



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## LANGLEY



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**Location:** 7 miles southwest of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4435.  
**Postcode:** CB11 4RU. **Access:** well off main roads. Bus: no effective service for visitors.  
**County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** 355 in 2011.

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The parish of Langley is formed of two main parts, Langley Upper Green & Langley Lower Green, with some outlying settlements. It is one of the most northwesterly outposts of the county of Essex, adjoining both Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. The parish boundary with Chrishall passes through the highest point in Essex, 147 metres (482 feet) above sea level.

This high point is also passed by the Harcamlow Way long-distance path, one of several good public rights of way that criss-cross the parish through quiet countryside. Langley is no stranger to long distance routes, for the distinctive straight line of the Roman road between Great Chesterford and Braughing is clearly visible, some of it still used as a byway and defining the eastern parish boundary with Clavering.

The name Langley occurs in many parts of England and probably originates from Anglo-Saxon for '*long clearing in the woodland*'. Whilst Langley Upper Green is on high ground and Lower Green is in the valley beside the nascent River Stort, each part of the village is a linear settlement with extensive areas of common land fronting most properties. The common land offered grazing to commoners and also to drovers taking their livestock to London in earlier times. This common land is now managed in different ways: some is mown, some managed for wild flowers, some for hay and other areas left naturally 'rough'. The village green in Upper Green is managed by the village cricket club, whose field of play includes the road that passes through.



There is little road traffic, but the lanes are narrow and need care. The approaches to Langley, and through the village itself, offer views over undulating agricultural land. From the parish church in Upper Green there are especially long views into Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, including the site of the World War II airfield one mile to the west in Nuthampstead. From this vantage point, it is just possible to imagine how the land to the south and southwest, either side of the lane up from the Bull pub, was once farmed. Older maps show large common fields, up to 110 acres, divided into many strips of perhaps one or two acres each, with

narrow paths between. These open or common fields evolved over centuries, probably starting from forest clearances in Saxon times. It was farmed like this for hundreds of years until the middle of the 19th century, when this land was 'enclosed' by the landowners, removing the traditional activity of small farmers to share the use of open fields and 'common' land, henceforth reserving that right for the landowner. Enclosure came relatively late to Langley, having been sanctioned by the Enclosure Act of 1773.

The soil in Langley is mainly chalky boulder clay (also known as 'glacial till') which is valuable agricultural land suitable for cereals. The chalk-influenced soils give rise to a very wide variety of natural vegetation. There are two notable rare species found in the village - crested cow wheat and the scarlet malachite beetle, pictured here.



The village is small in terms of population and so has limited amenities: the Bull pub at Lower Green, playground, cricket club, and a community centre on Upper Green. There are two churches (parish and Baptist) but a third (Methodist) has closed in recent years, along with the school, shop and even a telephone box. Interestingly, three telephone exchange lines terminate in the parish, literally 'the end of the line'. The village does have electricity, although it came only in 1950 !

The opening hours of the Bull pub at Langley Lower Green are not regular, so it is advisable to phone before relying on it for sustenance (details below).

If you should become desperate, please heed the ancient sign on the cottage opposite the pub. The Magistrates give notice that "all persons found begging in this parish will be taken up by the Vagrant Act and punished" - presumably a reference to the Vagrancy Act of 1824.

As with so many of the Hundred Parishes, a high proportion of Langley's attractive properties are listed. These include the small parish church dedicated to St John the Evangelist. It has 12th-century origins including its Norman porch, a 14th-century tower and noteworthy double hammerbeam roof from the 15th century.

Beside the parish church is Langley Hall, dating from the 17th century and shown here. There has been a manor house on this site since the Middle Ages,

Situated about midway between road and rail connections to London and Cambridge (via either the M11 and A10 road corridors or Audley End and Royston stations), Langley is not as remote as it may seem, at least for someone with a car or cycle. Once here, it is possible to walk or ride for miles on quiet lanes, public rights of way and permissive routes over agricultural land with good hedgerows and woodland without meeting another person. However, you might have the good fortune to see a herd of fallow deer or a muntjac deer, even a fox or signs of a badger, whilst buzzards and red kites are now almost common.



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### Hospitality:

The Bull, Langley Lower Green (limited food and opening hours) - 01279 777307.

**Adjacent parishes:** Meesden, Nuthampstead, Barley, Great & Little Chishill, Chrishall, Elmdon & Wenden Lofts, Clavering.

### Links:

Parish Council: [www.essexinfo.net/langleygreens](http://www.essexinfo.net/langleygreens)

History: [www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/langley/langleyhomepage.html](http://www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/langley/langleyhomepage.html)

Langley Church: [www.achurchnearyou.com/langley-st-john-the-evangelist](http://www.achurchnearyou.com/langley-st-john-the-evangelist)

### Further reading:

*Clavering and Langley, the first thousand years*, E.M. Ludgate.

*Clavering and Langley, 1783-1983*, E.M. Ludgate.