



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

HINXTON



Location: 6 miles northwest of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square** TL4945.
Postcode CB10 1RF. **Access:** off A1301. National Cycle Route 11. Bus: 7A to Cambridge.
County: Cambridgeshire. **District:** South Cambridgeshire. **Population:** 334 in 2011.

This relatively small parish, somewhat off the beaten track, is a place of contrasts. It is steeped in ancient history yet is home to a world-class research facility.

The parish is triangular-shaped, bounded by the River Cam in the west, rising steadily to the old Roman road (now the A11) in the east, and with a stretch of the A505 and a rather arbitrary field edge for its northern perimeter. Most of the parish is arable farmland that extends north and east from the village of Hinxtton. Below are some views of the attractive centre of the village.



The ancient Icknield Way from Norfolk to Wiltshire ran roughly east-west through this area and several strands of the route took advantage of a number of places where the River Cam could be forded, so it was natural that settlement should evolve here. Hinxtton grew up on the east bank.

Archaeological digs in several parts of the parish have uncovered evidence of human activity dating back several thousand years – from the Mesolithic period (roughly pre 4000 BC when humans were "hunter-gatherers"), through the Neolithic period (circa 4000 BC to 2000 BC when man settled and farmed), the Bronze Age (circa 2000 BC to circa 700 BC when metal started to be used to fashion tools, utensils and weapons), and into the Iron Age (circa 700 BC until the arrival of the Romans, a period when tools and farming implements became more efficient through use of the tougher iron). There is evidence of Roman occupation, which is not surprising, given the proximity of the Roman fort at Great Chesterford less than two miles to the south.



In the south of the parish, there was once a Saxon settlement. Following the arrival of the Normans, the village was recorded in the 1086 Domesday Book as Hestitona, or Hengest's Farm. At that time, Hinxtton had three watermills, one of which may have stood on the site of the present watermill, shown here. This was built in the 17th century and ceased working in 1955. Fortunately, it was saved from demolition by the Cambridge Preservation Society (now Cambridge Past, Present and Future) and reinstated to working order. It is open to the public on specific dates (see link below).

The parish church dates from the 12th century and its Norman origins are evident in the northern doorway and font. Its tower has a rare external "Sanctus" bell, just like neighbouring Ickleton.

The Saxon settlement gradually extended northwards into what today is the High Street, part of an important north-south route in the Middle Ages. The present red brick Hinxtton Hall, pictured here, was built in the 18th century near the southern end of the High Street. Subsequently, the road was diverted and houses demolished in the 19th century to create parkland around the Hall. Most through traffic had already been diverted from the High Street, possibly even before the turnpike road was opened in 1724. Today, the village is tucked away, unseen by those who use the turnpike, now classified as the A1301.



The Hall and its estate were acquired by the medical research charity, Wellcome Trust, in 1992 and since then there has been much development of the site to create the Genome Campus. Construction was delayed several months while archaeologists uncovered a wealth of historic artefacts and in particular the site of an Anglo-Saxon settlement of the 6th to 7th centuries. During modernisation, the architectural and decorative features of the Hall were sympathetically renovated, with particular focus on the "Pompeii parlour", a room that had been richly decorated in the 1830s with Roman-style frescos and murals. The Hall retains the look and feel of an elegant country house and functions partly as a conference centre, working alongside the purpose-built research and computing facilities. The Hall is not open to the public but can be seen from a footpath that runs along the edge of the parkland.

The Genome Campus is the British hub of biomedical science and it was here that some of the most important genetic discoveries were made, with one-third of the human genome sequencing having been carried out here. Whilst archaeological research revealed the site's ancient history, today Hinxtton Hall operates at the cutting edge of world science, aiming to improve human and animal health through research and by sharing the results to enhance understanding of genome science and biology. Hinxtton Hall is occupied by the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute and also the European Bioinformatics Institute which is largely funded by international governments. The combined workforce of 1,500 greatly outnumbers the residents of the parish.

In the mid 19th century, most of the land in the parish was owned by Wedd William Nash. He built a new residence, Hinxtton Grange, to the north of the parish, well away from the village and hidden from view. In the early 21st century the UK Government short-listed Hinxtton Grange as a potential site for a so-called "eco-town" for about 20,000 people, but after determined local opposition the idea was abandoned and the character of the parish was preserved.

Hospitality:

Red Lion – 17th century inn, centre of Hinxtton - 01799 530601 - <http://redlionhinxtton.co.uk/>
McDonald's – beside A505 / A1301 roundabout

Included in Hundred Parishes walk:

14: Between Great Chesterford and Whittlesford stations (5 miles).

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: Ickleton, Duxford, Great Chesterford.

Links:

Parish Council: <http://www.hinxtton-pc.org.uk/community/hinxtton-parish-council-7847/home>
Hinxtton Hall history <https://www.sanger.ac.uk/about/campus/campus-history>
Hinxtton Watermill: <https://www.cambridgeppf.org/about-hinxtton-watermill>
History: www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=66725

Further reading:

The Life and Times of Hinxtton, published by Virginia Walker, Hinxtton