

## The villages of North Hertfordshire

A lot of the historical research into our district has been focused on the four towns – Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston – but they are only part of the story. Most places are villages and hamlets and these were the sorts of settlements most people have lived in over time. There are places that were once regarded as towns – Ashwell, Codicote and Knebworth – because they had markets, but which have become less important, even though they are now larger places than when they had their markets.

The district currently has 82 individual settlements (can you name them all?), spread between 37 parishes. Some parishes have only one settlement – Baldock, Bygrave, Caldecote, Hexton, Hinxworth, Holwell, Ickleford, Kelshall, Langley, Letchworth, Lilley, Newnham, Nuthampstead, Pirton, Preston, Radwell, Reed and Wallington – but the others have more than one. Whitwell is the main settlement in St Paul's Walden parish, while Codicote and King's Walkden have seven settlements each (Codicote, Codicote Heights, Driver's End, Nup End Green, Oakhills, Pottersheath and Tagmore Green are all in Codicote parish, while Breachwood Green, Darleyhall, King's Walden, Ley Green, Lye Hill, The Heath and Wandon End are the settlements in King's Walden).



Thatched cottage in Rushden (Herts)



The village pump in Hexton

It gets even more complicated if you go back over 900 years to the time when Domesday Book was compiled, in 1085-6. This names places by vill, a manorial unit held by a specific person or institution. We use the term 'held' rather than 'owned' because in feudal law, everything belonged either to the king or to the church, so lords of the manor only had properties because their feudal overlords had granted it to them. They could throw out the lord at any time they wanted. Domesday Book lists 103 separate villas in North Hertfordshire; there are six in Reed alone, where today we recognise only one village. This complexity can make life very difficult for the local historian.

In coming weeks, I'm going to be writing about some of these smaller places in the district. I want to show that our history isn't just about the bigger places, which we might think of as more important. Everywhere has its own story and these stories are every bit as interesting as those of the towns. The history that I am interested in goes beyond the lords of the manor and the parish priests to the lives of ordinary people, the places they lived and how they occupied their time.

If you couldn't name all the settlements, [here's a list](#), which includes the name of the parish they are in, when they were first recorded in documents and what we believe the name to mean.

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