



# The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

## BARDFIELD SALING



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**Location:** 5 miles northeast of Great Dunmow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6826.

**Postcode:** CM7 5EE. **Access:** well off main roads.

**County:** Essex. **District:** Braintree. **Population:** 193 in 2011.

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Sandwiched between the two 'Great' parishes of Great Bardfield and Great Saling to the west of Braintree in Essex is the small parish of Bardfield Saling, perhaps more commonly known (by locals at any rate) as Little Saling. The 'Great' and 'Little' appellations are somewhat quaint. Even Great Saling is fairly diminutive in size (blink too hard and you might miss it), but Bardfield Saling is indeed little. Its tiny linear hamlet has no obvious 'centre', unless it is the parish church of St Peter and St Paul on Church Road. A little further down the road it has retained a red public telephone box, which is a striking splash of colour amid the quiet rural green, and somehow a focal point in this community without shop or pub.

A visit to St Peter and St Paul is a must – don't miss it. This is a delightful 14th-century, Grade I-listed church which, unlike many ecclesiastical buildings of this era is full of light and especially welcoming on a sunny day. It has a round tower, one of only seven in Essex and a particularly late example. The tower is the only example in the UK of the decorated period and would appear to be the last of its kind to be built in medieval times.

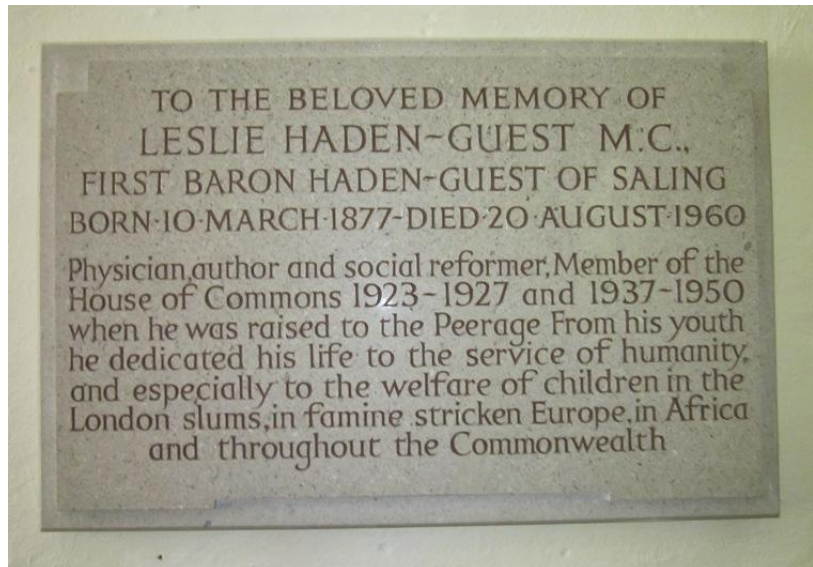


Of particular note in the interior are the 15th-century font, an unusual 17th-century hexagonal pulpit and the 18th-century musicians' gallery and chamber organ. There are also some very curious 16th-century graffiti carved into one of the pillars - allegedly a caricature of a churchwarden. In the porch and elsewhere there are initials and dates from two centuries later. One wonders how they came to be here; direct vandalism perhaps, or maybe just a distraction from long and boring sermons? Either way, a fascinating fingerprint of the illicit art we are more usually inclined to think of as a modern blight.

The church also has some fine framed examples of the straw-plaiter's art. Straw plaiting was introduced in the early 1800s to nearby Gosfield and Halstead as a means of income for the rural poor. Although never the extensive industry that it was in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, it became a viable trade across north Essex, particularly among women and children, enabling them to achieve a rare independence and to compete with their men as wage earners. Straw plaiting reached its peak in the 1850s – 1860s, but cheap imports of straw from abroad, mechanisation and a societal move discouraging child labour brought about a sudden decline in the industry, and by the turn of the century there were no straw plaiters left in the county. Today, as we contemplate the extraordinary intricacy, art and skill in these samplers left to us, we are glad of and enriched by the keepsake; nevertheless the remembrance (as so often) is tinged with regret at the obsolescence of another craft and tradition of a bygone era.

For the walker in Bardfield Saling, there are quiet winding lanes, footpaths and byways to explore, all of which can be found on the map of Footpaths In and Around The Salings, available from the Great Saling parish council. The fitter enthusiast may wish to check out the running routes around the parish to be found on the website [www.walkjoqrun.net](http://www.walkjoqrun.net). There is much to be said though for the more leisurely approach, for there are over 30 listed buildings to be discovered in the area. Not least of these is Pollards Farm, rendered infamous in 2008/9 by the discovery of 'dealer in death' Paul Alexander's gun factory and cannabis farm. It is hard indeed to believe that this sleepy parish, in many respects so detached and unworldly, should harbour 'one of the most notorious firearms dealers we have ever seen in this county'. Since Alexander was detained indefinitely at Her Majesty's pleasure, the parish has returned to its relative anonymity.

An altogether more honourable resident of Bardfield Saling was Baron Leslie Haden-Guest MC, whose memorial plaque is in St Peter and St Paul church. Baron Haden-Guest was a physician and surgeon who served in the Boer War, a social reformer and prolific author on health and social care issues, and latterly a Member of Parliament for a London constituency. He was the grandfather of actor and film director Christopher Guest, the fifth and current Baron, who is married to the actress Jamie Lee-Curtis.



If you are planning a visit to Bardfield Saling, you might want to take a packed lunch, or alternatively include in your itinerary a refreshment detour into neighbouring Great Bardfield or Great Saling. Although they have separate parochial identities and discrete boundaries, Great Saling and Bardfield Saling often seem conjoined and share many things – such as the footpath map, The Salings Magazine, The Salings Millennium Hall and the Summer Fete. At only 3.5 miles north to south and 2 miles across their widest point east to west, the two parishes are eminently 'explorable' in a day trip, even on foot. There is much to enjoy.

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**Adjacent parishes:** Great Saling, Stebbing, Great Bardfield, Shalford.

**Links:**

Parish Council: No website

Footpath map - available from Great Saling Parish Council: [www.essexinfo.net/greatsalingpc](http://www.essexinfo.net/greatsalingpc)

Strawplaiting in Essex - [www.foxearth.org.uk/blog/2005/06/strawplaiting.html](http://www.foxearth.org.uk/blog/2005/06/strawplaiting.html)

**Further reading:**

The Salings Magazine. Published monthly and available in the parish churches.