



The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about WEATHERVANES (or weather vanes)

Before the advent of weather forecasts on radio and television, people had to rely on checking nearby weathervanes for the wind direction. These were usually found on tall buildings such as church spires.

Forecasting the weather for those who till the soil is helpful as weeks of westerly winds can bring relentless rain, causing waterlogging of the ground, while cold easterly winds dry out the soil and retard growth. The old saying certainly rings true: "When the wind is in the East, 'tis neither good for man nor beast".

These days, the UK Meteorological Office operates over 200 official weather stations, each recording accurate measurements of temperature, wind speed and direction, and the amount of precipitation. These readings are processed by powerful computers and the results enable forecasters to make predictions about future weather conditions. Two sites within the Hundred Parishes, one read manually at Buntingford and an automated station at Stebbing, contribute towards the forecasts available on the Met Office website <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk>.



Today we can see a variety of weathervanes on a range of buildings. Audley End House has gilded weathervanes mounted on eight corner turrets; two are pictured on the left.

Their design is consistent with the original derivation of the word VANE. It comes from an Old English word FANA, meaning flag.

Weathervanes on churches are often surmounted by a cock, a long-established emblem of Christianity, representing St Peter. Back in the 9th century, Pope Nicholas I ordered that the figure of a cock or rooster should be positioned on every church steeple. The Bayeux tapestry in France shows a man placing a cock on Westminster Abbey. This one was photographed on Arkesden parish church.



The traditional rooster still appears on many church weathervanes, but there seems to be no limit to the imagination of what else might be featured on secular weathervanes. Over the next few pages, you will find photos of some of the great variety to be spotted around the Hundred Parishes.

The gardener immediately below was snapped in Great Waltham, as was the traction engine. The owl and the curlew had both landed in Wethersfield.

The wheelwright was spotted in Steeple Bumpstead and the whale surfaced in Linton.



The lady battling the wind with her umbrella, immediately below, is in Wethersfield and the witch flies in Clavering. The horse and trap can be seen in Great Chesterford and the windmill is in Lindsell. Two versions of Old Father Time with his scythe: the upper example is in Braughing and the lower, lifting the bails, is signalling the end of play at Matching Green Cricket Club in Matching.



The next page begins with a heron in Chrishall and a horse-drawn wagon in Arkesden, followed by a hot air balloon in Thundridge (close to where Vincent Lunardi landed his balloon in 1794) and a cat in High Roding.



Finally, the duck is in Wendens Ambo and the highwayman holds up a stagecoach in Little Bardfield. It's quite an art form! Do keep a lookout for others.



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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. There is an extensive What's On section and more than a hundred walk route descriptions that can be freely downloaded, with each of the hundred parishes featuring in at least one walk.