



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

WENDENS AMBO



Location: 2 miles southwest of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5136.

Postcode: CB11 4LB. **Access:** Audley End Station on London Liverpool Street to Cambridge line; B1383 and B1039. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** 473 in 2011.

This view along Church Path is one of the best known in the Hundred Parishes area. The cottages date from the 16th century and one is believed to have been a guildhall. The church tower is Norman, almost a thousand years old, although its “Hertfordshire spike” was added later. Roman bricks, clearly visible around the doorway, were probably taken from a villa whose remains were excavated nearby. Evidence of an Iron Age settlement and flint tools from the Bronze Age indicate that this fertile valley has been inhabited for several thousand years.



The Domesday Book of 1085 recorded two adjacent parishes – Wendena Magna and Wendena Parva. These later became known as Great Wenden and Little Wenden. Wendena is probably a Saxon word meaning a winding valley. In 1662, the Bishop of London approved the merger of these two small parishes under the name Wendens Ambo, ‘ambo’ meaning both in Latin. Little Wenden probably had its own church, but it had disappeared by 1700.

The unnamed stream that flows through the village passes beneath the London – Newmarket road, B1383, to join the River Cam. The crossing is no longer obvious, but at one time the roadway crossed the stream at what was called “Udel’s Ford”. Udel was probably a local landowner. The name was adopted by the local Saxon administrative area, the Uttlesford Hundred, and today the parish is in Uttlesford District.



In addition to the church, the village includes many more listed buildings, dating back to the 15th century. They are scattered along several narrow roads that meander through the parish, including Duck Street and Rookery Lane. Most listings refer to buildings, but they include a 3 metre high wall, built of flint and puddingstone, that follows the bend in the B1039 close to Church Path. Flint is used as a building material throughout much of the Hundred Parishes area, whilst “Hertfordshire puddingstone” is found only occasionally. It is a natural rock composed of flint pebbles and believed to have been formed around 50 million years ago.

Both the M11 motorway and the London Liverpool Street to Cambridge railway line pass through the village. The motorway was opened in the 1970s and its closest exit, junction 9, lies 8 kilometres north at Stump Cross. The railway station serves a wide area. When it opened in 1845 the station was called Wenden, but it was soon renamed Audley End in deference to Audley End House which lies 2kms to the north. The house was built in the early 1600s by Lord Howard de Walden who became Earl of Suffolk and owned the majority of Wendens Ambo parish. It was one of the finest houses in England. It is now only one-third of its original size but is still magnificent, in the care of English Heritage and open to the public.



The station's unusual and grand porch was built for guests of Lord Braybrooke, the Victorian owner of Audley End House. The porch provided shelter as they boarded the horse-drawn coaches.

A branch line to Saffron Walden and Bartlow operated from 1865 to 1964 and its route and platform are clearly visible in what is now the car park.

Lord Braybrooke built this mid 19th century terrace of flint-faced dwellings near Audley End station to fulfil some of the housing demand created by the arrival of the railway and its associated activities.

Despite being bisected by three major transport corridors, the railway, M11 and B1383, Wendens Ambo retains its charm and remains relatively peaceful, nestling just off the beaten track and with footpaths heading into open countryside with fine views from higher ground over the valley of the River Cam.

Hospitality

Bell Inn, Royston Road – 01799 540382 - www.thebellatwenden.co.uk

Fighting Cocks, London Road, B1383: 01799 541279 - www.thefightingcocks.biz

Included in Hundred Parishes walks:

6: Between Newport and Audley End stations (3.5 miles).

11: Between Newport and Audley End stations (10 miles).

13: Between Audley End and Great Chesterford stations (8 miles).

Adjacent parishes:

Arkesden, Elmdon & Wenden Lofts, Littlebury, Saffron Walden, Newport, Wicken Bonhunt.

Links

Parish Council: www.wendensambo.org.uk

Wendens Ambo Church: <http://www.stmarywendensambo.org/>

History: www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/wendensambo/wendensambohistory.html

Audley End Ho: www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/audley-end-house-and-gardens

Further reading:

Wendens Ambo: the history of an Essex village by John J. Mackay (1982) ISBN 0-9508532-0-8, from which some of these historical notes have been extracted.

Both Wendens – a Golden Jubilee Reflection by Denis Dunstone – see

www.wendensambo.org/wenden/was.htm