

A Potted History of Hempstead

As a newcomer to Hempstead, it may interest you to know that your village has a colourful history with a number of interesting "claims to fame."

Hempstead is mentioned in the "Little Domesday Book" of 1086, and is referred to as Hamsteda: "Ham" meaning village and "Stead" meaning place in Saxon English (350AD – 1000AD).

Hempstead has long been a rural and largely agricultural community, mixing arable farming with animal husbandry. Some land such as Hempstead Wood, was kept as primary woodland, providing essential resources for building materials and fuel.

The village used to have a post-mill, which was built in 1678 on high ground south of the church, but which sadly burned down around 1900. It also sported a gallows on the tellingly named Anser Gallows Corner from Saxon times until at least 1578.

Our church, St Andrews, was consecrated on 8th January 1365 by Simon of Sudbury, Bishop of London and consequently Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor of England. A number of notable persons are buried within it.

Hempstead's claims to fame include William Harvey (1578-1657), physician to Charles 1 and renowned for his work on the Circulation of the Blood during the 17th Century. He was a frequent visitor to Wincelow Hall, owned by his brother, and his sarcophagus, provided by the Royal College of Physicians in 1883, can be visited in the church. Harvey was described by a pall bearer at his funeral as follows:

"He was not tall; but of the lowest stature, round faced, olivaster complexion; little eie, round, very black, full of spirit; his haire was black as a raven, but quite white 20 yeares before he dyed."

Another member of the Harvey family buried in Hempstead church, Admiral Sir Eliab Harvey(1758-1830) fought with Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar. He commanded the ship, the "Temeraire", which played such an important part in the victory, and was immortalised by the painter J.M.W. Turner in his painting, the "Fighting Temeraire".

The notorious highwayman Dick Turpin, and member of the feared Gregory Gang, was baptised in the church in 1705. It is said that he was born and brought up in the Bluebell Inn (then known as the Bell Inn), where his father was a butcher and innkeeper. As a young man he was apprenticed to a butcher in Thaxted after which he set up shop in the same town. After being accused of sheep and cattle stealing, he pursued a career as the notorious highwayman. He was hanged for his crimes in York in 1739, and it should be known that contrary to his dashing reputation, immortalised by author William Harrison Ainsworth in his romantic Victorian novel Rockwood, he was in fact short, stout and bald with a pock marked face! He was also a murderer and prolific horse stealer.

As you can see Hempstead has a rich history, and we have just touched the surface! If you are interested in delving deeper and hearing more, you would be very welcome to join the History Society. Please contact Alan Weedon on 01799 599366 for further details or keep an eye out for future events!

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Hempstead Newcomers Pack

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Hempstead has long been a rural and largely agricultural community, mixing arable farming with animal husbandry. Some land such as Hempstead Wood, was kept as woodland, providing essential resources for building materials and fuel. There was also a ~~thriving cottage industry during the middle ages based on the Essex and Suffolk woollen and weaving industries.~~

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Claims to fame include William Harvey (1578-1657), physician to Charles I and renowned for his work on the Circulation of the Blood during the 17th Century. He lived in Winslow Hall and is buried in Hempstead Church in a ~~vault built~~ by his brother Eliab Harvey. He was described by a pall bearer at his funeral as follows:

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