



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## HELIONS BUMPSTEAD



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**Location:** 3 miles southwest of Haverhill. **Ordnance Survey grid square** TL6541.  
**Postcode:** CB9 7AB. **Access:** west off B1057. **County:** Essex. **District:** Braintree.  
**Buses:** 319 and 321 (Monday to Saturday) between Saffron Walden and Haverhill.  
**Population:** 473 in 2001, 439 in 2011, 400 in 2021.

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Helions (pronounced like "hell" rather than "heel") came from the Helion family whose founder came from Hellean in Brittany as one of William's conquerors in 1066.

Bumpstead meant a place where rushes grew and, in this case, would have referred to Helions Brook which flows eastwards through Helions Bumpstead village. It runs beside Water Lane and then Steeple Bumpstead Road on its way to meet Bumpstead Brook at Steeple Bumpstead before continuing northeast to join the River Stour. These brooks have caused regular flooding in recent years, so a major flood alleviation plan was implemented in 2014 and 2015.

The western parish boundary also defines the border between Essex and Cambridgeshire, whilst the northern boundary also marks the Essex county border with Suffolk. The point where these three modern counties come together is thought to be the traditional meeting point more than a thousand years ago of three ancient kingdoms – East Anglia, Mercia and the East Saxons (Essex).

Helions Bumpstead has retained its rural charm and avoided over-development. It has 20 listed buildings, all dating from the 17th century or earlier. Lower House, pictured here, is one of the youngest listed buildings and is situated by the green in the centre of the village where the parish's four winding lanes meet at a crossroads. Nearby are the parish church, pub and village hall.



The parish church of St Andrew is the oldest building. Various elements of its structure date from the 13th to the 20th century, with the chancel being dated as mid-13th century and the nave possibly even older.

The church is exceptionally light, benefitting from the three large 16th-century, south-facing windows which were re-housed in oak frames in 1956.



In the churchyard is a memorial to 22 year-old Alfred Baynes who died in 1895 when trying to save the life of a well inspector down a newly-dug well at Pale Green.



The village pub, the Three Horseshoes, closed in 2014, was bought by the community in 2019, refurbished and re-opened. It is very popular.

Until 1960, Helions Bumpstead had two more public houses, the 16th-century Marquis of Granby, just north of the crossroads, and the Pig and Whistle at Wiggins Green. Both were converted to private houses, the latter now called Peggy House and pictured here.

In 1914, Helions Bumpstead became a centre of national attention. Agricultural workers had always

been poorly paid and there was growing demand for better conditions of employment. The Agricultural and Rural Workers' Union became active and the first local branch was formed in Helions Bumpstead, attracting more than 80 members. Richard Ruffle, the farmer at Copy Farm, gave ten of his labourers a week's notice of termination of their employment unless they left the union. The men refused and were sacked. There was a mass demonstration on the village green and meetings were held at the Marquis of Granby which soon became the base for national reporters. The situation quickly escalated and spread to surrounding parishes. More labourers joined the union and were "locked out" by their employers. There were torchlight marches between Steeple Bumpstead and Helions Bumpstead. Farmers retaliated by trying to bring in outside labour and the situation became more and more inflamed.

After the Helions Bumpstead workers had been locked out for three months, the union called a strike in six parishes. Soon, 800 farm workers were on strike, demanding the right to belong to a trade union and improved pay. Many police were drafted into the area and men were sent to prison for violent acts. Union leaders, leftwing politicians and suffragettes came to speak in support of the strikers. Sylvia Pankhurst drew a crowd of 2,000 to hear her speak outside the Pig and Whistle. This was followed by a march to the Marquis of Granby where she stayed that night. After two months of strike, with World War I looming and a harvest about to be wasted, a settlement was brokered and all striking labourers were reinstated, allowed to remain in the union and given improved pay. War was declared in the week that the strikers returned to work. Soon, many of them would leave the land to fight in the war.

Sixteen men from the parish died in World War I. In 1920 the Recreation Ground was purchased in their memory from funds raised by public subscription. This is used now by Helions Bumpstead Cricket Club and is situated behind the village hall which was built in 1854 as a school, also funded by public subscription. The school closed in 1948 but the building was saved by the community. Its facilities have been steadily improved in recent years and it is used for meetings and activities that include coffee mornings, carpet bowls and table tennis. Helions Bumpstead still has a part-time post office, situated at Pale Green. A good parish website and quarterly magazine provide further evidence of a thriving community that includes Bumpstead First Responders, ready to tackle any emergency, a group of handbell ringers and a wildlife group.

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### Hospitality:

The Three Horseshoes (community-owned pub), CB9 7AL – 01440 730088 - <https://threehorseshoeshelions.co.uk/>

### Hundred Parishes Society walks include . . .

Circular walk 156 which covers 4.2 miles around Helions Bumpstead parish.

**Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes:** Hempstead, Castle Camps, Steeple Bumpstead.

### Links:

Parish Council: <https://helionsbumpsteadparishcouncil.gov.uk/>

### Further reading:

*Portrait of Helions Bumpstead*, Roy Brazier, 1999, published by Quayside Press, 1999.

*The Empty Fields, the Agricultural Strike of 1914*, Roy Brazier, 1989, Ian Henry Publications.

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