



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## LITTLE BARDFIELD



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**Location:** 7 miles northeast of Great Dunmow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6530.  
**Postcode:** CM7 4TP. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Access:** off B1057.  
**Bus:** no general bus service visits Little Bardfield, only a school bus.  
**Population:** 237 in 2001, 264 in 2011, 260 in 2021.

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Little Bardfield is a small parish focused mainly along the road between its larger sister parish of Great Bardfield to the east and Thaxted to the west. Predominantly open arable farmland, the parish has three main communities: the village of the same name and the hamlets of Hawkspur Green to the north and Oxen End a little to the south.

The parish's Village Design Statement, published in 2009, affords a glimpse into the history, character and aspirations of the parish residents: '...it is important to remember that Little Bardfield is a small village set amid the beautiful countryside. It is not an urban community and must not develop into one.' Thus spoke one of the residents in the public consultation which informed the statement, and who appears to have spoken for the majority.

To describe Little Bardfield as having a 'timeless quality' about it is to use an apposite, albeit rather hackneyed, epithet. For one cannot imagine, walking around the parish or perusing some of the 'before and after' photographs included in the statement, that it has ever looked very different, or indeed, that it ever *will* look very different. A little gem of a clip from a 1938 Pathé newsreel gives us an idea. Do take a look using the link below. Whilst the familiar delivery of the newsreader is today amusing and anachronistic, the images are not. A video taken today of those same leafy lanes and ancient dwellings would look little different; see, for example, these recent photos of the 18th-century almshouses on the left and the 17th-century Chequers on the right.



The parish has many more listed buildings such as Wainsford Farmhouse pictured on the left and the more lowly but delightfully named crinkle crankle wall adjacent to the parish church.

With one exception, all the listings are at Grade II. The exception is the Grade I-listed parish church of St Katharine, rather disparagingly referred to by Pathéman as 'a lovely old pile'. Lovely it is; pile it is not.

Having a heritage which dates back to the mid-11th century, the church was renovated in the 1860s by GF Bodley, the leading ecclesiastical architect of that era. Further internal work in 2006 endeavoured to remain faithful to Bodley's design and colours.



There is much of interest in the church. Bodley's rood, reredos, altar and tabernacle have been a feature of the recent work. A pre-14th century rector's gravestone which was found beneath the Victorian floor is now displayed in the porch and, on the east wall, there is a 17th-century table tomb monument that is individually listed in its own right. Perhaps the most notable feature is the organ (restored and working) with its carved case, thought to have been built around 1700 by the master organ-maker Renatus Harris and to have come from Jesus College Chapel in Cambridge. Some excellent images of the church and its environs can be viewed at the Tricia's Tales blogspot (link below).

Over the doorway of the church are painted the words 'Reverence My Sanctuary', an inscription which has been adopted as a book title by the present incumbent of the church. Robert Beaken has written a history and guide (see links below) to the church and in particular the Brotherhood of St Paul, an independent anglo-catholic theological college which operated in and from the church in the early 20th century. The college was opened in 1910 by the rector of the time, the Rev Edward Mears, to provide theological training for poorer ordinands who could not otherwise have fulfilled their vocations. After Mears' retirement in 1940, the Brotherhood gradually declined and was finally dissolved in 1957. Nevertheless, over 300 priests were trained for ordination here during this period and sent out to serve in parishes in this country, on mission stations overseas and as military chaplains during the Second World War.

Curiously, whilst Mears was making provision for intellectually-gifted and aspirational young men, another altruistic youth initiative was taking place in the north of the parish on Hill Hall Common at Hawkspur Green. This was for young men at the opposite end of the spectrum, who would probably today be known as young offenders. Ahead of its time in 1936, the Q Camp, as it was known, operated as a self-governing therapeutic community, using the opportunities of the rural farming setting and camp living to teach life skills and to improve social behaviour and physical health. It survived only until the outbreak of World War II, re-opening briefly at the end of the war as a camp for younger boys. Its legacy, however, as a pioneer in the field of child care and mental health, is considerable.

Little Bardfield is full of lovely landscapes, pastoral views, flora and fauna. Visitors exploring the parish on foot will find many inviting lanes and footpaths; but take a packed lunch, for the parish is not equipped for creature comforts. It may be necessary to venture into nearby Thaxted or Great Bardfield for bodily sustenance.

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**Adjacent parishes:** Stebbing, Lindsell, Thaxted, The Sampfords, Great Bardfield.

**Hundred Parishes Society walks** include . . .

Circular walk 141 which follows a countryside route of 4.5 miles, mostly in Little Bardfield parish.

**Links:**

Parish Council and parish history: <https://www.littlebardfieldparish.org.uk/>.

Village Design Statement, 2009 (a very long address):

[https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/media/1392/Little-Bardfield-Village-Design-Statement-2009/pdf/Little\\_Bardfield\\_Village\\_Design\\_Statement.pdf?m=637472581416170000](https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/media/1392/Little-Bardfield-Village-Design-Statement-2009/pdf/Little_Bardfield_Village_Design_Statement.pdf?m=637472581416170000)

Pathé video: <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/little-bardfield-issue-title-is-happy-days>

Tricia's Tales: <http://belfiebird.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/well-it-didnt-rain-so-off-to-little.html>

Brotherhood of St Paul: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2010/27-august/features/chelmsford-s-unwanted-gift>

Q Camps: <http://www.utoopia-britannica.org.uk/pages/Qcamps.htm>

**Further reading:**

*Reverence My Sanctuary: A History and Guide to the Parish Church of St Katharine and the Brotherhood of St Paul, Little Bardfield.* R Beaken, 2007, Taverner Publications.

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