

ARTISTS REFLECT ON WHEATHAMPSTEAD

Wheathampstead is an attractive rural Hertfordshire village with a conspicuous and eye-catching church spire and a picturesque, historic High Street featuring medieval houses and inns. Standing on the banks of the River Lea, which once powered the ancient mill, the village is surrounded by productive farm land and richly-wooded countryside. Over the past two hundred and fifty years, a varied range of artists visiting Wheathampstead have been inspired to portray it in different art forms, allowing us to see the village in new ways.

One of the earliest images is a drawing of Wheathampstead Church, by T.C., an unknown artist, and dated 1791. It shows St Helen's with the original spire and an iron framework, which was installed 'round the tower of the church' in 1784. The whole building was restored under Canon Owen Davys in 1865 and the new spire we see today was constructed at that time.



Wheathampstead Church, 1791



A View of Wheathampstead Church

This is a watercolour by Francis John Serjeant (1780 - 1812), a landscape artist based in London. He exhibited two works at the Royal Academy, in 1802 and 1803, entitled 'View of the City of London from the fields below Hampstead' and 'A View of Woolwich, looking down the river'. Serjeant's visit to Wheathampstead was before the installation of the new spire, but he has taken considerable artistic licence in his portrayal. The tower, approached by a sheltered pathway and glimpsed between the trees, is depicted with a different shape from the original and was not at the end of the building as he suggests.



Wheathampstead Village and Church

Hertfordshire Archive and Local Studies Library contains a number of paintings and sketches of Wheathampstead, including this view of the village and church. Dated 1850, it was also painted before the restoration of St Helen's but is a more accurate portrayal. Nothing is known about the artist, J. Oke, but he has skilfully captured the rural aspect of the area with its varied greenery, river, gardens, cottages and local inhabitants. He has also featured the sluice gate that once controlled the flow of water to the mill wheel.

Also at HALS are four volumes of topographical drawings, dated between about 1835 and 1840 by John Chessell Buckler (1793-1894). He belonged to an old Dorsetshire family and practised as an architect until his 90th year, working for various Oxford colleges and taking part in the restoration of Lincoln and Norwich cathedrals. He created numerous volumes of sketches, most of which are now in the British Museum or the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Some of his drawings include a remarkable record of the ecclesiastic and domestic architecture of buildings in Hertfordshire. To prevent this collection of local interest being broken up and dispersed, it was eventually acquired by a Hertfordshire resident, who presented it to the County in 1932. Buckler's Hertfordshire work is now arranged in parishes so a range of drawings of Wheathampstead can be seen at HALS.



