

Campsea Ashe is an East Suffolk village, two miles due east of Wickham Market and eight miles inland from Aldeburgh. The village consists of a scattering of houses old and new, within about 1800 acres of farmsteads and parkland, and has a population of 375 (179 males / 196 females) according to the 2011 census. Most of Campsea Ashe sits on comparatively elevated ground - about 25 metres (80 feet) above sea level - midway between the Rivers Ore to the north and Deben to the south-west, three miles or so upstream from where they both broaden into their distinctive wide estuaries. The eastern section of the B1078 road rises from the Deben flood-plain and passes through the village from the A12 trunk road at Wickham Market on its way to Tunstall, and ultimately joins the B1084 to meet the Suffolk Heritage Coast at Orford. Centred on grid reference TM325557, the Ordnance Survey *Landranger* 1:50,000 map shows Campsea Ashe to be laced with several ancient bridleways and footpaths. The East Suffolk railway line runs through the village, and trains stop at the seemingly mis-named Wickham Market station to carry passengers either southwards to Ipswich and London Liverpool Street, or northwards to Lowestoft. A double line of high-voltage pylons, erected in the 1960s, runs close by the village, feeding power into the National Grid from the Sizewell nuclear power station near Leiston.

The origins of the village name have become lost in the passage of time, but the simplest derivation may stem from a combination of it having been an ancient island settlement or 'camp' set amongst ash trees. Spelling variants have also abounded through historical sources, and include *Ashe juxta Campessy* and *Ash by Campsey* as well as the individual names *Campesse*, *Capsea*, *Camesy*, *Ayssch*, *Asshe* and so on. Even today the village answers either to 'Campsea Ashe' or 'Campsey Ash', though the former is by far the more generally used. The original 1937 Village Sign, standing beside the 'triangle' road junction near the church and depicting the eponymous camp palisade and ash tree, has been renewed this year (2017) following some recent accidental damage.

Of the older buildings in the village, the most prominent is the 14th Century Church of St John the Baptist - a well-proportioned building of knapped flint, distinctively long at 113 feet, and with a lofty 76 foot Tower topped with an unusual 'spirelet'. It sits in about 1½ acres of churchyard. The church has seating for about 150 people, has several stained glass windows of note, a peal of six recently restored bells (two dating from the early 17th century), and a brass of Sir Alexander Inglisshe set in the nave near the chancel step. It also contains a number of striking monuments, notably to the Sheppard family, Frederick Brook Thelluson (the 5th Baron Rendlesham), and the Lowther family - one of these importantly to the memory of The Hon. Mr William Lowther, Viscount Ullswater (1855-1949) of Campsea Ashe High House, who was Speaker of the House of Commons between 1905 and 1921. The High House itself, said to have dated from before 1600, was demolished in the 1950s, leaving its extensive grounds - remnants of an ancient deer park - and some gardens in private hands. Also on a private estate, a mile to the south-west of the village, are vestiges of the Augustinian 12th century Ashe Abbey (erstwhile the *Priory of Campsea*), dissolved by Henry VIII in 1536.

Amongst other more established buildings - some dating from the 17th century or earlier - are Chantry Farm (formerly Park House manor), the 'Old Rectory', the former 'Buck's Head Inn', the Georgian *White House* and the former 'Old Forge' - these generally in the vicinity of the church. Much of the rest of the village is either red-brick Victorian, mid-late 20th century or modern 21st century in-fill. The height of the railway era, from mid-Victorian times up to the 1960s, found in Campsea Ashe the bustling if modest 'Wickham Market' marshalling yard and goods depot, and there had been extensive railway infrastructure, such as the station buildings, platforms and signal-box, the road bridge, the goods yard with its engine shed, and the Railway ('Talbot') Hotel. However, since the down-grading of the line and closure of its branches to Framlingham and Snape, these buildings have been refurbished, demolished, or converted for modern use; indeed 2017 has seen the culmination of a major project to transform the 1859 station and station-house buildings into a modern set of meeting rooms, conference facilities and café designed to serve the village and nearby communities.

Over the years there have been many commercial and business activities in Campsea Ashe, some associated with the railway such as some light engineering works and a branch of W H Smiths as the station booksellers & newsagents. Other businesses have included several shops, a Post Office (which closed about 10 years ago), a windmill, a dairy, a forge, at least one blacksmith, a saddle & harness-makers, osier beds, two garages and a specialist agricultural machinery & motor manufacturer. And, of course, there have always been numerous farms, small-holdings, coppices, paddocks and pheasant spinneys, practically all of which continue the village's

agricultural importance to this day. There is also evidence of several ponds and disused sand-pits. Throughout the second half of the 20th century the village's proximity to the RAF / USAF Bentwaters air base meant that there was a strong military presence with many resident service personnel. Currently the principal commercial activity is that of the Clarke & Simpson Sale Yard & Auction Centre, but other successful businesses include the *Dog & Duck* public house (formerly the *Talbot*), Allonsfield House Care Home, Springside Stores Village Shop, Brick Kiln Farm campsite, *Botanica* Nurseries and several bed-and-breakfast premises.

The village had its own school until 1974, and the buildings still exist – this and the adjacent school house – as private residences. Most children now have the primary school in Eyke as their immediate choice, and either Farlingaye School in Woodbridge or Thomas Mills School in Framlingham for secondary education.

Socially there are several organisations in the village, centred on the Parish Council, the Parish Church Council (PCC), the Church community and its bell-ringing; also the Heritage Group, Playground & Village Hall committees. In particular the latter looks after the Campsea Ashe *Victory Hall*, built for the village in 1945 to replace the 1910 'Iron Room' community centre that still stands empty beside the Old Rectory. On-line there are numerous websites relating to Campsea Ashe, two in particular covering more generic matters. One is closely affiliated to the local authorities' *OneSuffolk*, and the other is the independent Campsea Ashe Church website:-

<http://campseaashe.onesuffolk.net/>

<http://www.campseaashechurch.org.uk/>

Between them these provide details of the village's amenities, community activities and history. Though there are no longer bus services through the village, there is a regular visit from the Suffolk County Council Mobile Library. More widely, extra social activities, shops, a library and medical / dental surgeries are to be found in Wickham Market, Woodbridge, Framlingham and Saxmundham.

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