



# The Hundred Parishes

Introduction to a famous person with local connections . . .

## CHARLES LAMB (1775 – 1834)

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Charles Lamb was born in London in 1775. He was an English essayist best known for his “Essays of Elia” and for the children’s book “Tales from Shakespeare”, which he produced with his elder sister, Mary Lamb.

He spent his early life in London, but some of his fondest childhood memories were of the time he spent in Hertfordshire.

His maternal grandmother was Mrs Mary Field. She was a servant of the Plummer family, who owned a large house called Blakesware in what is now Wareside parish, just outside Widford. After Mrs. Plummer died, Charles’s grandmother was in sole charge of the house and when Mr. Plummer was away Charles and his sister Mary would spend time there.

The joy of these visits is captured in “Dream Children” and in the Elia essay “Blakemoor in H.....shire”, in which Lamb wrote, “every plank and panel of that house for me had magic in it”.

In 1792, whilst visiting his grandmother, Charles fell in love with Ann Simmins. He wooed her for a number of years but she eventually married a silversmith and Lamb called the failure of the affair his “great disappointment”. Mrs Field died in 1792 and is buried in Widford parish. Blakesware was demolished in 1822.

Lamb was a lifelong friend of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and through him made friends with William Wordsworth.

Another Hertfordshire property associated with Lamb is Button Snap Cottage, Cherry Green, Westmill. It was bequeathed to him by an aunt in 1812. Lamb wrote, “I strode (shall I confess the vanity?) with larger paces over my allotment of three quarters of an acre, with its commodious mansion in its midst, with the feeling of an English freeholder that all betwixt sky and centre was my own”. Despite his initial excitement, Lamb sold Button Snap three years later for £50 to Mr Thomas Greg and so it passed “into more prudent hands”.

A medallion of Charles Lamb, pictured here, is set into the verge outside Button Snap. It was presented to the Charles Lamb Society by Westminster Bank Ltd in 1965 after it was removed from their premises at Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London.



Lamb died a bachelor in 1834 at the age of 59 and is buried with his sister in All Saints churchyard, Edmonton, which is now in north London.

Further information:

*Charles Lamb and his Hertfordshire*, Reginald L. Hine.

[www.charleslambociety.com](http://www.charleslambociety.com)