



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

WYDDIAL



Location: 2 miles northeast of Buntingford. **Ordnance Survey grid square** TL3731.

Postcode SG9 0EW. **Access:** west off B1368. **Bus:** none.

County: Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts. **Population:** 156 in 2011.

Wyddial is a very rural parish with just one small settlement - the village of Wyddial itself which lies on the Greenwich Meridian, astride a winding lane. Nearly all of the parish is more than 100 metres above sea level, dipping only slightly along the valley of the nascent River Rib in the west of the parish.

Today's parish includes two manors that appeared in the Domesday Book of 1086 – Widihale (meaning "willow nook") and Cornei (meaning "corn island"). Both have less prominence today. Nearby Buntingford did not appear in Domesday, but through the intervening centuries it grew to become the major centre of population and trade in this part of Hertfordshire, surrounded by farms and small villages like Wyddial.

Cornei became Corneybury or Corney Bury. It is on the River Rib and also Ermine Street, the former Roman road that ran from London to Lincoln and York and which forms Wyddial's western parish boundary. During the Middle Ages Corneybury hosted a regular market, but today it is one of Hertfordshire's "lost settlements". At the beginning of the 17th century, Corneybury was bought by one John Crouch and his family owned the estate for much of that century. John Crouch had five sons and five daughters. The daughters were notable for their number of marriages, having no less than twelve husbands between them including two Lord Mayors of London and the Earl of Manchester. All that remains today is a 16th-century manor house which is listed along with associated buildings that are now part of a large farm complex. Like many of Wyddial's larger dwellings, the red-brick house is not visible from the public highway.

Corney Bury is about 2 kilometres, just over a mile, southwest of the village of Wyddial. Outside the village, the parish comprises just a few large farms with associated farmhouse and farm buildings. Today, most of Wyddial is arable farmland, although through much of the 20th century the focus was on dairy cattle.

The Parish Church of St Giles dates from the 14th century, although much of it was rebuilt in the 19th. It is listed as Grade I.

Inside, of most significance, are Jacobean screens and the north aisle and north chancel which were built of brick in 1532, a fact that is recorded on a brass plaque.



The church has an interesting display of photographs and notes that record some of Wyddial's more recent past. There is a copy of the 1946 notice advertising the sale of the "Residential, Agricultural and Sporting Estate known as Wyddial". The estate's 1,400 acres encompassed much of the parish and included Wyddial Hall and three farms. These were being sold by the estate of the late Sir Charles Heaton-Ellis, an officer in the Boer War and WWI whose family had lived at the Hall for nearly 200 years.

Wyddial Hall is now largely hidden behind the church, a substantial white residence that is listed as Grade II*. Much of the house was rebuilt after a disastrous fire in 1733, but some of the original 16th-century house, including its cellars, was incorporated into the new building.

This view of the Hall was photographed from the churchyard. Other attractive Wyddial houses are shown below.



To mark the 900th anniversary of Domesday, the BBC headed the *BBC Domesday Project* to gather a new survey of the United Kingdom, recording a snapshot of everyday life across the UK. Working with thousands of schools and other organisations, a mass of information, images and video was gathered and published in 1986. All the data was stored on computer disks, but as time passed the storage medium and the means to access and interpret it became progressively superseded. The danger of losing it all for ever has been cited as a classic example of the risks of digital obsolescence. Eventually, in 2011, much of the data was republished by the BBC in a web-based format as *Domesday Reloaded*. The written accounts of Wyddial, compiled in 1986 by members and friends of the Women's Institute in the adjacent parish of Hormead, are now available online – see the link below. Here are a few snippets recalling life in the 1980s:

- No houses have main drainage but all have access to mains water and electricity.
- Wyddial has no shop, school or public house, and no community activity except a Sunday morning church service.
- Milk is delivered twice weekly from Buntingford.
- Only Biggin Manor, Wyddial Bury and Home Farms are still working farms.
- Mrs Boyd Carpenter of Wyddial Hall is a professional embroiderer whose commissions have included the cope and mitre worn by the Archbishop of Canterbury for the wedding of the Prince of Wales and Diana Spencer in 1981.

Adjacent Hundred Parishes: Buntingford, Barkway, Anstey, Hormead.

Links:

Parish Council: No website.

Hertfordshire Genealogy:

www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/data/places/places-w/wyddial/wyddial.htm

Domesday Reloaded: www.bbc.co.uk/history/domesday/dblock/GB-536000-231000/page/1

Corneybury history: www.layston-church.org.uk/eastherts2.html

This page was last updated 20 January 2016.