



The Hundred Parishes

Introduction to a famous local person . . .

DICK TURPIN (1705 – 1739)

Richard “Dick” Turpin, a highwayman, was born in Hempstead at the Blue Bell Inn (shown below) where his father was the innkeeper and also a butcher. Richard was baptised in Hempstead in September 1705. Turpin followed his father in the butchery trade and opened a shop in Buckhurst Hill, Essex.



By 1734 Turpin fell in with the Gregory Gang. This gang carried out a series of thefts, assaults and burglaries in and about London. In 1735, some of them were caught and one of the gang betrayed his associates. His descriptions were circulated in the press. In the *London Gazette*, Turpin was described as “Richard Turpin, a butcher by trade . . . a tall fresh-coloured man very much marked with small pox, about 26 years of age, about five feet nine inches . . . wears a blue-grey coat and natural wig”.

Turpin escaped capture although most of the gang were caught and executed.

It was around this time that Turpin turned to highway robbery, for which he is best known. After a big reward was offered for his capture, Turpin journeyed to Yorkshire where he lived under the alias John Palmer and continued his criminal activities.

As John Palmer, he was arrested on another matter and put in gaol while investigations were carried out. Unfortunately for him, he wrote to his brother-in-law, a man named Rivenall, who lived in Hempstead. Rivenall refused to pay the delivery charge, so the letter was returned to the Post Office in Saffron Walden. By chance, the handwriting was recognised by Turpin’s old school master, who subsequently travelled to York and



identified Palmer as Richard Turpin. Turpin was charged with horse-stealing, a capital offence. He was found guilty and hanged at York in 1739.

The popular legend that Turpin rode his horse, Black Bess, from London to York is probably untrue and can be attributed to a novelist, William Harrison Ainsworth who included the myth in his book “Rookwood”, published in 1834. Turpin was portrayed in this novel and in other popular tales and ballads, as a cult hero, when in reality he was a vicious criminal.

Turpin’s name appears on several properties in and around Hempstead, probably without justification. His glamourised image even appeared on pottery, as depicted here.