



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

HADSTOCK



Location: 5 miles north of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5544.

Postcode: CB21 4PH. **Access:** south off A1307. **Bus:** 29 (Tues only) Saffron Walden – Linton.

County: Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** 332 in 2011.

Hadstock is a relatively small parish and has never had a wealthy resident or squire, yet the past has handed down evidence of a variety of interesting historical events. The population peaked at 482 in 1871 before declining as agriculture became mechanised. Hadstock has avoided any significant development and today is home to 300 people, of whom very few work on the land.



Hadstock's Anglo-Saxon church, dedicated to St Botolph, holds the key to the parish's ancient history, having been built in the first half of the 11th century, before the Norman Conquest. Its northern door is believed to be the oldest door still in regular use in England. It is made of oak planks with iron straps outside riveted through to circular wooden bars on the inside. The inside is shown here on the left and the outside on the right.



The Domesday Book of 1086 recorded that Hadstock, with 27 households, came under the control of the Abbey of Ely St Etheldreda, now Ely Cathedral. The monks may have believed that St Botolph, the patron saint of travellers, was buried here. Botolph was a 7th century Benedictine monk who founded a monastery at a place called Icanho in 654 AD and was buried there after his death in 680 AD. There is some circumstantial evidence that Hadstock may be Icanho. There is also circumstantial evidence that Hadstock church may have been the minster church built by King Canute to commemorate those who died at the decisive victory of his Danish army over the English in 1016 at the Battle of Assandun, which may have taken place in adjacent Ashdon.

It must be said that there are other claims for the locations of Icanho, Assandun and the minster. The Hadstock theories led to two major excavations, inside the church in 1974 and outside in 2005. The 1974 investigation found Roman and Saxon pottery fragments beneath the many layers of flooring and also a large empty grave. It was established that the church's structure had

been altered several times during its thousand years and the northern doorway with its Anglo-Saxon door had been reconstructed during the early Middle Ages. The 2005 dig, organised by the Hadstock Society, found evidence of Roman farming. Neither investigation was able to confirm the theories about Icanho or Assendun, but they left both possibilities open.

St Botolph's is listed as Grade I. Hadstock has 38 further listed buildings, most of which are in the centre of the village which has been designated as a Conservation Area since the 1970s. The picture on the right is of 18th-century Pond House, photographed across the village green. Below, seen from the churchyard, is 16th-century Beam Ends.



Most of the parish is on higher ground than Hadstock village itself. In particular, the land rises in the south to a plateau where the parish shares boundaries with Great Chesterford, Saffron Walden and Ashdon. This plateau was converted to an airfield in World War II. Known both as Hadstock and, more often, as Little Walden airfield, it was one of thirteen wartime airfields in the Hundred Parishes area. It was

an important bomber and fighter base for the United States Army Air Forces from 1944 to 1945 and then used by the RAF to store surplus military vehicles. It was decommissioned in 1958 and returned to agricultural use. The control tower was later converted into a private residence. Part of the airfield, an unimproved area of boulder clay grassland, is cared for by the Essex Wildlife Trust as the Harrison Sayer Nature Reserve, named after the previous late owner.

Part of one of the three wartime runways now provides a firm surface for a stretch of the long-distance Icknield Way Path which crosses the parish and passes through the village.

A separate branch of the Icknield Way defines Hadstock's western boundary, whilst the northern parish perimeter follows the line of the old railway which ran between Cambridge and Haverhill from 1865 to 1967. Hadstock's northern and western boundaries also constitute the county boundary between Essex and Cambridgeshire.

All in all, the pretty village of Hadstock is steeped in history and well worth a more detailed look.

Accommodation:

Pippin Cottage B&B – 01223 890049

Hospitality:

King's Head – www.hadstockcommunitypub.co.uk/ [Closed in 2016, hoping to reopen]

Adjacent parishes: Ashdon, Saffron Walden, Great Chesterford, Linton.

Further reading: *Under Hadstock Church*, a booklet available in the church

Links:

Parish Council and Hadstock Society: www.essexinfo.net/hadstock

History: www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/hadstock/hadstockindex.html

Conservation area appraisal - link from: www.uttlesford.gov.uk/caa

RAF Little Walden: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF_Little_Walden

This page was last updated 19 November 2017.