



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## WIDDINGTON



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**Location:** 4 miles south of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5331.  
**Postcode** CB11 3SG. **Access:** east off B1383; 2 miles SE of Newport Station. **Bus:** 301 (Mon-Sat) Saffron Walden – Audley End Station – Widdington – Stansted Airport Coach Station.  
**County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** 504 in 2011.

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There is a detailed history of Widdington online. Please use the link below to go to the website compiled by Gary Dunnett. It includes copies of many old photos, a village history written in 1939 by Sir Claud Hollis (who had Widdington ancestry), and *The Widdington Chronicles*, a collection published in 1999 of articles from Widdington's Parish Magazine over the preceding 40 years.

It is not the purpose of the Hundred Parishes Society to duplicate what is readily available elsewhere, so this brief introduction highlights just a few aspects of the parish's history and identifies a few of its historic buildings.

Widituna was mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, as also was Amberdana, a manor that is today at least partly within the south-eastern part of Widdington parish.

Widdington village sits on relatively high ground, mostly 100 metres or more above sea level, to the east of the River Cam, which defines much of the parish's western boundary. The village has



no real through road, but is well connected by public paths and byways to nearby settlements. Its relative isolation may help to explain why it is home to several very old buildings.

The best-known is probably Prior's Hall Barn, a very large 14<sup>th</sup>-century building whose construction is thought to have used 400 oak trees. It benefited from a major restoration project in the 1970s and is now in the care of English Heritage. It is open free of charge at weekends from April to September.

The barn has a Grade I listing, as too does its neighbour, Prior's Hall. Not long ago it was found that the 14<sup>th</sup>-century elements of this private house were probably a re-modelling of a 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup>-century Saxon chapel, making it one of the oldest private houses in England. After the Norman Conquest, Prior's Hall manor was owned by the Priory of St Valery in Picardy. Ownership passed



to the newly-founded New College, Oxford in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and remained with the college until around 1920.

Widdington's parish church dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was largely rebuilt and a new tower constructed in the 1870s, but it retains some early features including individual windows from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The parish has had no dominant landowner with grand manor house, but there have been plenty of well-to-do landowners whose farmhouses have survived until today.



Widdington Hall, shown here in an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century photo, is hidden from view behind the parish church. It dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and still retains part of its moat.

East of the village, there are several more Halls dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> centuries: Swayne's Hall, Mole Hall, Thistley Hall and

Amberden Hall. For around 40 years, until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Mole Hall was the home of a popular wildlife park that grew out of the owner's private animal collection.

Sir George Clausen, RA, a celebrated artist, lived in Widdington for 14 years until 1905. On his departure, he donated his studio to the village and it was used for many years as a reading room and men's club. [The People pages of our website include a short article on Clausen].

The Austrian-Jewish Tugendhat family settled here in the 1930s and when their politician son Christopher was granted a peerage he chose the title Baron Tugendhat of Widdington.

Prior's Hall, Widdington Hall and the historic centre of the village are within a Conservation Area that incorporates more than half of Widdington's 45 listed buildings. They include the two pictured below. On the left is the Old Post Office (which served as such until 1986) with its 19<sup>th</sup>-century bay shop window. On the right is the Fleur de Lys, Widdington's popular pub and restaurant which dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



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#### **Hospitality:**

Fleur de Lys – 01799 543280 - <http://thefleurdelys.co.uk>

#### **Included in Hundred Parishes walk:**

Walk number 5: Between Elsenham and Newport stations (7 miles).

**Adjacent parishes:** Henham, Ugley, Quendon & Rickling, Newport, Debden.

#### **Links:**

History, old photos, etc: <https://sites.google.com/site/garydwiddington>

Conservation Area Appraisal 2013 – link from [www.uttlesford.gov.uk/caa](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/caa)

Parish Council - [www.essexinfo.net/widdington-parish-council](http://www.essexinfo.net/widdington-parish-council)

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