



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

HILDERSHAM



Location: 7 miles northwest of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square** TL5448.

Postcode: CB21 6BS. **Access:** north from A1307. **Bus:** 13 (Cambridge – Haverhill).

County: Cambridgeshire. **District:** South Cambridgeshire. **Population:** 211 in 2011.

Hildersham is the most northerly of the Hundred Parishes. Most inhabitants live in the charming village of Hildersham at the centre of the parish, whilst arable farmland extends uphill from the village to the Essex border in the south and north to the parish boundary along Wool Street, the Roman road from Colchester to Cambridge. Roman coins, pottery and foundations have been found near the church on what is probably the site of a Roman camp. They would have been attracted by the River Granta which meanders through the village, except in the centre where it has been straightened. There may also have been a Roman burial mound, like those in nearby Bartlow, but a 19th-century vicar disapproved of its use as a maypole site and had it levelled.

A small Anglo-Saxon cemetery was revealed at Furze Hill, half a mile east of the village, after the hill was used as a bombing range during the Second World War.

Hildriceham (the village of Hildric) appears in the Domesday Book of 1086.

Holy Trinity Church was founded in 1150. The present building dates from the 13th century and includes an octagonal font from that time. The church's interior is notable for the colourful late-Victorian decoration of the walls and roof of the chancel with floral motifs and Biblical scenes.



The church is listed as Grade I, one of more than 50 within the Hundred Parishes, whilst a Grade II* listing has been awarded to no fewer than three private residences - a high proportion of the 80 dwellings.

Mabbuts, shown here, is the oldest, from the 16th century, whilst 17th-century Burford House has murals indicating Royalist support that remained hidden behind panelling from Cromwellian times until recently.



In the 19th century the rector, Robert Goodwin, and his family endowed the church and Hildersham generally with many treasures, including the beech trees that are prominent around the village. One of the family's gifts was the iron bridge, built by the local blacksmith over the Granta in 1886 and even today affording a more certain crossing than the adjacent ford. The Granta is prone to flooding and in the Middle Ages the village consisted of two communities, north and south of the river.

Hildersham is believed to have been the very last village in England where the medieval system of strip farming on common land was abolished by enclosure, following an Act of Parliament in 1887. Even then, with much of the parish being under single ownership, few dividing hedges were planted and today there is still considerable common land.

The Cambridge – Haverhill railway ran through the southern part of the parish for a hundred years, until 1967, although the nearest station was more than a mile away in Linton. For many years, the village had a school, but this closed in 1928 with only seven pupils. The village pub, the Pear Tree, closed in 2013, although there are hopes that it can be revived. Just opposite is Forge Green, named after the blacksmith's forge that once operated there.



Close by, the telephone kiosk has a new lease of life as a lending library. This is just one of the signs that Hildersham has a thriving community spirit. In the spring, daffodils bring the village to life, and during the summer tea and cakes are available one afternoon a month in the village hall beside the recreation ground.

The village hall started life in 1914 as a makeshift army surgical ward in Cambridge during World War I, before being bought by the village. It has been in regular use ever since.



Dotted around Hildersham are some attractive artistic works – a girl on a swing, a plaque denoting Old School Wood beside the church, the attractive memorial seat shown above – and, of course, the iron bridge, immediately above.

Hospitality:

None - see adjacent parishes.

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: Great Chesterford, Linton.

Links:

Parish Council: www.hildersham.org.uk

History: www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=66708