



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

THE SAMPFORDS



Location: 6 miles southeast of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6435.
Postcode CB10 2RG. **Access:** B1051, B1053. **Buses:** School and shopping services only.
County: Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** 837 in 2011.

The Sampfords is a combined north Essex parish of what was once two, Great Sampford to the north and Little Sampford to the south. There is evidence of settlement here as far back as the Bronze Age, and the archaeological project 'Heritage Sampford', conducted in the early years of our new millennium by the Sampfords Society, suggests settled farming in the Iron Age period and increasing stability of community life through the Roman era. The name Sampford seems to derive from two manors which appear in the Domesday record, Sanfort and Sanforda, after a sandy ford. Curiously, a sandy ford still exists in Great Sampford today, being sufficiently well-known to find its way onto YouTube (see link below). Do not attempt - unless in a 4x4!



The Sampfords were associated in medieval times with the Roman Catholic military order of the Knights Hospitallers. It is believed that in the 14th century they built the Great Sampford parish church of St Michael the Archangel, notably characterised by some 26 arched stone bays in the chancel, 11 on one side and 15 on the other, each said to have seated one of the Knights. Once described as 'a church of the Essex cornfields', St Michael's is a Grade I-listed building, entry into which is through a remarkably woodwormed door.

Presumably the bugs have departed, for the door has clearly been doing its duty for a very long time. The church interior is unusually light, owing to the large, five-light traceried east window which has at some point lost its stained glass. It retains some excellent stone carvings.

Great Sampford's sister church in the village of Little Sampford is St Mary the Virgin, also 14th-century and Grade I-listed. It is delightfully set on a small hill, and the tower with its distinctive 'Hertfordshire spike' (a small leaded spire) can be seen from some distance. There are beautiful views of the surrounding countryside, and benches have been thoughtfully placed for sightseers to view it at leisure and at its best. However, the churchyard, which has been developed into a small nature reserve, does appear to have been fighting a long-standing (and losing) battle with moles. Mind your step.



Inside there are a number of ornate monuments, the largest and most noticeable of which is attributed to one Bridget Peck of one of the noble families of Little Sampford Hall. Bridget has been reclining in marble for some 300 years, clearly long enough to have become rather bored with her book.



Both St Mary's and St Michael's are open daily for those who wish to visit.

There is a third church in the parish, a Baptist chapel in Great Sampford just across the road from St Michael's. It was established originally in 1802, though the present church was built in 1875.

Much of the parish is a picturesque and gently undulating arable land, with the two villages lying alongside the River Pant, which winds north to south from its source near Saffron Walden to Bocking in Braintree where it becomes the River Blackwater. Footpaths are plentiful and many cross, re-cross and run adjacent to the river in its course between the villages and beyond. Those



wanting a planned route might like to try the circular walk around Great Sampford village from Essex Walks (see link below). Nature lovers shouldn't miss the West Wood Nature Reserve in the south of the parish just off the Thaxted road. This 58-acre wet woodland is owned by the Essex Wildlife Trust, and is home to many species of flora and fauna, including the rare oxlip and wood barley.

There are over 100 fine listed buildings in the parish, some of



which are shown here. The thriving commercial life which once saw a proliferation of shops, businesses and craftsmen is of course now long gone, as indeed it is across much of rural England. Here were the watchmaker, the draper, the wheelwright, the blacksmith and the straw plaiters, among many others. There were three hostleries too. All that is left now is the school in the village of Great Sampford. Even the Red Lion pub seems to have closed.



The Sampfords have been home, at one time or another, to a number of notable personalities. Sir James Nicholl McAdam, son of the inventor of tarmac, lived at Little Sampford Hall. More recent residents included composers Alan Rawsthorne and John Ireland. The latter gave the parish name to the tune 'Sampford' which accompanies an Ancient and Modern Easter hymn. The artist and designer Olga Lehmann lived for many years in Great Sampford, and painted many of her landscapes in the surrounding countryside.

Hospitality:

Barley Croft B&B, Little Sampford – 01799 586296

Bush Farm B&B, Little Sampford – 01799 586636

Adjacent parishes:

Wimbish, Radwinter, Hempstead, Finchingfield, Great Bardfield, Little Bardfield, Thaxted.

Links:

Parish Council: www.thesampfords.co.uk

History: www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/greatsampford/greatsampford.html

Great Sampford ford: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l45kGO8NqIQ>

Great Sampford Conservation Area Appraisal:

www.uttlesford.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=2278&p=0

Essex Walks: www.essexwalks.com/walks/gt_sampford.html#page=description

West Wood Nature Reserve: <http://www.essexwt.org.uk/reserves/west-wood>

Further reading:

The Story of the Sampfords, written and published by Gerald Curtis, 1981.

RAF Great Sampford, by Michael Southgate, published by The Radwinter Society, 2016.