

The Town of Buntingford - Historic Overview



Buntingford is a small market town located on the London to York road known as Ermine Street. In fact the north end of the High Street still carries that name.

The main centre lies in the small valley of the river Rib with the old original settlement of Layston a few hundred metres to the east just up the side of the valley. This contains the ancient church of St Bartholomew and its churchyards.

Unfortunately this is now a disused church in a poor state of repair although it was used for the occasional service as recently as the 1980s. It has been acquired on the open market and is in the process of being converted to a residential dwelling.



Buntingford is first mentioned in a Knights Templars land document of 1185 and in 1253 Henry III granted a charter to hold a weekly market to the Manor of Corneybury. St Peter's Church was built early in the 17th century on the site of an earlier chapel.



The nearby Alms-houses were erected in 1684 by Seth Ward who later became the bishop of Exeter and subsequently Salisbury.

Buntingford's heyday was in the early 1700s when it became an important stagecoach stop on the way to York. It is even reported that Samuel Pepys stayed at the George Inn. Many of the old coaching houses are now shops and dwelling houses but retain the original character with some dating back to the 15th century. Visitors might spot the rare 16th century turret one-handed clock on a building originally known as The Angel Inn.



Just off the High Street down Church Street (the original road leading to St Bartholomew's Church) near the river there is the Cage a lock up for the miscreants of olden days. Just a few yards to the north is the ford which was the crossing place before the bridge was built. On the other side of the river running south is Pigs Nose once a thoroughfare, now a footpath passing by a thatched cottage of the same name (look out for the unusual topiary).

At the southern end of Pigs Nose is the old Buntingford Union Workhouse which was designed by William T Nash and built between 1836 and 1837. It served 16 constituent parishes and could house around 160 inmates. A new wing was added in 1872. This building has had many uses of the years including offices for Braughing Rural District Council, Buntingford Parish Council and the Buntingford Town Council, hostel for single parents, etc. In 2007 it was converted to 5 private dwellings.



There are many old and distinguished houses in and around the High Street and on Market Hill is the C18 Manor House. This is now owned by Buntingford Town Council and also houses the Tourist Information Point and Heritage Centre. Nearby is Layston Court House built in the early 17th century as the Buntingford Grammar School. The house is now privately owned but much of the original grounds form the Layston Court Gardens which provide a pleasant respite from the town centre.

Some street names retain the history such as The Tannery, Union Terrace, Bridgefoot, Longmead, Bakehouse Court, Meeting House Lane, Bridewell Close, The Causeway, River Green, Bowling Green Lane (not the site of the Bowls Club), etc. The Bowls Club is actually in Wyddial Road and the green was laid in 1926 although the club was founded sometime around 1912 (this is another place with some unusual topiary).

The 1960s saw a major expansion when Sainsbury's decided to build a distribution centre just south of the town. This brought a large influx of workers from south London who were housed mainly at the north end of the town. Many other houses were built as more people, mainly from north London, decided Buntingford was a great place to live.

Subsequent decades has seen limited development with the exception of the "Bovis" estate which lies between the town and Aspenden.

Whilst some may view the influx as regrettable, it has ensured a viable High Street with a mixture of shops. It has also brought a new First School, Health Centre, Upper School, swimming pool and community centre with its football pitches and playground.