



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## BARTLOW



**Location:** 6 miles northeast of Saffron Walden. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL5845.

**Postcode:** CB21 4PY. **Access:** south from A1307. **County:** Cambridgeshire.

**District:** South Cambs. **Buses:** 19 to Haverhill.

**Population:** 102 in 2001, 110 in 2011, 114 in 2021.

Bartlow is one of the smallest parishes in Cambridgeshire, covering just 156 hectares or 385 acres (less than a square mile) and having a population of just over one hundred.



However, size is

not everything and the parish has a big story. It is particularly noteworthy for the Bartlow Hills, but also the ancient wall paintings in its unusual church.

Bartlow Hills is a Scheduled Ancient Monument that features on the village sign and in these two photos, the first from over 100 years ago. It is actually a series of barrows from the time of Roman occupation. They are some of the finest Roman burial mounds in Europe. They are not visible from the road, but can be visited most easily by way of the path to the east (left) of the church.

Originally there were six, possibly seven, steep-sided conical mounds in two parallel lines. Today only four remain clearly visible. The largest stands 12 metres (40 feet) high, taller than any other Roman mound in western Europe.



All six mounds were investigated in the early 19th century and in each of them were found cremated human remains in a glass vessel, together with richly decorated bronze, enamel and glass implements for eating and drinking. In one mound the

archaeologists found the remains of a folding chair with bronze ornaments and a seat of leather straps. The burials have been dated to the late 1st or early 2nd century AD. Each mound appears to have been constructed for a single wealthy person. Whilst the remains of a small Romano-British house were excavated in Bartlow in the 19th century, it would seem that this group of burial mounds had been for people of considerably higher status.

During excavations, evidence was found of even earlier inhabitants, from the Bronze Age (around 2,500BC to 800BC) and the Neolithic period before that.

Today, a wooden stairway allows visitors to climb to the top of the tallest mound.

Most of the important finds from the 19th century excavations were taken to Easton Lodge, Little Easton, near Dunmow, the home of Viscount Maynard. At that time, the Bartlow Hills were in the county of Essex. Sadly, Easton Lodge was destroyed by fire in 1847 and the artefacts were also destroyed.

Some of the finds that were not taken to Easton Lodge are now displayed in Saffron Walden Museum.

The Bartlow Hills Roman barrow cemetery is owned by the trustees of the Bartlow Estate and has been in the care of Cambridgeshire County Council since 1990.



While this area was inhabited long ago, there is no mention of Bartlow in the Domesday Book of 1086. The first known reference to the village occurred in the 13th century.

Bartlow's Grade I-listed church was built before then, probably around 1100 AD. Its distinctive round tower is one of only two in Cambridgeshire and one of only two in the Hundred Parishes (the other is at Bardfield Saling in The Salings parish in Essex). Round church towers are more common further north, in Suffolk and especially Norfolk, but are rarely found anywhere outside East Anglia.



Inside St Mary's Church there are some recently-conserved 15th-century wall paintings. They include St George's dragon (without St George), shown here.



Another painting, copied below, shows St Michael weighing souls. His attempts are being disrupted by the Devil (bottom right) trying to unbalance the scales.

In 1865 the railway came to Bartlow when the Shelford-Sudbury line was opened. Unfortunately, this was routed right through the Bartlow Hills, severely damaging some of the mounds. Fifteen skeletons were found during the construction work, suggesting that this area had been used as a cemetery more extensively than just the barrows. In 1866 the Audley End – Saffron Walden line was extended to Bartlow which then became a significant railway junction.



Like so many railways, these lines became commercially unviable and both closed in the 1960s. There are still signs of where the tracks went.

The old station has been converted into a residential property, appropriately named The Booking Office.

In the early 21st century, one resident trimmed his hedge in honour of the steam engines that once passed close to his property. Sadly, the hedge has now reverted to a less conspicuous shape.

The former post office also shut some years ago but the 16th-century building, shown below on the right, still displays its old sign.





Bartlow's pub, shown above, is appropriately named "The Three Hills". It dates from the 17th and 18th centuries but provides up-to-date hospitality and has won several awards in the 2020s.

Just out of sight, to the right of the pub, The Forge goes back to the 16th and 17th centuries and is pictured on the left. It stands beside the young River Granta which flows north-westwards towards Cambridge.

A view of the Granta is shown below, taken from the footpath a little way south of the church.



Another ancient building near the centre of the village is The Old Hall, shown below. It dates from the 16th century when it was built as a hall house with an open fire and no chimney, its smoke drifting upwards through vents in the roof.



Today Bartlow has a thriving community. Its activities include the Bartlow Three Counties Walk. The Walk is a well-established fund-raising event that attracts hundreds of walkers and offers a choice of four routes, from 1 mile to 13 miles, and passes the point where Essex, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk meet.

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## MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BARTLOW

**Hospitality:** The Three Hills pub and restaurant:  
[www.thethreehills.co.uk](http://www.thethreehills.co.uk) – 01223 890500

**Hundred Parishes Circular walk 114** covers 1 mile around Bartlow

**Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes:** Linton, Castle Camps, Ashdon.

**Links:**

Bartlow village and parish council:

<https://bartlow.parish.uk/>

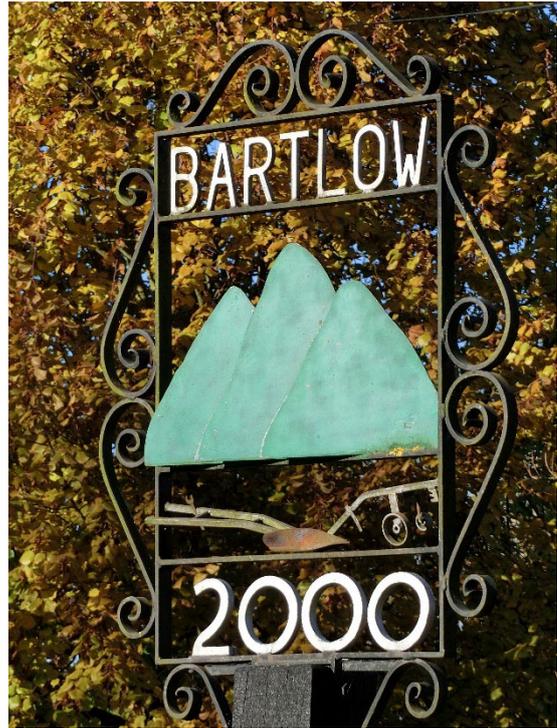
Bartlow 3 Counties Charity Walk:

<https://www.bartlow3countieswalk.co.uk/>

Bartlow Hills Scheduled Monument listing:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1018974>

Bartlow Station: <http://www.disused-stations.org.uk/b/bartlow/index18.shtml>



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