



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

SHALFORD



Location: 5 miles northwest of Braintree. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL7229.
Postcode: CM7 5HJ. **Access:** Braintree Station on the London to Norwich line. B1053.
Bus services: 9 and 10 Great Notley to Great Bardfield.
County: Essex **District:** Braintree **Population:** 747 in 2011.

Shalford is a small parish of approximately 750 people in the heart of rural Essex, deriving its name from a 'shallow ford' across the River Pant. 5 miles north-west of the market town of Braintree, Shalford is a village of ancient origins and gentle countryside. There is evidence of Celtic, Roman and Saxon civilisation, and hints of royal connection in gifts made of the local manor by William the Conqueror to his queen, Matilda, and some five centuries later by Henry VIII to Anne of Cleves.

Approaching Shalford from the south offers perhaps the finest view of the area - across the broad compass of the Pant valley. One arrives first at the small hamlet of Church End, which might initially serve to confuse since the focal point among the cluster of dwellings is the popular Shalford Village Store and the Shalford Village Hall. Shalford itself however, is a mile further down the road and feels to the newcomer a rather different place. Perhaps it is the attractive downhill sweep of the road through the village past the parish church grounds, or maybe the skein of listed residences which largely comprise The Street (the main thoroughfare), but it feels here that one is entering historic Shalford. The ancients clearly had the requirements of body and soul properly prioritised; the George Inn and the church of St Andrew's, both 14th century buildings within a hundred yards of each other, dominate the village.



St Andrew's has Saxon origins but was extensively reconstructed in the Decorated and later the Perpendicular style. The flint and pebble church houses one of the finest organs in north-west Essex, built in the late 1870s. Also worthy of note - and of a similar era - is a framed altar frontal exhibiting a remarkably skilled and intricate example of straw plaiting, a widespread and lucrative cottage industry across the Home Counties until cheap imported straw from the Far East brought it into decline at the start of the 20th century.



The war memorial in the rear of the church bears the familiar name of Eric Ravilious. Ravilious was a Sussex-born artist, one of whose woodcuts has been adopted as the logo of the Hundred Parishes Society (see top of page). Ravilious worked in a range of artistic media, some of which may be seen at the Fry Gallery in Saffron Walden. During World War 2 he was commissioned as a war artist and a large collection is on display at the Imperial War Museum in London.

Ravilious lived in north-west Essex in his latter years, the last two of which were in Shalford at Iron Bridge Farm, pictured here. He was lost at sea whilst on active service in 1942.



Ministering to bodily needs a short step down the road from the church is the timber-framed George Inn, also 14th century in origin. Open for lunches and evening meals, it has good reviews and is listed in the Good Beer Guide. Those wanting lighter fare might want to retrace their steps to the well-stocked Shalford Village Store which is usually open early till late.

Walks abound through the gently undulating countryside of the parish, many of which touch on wildlife sites and areas of ancient woodland. Levelly Wood is perhaps the largest of these, maintained by the Friends of the Flitch Way who do a great deal of conservation work in the surrounding areas. The Shalford Parish Footpaths Map is an excellent starting point for those wishing to explore, and can be obtained from the village store for a small donation. For the serious wildlife enthusiast, a local resident has produced a detailed paper on the flora and fauna to be found on these sites – see www.essexinfo.net/shalford/assets/documents/wildlife01

Rather more modern is the recently created Stoneley Park, an area of land being reclaimed and developed as a local amenity with a wild life area. It is clearly a work in progress, but a laudable community endeavour which, since the site borders Levelly Wood and Shalford Park, has considerable potential to enlarge and enrich Shalford's managed conservation green space.

Hospitality

The George Inn on The Street, CM7 5HH; 01371 850207; www.thegeorgeinnshalford.co.uk
Lynton House B&B in Church End, CM7 5EZ; 01371 850975; www.lynton-house.co.uk

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes:

Great Saling, Bardfield Saling, Great Bardfield, Finchingfield, Wethersfield.

Links

Parish Council and parish organisations including History Society: www.essexinfo.net/shalford
Friends of St Andrew's Church: www.fostac.co.uk
Friends of the Flitch Way: www.friends-of-the-flitch-way.org.uk
Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden: <http://www.fryartgallery.org>

Further reading:

The Story of Shalford, Dorothy Gardner, 2000. ISBN 0 9525147 1 0. Available from the Parish Clerk (contact details on Parish Council website).
St Andrew's Church: As It Was and Is. Available from St Andrew's Church.