



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

CHICKNEY



Location: 4 miles northeast of Stansted Mountfitchet. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5728.

Postcode: CM6 2BY. **Access:** north off B1051.

County: Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Population:** Approx 34 in 2011 (38 in 2001).

Chickney and the City of London have one thing in common: they each cover one square mile. But there all similarities end, for Chickney is a complete antithesis of a city – in fact it is perhaps the ultimate rural parish. Its main thoroughfare is an unsurfaced byway, its population of around 30 is thinly dispersed, and its few listed buildings are mostly well hidden.



Yet Chickney has one little gem – a remote Saxon church that is one of the oldest in the Hundred Parishes. St Mary's closed in 1972 and is now cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust. It is hidden down a gravel track about 600 metres off the B1051.

The church was built of local flint and rubble more than a thousand years ago, some time between 850 AD and 1000 AD. The nave and part of the chancel still stand from that time.

The two narrow slit windows, high up, date from that period, although they would not have been glazed then. Their openings are narrowest where they are now glazed and they then splay both outwards and inwards.



The tower dates from the early 14th century.

Larger windows were inserted into the nave around 1400 AD and the ornate octagonal stone font dates from around that era. The church has benefited from remedial work over the centuries, but its basic structure has stood the test of time.



The building is an uneven shape, not quite rectangular. Outside, the churchyard is oval, which may indicate that the ground was sacred in pre-Christian times.

A fuller explanation of the church and its many fascinating features is given in the booklet which may be purchased in the church.

Notwithstanding its tiny population, Chickney has retained its independence as an administrative parish. On the other hand, the local ecclesiastical parishes have gradually combined resources. Since 1987, five churches have been included within “The Parish of Broxted with Chickney and Tilty and Great and Little Easton”, better known as the Five Parishes.

Despite its remoteness, Chickney once had a railway station in its northern extremity. The station, called Sibleys after the nearby 15th-century farm (pictured below), was on the branch line between Elsenham and Thaxted that operated for 40 years until 1952. Steam trains were run firstly by Great Eastern Railway (GER) and then by London and North Eastern Railway (LNER). Sibleys Station mainly handled farm produce, rather than passengers. There is hardly any sign that the railway ever existed, and today the area is distinguished by a view of the giant microwave radio mast, just over the parish boundary in Debden.



Whilst there is little sign of Chickney’s present inhabitants, its paths and byways offer lovely views of gently rolling countryside so typical of the Hundred Parishes. This view is from the approach to the church, whose spire is just visible above the trees.



Hospitality: See adjacent parishes (below).

Adjacent parishes: Broxted, Henham, Debden.

Links:

Parish Council: No website

Chickney church: www.thefiveparishes.org.uk/churches.html

Further reading:

St Mary’s Church, Chickney, published by the Churches Conservation Trust and available in the church.

The Five Parishes – a brief history, Claire Squibbs.