



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

HIGH EASTER



Location: 4 miles south of Great Dunmow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6114.
Postcode: CM1 4QW. **Access:** well off main roads. Regional Cycle Route 60. Limited Lodge's bus service. **County:** Essex **District:** Uttlesford **Population:** 754 in 2011.

High Easter is a large parish of central Essex, comprising a village of the same name and the small hamlets of Stagden Cross and Bishop's Green. Contrary to what one might expect from the name, the parish is predominantly low-lying farmland with scattered small areas of woodland. It is not high in the sense of elevated (although there is some dispute among commentators as to the derivation of the name), but the word was understood as chief or principal – to distinguish it from neighbouring Good Easter. Nor does the name Easter have anything to do with the ecclesiastical calendar as one might suppose; rather, it is from the Anglo-Saxon 'eowestre' - a sheepfold.



There is evidence across the parish of Bronze Age and Roman occupation, and the Domesday record indicates that it once belonged to Ely Abbey. At the beginning of the 12th century, along with adjacent parishes Great Waltham and Pleshey, High Easter was in the hands of the de Mandeville family, of which Geoffrey became the 1st Earl of Essex and later an outlaw. The estates passed through the families Fitz Peter, de Bohun and Stafford (William Stafford married Mary Boleyn, sister of Anne) families, before being acquired in the 18th century by the Tufnell family of Langleys in Great Waltham.

The oldest known surviving building in High Easter is the parish church of St Mary the Virgin, Grade I-listed and built around 1100AD. Early construction was of flint, red brick being added in the 16th century. A large and imposing tower was raised at the west end of the nave in the mid-1400s. St Mary's is notable for its fine carved roof and its clerestory (the upper storey of windows) and, not least, for the octagonal, lead-lined 14th century font and a large stone mortar or bowl of similar antiquity discovered embedded in the chancel wall in 1968. The mortar has a double lip suggesting the manufacture of lead, and one could perhaps assume that it was used in the leading of the stained glass windows and the lining of the font.



Also of note on the north aisle of the church, the war memorial chapel offers a poignant glimpse of rural life in times gone by. The marble memorial records the falling of 22 men in the Great War. Four of the families mentioned each lost three of their men, but an adjacent memorial in framed calligraphic form indicates that substantial numbers of men fought (including 12 of the family name Mead and 13 named Locke). From the perspective of a century's distance one can only speculate on the impact this must have had on a small rural economy and the very large families, commonplace then, which supported it.

High Easter is home to some 70 other listed buildings, a number of which can be found clustering around the church and along The Street, the main conservation area of High Easter village. Many of these (and other buildings of note) are helpfully identified, pictured and described in the High

Easter Conservation Area Appraisal (see below). Offsetting the serious architectural history with a lighter note, a stroll down The Street offers a delightful bit of serendipity. High Easter doesn't do house numbers; it does do a range of curiously evocative house names which tweak the imagination and set one wondering: Chuckles, Scarecrows, Homely, Cottons and Trinity are just a few which might tell a story. It is worth pausing at Pump Green too, to wonder and to recollect. The communal village pump has been sensitively renovated and sits in the shade of a century-old lime tree planted to commemorate the coronation of King George V. It was in use until the 1930s and would once of course have been the focal point of the village and a social hub of the community. But Pump Green is effectively now diminished to a small traffic island, and so easy to pass unnoticed and unconsidered.

The parish has many miles of footpaths, byways and bridleways, and walkers may like to avail themselves of the recently published footpath map. Part of the long-distance Essex Way crosses the southern aspect of the parish from Pleshey into Good Easter. The ancient coppiced woodland of Garnett's Wood to the north of the parish is a site of special scientific interest and is known for its proliferation of fungi among the ponds, streams and damp areas of sedge. It is guarded silently (and in a certain light - rather menacingly) by a knight of the 12th century who was given the wood by King Henry II. He is of imposing stature and carved from a tree trunk. Nobody seems to know how long he has been standing there.



Whilst High Easter has three places to eat, potential visitors should be aware that opening hours are somewhat limited in High Easter village itself. However, the Snug Cafe is open Monday to Friday from 9 to 4 and on Saturday, Sunday from 10 to 4, sharing a site with Lodge's Coaches and the Post Office. Rather more upmarket is the 16th-century restaurant The Punch Bowl, open Fridays and Saturdays for dinner, Sunday lunch and special occasions. At the northern end of the parish, the Spotted Dog at Bishop's Green is open for lunches Monday to Saturday and evening meals mid-week.

Hospitality

Snug Cafe on the road to Pleshey, CM1 4QR – 01245 230715; www.snugcafe.co.uk

The Punch Bowl Restaurant on The Street, CM1 4QW - 01245 231222; www.thepunchbowl.co.uk

The Spotted Dog in Bishop's Green, CM6 1NF - 01245 231598; www.the-spotted-dog-bishopsgreen.co.uk

Acreland Green B&B, Acreland Green, CM3 1HP; 01245 231277

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes:

Pleshey, Leaden Roding, Aythorpe Roding, High Roding, Barnston and Great Waltham.

Links

www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/higheaster/higheasterhistory.html

Great Garnetts Farmers Market and Shop, CM6 1NE; 01245 231331; www.greatgarnetts.co.uk

Further reading:

The Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways in the Parish of High Easter. Published by High Easter Parish Council and available from The Village Post Office and Cafe

High Easter Conservation Area Appraisal can be downloaded from www.uttlesford.gov.uk/caa

Old Photographs of High Easter. Derek Bircher

High Easter Through the Twentieth Century. Derek Bircher