



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

HEYDON



Location: 4 miles east of Royston. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4340.

Postcode: SG8 8PN. **Access:** north off B1039. **County:** Cambridgeshire. **District:** South Cambridgeshire. **Buses:** Minimal – 31 to Cambridge and 444 to Saffron Walden.

Population: 206 in 2001, 243 in 2011, 210 in 2021.

Heydon village stands on the high escarpment of chalk and glacial till (also known as boulder clay) that generally defines the boundary between Essex and Cambridgeshire. From a height of about 140 metres (460 feet) above sea level, the parish sweeps down to about 40 metres (130 feet) at its northern boundary. Like its larger neighbouring parish, Great and Little Chishill, Heydon moved from Essex to Cambridgeshire as part of a boundary change in 1895.

Archaeological evidence suggests that this was an important location nearly 2,000 years ago. The parish is crossed by the Icknield Way, a broad and ancient trackway that runs from Norfolk to Wiltshire, and also by Bran Ditch, a 3-mile defensive earthwork. The date of origin of both features is uncertain.

Bran Ditch, shown here, runs in an almost straight line northwest from Heydon village towards Fowlmere and is believed to be part of the defensive network known as the Cambridgeshire Dykes. Bran Ditch and adjacent sites were scheduled as an Ancient Monument only in 2012. The English Heritage citation explains that the ditch and bank is probably post-Roman, probably Anglo-Saxon, built by the early Germanic settlers to deter British incursion from the west.



The earthwork is followed for some distance out of Heydon village by the Harcamlow Way long-distance path. It is not always apparent although it is still up to two metres high and 12 metres wide in places. Just beyond Heydon's northern boundary, in Fowlmere, archaeologists found an Anglo-Saxon burial ground beside Bran Ditch. The 60 bodies had all met a violent death and it is believed they had suffered punishment as criminals, rather than been victims of battle.

Heydon was the site of more recent Anglo-German hostilities when Holy Trinity Church was severely damaged by a bomb or bombs during the Second World War. The bomb caused the tower to collapse and knock down half of the nave. The church was rebuilt and re-consecrated in 1956. Inside the church are photos of the damage. The stone arch above the north door records the event. It also declares that this has been a place of worship since 1298, although there is a record of a vicar here as early as 1164. The oldest surviving parts of the church date from the 15th century.



Heydon has several grand houses that are hidden from public view. One of these is Heydon House, a 19th-century replacement for the manor house that had previously stood there. That mansion had been the home of Sir Peter Soame who served as Lord Mayor of London in the 17th century. As lord of Heydon manor, he had the rather curious responsibility for holding a basin, jug and towel for James II at his coronation in 1685. The Soame family owned much of Heydon from the 17th to the 19th century.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the parish was best known for hunting and shooting. Sadly, it is thought that the last bustard in England may have been shot here.

For more than 60 years, Heydon was home to a Wood Green animal shelter but it closed in 2021.

Today, Heydon is a peaceful, rural community whose population has been falling steadily in recent times - from 368 in 1851 to 206 in 2001. There is no school or shop, but the village does have a pub, the King William IV. For such a small community, there is an interesting mix of dwellings – each one seems to have a different architectural style and no fewer than 27 are listed. Here is a small selection, including the King William IV pub (top left).



Hospitality & Accommodation:

King William IV, SG8 8PN – 01763 838773 – <https://www.kingwilliamheydon.com/>

The End Cottage B&B, SG8 8PZ – 01763 838212 – www.theendcottage.co.uk

Hundred Parishes Society walks include . . .

Circular walk 123 whose 8-mile route starts in Chrishall but could be joined in Heydon at page 3.

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes: Great & Little Chishill, Chrishall.

Links:

Parish Council: <http://www.heydonparishcouncil.com/>

Bran Ditch: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1410907?section=official-listing>

This page, last updated 31 October 2023, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk.