



# The Hundred Parishes

## An introductory article about CHURCH TOWERS, SPIRES AND BELLCOTES

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Almost every administrative parish within the Hundred Parishes has a church of great antiquity. Each one is different. The most notable external feature is often the tower, erected originally to house a bell or set of bells, raised high so their sound would travel above the surrounding rooftops to summon parishioners to prayer or for a special occasion. Shown below are the towers of Hildersham, on the left, and Pleshey on the right.



Almost all our church towers are square with just two being round: Bartlow, shown here, and Bardfield Saling.



Some churches have a spire, usually extending upwards from the square tower base and tapering to a point. The shapes of spires vary greatly; tall and thin styles are often referred to as 'Hertfordshire spikes' although they are not confined to Hertfordshire. Widford's spire is pictured on the right.

The combination of tower and spire may be called a steeple.

The tallest local steeples are at Thaxted (181 feet), shown on the left, and Saffron Walden (193 feet) on the right.



A few churches, like High Roding on the left, have a bellcote, where one or two bells hang in a small frame above one end of the roof. Several of these were erected to replace a collapsed bell tower. In the case of High Roding, the former tower collapsed after a lightning strike in the 19th century.

Wimbish, on the right, seems to be our only parish church with no tower, spire or bellcote, following the demolition of its unsafe tower in 1883.





A few churches have unusual towers or spires including Little Dunmow's separate thin turret, shown above on the left, Wareside's octagonal bell tower above on the right, and High Wych's thin circular spire, below on the left.



Little Sampford's tower, below, has a distinctive design, topped by a short Hertfordshire spike.



On the left, Great Canfield's Norman church dates largely from the 12th century. Its wooden bell tower was added in the 15th century and the shingled spire in the 19th.

A few local churches are surmounted by a feature which is neither a tower, spire or bellcote. Quendon's parish church, below on the left, has a 20th-century bell tower and cupola, while Tilty on the right is described as having a bell turret, dating from the 18th century, and cupola.



Sewards End church, on the left, has what is described as a fleche.

The photo below shows the tower of Thundridge Old Church, all that remains of Thundridge's former parish church.



Next time you are out and about, please keep an eye open for the rich variety of local church architecture.

On [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk), the parish introductions usually include a photo of the parish church.

A picture of each parish church appears amongst the thousand photos in the Society's book, *The Hundred Parishes: An Introduction*, which is still available from libraries.

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