



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.



Ansteys is a small, peaceful and secluded village in East Hertfordshire, four miles northeast of Buntingford. Its name derives from hean stige, Anglo-Saxon for a high pathway.

A castle was built here on this high ground soon after the Norman Conquest but it 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 an earlier Saxon church. The church has been given a Grade I listing.

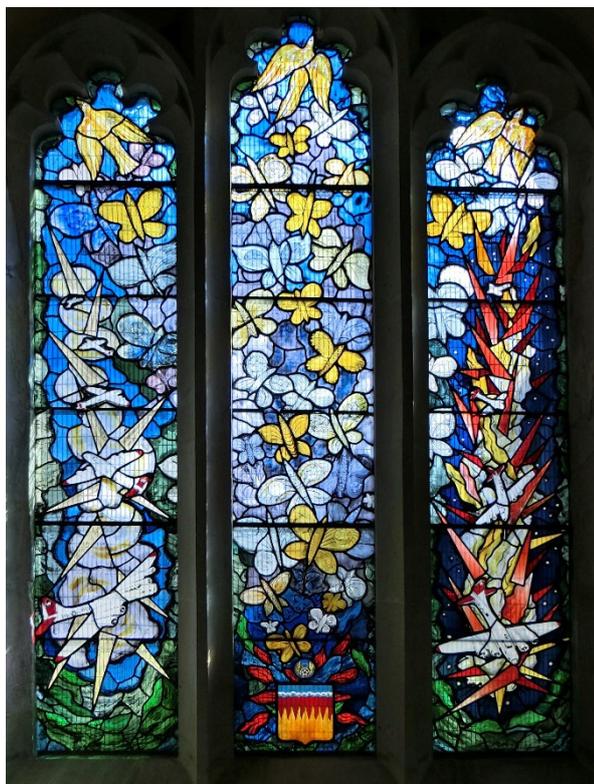


The mound with its surrounding moat can still be seen and was the site in October 1944 of a tragic crash of an American B-17 bomber less than a mile from its base at Nuthampstead airfield. Fragments of wreckage are still recovered from time to time.

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. It 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 search will reveal helmets, shields, scallops (the symbol of pilgrims), wagons, merchants and even a three-legged pot, all 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 United States 398th Bomb Group is commemorated in the Millennium window in the church, unveiled in 2000 AD. Here, the names of all those from the unit who died are inscribed on the wings of butterflies.



Anstey's church is believed to be the only one within The Hundred Parishes that has misericords.

These wooden supports are on the underside of a hinged seat. They allowed choristers or clergy who were required to 'stand' for a long time to be supported by a narrow ledge. The underside of the seat, which would not normally be visible, was often carved.

Anstey has six misericords, believed to have been installed in the 14th century.



The misericords have been carved with a variety of designs and figures. The subject, or possible religious significance, is not always apparent.

An example of one of the curious carvings is shown here – the head of a person who appears to be winking and sticking out his or her tongue.



Another unusual feature of St George's is the lychgate at the entrance to the churchyard. It is believed to date from the 15th century.

In 1831 the left side, as viewed from the church, was bricked up and a stout studded door set into it so that it could be used as the village lock-up.

It was still being used for this purpose as recently as 1920.



Also worthy of inspection is what is known as the village well, shown on the right. It stands on a small green, complete with a welcoming bench

The wellhead and its octagonal shelter are listed. Its entry in the register of British Listed Buildings (its "listing") describes it as "A picturesque village feature of special social and technological interest."

The rather grand 19th century cast iron winding mechanism stands over the well which was capped long ago with a concrete slab.





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, playing a fiddle and accompanied by his dog. 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 provides sustenance to cyclists and walkers who enjoy the parish's quiet lanes and footpaths.

Those paths include the long-distance Hertfordshire Way. Several Hundred Parishes routes start from Anstey or pass through the parish.

A variety of interesting residential properties are scattered throughout the parish. Essex Cottage, in the hamlet of Snow End and pictured below on the left, dates from the 16th century or earlier. Red Stack, on the right, dates from the 17th century and stands close to the village well.



The dark weatherboarding on Low Hall, below on the left, tends to disguise the fact that this house was built in the 16th century as a single-storey open hall house with a central open fire whose smoke escaped through the roof. The second storey and a chimney were added later in the 16th century.

Below on the right is the former Bell Inn, situated in the tiny hamlet of Daw's End.



Anstey has a second church, the Union Chapel, erected in 1902 and shown below on the left. On the right below is another former open hall house, at Pain's End, dating from around 1500AD.



This final view of Anstey was taken from a distance at harvest time.



MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ANSTEY

Hospitality: The Blind Fiddler – SG9 0BW - 01763 848000 - <http://theblindfiddler.co.uk/>

Hundred Parishes circular walks that include Anstey: numbers 132 (6.9 miles), 142 (5.6 miles), 186 (5.6 miles), 303 (4 miles), 306 (10.5 miles) and 335 (6.3 miles).

Adjacent parishes: Hormead, 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

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