

DEDHAM

Dedham is in Essex, 7 miles north-east of Colchester, close to the Suffolk border at the heart of Constable's Country. The painter came to school here and the tall flint-faced tower of St Mary's Church, a prominent landmark in the Vale, features in many of his best-loved paintings. Formerly a market town, Dedham is now a large village with several outlying hamlets and a population of 1850 people. The diverse geology of this large parish, which includes gravel, sand and clay, has led to a varied landscape ranging from heath and woodland to arable fields, with water meadows along the banks of the River Stour.

By the late middle ages the Saxon settlement recorded in Domesday Book, subsequently a Norman manor, had developed into a prosperous industrial town based on the thriving cloth trade. Rich wool merchants financed the building of the handsome parish church in the late fourteenth century and many of the village's timber-framed houses date from the 1500s. With the founding of the Grammar School in 1571 the town became an important centre for education, while the Puritan Lectureship set up at about this time established its ecclesiastical importance. By the eighteenth century Dedham's increased social status led to the construction of the Assembly Rooms and the fashionable Georgian refronting of many of the earlier timber-framed houses. The distinguished Old Grammar School in Royal Square and Shermans in the High Street date from the 1730s.

Economic decline during the late Victorian period was followed by an increase in tourism in the course of the twentieth century. The remarkable quality of Dedham's historic architecture is reflected in its high proportion of listed buildings dating from the fourteenth to the twentieth century. The National Trust owns Shermans (not open to the public) and land in the parish at Bridges Farm, Moorats Park, Dedham Hall and Lower Barn.



St Mary's Church, Dedham

There are two churches: St Mary's (C of E) and the nineteenth-century Methodist chapel on Long Road. The Assembly Rooms and the Duchy Barn Community Centre are available for public use and the village has a large recreation ground and playing field. There are playgroups and an excellent primary school. Today Dedham's pubs, restaurants and tearooms cater for its many visitors but the village is primarily a lively residential community and an important commercial centre for the surrounding neighbourhood. The High Street provides a wide selection of shops, including a Co-op grocery, a delicatessen, a butcher, a pharmacy with post office and book, clothes, flower and gift shops, as well as a range of professional services. There is a regular bus service to Colchester. Boats can be hired beside the bridge over the river. The Sir Alfred Munnings Art Museum at Castle House is open to the public during the summer months.



High Street, Dedham



For more information visit:

www.dedhamparishcouncil.org.uk

www.dedham-parishchurch.org.uk