Castle Farm, 1901

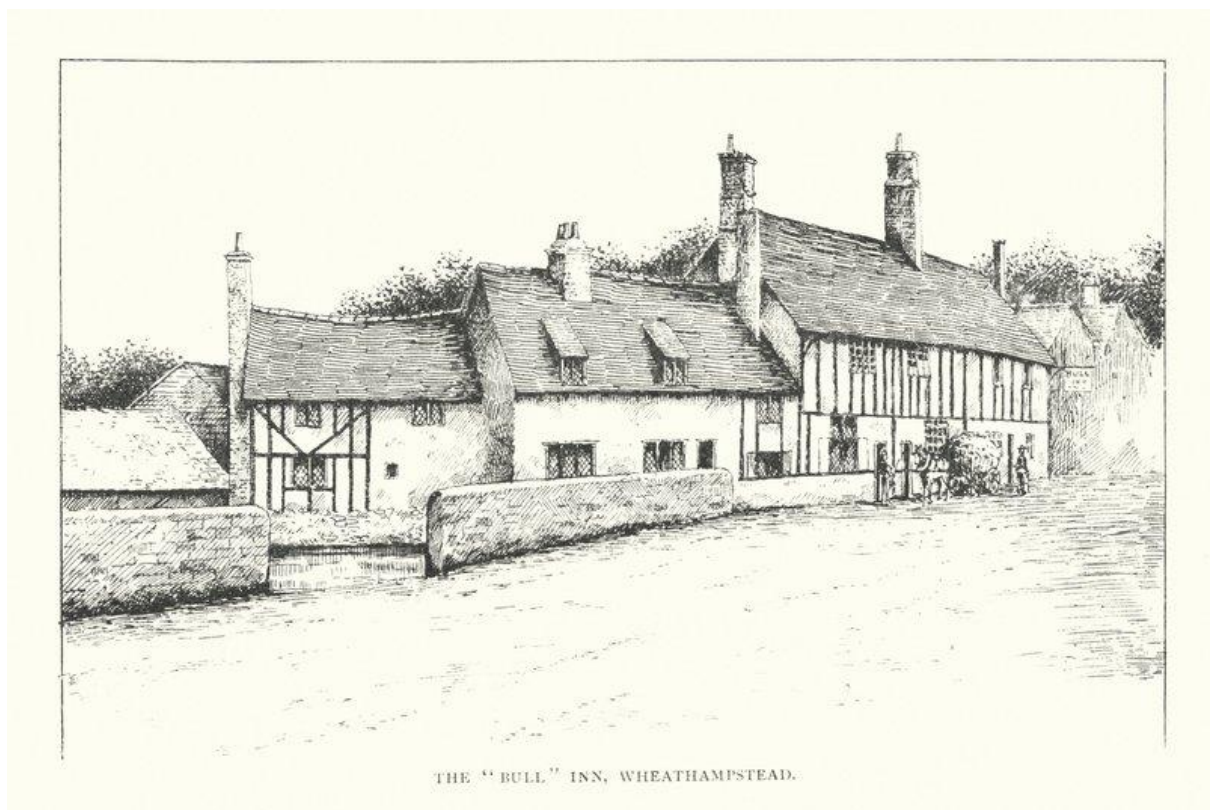
This evocative watercolour of Castle Farm on the River Lea in Wheathampstead was painted by E. A. Phipson. The farmhouse, sited in an attractive position by the river, was probably built for a member of the Brocket family in about 1620. The painting was signed Evacustes A. Phipson in 1901. Born Edward Arthur Phipson in 1854 at King's Norton near Birmingham, his family was engaged in local manufacturing. He seems to have received a good education and possibly trained for a time as an architect. He adopted the name 'Evacustes' himself, the word probably originating from Ancient Greek, meaning 'ready to obey or listen'. He was a prolific watercolour artist and there are several large collections of his works in England and abroad, many of them in public libraries. Hammersmith & Fulham Libraries have more than 60 of his local scenes.



Horses and Hounds by the Bull Hotel, High Street, Wheathampstead, 1901

Sam Collins MBE was a lifetime resident of Wheathampstead, an antiques dealer in the village for nearly 30 years, and an important figure on the Parish Council. In the early 1960s he purchased a badly discoloured painting of the High Street by an unknown artist. When it was cleaned it revealed a fox-

hunting scene at the beginning of the twentieth century. Many of the High Street buildings of the time are in the background, together with caricatures of well-known villagers, including the publican of The Bull, the local blacksmith and Amos Gale, the lamplighter. With the Master of Hounds in his red jacket astride his horse and the lively dogs ready to begin the chase, this painting recalls a gathering in Wheathampstead for a fox hunt, a sport deeply rooted in the agricultural history of Hertfordshire. It also records buildings in the High Street that were demolished in the 1960s.



The Bull Inn, Wheathampstead (undated lithograph)

The earliest record of the Grade II listed timber-framed Bull Inn dates from 1617, when it was owned by the Garrards of Lamer and had a range of stabling and 119 acres of land. Located in the High Street near the banks of the River Lea, the Bull Inn's steeply-pitched and tiled roofs and its long curving facade, bending away from the road above the river, attracted the attention of several artists visiting the village.

Duncan Moul was a twentieth-century printmaker, active between 1904 and 1926. He was known for his lithographs of architectural and rural village scenes, especially in Sussex and Hertfordshire. This image of The Bull includes the tiny detail of local villagers with a hay wagon using a village pump. Moul produced at least 182 artworks and two books - *Picturesque Hertfordshire* in 1904, an excellent source on a hundred years of drawings of old buildings, and *The Roadmender Country Illustrator* in 1926.



