



# The Hundred Parishes

## An introductory article about PUB NAMES AND SIGNS

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The local pub has long been a focal point of the community. Samuel Pepys in his diary described the pub as “the heart of England”. Beer was once much safer to drink than potentially-contaminated water.

Many of our local pubs are centuries old, built when most of the population were illiterate. They had distinctive names and simple signs to identify them. As early as 1393, Richard II required landlords to erect signs so that ale houses were clearly visible to his inspectors, who judged the quality of the ale. Nowadays, not all have signs but there are many interesting names. We will mention just a few.

The Saracen’s Head in Great Dunmow, opposite the market place, is a 16th-century coaching inn. A Saracen was an Arab Muslim who in the Middle Ages fought against Christians for control of The Holy Land.



In Anstey, The Blind Fiddler takes its name from a tale of George the blind fiddler who, for a bet, entered a tunnel said to run from a pit to the castle mound a mile away. He was accompanied by his dog. A scream was heard; the dog reappeared singing from head to tail, but George was never seen again!





In Bartlow, The Three Hills, shown on the left, dates from around 1800 AD and is named after the parish's large Roman burial mounds which also feature on the village sign.

The Sword in Hand in Westmill takes its name from the coat of arms of the Greg family who once lived in the parish and were generous benefactors. It has an unusual and distinctive sign.

The thatched Red Cow in Chrishall originated in the 15th century.

The large straw cow perched on the roof makes it hard to miss.



Three pubs within the Hundred Parishes are named The Axe and Compasses – in Arkesden, Aythorpe Roding and Braughing. The name seems to originate from the tools of a carpenter and at least two of these pubs have connections with carpenters. Pictured here is the one in Arkesden which burnt down in 2022 but was rebuilt and opened again in 2023.

The most prolific pub name seems to be The Three Horseshoes; they can be found at Farnham, Helions Bumpstead, Duton Hill in the parish of Great Easton & Tilty, Molehill Green in Takeley parish and Spellbrook in Sawbridgeworth parish.

If the Lions could get their act together, they would take pride of place with the most prolific name, but they are divided by colour: four Red Lions (Great Sampford, Hinxton, Stanstead Abbots and Steeple Bumpstead), a White Lion in Sawbridgeworth, a Black Lion in High Roding and one with no specified colour in Finchingfield, as well as the Lion and Lamb in Little Canfield.

More unusual names include The Temeraire in Saffron Walden, named after a notable fighting ship at the Battle of Trafalgar and the Kicking Dickey in Great Dunmow, referring to a feisty donkey, 'dickey' being a Norfolk word for donkey.

The Plume of Feathers in Gilston, shown below on the left, was once known as The Plumer-Ward's Arms after the local 'ruling family' and was renamed when the village was purchased in the 19th century by the Hodgson brothers. The Prince of Wales in Broxted was no doubt named after Queen Victoria's eldest son who was a frequent local visitor.



The Angel & Harp in Great Dunmow has an unusual name, origin as yet unknown



Some pub signs are not what you might expect, for example The Three Willows in Birchanger, below on the left, shows cricket bats which are made of willow, while The Beehive at Hare Street in Hormead displays the 1960s beehive hairstyle.



Imagination was also used for the signs hanging outside The Bell in Wendens Ambo (with Quasimodo from the 1996 cartoon The Hunchback of Notre Dame) and The Coach & Horses in Thorley.



Pubs and restaurants sometimes close or re-open or change their website. We seek to keep details on the Parish Introductions on our website updated with any changes.

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Any comments or suggestions for improvement may be submitted by using the Feedback form on the website. The website has many short articles on various aspects of The Hundred Parishes, as well as introductions to individual parishes and to a number of local celebrities, and an extensive What's On section. More than a hundred walk route descriptions can be freely downloaded, with each of the hundred parishes featuring in at least one walk.