



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to **GREAT** and **LITTLE CHISHILL**



Location: 6 miles southeast of Royston. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4238.

Postcode: SG8 8SB. **Access:** B1039.

County: Cambridgeshire. **District:** South Cambridgeshire. **Population:** 678 in 2011.

This has long been border country. More than a thousand years ago, Cumberton Brook, which runs roughly north to south on the western side of the parish, is thought to have defined part of the border between the Saxon kingdoms of Essex and Mercia. The parish was part of Essex until 1895 when the county boundary was changed, making this the most southerly part of Cambridgeshire. The parish is mainly farmland. Most residents live in the village of Great Chishill, which sits on a steep chalk escarpment.

As the land falls away to the north, there is evidence of how medieval ploughing along the contour lines gradually created a series of stepped terraces as the soil was displaced year after year to form what are known as “strip-lynchets”. There is archaeological evidence of much earlier settlement, with numerous ring ditches indicating Bronze Age or Neolithic occupation along the Icknield Way that crosses the northern end of the parish.

The Domesday Book of 1086 included both Cishella and Little Cishella. The spelling has changed from time to time, causing some confusion with the adjacent parish of Chrishall. One or two local road signs point to “Great Chishall”. At some stage Great Chishill and Little Chishill combined into the single administrative parish of Great and Little Chishill.



There are two parish churches. The Church of St Swithun (an alternative spelling of Swithin), pictured here, is situated at the crossroads in Great Chishill and dates from the 13th century, although the tower is as recent as 1895, built to replace its collapsed predecessor. In 1789, the church survived a fire which destroyed most of Great Chishill. The war memorial outside St Swithun’s records the thirteen men of Chishill who gave their lives in the 1914-1918 war. This was a high proportion of the population which numbered only 444 in 1901.

The Church of St Nicholas in Little Chishill is somewhat older, with parts dating from the 12th century. During the Black Death of 1348/9, the churchyard was used for a mass grave for many plague victims from nearby parishes. Today, Little Chishill is a tiny hamlet whose social highlight is the open garden event held every two years (in the odd-numbered years) at Little Chishill Manor.

Altogether, the parish has some 40 listed buildings including the two parish churches, many attractive residential properties, and also a tiny Victorian lock-up, a red telephone box, three pumps and a milestone dating from 1721 on Barley Road, an old London to Cambridge route, near where it crosses the Icknield Way.





The main access to the parish is the B1039 road which comes from Wendens Ambo in Essex, passes through Great Chishill (and two miles of Cambridgeshire) before continuing into Hertfordshire on its way to Barley and Royston.

Great Chishill Windmill is a striking landmark along this road. It is a post mill, meaning that most of the wooden structure rotates on a central post to ensure the sails face into the prevailing wind. There has been a mill on this site since at least 1592. The present mill was built in 1819 and was last used in 1951. Today it is leased from Cambridgeshire County Council to Great Chishill Windmill Trust, whose volunteers are currently raising funds to complete some major renovation work. This will hopefully enable the fantail once again to guide the mill automatically into the wind.

Great Chishill boasts the highest point in Cambridgeshire, 146 metres (480 feet) above sea level. This elevation means that there are splendid long views from the village, especially looking northwest to the more typical flat Cambridgeshire countryside.

There are also fine views from the ancient byway that runs for a mile between the two parish churches, unusually looking down onto the windmill.

Like most rural communities, Great Chishill's population has gradually increased over the last century, yet it has lost many of its local amenities. There were once several shops and a school for a hundred children, but these have now vanished, along with the post office and the two pubs. However, there are still plenty of small business enterprises scattered through the parish. Social activities focus on the village hall, opened in 1982.



Hospitality:

Hall Farm B&B and self-catering – 01763 838263 – www.hallfarmbb.co.uk

Adjacent Hundred Parishes: Barley, Heydon, Chrishill, Langley.

Links:

Parish Council: www.greatchishillpc.com

Churches: www.icknielldwayparish.com

Great Chishill community website: www.greatchishill.org.uk

... including History: www.greatchishill.org.uk/history.html

Great Chishill Windmill: www.greatchishillwindmill.com