in Village of the Year and Best Kept Village competitions and, notably, by its community shop and post office. The shop was opened in 1982, the first community shop in Essex, and is run mostly by volunteers, providing a focus for the village as an informal meeting place. Debden has a thriving primary school and pre-school and a range of social activities. It has several societies and clubs including a local history group and a successful football team. Debden and the neighbouring parish of Wimbish are twinned with the village of Tang Ting in Nepal. Debden has a close association with the Engineer regiments based at nearby Carver Barracks, formerly RAF Debden, a key Fighter Command base in the Second World War. There is an antiques centre and café opposite the barracks.

Debden is essentially a rural parish. It has a network of public footpaths that provide access to surrounding fields and woodlands. Another footpath opposite Carver Barracks leads to Rowney Wood. An ancient wood owned by the Forestry Commission, it covers 85 hectares and has a wealth of plant and tree species and wildlife.

Hospitality:

Plough – 01799 541899 - <https://theploughatdebden.co.uk/>

Yuva/White Hart – 01799 543699 - <http://w-byte.com/yuvadebden/index.html>

Elder Street Café, Debden Barns, Elder Street – 01799 543598 – www.elderstreetcafedeli.co.uk

Included in Hundred Parishes walk:

15: Between Newport and Audley End stations (5 miles).

Adjacent parishes:

Henham, Widdington, Newport, Saffron Walden, Wimbish, Thaxted, Broxted, Chickney.

Links:

Parish Council: www.debden.org

History: www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/debden/debdentemplate.html

RAF Debden history: www.controltowers.co.uk/D/Debden.htm

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