



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

ANSTEY



Location: 4 miles northeast of Buntingford. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4032. **Postcode:** SG9 0BY. **Access:** off B1368.

Buses: 27 (Monday & Wednesday) to Royston and 20 (Monday to Friday) to Bishop's Stortford.

County: Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts. **Population:** 338 in 2001, 299 in 2011, 310 in 2021.



A small, peaceful and secluded village whose name was derived from "hean stige", Anglo-Saxon for 'high pathway'.

A castle was built here on this high ground soon after the Conquest but was demolished in the reign of Henry III. Stone from the castle was used in the building of the present church, St George's, which stands adjacent to the castle mound and replaced the original Saxon building.

The mound with its surrounding moat can still be seen and was the site in October 1944 of the tragic crash of an American B-17 bomber less than a mile from its base

at Nuthampstead airfield. Fragments of wreckage are still recovered from time to time.

Perhaps the only fortunate thing about that awful event was that the church was undamaged. It is an impressive and unusual building being cruciform in shape and dates from the 12th century. The church is noted for its abundance of early graffiti, some dating as far back as the 13th century. A careful tour of the building will reveal helmets, shields, scallops (the symbol of pilgrims), wagons and merchants, and even a three legged pot incised into the walls and pillars.



The 11th-century font is one of only two known to be decorated with the figures of Mermen (the other is in St Peter's in Cambridge). Mermen were mythological creatures, the male counterparts to mermaids.

The close bond that was formed in WWII between the village and the men of the U.S. 398th Bomb Group is commemorated in the Millennium window in the church on which is recorded the names of all those from the unit who died.

Another unusual feature of St George's is the lychgate which dates to the 15th century. In 1831, the left side was bricked up and a stout studded door set into it for use as the village lock-up. It was still being used as such as recently as 1920.

Also worthy of inspection is what is known as the village well (shown below) although some experts have suggested that the mechanism with its large iron wheel was more likely a well head.



The village pub, the Blind Fiddler, takes its name from the enduring legend of George the Blind Fiddler of Anstey. It was said that a tunnel ran from Cave Gate, a pit west of the village to the castle mound about a mile away. For a bet, George entered it with his dog and playing his fiddle. Suddenly a horrific scream was heard and the dog emerged singed from head to tail. George was never seen again!

Today, the pub provides a focal point for village social life and sustenance to cyclists and walkers who enjoy the parish's quiet lanes and footpaths, including the long-distance Hertfordshire Way.



Hospitality: The Blind Fiddler – SG9 0BW - 01763 848000

Hundred Parishes circular walks from Anstey: numbers 132 (6.9 miles) and 142 (5.6 miles):

Adjacent parishes: Hornead, Wyddial, Barkway, Nuthampstead, Meesden, Brent Pelham.

Further reading: "Anstey: Our True Surname Origin and Shared Medieval Ancestry" by GM and TJ Anstey includes a chapter on medieval Anstey.

Links:

Village website: www.ansteyvillage.co.uk

Friends of the Hertfordshire Way: www.fhw.org.uk

Hertfordshire Genealogy:

www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/data/places/places-a/anstey/anstey.htm