

Welcome to Hemingford Abbots

In and around the Playing Field



Every community needs an open green space where people of all ages can get together and children can play. Over the years this Playing Field has hosted big events such as village festivals and jubilee celebrations, as well as simple picnics and family fun. There's a bench in memory of grandparents who spent happy hours here with small grandchildren.

The Hemingford Abbots Playing Field is something of a hidden gem – although it is in the centre of the village, it is behind the houses and away from passing traffic. But now that you have found the field and are here, why not walk around it and enjoy some of its nature and history?

Barnack stone, 22 inches square, with a line of simple carving. The socket for the shaft of the Cross can be seen in the centre, and around it are fragments of the lead lining used to secure the upright stone in the base stone. From 974 Hemingford Abbots was part of the estates of Ramsey Abbey, and it is likely that the



Cross would have been placed in the village by the Abbey. (The original site is not known). It is thought that the Cross was broken up at some time in the 16th century during the English Reformation.



The Royal Oak 6

In the late 19th and early 20th century there were six pubs in the village – so, plenty of choice as to where to have a beer! On Royal Oak Lane there was, unsurprisingly but patriotically, the Royal Oak pub. The building is now a private house, but the decorated name board on the first floor is a nice reminder of its history.



The Axe & Compass 8

There is only one pub in the village today; this is the Axe and Compass. The picturesque, thatched building dates from at least the 17th century, but could be older. Its name refers to a wood worker's tools, but the locals refer to it as just one – 'The Axe'.



2 Here is Frederick Bidwell, licensee of The Wheatsheaf in c1910, with some of his children – or grandchildren – and their friends.

The Village Cross 6

At the junction of Royal Oak Lane and the High Street is the base stone of a medieval Village Cross, fixed on a low plinth. This listed 'Historical Monument' is all that remains of the Cross, probably 13th century. It is a piece of

Hemingford Abbots Playing Field

In 1943 Edward Greville Herbert of 'The Tall House', Royal Oak Lane, gave this land, in trust, to be a Playing Field for the village. (Earlier, in 1921, he had given the adjacent plot of land as the site for a Village Hall.) The managers of the Village School were responsible for the maintenance of the Playing Field, but when the school closed in 1978, the Parish Council took over. In 2007 this arrangement was formalised and a new scheme for the charity was agreed by the Charity Commission. Two members of the Herbert family are now the Land Holding Trustees and Hemingford Abbots Parish Council is the Administrative Trustee of the Playing Field.

Sunnymede and artists in the Hemingford villages 3

'Sunnymede', the cottage near the main entrance to the Playing Field, was the home of the artist William Kay Blacklock (1872-1924) and his wife Nellie between 1916 and 1920. They were part of a colony of artists who lived and worked in the pretty villages near St Ives along the river – Houghton, Holywell and the Hemingfords – from c1880 until c1930. Their paintings of idyllic rural life and charming riverside scenes made the area well-known as a beauty spot. Tourists came here to enjoy boating and walking holidays, and today the special countryside of the Great Ouse Valley continues to attract many visitors.



A view of the Playing Field by WK Blacklock in 1916 when it was a stackyard. Farm carts such as these in the painting would have used The Splash

The Splash 7

The Splash is a semi-circular pond alongside the road. It was made specifically for farm carts and wagons as they entered the village. There are gentle slopes built in and out of the shallow water, and the bottom is lined with gravel. When the carts were driven off the road into the Splash, the horses could drink whilst the wheels of the cart would be washed. In dry weather, the water would swell the wooden cart wheels so that their metal rims would be tight. The farm horses have long since been replaced by tractors, but the Splash remains as part of the village's rural heritage.

The Village Signs

Hemingford Abbots has two, identical, Village Signs. One is sited at the eastern end of the High Street and the other at the entrance to the village on Rideaway. The signs were designed in 1986 by David Peace, MBE (1915-2003), a resident of the village and a glass engraver of national renown. On one side of the signs are the 'arms' of Ramsey Abbey – the three rams' heads – surmounted by an abbot's mitre. (Ramsey Abbey held the manor of Hemingford Abbots from 974



until 1539). On the reverse of the signs a wheatsheaf represents rural agriculture and across it is a hunting horn from the arms of the old County of Huntingdonshire. Behind the sheaf is the red heart of Robert the Bruce – part of the arms of the Douglas family who were the last known Lords of the Manor until the manorial lands were sold in 1933. Below the signs are waves of the river with a golden fish.

Beecher's 4

'Beecher's' was a small farmstead and dates back to the early 17th century. The cottage is on an L-shaped plan and is timber-framed – although the timbers you see on the outside are only decorative; the real, structural timbers are behind the rendering.

Like many of the old cottages in the village 'Beecher's' is thatched. Reed was a plentiful and cheap roofing material in a riverside village, but today the reed is sourced from further afield – often imported from eastern Europe. With its attractive front garden, Beecher's is one of the most photographed houses in the village.



1 The Village Hall

The Village Hall opened in 1921. The building was a wooden ex-WWI Army hut, purchased from the War Department. In 1935 Silver Birch trees were planted either side of the Village Hall to mark the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary. The Village Hall was very well used by the many clubs and societies in the village such as Keep Fit, Amateur Dramatics, Women's Institute, and Play Group. In 1999, as the old building was showing its age, the Village Hall Management Committee looked to build a new modern hall. But it took a village referendum before the design was agreed. The new Village Hall opened in 2004. It has excellent facilities and is at the heart of village activities.

