

LOCAL GEOLOGICAL SITES

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT



UfdG4 Ashdon Meteorite (site of fall)

Site location: Adjacent to the public footpath (farm road) south of Church End, Ashdon.

Grid Reference: TL 5812 4093

Status: Publicly accessible

Summary of the geological interest:

The Ashdon meteorite that fell in 1923 is the only meteorite to have been found in Essex. The fall was witnessed by a farm worker in broad daylight on Ashdon Hall Farm and subsequently dug up from a depth of two feet. This is a very rare example of a meteorite fall being witnessed and the stone recovered. The meteorite is now in the Natural History Museum, London. The site of the fall is therefore historically important and is marked by a wooden post that was installed in 2023 to mark the centenary of the fall. A booklet on the Ashdon Meteorite has also been published (Lucy and Howgate 2023).



Site Assessment. Local Geological Sites (LoGS) in Essex are assessed using criteria based on DEFRA guidance. An assessment form is used which asks key questions under four value categories: scientific, educational, historical and aesthetic. This site has been assessed and qualifies under these criteria

Scientific interest and site importance

On 9 March 1923 Frederick Pratt, a thatcher, was working in the corner of a wheat field on Ashdon Hall Farm when, about 1pm, he heard a strange hissing sound and looked up, supposing it to be an aeroplane. A second or two later he saw an object fall about thirty yards from him into the field causing the earth to 'fly up like water'. Three days later, in the company of another worker on the farm, he dug up a stone from a depth of about 60 centimetres (two feet) and took it to the police station. He subsequently passed it to the vicar of Wendens Ambo who fortunately donated it to the Natural History Museum in London. Scientific investigation proved beyond doubt that the stone was a meteorite. This was an object that had travelled billions of miles in space and was at least ten times older than any other stone to be found in the soil of Essex.

From Pratt's observations as to the direction from which the sound came and the inclination of the hole, it would seem that the stone was travelling south-west to north-east and must have passed over Saffron Walden. As far as could be ascertained there were no reports of sonic booms or detonations which would have been expected as the stone travelled at supersonic speed. During its descent through the atmosphere frictional heating would have turned it into a fireball. Had Pratt been able to handle the stone immediately after impact he would have found it warm to the touch but the interior would still have been exceptionally cold - the temperature of deep space.

The Ashdon meteorite is important not only because it is well-preserved and still available for study but because the fall was witnessed. The meteorite is now in the Natural History Museum in London although it is not currently on display. It can be seen by appointment. A cast of the meteorite is on display in Saffron Walden Museum. Ashdon Village Museum also has a cast of the meteorite and a small display on the fall. In 2023, on the centenary of the fall, a commemorative oak post was installed on the site, which is on a public footpath.

Reference:

Lucy, G. and Howgate, M. 2023. **The Ashdon Meteorite: The story of a stone that fell from the sky.** Essex Rock and Mineral Society



The commemorative oak post installed in 2023 at the site of the meteorite fall in 1923.



The Ashon Meteorite, now in the Natural History Museum in London. As the leading surface melted during its flight the meteorite acquired a rounded or shield-shape. This view clearly shows the lines of melt as ridges and grooves.

Photo: Phil James