

Epping Forest is an area of ancient woodland in south-east England, straddling the border between north-east Greater London and Essex. Formed in approximately 8000 BC after the last ice age, it covers nearly 6,000 acres (24 km²)^[1] and contains areas of grassland, heath, rivers, bogs and ponds. Stretching between Forest Gate in the south and Epping in the north, Epping Forest is approximately 18 km long in the north-south direction, but no more than 4 km from east to west at its widest point, and in most places considerably narrower. The forest lies on a ridge between the valleys of the rivers Lea and Roding; its elevation and thin gravelly soil - the result of glaciation - historically made it unsuitable for agriculture. Embankments of two Iron Age camps - Loughton Camp and Ambresbury Banks - can be found hidden in the woodland. It gives its name to the Epping Forest local government district.

[Dick Turpin](#) (1705-1739), the notorious highwayman, made his mark in the area during his life of crime. In about 1734, the Widow Shelley, living in a farm on Traps Hill, was supposedly roasted over her own fire by Turpin until she confessed to where her money was hidden. In fact, his last spell of 'going straight' before he became a professional thief appears to have been in Buckhurst Hill, where between 1733-4 he was a butcher. The area was no doubt convenient for deer-poaching, another of his 'trades'. Fear of his ruthless style of burglary led householders in Loughton to build 'Turpin traps', heavy wooden flaps let down over the top of the stairs and jammed in place with a pole against the upstairs ceiling. Some of these survived until the middle of the 19th century.

Loughton has a very long history of settlement. Settlers first made their homes in Loughton over 250,000 years ago. Standing on a strategic spur of high ground in Epping Forest is Loughton Camp, an [Iron Age](#) fort built about [500 BC](#). Loughton Camp is roughly oval, defended by a single earth rampart enclosing about 12 acres. At one time, the Camp must have commanded a spectacular view down the Roding valley, but by 1872 it was covered by dense undergrowth and entirely forgotten. In that year it was re-discovered by a Mr B.H. Cowper, and excavations ten years later found Iron Age pottery within the ramparts. Camps like this were probably places of refuge and citadels rather than places to live.

Loughton Camp lies close to [Ambresbury Banks](#), another Iron Age fortification (which is in [Epping](#) parish). Though the two forts were once thought to be sequential - Loughton Camp followed by Ambresbury - the current view is that they face each other across a watershed which was an ancient boundary line, later re-used as the boundary between [Ongar](#) and Waltham Hundreds. It is now believed that these two forts were in separate - and presumably sometimes hostile - territories, roughly equivalent to the medieval Hundreds of Ongar (Loughton Camp) and Ambresbury (Waltham), the forts may therefore have acted as very visible strategic positions, huge frontier markers, which defined the boundary between two territories.

In the fifth century, there was some continuation of Roman-style rule for a time, but [Anglo-Saxon](#) invaders quickly carved out new territories. One of these was the [Kingdom of Essex](#). In the Loughton area, it is likely that rural life carried on much as it had always done, although the forest may have expanded as the population declined through war and plague. It was in this Saxon period that modern Loughton first began, known as *Lukintune*, the place-name is Anglo-Saxon, and means 'the farm of Luhha'. Settlement was widely scattered; Lukintune was in the area of the later Loughton Hall, and two other hamlets were around Alderton Hall (*Aelwartone* - 'the farm of Aethelwaru'), and Debden House (*Tippedene* - 'the valley of Tippa')

The name "Epping Forest" was first recorded in the [17th century](#); prior to this it was known as Waltham Forest (which gives its name to the present-day [London borough](#)). The forest is thought to have been given legal status as a [royal forest](#) by [Henry III](#) in the [12th century](#). This status allowed commoners to use the forest to gather wood and foodstuffs, and [to graze livestock](#), but only the king was allowed to hunt there.

In [Tudor](#) times [Henry VIII](#) and [Queen Elizabeth I](#) hunted in the forest. In [1543](#) Henry commissioned a building, known as Great Standing, from which to view the chase at [Chingford](#). The building was renovated in [1589](#) for Queen Elizabeth I and can still be seen today in Chingford. The building is now known as Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge, and is open to the public as a museum.

There were disputes between landowners (who [enclosed](#) land) and commoners (who had grazing and cutting rights), including that led by [Thomas Willingale](#) (1799-1870) who on behalf of the villagers of [Loughton](#) continued to lop the trees after the Lord of the Manor (Maitland) had enclosed 1,300 acres (5 km²) of forest in Loughton. This led to an injunction against further enclosures.

The Epping Forest Act was passed in [1878](#). The forest was saved by the [Corporation of London](#) from illegal enclosure, halting the shrinkage of the forest that this had caused. Epping Forest ceased to be a royal forest and the Crown's right to [deer](#) and [venison](#) was terminated. [Pollarding](#) was no longer allowed although grazing rights continued. This act laid down a stipulation that the Conservators (i.e. the Corporation of London) "shall at all times keep Epping Forest unenclosed and unbuilt on as an open space for the recreation and enjoyment of the people". When [Queen Victoria](#) visited Chingford on [6 May 1882](#) she declared "It gives me the greatest satisfaction to dedicate this beautiful forest to the use and enjoyment of my people for all time" and it thus became "The People's Forest". The Corporation of London still own and manage Epping Forest in strict conformity with the Epping Forest Act without any money for its upkeep coming from local rates or taxes. The Conservators administer the forest from the [Grade II* listed](#) Warren House in Loughton; the grounds of Warren House, which was built around a medieval hunting lodge, were laid out by [Humphry Repton](#).

Until the outbreak of BSE in 1996 commoners still exercised their right to graze cattle and every summer herds of cattle would roam freely in the southern part of the forest. Cattle were reintroduced in 2001 but their movements are now more restricted to reduce conflict with traffic.^[2]

The right to collect wood still exists but is rarely practised and is limited to "one [faggot](#) of dead or driftwood" per day per adult resident.

Epping, however, traces its story back to even earlier times long before the Romans, several of whose villas have been excavated near the town. Legend has it that in AD 61 Queen Boudicca made a gallant last stand against the Romans at Ambresbury Banks, an ancient British camp. The Saxons first settled the area and gave the place its name or rather, variations of names that included, at different times, Ippying, Ipping, Eppingheth and Eppingthorpe. The parish was then divided into eight manors and the church was at Epping Upland, and it was here, in Henry III's reign, that the market first functioned.

Throughout its history Epping has been important as a market and fair town and as a place of importance on one of the main routes from London into East Anglia.

As a main road town Epping had many coaching inns 16 at one time saw many travellers (Samuel Pepys in 1660; Charles II in 1684 and Queen Anne in 1705 and 1707) - and was also a haunt for highwaymen. Dick Turpin supposedly operated here (he is said to have shot a forest keeper in 1737) but was unflatteringly described as a male of only average height and much marked by smallpox. The last recorded highway robbery took place in 1837 when a local solicitor was robbed by three men. The coming of the Great Eastern Railway in 1865 virtually put an end to both main road prosperity and thoughts of highway robbery and the road itself was toll-free in 1870. Epping gradually grew as a favoured town of residence for those who worked in London

Loughton first appeared, as 'Lukintone' in a charter of 1062 and was 'Lochetuna' in the Domesday Book in which Chigwell also found mention as 'Cinghvella'. In 1135 reference was made to 'La Bocherste' (Buckhurst Hill), an area referred to in much later years as Bucket Hill, meaning a hill covered with beech trees. The three communities remained as small forest clearings through the centuries, but with only Chigwell and Loughton having churches, the former certainly being in existence as far back as the 12th Century. In the great days of the forest as a Royal hunting ground, visits from monarchs were frequent. Henry VIII often stayed at a hunting lodge known as Poteles at Buckhurst Hill and Kings Avenue today perpetuates the memory of his visits with Anne Boleyn. James I was entertained at Loughton Hall in 1605.

As well as monarchs, this part of the forest perhaps because of its proximity to London drew numerous literary and military figures during the 17th to 19th Centuries. Tennyson, John Clare and Edward Thomas are associated with High Beach; Sotheby rented a house called Fairmead Lodge. Loughton was quite an artistic and literary area in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century. Amongst those who have lived there were writers Arthur Morrison and W.W. Jacobs, lexicographer Robert Hunter and sculptor Sir Jacob Epstein; Kipling was also a visitor. Admiral George Cockburn who ferried Napoleon into exile on St Helena, lived at High Beach where, ironically, that emperor's nephew, Prince Louis Lucien Bonaparte also lived in a house less than three hundred yards distant! Another famous admiral, Sir Elias Harvey, who fought alongside Nelson on the Temeraire at Trafalgar, had his home at Chigwell. The town's famous grammar school also had celebrated pupils and visitors William Penn, the quaker, was a scholar here and James Smith, the poet, wrote about the District when revisiting Chigwell in later years. The famous cartoonist F. Carruthers Gould lived at Buckhurst Hill.

<http://www.themodernantiquarian.com/site/2140>

Paranormal

If you do ever go there, go to Avey Lane and if you are travelling west you will see a little turning just before Pynest Green Lane. This lane is not on any maps and is known as Hangman's Hill. Drive your car onto the slight hill from Avey Lane, put car in neutral and take your foot off the brake - your car will roll uphill and always comes to a dead stop at a tall tree. Spirit levels show a definite gradient and a ball will roll downhill onto Avey Lane, but your car will roll uphill!!