

THE HUNDRED PARISHES SOCIETY

www.hundredparishes.org.uk

At this difficult time, we are fortunate to live in such a lovely area where we can take exercise close to home in attractive and interesting surroundings. One of the local delights is the number of thatched buildings.

Thatch was once the roofing choice of the poor as it was locally sourced, inexpensive and sustainable; now it seems that only the better-off can afford the necessary regular servicing and replacement. Most roofs are thatched with long wheat straw and many are topped out with a decorative straw feature on the apex. These are called straw finials.

Pheasants and foxes are still among the favourites for this tradition that goes back centuries. These finials may once have been installed to keep away birds or even witches, while some may have been the trademark of the individual thatcher. Today, they are more likely chosen by the customer from an online catalogue. They seem to be more abundant and varied than ever.

I have spotted some fine examples around The Hundred Parishes such as the two running hares on a cottage at Ashdon. In Finchingfield and Radwinter you may find families of ducks and there is a large thatched cow on the barn of the Red Cow pub at Chrishall.

You may see a hare on Dick Turpin's Cottage at Hempstead or a galloping horse at Great Bardfield. High Roding has a delightful cat stretching up the chimney stack and a fox chases a hare in Brent Pelham. An eagle has landed in Aythorpe Roding and there is a flying pig in Ugley.

The 16th-century Thatchers pub at Hatfield Heath is appropriately situated on a road that was once part of the route for horse-drawn cartage of wheat from Suffolk to London.

Do keep looking up!
Ken McDonald, Secretary.