



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

STEEPLE BUMPSTEAD



Location: 3 miles south of Haverhill. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6741.
Postcode: CB9 7DQ. **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 northeasterly 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 large 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. Not all are visible to the casual visitor, but there are sufficient to make this an interesting destination. Altogether there are 53 listed buildings of which 44 date from the 17th century or earlier. Two are rated at Grade I. One is the Parish Church of St Mary, shown below. It 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.



Although the parish church does not have a steeple, the red brick Victorian Congregational Chapel, pictured below, has an unusual 70-foot spire.



Monuments inside the parish church include this particularly fine one by Thomas Stayner depicting Sir Henry Bendyshe who died in 1717. The Bendyshe, Bendysh or Bendish family lived at Bower Hall, long-since demolished.

Sir Henry Bendyshe was the last of his line, being pre-deceased by his only son who died aged five months. The baby is also depicted on this memorial. Sir Henry was the last of four Bendyshe baronets, a very wealthy man, owning a plantation in Barbados and, no doubt, a good number of slaves to work it. Some of his forebears are commemorated on a much older memorial, pictured on the right – their deaths are recorded in 1486, 1523 and 1585.



The church tower has a clock on each side – one of only three churches in the Hundred Parishes to have four clocks.

A rather modest listed building abuts against the churchyard wall – a small brick lock-up dating from the late 18th or early 19th century. It would have been used as a temporary detention centre for drunks or petty criminals. It has probably not been used since its restoration in 1977.

Steeple Bumpstead's two churches are within the conservation area that affords some protection to the village's historic centre.



Within that area, at the corner of Church Street and Chapel Street, the B1057, stands the Moot Hall, shown below. It 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 for some time 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 opposition to his claim was upheld by an ecclesiastical court. Today the Moot Hall is used as a library and parish council meeting room.



Close by the Moot Hall are two inns that date from the 17th century, the Red Lion and the Fox & Hounds. The latter is shown below.



Within the conservation area, thatched Portobello Cottage, shown below, dates from the 17th century, while Ancient House, on the right, was built in the 15th-century as a hall house.



Steeple Bumpstead has a long history of Nonconformist 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 in 1662.

The 16th-century martyr was also commemorated in the naming of the 20th-century road, John Tibauld Court. It is fitting that such newer developments recall Steeple Bumpstead's links to the past.

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 1914 agricultural strike. When the strike ended, many of the young farm labourers went to fight in the First World War. The war memorial beside the Moot Hall, shown here, records the names of 25 men from the parish who did not return.



Another victim of World War I was Edith Cavell. As a young woman during the 1880s she served as governess to the children of Steeple Bumpstead's vicar. 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 to escape the occupied country. She is commemorated by a plaque in the church and by the residential road Edith Cavell Way.

Bumpstead Brook flows through Steeple Bumpstead village in a northeasterly direction to join the River Stour just beyond the parish boundary. While 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 village centre, 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. The loss of heritage was considered justified to give greater protection to homes along the brook.



Another lost piece of heritage was the Iron House which stood in North Street before its demolition in the 1960s. It was built of corrugated iron by Colonel JC Humphrey, the son of the village wheelwright. He claimed to have invented corrugated iron.

Below are two more attractive, listed buildings near the centre of the village: on the left, Freezes Farm from the 17th century and, on the right, Broadgate House which dates from the 16th century.



Beyond the village, there are several more interesting and historic buildings, albeit not always visible from the public highway. One that can be seen is 16th-century Blois Farm, shown here on the right.



Steeple Bumpstead's second Grade I-listed building (in addition to the church) is Moyns Park, a substantial red-brick house built in the 16th century about a mile east of the village. It is pictured below.



Moyns Park was built by the Gent family who lived here for many generations from the Elizabethan era until the 19th century.

The house is still privately owned. It is well away from a public road, but the view shown on the previous page of the north-facing entrance may be enjoyed from a public footpath that passes the driveway. The footpath is included in Hundred Parishes walk number 155.

The house is little changed from this engraving, published in 1831.



Part of the Moyns Park estate is now run as an equestrian stud.

Further information about Steeple Bumpstead

Hospitality:

Fox and Hounds, CB9 7DQ – 01440 731810 - <https://www.foxinsteeples.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 parishes: Finchingfield, Hempstead, Helions Bumpstead.

Hundred Parishes Society walks include . . .

Circular walk 155 which covers 5.5 miles including Moyns Park and also about a mile outside The Hundred Parishes in the parish of Birdbrook.

Links:

Parish Council: <https://steeplebumpstead-pc.gov.uk>

Further reading:

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

This page, last updated 17 March 2026, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk