



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## SEWARDS END



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**Location:** 2 miles east of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5738.  
**Postcode:** CB10 2LE. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Access:** B1053.  
**Buses:** 320 and 321 (Mon – Sat) between Audley End Station, Saffron Walden and Haverhill.  
**Population:** 489 in 2001, 511 in 2011, 530 in 2021.

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Swards End is, as it has always been since its origins in the late 11th century, a small Essex community numbering only a few hundred inhabitants. It appears to take its name from one Sigisward, who was granted land in the area by the Lord of Saffron Walden, Geoffrey de Mandeville. The name has gone through a number of permutations through the ages, including Syward-hes-haund, Swardsende and latterly (until the early 20th century) the faintly unpleasant Sewers End. The community was administered as part of Saffron Walden until 2004 when it gained independence as the separate civil parish of Swards End.

The village of Swards End has, sadly, gone the way of many rural communities, its cottage industries and craftsmen gradually disappearing over the course of time. Within the last century it has lost its windmill, two inns, post office, garage and shops. It appears though, to have retained a thriving community, largely centred these days in the activities of the modern village hall and its adjacent recreation ground, hard-fought-for resources which took residents some years to acquire. Fortunately, however, many of the village's historic buildings (of which 23 are listed) remain, ten dating back to the 16th century or earlier. All the listed buildings are Grade II, with the exception of Grade I St Aylotts, reputedly built by Walden Abbey and used as a retreat for the abbey community. Its moated site and fishpond are protected as a scheduled monument.

St Aylotts is not really visible from the road and nor is another of Swards End's more intriguing buildings – The Towers – seen here in an old postcard image. Described by one commentator as a 'magnificently foolish edifice', the Towers was indeed built as a folly by William Gayton in the mid-19th century, and modelled on the Audley End palace. It was for a time a public school, but has been a private residence for many years.



Another Gayton contribution, this time from Thomas, William's brother, was the land for the village church. Strictly speaking, St James is not a church in its own right but a chapel of ease, a church building established within the boundaries of a parish for the convenience of those unable easily to reach the local parish church. Built in 1847, of rather curious construction with its semi-hexagonal apse and four-legged belfry with fleche, it is the daughter church of St Mary's in Saffron Walden. It was also used as a school until 1947. It remains active with fortnightly services.



The parish is predominantly arable farmland and woodland. It is excellent walking country. Its northern parish boundary follows the route of an old Roman road.

A small nature reserve worth investigating is Noakes Grove, an intriguing small-scale venture into organic farming. It is a community interest 'not-for-profit' company whose purpose is to benefit the

community it serves, offering shares to those who wish to invest in the safeguarding of the land. Noakes Grove runs community activities and working parties, all designed to encourage visitors (especially children) to love and understand the countryside and to take part in its management and conservation.

Pictured below on the left is Everards, whose listing describes it as 'late Medieval'. The village post office once operated from here. Elms Farmhouse, on the right, proclaims a very specific '1631' above its door.



Further listed buildings are shown below. On the left is 17th-century Pounce Hall and in the centre are two adjoining 19th-century thatched cottages.



The Towers, mentioned above, should not be confused with another rather unusual listed structure - the water tower. It was built in 1905 and supplied the village for some 70 years until modern systems took over. Another link to the relatively recent past is the defunct red telephone box which has found new life as a miniature lending library.

If you do decide to explore Swards End, please bring your own refreshments – or schedule your route to include the hospitality offered by adjacent parishes.

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**Hundred Parishes Society walks** include . . .

Circular walk 162 which covers 4.7 miles in two loops, starting from the Village Hall.

**Adjacent parishes:** Saffron Walden, Ashdon, Radwinter, Wimbish.

**Links:**

Parish Council: [www.sewardsend.org.uk](http://www.sewardsend.org.uk)

History: [www.recordingtuttlesfordhistory.org.uk/sewardsend/sewards%20end%20history.html](http://www.recordingtuttlesfordhistory.org.uk/sewardsend/sewards%20end%20history.html)

Noakes Grove: <https://walden-countryside.co.uk/>

**Further reading:**

*Swards End Essex – A History* by Gordon & Megan Ridgewell, 2010 - available from Saffron Walden Tourist Information Centre: <https://www.visitsaffronwalden.gov.uk/product-category/books/>

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