



# 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.

**Buses:** Infrequent: 19 Haverhill – Linton, 29 Saffron Walden – Linton.

**County:** Cambridgeshire. **District:** South Cambridgeshire. **Population:** 110 in 2011.



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 only 102 in 2001. However, size is not everything and the parish is particularly noteworthy for the Bartlow Hills, a scheduled ancient monument that features on the village sign.



Bartlow Hills 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 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 was 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 these burial arrangements had been for people of considerably higher status.



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

Most of the important finds from the 19th century excavations were taken to Easton Lodge, Little Easton, near Dunmow, the home of Viscount Maynard, Lord Lieutenant of Essex. 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 scheduled as an Ancient Monument. It is owned by the trustees of the Bartlow Estate and has been in the care of Cambridgeshire County Council since a county boundary change in 1990.



Whilst 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.

The church was built before then, probably around 1100. 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 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 are some recently-conserved 15th-century wall paintings including St Christopher, St Michael weighing souls and St George's dragon (without St George).

In 1865, the railway came to Bartlow when the Shelford-Sudbury line was opened. Unfortunately, this was routed 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 closed in the 1960s. There are still signs of where the tracks went and one resident seeks to keep the memory of the railway alive through his topiary.



Today, Bartlow has a thriving community. Its excellent website includes details of activities organised by the Bartlow Village Association, including the annual summer party, the Bartlow Estate Grand Trailer Tour and 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, the longest of which is 13 miles and passes the point where Essex, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk meet.

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#### **Hospitality:**

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

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

#### **Links:**

Parish Council: [www.bartlow.org.uk](http://www.bartlow.org.uk)

Bartlow Hills Scheduled Monument listing: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1018974>

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