



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to **ELMDON** & **WENDEN LOFTS**



Location: 6 miles west of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4639.
Postcode: CB11 4NH. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Access:** west off B1039.
Buses: There is no general bus service, only school buses.
Population: 594 in 2001, 610 in 2011, 610 in 2021.

This large rural parish is located on the chalk uplands that define the county boundary between Essex and Cambridgeshire. The parish council administers both Elmdon and Wenden Lofts, which were two separate parishes until 1958. The main centre of population is the village of Elmdon, whilst the parish also includes the hamlets of Duddenhoe End and Lower Pond Street.

There is evidence that this upland area has been settled for thousands of years, with remains of ring ditches, Bronze Age and Iron Age enclosures, a Roman burial mound and Roman road. The Domesday record of 1086 shows that Elmdon was already well established. The Icknield Way, a prehistoric hilltop track, passes through Elmdon village.



The most obvious evidence of early occupation is the Roman road which connected the garrisons at Great Chesterford and Braughing. This photo was taken near Rockell's Wood, looking northeast towards Elmdon Lee at the top of the hill. The quality of the original construction is still apparent, with the road being somewhat raised above the adjoining fields and having a drainage ditch on either side. Three kilometres (two miles) behind the photographer, the Roman road passes beside a Roman burial mound that today is only about a metre high. It marks the most southerly point of Elmdon parish - where it meets both Clavering and Langley.

The parish has three very different churches. Below, on the left, is the parish church in the centre of Elmdon, dedicated to St Nicholas - mostly Victorian, although the lower part of the tower dates from the 15th century. On the right is the Hamlet Church in Duddenhoe End. It started life as a barn at least 400 years ago and was converted into a church in 1859 - the only thatched church within the Hundred Parishes. The links at the end of this introduction include one to a short Pathé News film of the roof being thatched in 1951. The third church, 12th-century St Dunstons, was once Wenden Lofts' parish church, but is now a shell and inaccessible on private land.



The parish has a total of 80 listed buildings. One of the oldest is Pigots, on the outskirts of Elmdon village and shown on the right, a 16th-century manor house which is still encircled by a substantial moat.

Many of the parish's buildings are thatched, including 17th-century Hope Cottage in Wenden Lofts, pictured below.



Since the closure of the Elmdon Dial in 2013, the parish no longer has a pub or restaurant. Elmdon was once a rather isolated and self-sufficient community. Now it is not so self-sufficient as its residents can no longer walk to their village police station, post office, school or pub.

The final photo shows Crawley House, close to the church in Elmdon. It was built in the 16th century and served as a grammar school for nearly 300 years. In front, on the small village green, are the War Memorial and bus shelter.

Most of Elmdon village has been designated as a Conservation Area since 1978, recognising that there has been little modern development here and seeking to preserve its historic character. It is certainly an attractive and fascinating parish to explore, ideally with a camera.



The house pictured below is at Duddenhoe End. It was built in the 18th century and for many years was the Woodman public house.



Adjacent parishes:

Strethall, Littlebury, Wendens Ambo, Arkesden, Clavering, Langley, Chrishall, Ickleton.

Hundred Parishes Society walk routes which can be downloaded from the website include a 4.5 mile circular walk, number 164, starting at Chrishall Church and mostly in Elmdon and Wenden Lofts.

Links:

Parish Council: <https://www.elmdonessex.org/>

History: www.recordingtuttlesfordhistory.org.uk/elmdon/elmdon.html

Duddenhoe End - village hall, history, etc: <http://duddenhoeendhall.org>

Pathe News: Duddenhoe End Church being thatched in 1951:

www.britishpathe.com/video/thatched-church/query/Essex

Further reading: (most can be read in Saffron Walden Library)

Some Elmdon families, Audrey Richards & Jean Robin (1975).

Elmdon: Continuity and Change in a North-West Essex Village 1861-1964, Jean Robin, 2008.

Kinship at the Core: An Anthropology of Elmdon in the 1960s, Richards & Strathern, 2009.

Duddenhoe End: books 1, 2 and 3, Olive Harvey, 2008.

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