Bridge over River Lea, 1935

A.E. Kennedy (1883 – 1963), who was active between 1924 and 1963, created a different aspect of the Bull Inn in watercolour, viewed from the bridge. Born Albert Ernest Kennedy in Leyton, London, he was professionally known as A.E. Kennedy and was the elder brother of the noted flower painter, Cecil Kennedy. He was principally a children's book illustrator, particularly known for depicting animals, and was one of the few illustrators to win the approval of Alison Uttley, who wrote over a hundred stories for children. A. E. Kennedy illustrated her Sam Pig and Little Grey Rabbit series. This painting of Wheathampstead is very different from his usual style but the view must have attracted him and merited his artistic attention.



The Bull, Wheathampstead

Anton Pieck (1895 – 1987) was a Dutch painter and graphic artist. His works are noted for their nostalgic character and are widely popular, appearing regularly on greetings cards and calendars. He displayed a great talent for art early in life, winning his first prize for a still life oil painting when he was eleven. From the age of 25 until his retirement in 1960, he taught at an art school in Holland. His work extended beyond paintings in oil and watercolour, to include etchings, engravings, lithographs, travel drawings, woodcarvings, and book illustrations. He visited his daughter in Harpenden over many years, and while he was in the area made sketches around Harpenden, St Albans and Wheathampstead village.



The Hill at Wheathampstead

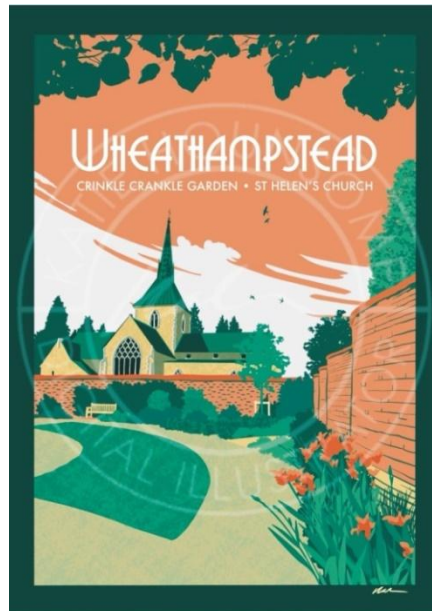
Stanley Orchard (1920 –2005) was born in Walthamstow, London and studied at the Leeds School of Art. A landscape artist, he worked in watercolour, oils, pen and ink and made lithographs. He is known for his beautiful portrayals of the English countryside. This painting was completed in 1961. He had 35 solo exhibitions in Bedford, Norwich, London and elsewhere and was in demand to carry out commissions for private patrons and businesses requiring paintings of their properties or scenes for calendars or Christmas cards.



Wheathampstead

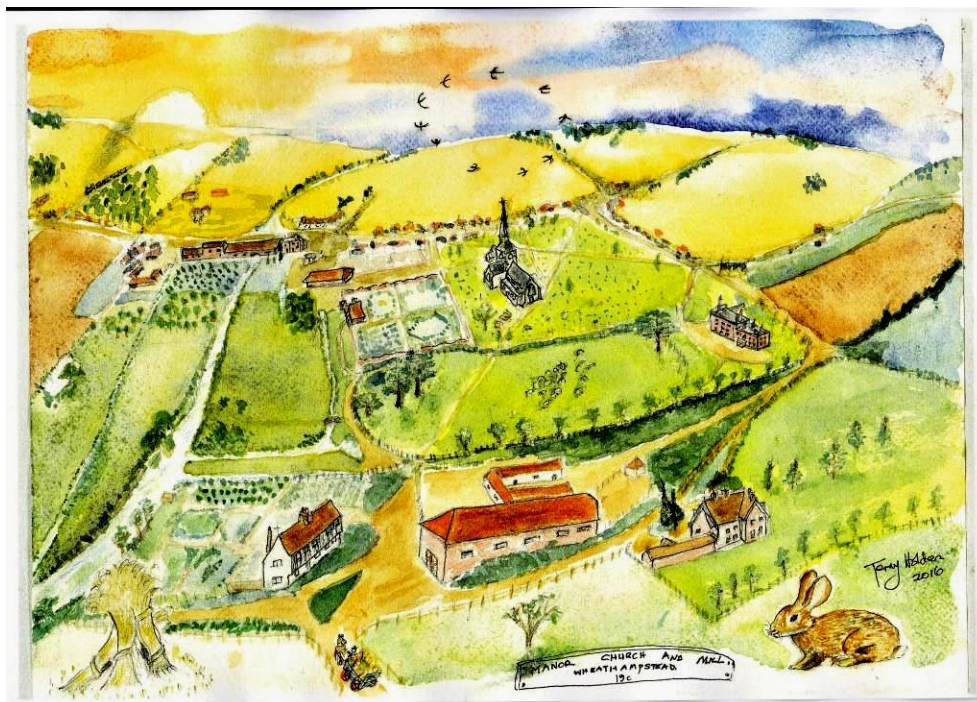
From 1983, artist brothers Philip and Glyn Martin toured Britain capturing, in finely detailed watercolour paintings, more than 850 portrayals of the much loved towns, villages and favourite places of England, Scotland and Wales.

