



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

LITTLE EASTON



Location: 2 miles northeast of Great Dunmow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6024.
Postcode CM6 2JR. **Access:** west off B184. Bus 313 Saffron Walden – Little Easton – Great Dunmow (weekdays, 2 hourly). **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** 437 in 2011.

Little Easton was recorded in the *Domesday Book* in 1086 as *Estaines Parva*, a hamlet in the Great Forest of Essex which stretched from the northeast of London almost to Thaxted. The early Manor of Little Easton was occupied by the family de Windsor for several generations passing by female descent to one Eleanor de Louvain who married Sir William Bouchier in 1365. The Bouchier family had many distinguished members over the decades who fought in the Crusades and served in various positions of high office including Henry Bouchier, who became Lord Treasurer of England in 1454, and his brother Thomas who became Archbishop of Canterbury and crowned Edward IV in 1461.

The estate passed to the Maynard family in 1590. They continued to live in Easton Lodge until the 20th century. The last Viscount Maynard died in 1865 and his sole heir was his granddaughter, Frances Evelyn Maynard, then aged three. At the age of 21 she married Francis Greville, who became the Earl of Warwick in 1893. “Darling Daisy”, as she was affectionately known, entertained lavishly at Easton Lodge, where the Prince of Wales (who was crowned King Edward VII in 1902) was a frequent guest.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Little Easton was the centre of a notable creative community that included Countess of Warwick tenants composer Gustav Holst and author H G Wells and several neighbours who were successful writers and newspaper editors. A theatre was created in a 16th-century barn, opening in 1913 and shown here. Such notables as George Bernard Shaw, Ellen Terry and Darling Daisy contributed to the Barn Theatre’s regular productions.



The Manor House, next to Little Easton church, dates from the 17th century with major reconstruction in 1840 and extension in the 1920s. In 1925, Lady Warwick’s daughter married a well-known theatrical and film producer, Basil Dean, and they were given the house and surrounding buildings which were converted into the present Manor House, pictured here.

Dean often filmed locally and film stars of the day, including Gracie Fields and George Formby, would stay at the Manor House.

Each year, the present owners of the Manor House generously open the gardens and the Barn Theatre during the August Bank Holiday weekend to accommodate the Countess of Warwick Show which attracts thousands of visitors (see link below).

Easton Lodge was requisitioned during the Second World War. The US Army Air Force created an airfield on what was once the deer park of Easton Lodge, and leading up to D-Day this was the base of the 386th Bombardment Group of the USAAF. The base was subsequently used by the RAF and then the British Army. The occupation rendered the house uninhabitable and it was demolished in 1948. Although the land was reinstated as farmland, the layout of the airfield can still be seen from the air.

The gardens of Easton Lodge itself, which are undergoing a major restoration, are also open to the public on specified dates (see link below).



The beautiful church of Little Easton is Norman in origin, with additions in several subsequent centuries. It was built on the site of a Saxon structure. Some medieval wall paintings still survive. There is a chapel and two interesting stained glass windows to honour the many American air crews who lost their lives in the Second World War.

The church is open to the public and contains several superb memorials to the Bouchiers and the Maynards, including a charming bust of Darling Daisy.

The parish has 35 listed buildings, many of which were once part of the Easton Lodge estate. They are spread around the rolling countryside and attractive lanes of this rather scattered community. Little Easton is one of five rural parishes that pool their resources within the "Five Parishes", initially an ecclesiastical body that was formed in 1983 - well before the Hundred Parishes evolved! The Five Parishes publish a joint monthly magazine and for the Millennium published a book of walks and a brief history.

Hospitality: The Stag Public House – 01371 870214 - <https://www.thestaglittleeaston.co.uk/>

Adjacent parishes: Little Canfield, Takeley, Broxton, Great Easton & Tilty, Great Dunmow.

Links:

Parish Council: www.littleeastonpc.co.uk

The Five Parishes: <http://thefiveparishes.org.uk/>

The Countess of Warwick Country Show: <http://countessofwarwickshow.org/>

The Gardens of Easton Lodge: www.eastonlodge.co.uk

Further reading:

Guide Book to Little Easton Church – available in the church.

Several other history booklets, Felice Spurrier – available in the church.