



# The Hundred Parishes

## An introduction to **BRENT PELHAM & MEESDEN**



**Location:** 5 miles east of Buntingford. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL4330.

**Postcode:** SG9 0HW. **Access:** B1038.

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

**County:** Hertfordshire. **District:** East Herts. **Population:** 289 in 2001, 295 in 2011, 320 in 2021.

The Domesday Book of 1086 refers to just one Pelham, but by 1300 there were three adjacent places on Hertfordshire's border with Essex: Brent Pelham in the north, Furneux Pelham in the south and Stocking Pelham in between. The name Pelham may originally have meant the homestead of a man called Peola, whilst Brent Pelham is apparently a corruption of the name *Burnt Pelham* which this settlement acquired after most of it was destroyed by a fire in the 12th century. Brent Pelham merged some years ago with the adjacent parish of Meesden to form a single administrative parish, each electing half of the members of the joint council.

Each of the three Pelhams has a parish church dedicated to St Mary – and so too does Meesden. This is the oldest place of worship, dating from the 12th century. It is rather isolated up a tree-lined path. Its unusual brick porch was added around 1530 AD. Inside, a mosaic tiled floor in front of the altar is an exceptional survival from the early part of the 14th century.

Brent Pelham's parish church, pictured below, dates from the 14th century. One monument is particularly noteworthy - built into a wall is the tomb of Piers Shonks, the dragon slayer. The carved marble top is thought to date from either the 13th or 14th century.



It was apparently in the 11th century that Shonks encountered the dragon, killing it with an arrow. However, this particular dragon was the favourite of the Devil, who swore that he would have Shonks's soul when he died, whether he was buried inside or outside the church. Later, shortly before his death, Shonks fired an arrow to determine where he should be

buried. It flew through a window into the church and embedded itself in the wall. Shonks was duly buried in the wall, thereby cheating the devil as he was neither inside nor outside the church. This tale is related in the church and on the website of East Herts District Council so it must surely be true - although the Council's claim that Shonks stood 23 feet tall may be an exaggeration.

Outside Brent Pelham Church is an ancient set of stocks, designed to hold as many as three felons. The stocks have been there for at least a hundred years.



Across the road from the church stands Brent Pelham Hall, pictured here on the right - a Grade I-listed building from the 16th and 17th century with a noted set of ornate chimney stacks. Some of the Hall's internal fittings came originally from Beeches, a farmhouse of similar antiquity that was once the manor house. Beeches (sometimes spelt Beaches), shown below, is also noted for its three fine 17th-century chimney stacks.



2000 years ago, a Roman road passed through what are now Brent Pelham and Meesden, linking the military posts at Chesterford and Braughing. The road between the two churches follows this route for about 600 metres, passing close to Westley Farm, shown above, right.

On the immediate right is one of the oldest of the parish's 43 listed buildings: 15th-century Walkers Farmhouse in Meesden.

On the far right is one of the more unusual: Brent Pelham's former windmill. It was built in 1826 and ceased operations in 1890. A water tank was installed on top and the wooden structure clad in corrugated iron.

This scattered, rural parish seems to have more than its fair share of interesting heritage.




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**Hospitality:** Black Horse pub, Brent Pelham: 01279 778925, [www.blackhorsebrentpelham.co.uk](http://www.blackhorsebrentpelham.co.uk)

**Hundred Parishes Society walks** include . . .

Circular walk 142 – 5.6 miles around Brent Pelham and Meesden

Circular walk 143 – 4.9 miles from Berden with just a little in Brent Pelham

**Adjacent parishes:** Stocking Pelham, Furneux Pelham, Hornead, Anstey, Nuthampstead, Langley, Clavering, Berden.

**Links:**

Parish Council: [www.brentpelham-meesden-pc.org](http://www.brentpelham-meesden-pc.org)

Piers Shonks story: [https://www.hertsmemories.org.uk/content/herts-history/towns-and-villages/brent\\_pelham/piers-shonks-hertfordshire-dragon-slayer](https://www.hertsmemories.org.uk/content/herts-history/towns-and-villages/brent_pelham/piers-shonks-hertfordshire-dragon-slayer)

Hertfordshire Genealogy:

[www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/data/places/places-b/brent-pelham/brent-pelham.htm](http://www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/data/places/places-b/brent-pelham/brent-pelham.htm)

[www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/data/places/places-m/meesden/meesden.htm](http://www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/data/places/places-m/meesden/meesden.htm)

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