



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

HIGH EASTER

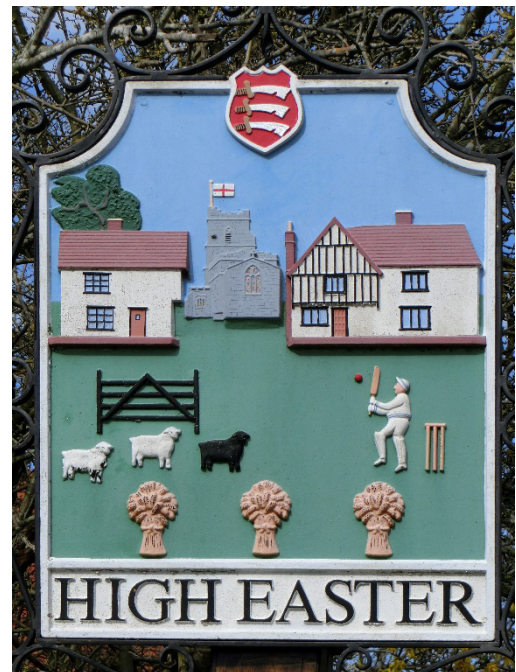


Location: 4 miles south of Great Dunmow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6114.
Postcode: CM1 4QW. **County:** Essex **District:** Uttlesford **Access:** well off main roads.
Regional Cycle Route 60. **Buses:** 17 (Fri & Sat) to Chelmsford; 18 (Tue & Thur) to Chelmsford.
Population: 657 in 2001, 754 in 2011, 720 in 2021.

High Easter is a large parish of central Essex comprising a village of the same name, the small hamlets of Stagden Cross and Bishop's Green, and a host of scattered dwellings that mostly began life long ago as farm houses. The parish is predominantly gently-rolling farmland with scattered small areas of woodland. The village sign is pictured below.

Contrary to what one might expect from the name, the parish is not high in the sense of elevation above sea level, although the church is at the top of a short climb from the west or south. 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. The *High* part of the name distinguishes this parish from neighbouring Good Easter.

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. The estates passed through the families Fitz Peter, de Bohun and Stafford (William Stafford married Mary Boleyn, sister of Anne), 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 1100 AD. 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, its clerestory (the upper storey of windows) and, not least, for a large stone vessel, thought to date from the 14th or 15th century and discovered embedded in the chancel wall in 1968.

The vessel, pictured below, has a bowl with a double lip and is hollow beneath the bowl. Furthermore, it seems to have been built to allow it to be tilted. It is assumed that it was used for melting and pouring lead, perhaps for the roof, for stained-glass windows and the lining of the font.



Some fragments remain of medieval windows but these are overshadowed by the vibrant colours of several windows installed in 1868. One is shown here, depicting two martyrs: St Edmund holding a sheaf of arrows and St George, on this occasion with no sign of a dragon.



Also of note, in 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. An adjacent memorial in framed calligraphic form indicates that substantial numbers of men served in the Great War (including 12 with 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 on the very large families, commonplace then, which supported it.



The names are repeated on the nearby parish war memorial, together with more casualties from the Second World War.

The photo below shows the view looking back across the churchyard towards a host of listed buildings in the centre of the village. On the left, with the tall chimney, is 16th-century The Punch Bowl, a restaurant until recent years; The Old Post Office in the centre is somewhat older; and on the right, the former Cock & Bell pub dates back to around 1400 AD.



This is a closer look at The Cock and Bell.

High Easter is home to some 70 listed buildings in all, mostly around the church and along The Street, an area that was first designated as a conservation area in 1991. Many of these (and other buildings of note) are helpfully identified, pictured and described in High Easter's Conservation Area Appraisal (see link below).

Offsetting the serious architectural history with a lighter note, a stroll down The Street offers a delightful bit of serendipity. High Easter does not do house numbers; however, it does do a range of curiously evocative house names which arouse 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.

The pump was in use until the 1930s and would once have been a 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.

Harder to miss is the Old Vicarage which was built in 1887 and now overlooks the cricket field.



In complete contrast to the scale and red brick of The Old Vicarage, tiny Barley Cottage has thatch and white weatherboarding over its timber frame. Barley Cottage dates from the 17th or 18th century and stands just along The Street, close to the village hall and playing field which comes to life with football matches at weekends.

As is usual, the village which gives its name to the parish is just a fraction of the overall parish area. The parish is criss-crossed by lanes that link to farms, hamlets and individual properties that mostly started as farmhouses. Just a few are pictured on this page. In the left column, Spooners is followed by Pentlowend (each dating back to the 14th century) and then 17th-century Houseground. On the right, The Old Beer House, 18th-century, is followed by Malyons, Smarts and Stagden Cross, all from the 16th century.



The quiet lanes, open countryside and attractive properties make this a popular area for cyclists.

The parish also has many miles of footpaths, byways and bridleways including part of the long-distance Essex Way which crosses the southern part of the parish on its route between Pleshey and Good Easter.



The ancient coppiced woodland of Garnett's Wood to the north of the parish is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (an "SSSI") and is known for its proliferation of fungi among the ponds, streams and damp areas of sedge. It is guarded silently 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. He appeared in 2023, replacing an earlier wooden knight who had stood guard for many years until age took its toll and he was forced to pass responsibility to a younger man.

While High Easter has two places to eat, potential visitors should be aware that the venues are not central – and they should check opening times to be sure not to be disappointed. The Snug Café shares a site with Lodge's Coaches, on the way to Stagden Cross, while the Spotted Dog restaurant and pub is to be found in the far north at Bishop's Green.



USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT HIGH EASTER

Hospitality

Snug Café on the road to Pleshey, opposite Village Hall, CM1 4QR – 01245 230715 -

https://www.facebook.com/thesNUGofhighheaster/?ref=py_c

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 -

<https://www.smoothhound.co.uk/hotels/acrelandgreen>

Hundred Parishes Society walks include . . .

Circular walk 130 which covers 3.2 miles of High Easter village and countryside.

Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes:

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

Links:

Parish Council - <https://e-voice.org.uk/highheaster/parish-council/>

History - www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk/highheaster/highheasterhistory.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 Snug Café.

High Easter Conservation Area Appraisal can be downloaded from

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/conservation-area-appraisals>

Old Photographs of High Easter. Derek Bircher

High Easter Through the Twentieth Century. Derek Bircher