



The Hundred Parishes

Circular Walks – number 114

Bartlow – 1.1 miles (2 kms)

This short clockwise walk around the heart of Bartlow visits two unusual places: a round-towered church and almost-unknown burial mounds from the period of Roman occupation. It is a fairly flat walk but sometimes on uneven ground. Some paths can be muddy at times. There are no stiles. The route passes The Three Hills pub and restaurant and Bartlow Church. If you hope to visit either, please be prepared to either remove muddy boots or wear boot covers or plastic bags. This walk could be combined with walk number 111, which covers 1.5 miles around nearby Hildersham.

Start and finish: The route starts from a small area that should be suitable for parking one or two cars. This is in quiet Bartlow Road, just west of the chicane beneath the former railway bridge. Bartlow Road runs eastwards off Ashdon Road, from the junction 200 yards south of Bartlow's crossroads and 150 yards south of Bartlow's pub, The Three Hills.

Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL581450 - Postcode: CB21 4PW (caution: this postcode covers an extensive area and is helpful only to find the village of Bartlow; then follow the guidance at the start of this information box).

The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 209.

A diagram of the route is provided at the end of the description.

Before setting out from the parking place, please reflect on what was once here. On the other side of this lane is an embankment that once carried a railway line from the Cambridge area, which is to our left. To the right, just after crossing the bridge over the road, the railway line forked. One track continued in an easterly direction towards Bartlow village and then Haverhill and the Stour Valley. The other turned south, heading along the field edge behind us, towards Saffron Walden and London. Between the two tracks was Bartlow Station. The two lines closed in the 1960s after operating for a hundred years. We will see the line again, and the station.

Now let's see what else Bartlow has to offer. We should set off between the brick pillars of the former railway bridge. In so doing, we leave Essex and enter Cambridgeshire. We continue along Bartlow Road with the Stour Valley railway line embankment on the right.

We soon pass 30mph speed limit signs and then cross over the River Bourn that flows from our right to the left where it soon runs into the River Granta.

Before the end of the road, when safe, we should cross to the left. At the junction, we turn left into Ashdon Road. When safe, we should cross to the right to face any oncoming traffic.

We pass The Forge on the left. This dates from the 16th century. Immediately afterwards we cross over the River Granta, flowing from right to left and heading towards Cambridge and eventually the North Sea.

We pass The Three Hills pub and restaurant on the right. The building dates from the 17th or 18th century and was recorded as an ale house in the mid-19th century. It is usually open for lunch from Wednesday to Sunday.

Soon afterwards, on the right, we pass 16th-century Maltings Cottage which once housed Bartlow's Post Office. The upper storey is jettied over the pavement and the whole face of the building has been decorated with pargetting. Opposite, Crossways House combines an interesting mix of building materials: brick, flint and timber-framing with plaster.

At the cross roads, note the Bartlow village sign diagonally opposite. It depicts the three hills that we will soon encounter. Set back behind the sign is Little Barham Hall, a 19th-century former farmhouse.

We turn right at the crossroads, signposted towards The Camps.

After about 200 yards, we turn right through the gateway into the churchyard of Bartlow's Grade I-listed St Mary's Church. This is one of only two round-towered churches in the Hundred Parishes. The church was built around 1100 AD and is worth visiting. Please remove or cover boots if they are dirty.

Inside, St Mary's has interesting 15th-century wall paintings including a dragon and St Michael weighing souls. There is an informative interpretation panel.

Leaving the church, we turn right from the porch. Immediately on the left is an unusual conical memorial whose inscriptions are no longer legible. It is believed to date from around 1800 AD.

We continue through the churchyard and then follow the public footpath (part of the long-distance Harcamlow Way) round to the right. Soon, there is a good view of the church to the right.

We continue along this path for over 200 yards with an ugly corrugated iron fence on the left. This hides the extensive parkland and gardens of Bartlow Park. The present house for the Bartlow Park estate, out of sight, was built in the 1960s to replace a very large mansion that burnt down in 1947. Our path descends, crosses over the River Granta, and then climbs again.

The iron fence ends just before the path crosses a bridge over the old Stour Valley railway line. Immediately after the bridge, the path of the railway can be seen below on the left. Immediately on the right is a tall earth mound or hill. Continue a little further and we will find two more. These are known as the Bartlow Hills.

The second Hill, the tallest, has wooden steps up to the top. Can you resist the challenge?

These are some of the finest Roman burial mounds in Europe. The site is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The tallest mound stands 40 feet high and is probably the tallest Roman mound north of the Alps. Originally there were six mounds, possibly seven, but only three clearly remained after the railway line was constructed.

We continue to the left of the mound with steps and then turn right between the second and third hills. To the right is an interpretation panel which tells the history of these ancient mounds.

The mounds were investigated before the railway was built. In each mound, cremated human remains were found in glass vessels along with many artefacts from around 100 AD. The finds were removed. Most were stored at Easton Lodge, Little Easton but were destroyed when Easton Lodge burned down in 1847. Other artefacts are held at Saffron Walden Museum.

With our backs to the interpretation panel, we head away from the Three Hills towards a fence. We bear left through a gate onto a narrow path that descends with a fence on either side.

When the path reaches a road, we turn right. Opposite is the entrance to Booking Hall, a private house that was once Bartlow Station. On the far side of the building, out of sight, there is now a lawn where once two tracks ran between the two platforms.

We continue along the road and soon pass between the remains of the arch which carried the railway across the road. The Booking Hall can be seen, up to the left.

When safe, we cross the road and then turn left, signposted towards Hadstock. This is Bartlow Road. We retrace our steps back to where we parked.

We have covered only a mile through one of Cambridgeshire's smallest parishes.

You can read more about Bartlow on www.hundredparishes.org.uk.

This route description, last updated 13 December 2021, was downloaded from www.hundredparishes.org.uk Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to hundredparishes@btinternet.com.

A diagram covering this route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

