



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## STEEPLE BUMPSTEAD



**Location:** 3 miles south of Haverhill. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6741.

**Postcode:** CB9 7ER. **County:** Essex. **District:** Braintree. **Access:** B1054, B1057.

**Buses:** 320 and 321 (Mon – Sat) between Audley End Station, Saffron Walden and Haverhill.

**Population:** 1481 in 2001, 1,627 in 2011, 1,600 in 2021.

This parish marks the most north-easterly extent of the Hundred Parishes. Lying within a mile of Essex's border with Suffolk, it also falls within the Stour Valley area. This has been a relatively extensive parish since the Domesday Book of 1086 which recorded 78 households. Bumpstead is believed to mean the place where reeds grow, but there is uncertainty concerning the Steeple element of the name. There is no record that the church ever had one, but mortices in the tower's roof timbers could well indicate that these once supported a short spire or 'spike'.

The parish has a wealth of ancient buildings. Whilst not all visible to the casual visitor, there are sufficient to make this an interesting destination. Altogether there are 52 listings of which 44 date from the 17th century or earlier. Two are rated as Grade I – Moyns Park and the parish church.

Moyns Park is a substantial Elizabethan home in private hands. It is well secluded and part of its large estate now operates as an equestrian stud. The house was built around 1580 and is little changed from this engraving, published in 1831. Fortunately, this view is still accessible from a public footpath – see walk 155 noted below.



The parish church of St Mary dates from the 11th century with much of the structure built between the 14th and 16th centuries. There have been occasional phases of renovation down through the ages. Monuments inside include a particularly fine one by Thomas Stayner of Sir Henry Bendyshe who died in 1717.

Whilst the parish church does not have a steeple, the Victorian Congregational Chapel, shown here, has a 70 foot spire.



Steeple Bumpstead has a long history of non-conformist worship. In 1527 John Tibauld was burnt at the stake here for his beliefs and in 1662 the vicar, Edward Symmes, was one of 2,000 clergy who were ejected from the Church of England for refusing to conform to the Act of Uniformity passed by the Government of Charles II.



The two churches are within the conservation area that affords some protection to the historic centre of Steeple Bumpstead.

Within that area, at the corner of Chapel Street, the B1057, and Church Street stands the Moot Hall. This was built in the 16th century as a market hall with the ground floor mostly open – rather like the one at Thaxted. Walls were added in the 18th century and the building was used as a school. When George Gent, the owner of Moyns Park, claimed the right to appoint the headmaster the villagers forcibly took possession of the school until their claim was upheld by an ecclesiastical court. Today the Moot Hall is used as a library and parish council meeting room.

Ancient House, pictured on the right, is a 15th century hall house within the conservation area.

Bumpstead Brook flows through Steeple Bumpstead in a northeasterly direction to join the River Stour just beyond the parish boundary. Whilst the brook was probably one reason for the original settlement here, it has also been a regular cause for concern. After a series of floods that affected many properties in the centre of the village, a major flood alleviation scheme was completed in 2014. One consequence has been the loss of the ford at the bottom of Church Street where it meets the main road, the B1054. The ford was replaced by a bridge, but the loss of heritage was considered justified to give greater protection to homes along the brook.



Steeple Bumpstead's reputation for rebellion (today it might be called fighting for human rights) was revived in the 20th century when the area witnessed much unrest during the agricultural strike of 1914. When the strike ended, many of the young farm labourers went to fight in the First World War. The 25 who did not return are recorded on the war memorial beside the Moot Hall.

As a young woman, Edith Cavell served as governess to the children of Steeple Bumpstead's vicar during the 1880s. She subsequently became a nurse in Belgium, where she was executed in 1915 by the occupying German authorities for her role in helping wounded Allied soldiers escape the occupied country. She is commemorated here by a plaque in the church and by the residential road Edith Cavell Way. The 16th-century martyr is also commemorated in the name of John Tibauld Court. It is fitting that these newer developments recall Steeple Bumpstead's past.

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#### **Hospitality:**

Fox and Hounds, CB9 7DQ – 01440 731810 - <https://www.foxinsteeple.co.uk/>  
 Red Lion (limited opening hours), CB9 7DG – 01440 731815 - <http://www.redlion5.co.uk/>  
 Orchard House B&B, CB9 7DP – 01440 730617 - <https://orchardhousesteepleb.co.uk/>

**Adjacent Hundred Parishes:** Finchingfield, Hempstead, Helions Bumpstead.

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

Circular walk 155 which covers 5.5 miles including Moyns Park and Birdbrook.

#### **Links:**

Parish Council: <https://www.steeplebumpstead-pc.org/>

#### **Further reading:**

*The Empty Fields, the Agricultural Strike of 1914*, Roy Brazier, 1989, Ian Henry Publications.

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