Although best known for British paintings, they have also travelled to America, France, Holland and Belgium to add to their portfolio. Philip and Glyn's work has regularly appeared in the Annual Fine Art Trade Guild survey of best - selling images and they have frequently been finalists in the Guild's Artist of the Year awards.



Travel Print Design

Kate Hounscome studied Graphic and Media Design at the London College of Communication. Her bright travel posters, using digital design and a limited palette, depict places in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. Here she includes the church and the distinctive and unusual Crinkle-Crankle Wall in Wheathampstead village. Her posters are available in a range of products including prints, coasters and cushions.



Manor, Church and Mill in the 19th century, Wheathampstead

Terry Holden has lived in Wheathampstead for more than 50 years. A retired Surveyor, Project Manager and Chartered Builder, he has a love of sketching and painting and a keen interest in village history. His watercolour of 2018 traces the relationship between the Manor, Church and Mill, the key buildings in the village. The River Lea is depicted in his painting, as is a steam train, common on the village line before the railway was removed from Wheathampstead in the 1960s. Terry's painting is a symbolic representation of how the village looked in past times. He hoped it would be enjoyable and nostalgic for viewers, who would not take it too seriously and share his sense of humour.



River Lea in Wheathampstead

Karolina Swidecka graduated with first class honours from the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow, Poland in 2001. To date, she has been very successful at group and individual exhibitions in prestigious venues. Karolina's art is inspired by people and the reality surrounding them. This painting shows a boy enjoying himself amid the lush foliage found near the banks of the River Lea.



A Small Study of the River Lea at Wheathampstead

In 2025 the Ayot St Lawrence Art Show, held in the Palladian Church outside the village, celebrated its 50th year. Laura Bardell, an artist and teacher, who studied at Camberwell College of Art and Loughborough University, presented 'A Small Study of the River Lea at Wheathampstead' at this exhibition. Based in Buckinghamshire, she said, 'I have a lot of family history in Wheathampstead and haven't been there for years so it was a treat to explore and paint a local scene'. Laura is drawn to the quiet beauty of the land, to the light and the ever-changing aspects of time and seasons. She is conscious of the fragility of her surroundings and seeks to celebrate and respect the heritage of which we are all caretakers.



Wheathampstead High Street

Suzanne Moffatt is an imaginative interior designer with extensive experience working on a range of projects. She has a keen eye for detail and is passionate about design. She works across a range of platforms, including computer-aided design. Her accurate depiction of a section of the High Street creates a contemporary atmosphere and employs an effective choice of contrasting textures and colours.

The absence of traffic in all these depictions of Wheathampstead reflects the rural nature of the area, while the presence and centrality of the church spire

in the panorama of many of the artists' work indicate its place in the landscape and life of the village.

Many of these artists have their own websites, where framed prints are available for purchase. These are listed below.

Websites

Francis John Serjeant - invaluable.com
Evacustes A. Phipson - sulisfineart.com
Duncan Moul - MeisterDrucke.uk
A. E. Kennedy - invaluable.com
Stanley Orchard - Art UK
Philip and Glyn Martin - portraitsofbritain.co.uk
Katie Hounscome - katiehcreates.com
Karolina Swidecka – Saatchi Art
Laura Bardell – [www. fitch & fellows](http://www.fitch & fellows)
Suzanne Moffatt - suzannemoffatt.com

Sources

Wheathampstead Church, T.C., 1791 – British Library
HALS - J. Oke and John Chessell Buckler
Dictionary of 20th century British Book Illustrators
Mary Evans Picture Library
Harpenden History Society - Anton Pieck

My thanks to Patrick McNeill for his helpful comments

Dianne Payne, 2025