The parish of Great Bardfield lies on the southern aspect of the River Pant, just a few miles upstream from Braintree where it becomes the River Blackwater. Great Bardfield is a place of considerable historic, architectural and cultural interest. Many have considered it the quintessential English village, not least the group known as the Bardfield Artists, many of whom chose to settle here in the period 1930s to 1950s. Perhaps the best known of these artists, Edward Bawden, dedicated a series of 16 lithographs, ‘Life in an English Village’, to the shops and workplaces of local tradesmen and women, and in doing so has preserved a record of a now vanished way of village life. The war artist Eric Ravilious (whose wood engraving of Great Bardfield Church appears at the top of this page) spent some years here, as did the ‘Colonel Blimp’ cartoonist David Low who lived in Sergeant Bendlowe’s Cottage (seen here) and Marianne Straub, some of whose textiles are retained in the Warner Textile Archive in Braintree. There were numerous others, and a series of ‘open house’ exhibitions during the 1950s served to put Great Bardfield on the national cultural map. Much of the work of the Bardfield Artists can be viewed today at the Fry Art Gallery in Saffron Walden. A later son of Great Bardfield, who grew up here and perhaps imbibed something of its artistic heritage, is the ceramicist Grayson Perry.

Someone who clearly inherited the artistic gene is Richard Bawden, son of Edward, who has set his own recent stamp on the village in the form of two large engraved glass doors set into the tower of the parish church of St Mary the Virgin. Grade I-listed St Mary’s is predominantly of 14th century origin, although parts of the chancel foundation appear to date back to the 12th century; some architects have considered them even earlier, possibly pre-Christian. The church is visually distinct in the area for its copper roof and huge blue clock, so large that some have described it as ‘the clock with a church on it’. This was added in 1912 to commemorate the coronation of King George V. The interior is notable for its fine stained glass windows, mostly Victorian, and its 14th-century stone carved rood screen, one of only three in the world. Another can be found in the parish church in neighbouring Stebbing; the other in Trondheim Cathedral in Norway.
Other places of worship in the area are the Quaker Meeting House, which has maintained its weekly services for over 200 years, and a modern Catholic Church which looks altogether like a private residence. The Methodist Chapel is now a private residence but has retained its external 1862 characteristics. In fact every turn you take in Great Bardfield has potential to tell you a story, and often that story is centuries old. There are over 100 listed buildings in the parish, most of them in the village itself, and every house is unique, its name often a reminder of bygone village life; Old Police House, Drill Hall House, The Cage (a 19th century lock-up pictured here on the right), Old Dairy, The Maltings, The Old Bakehouse, Corniche. The booklet ‘A Walk Around Great Bardfield’ produced by the Historical Society will prove an excellent guide and ensure that the visitor misses nothing of interest. The Village Design Statement, too, is a great introduction to the village. Both can be obtained at the Cottage Museum or the Community Information Point adjacent to the Town Hall.

Other informative walks which will take you a little further afield into the surrounding countryside can be found on the The Vine pub’s Footpath Map. The AA has the alarmingly named ‘Brawling and Benefactors Around Great Bardfield’ walk, and Uttlesford Wildlife has a walk especially dedicated to the famous Bardfield Oxlip (links to all below). The Bardfield Oxlip is a rare native primula found only in the east of England, and in recent years a programme for its regeneration has been taking place in Pipers’ Meadow on the edge of the river. It is the parish emblem and can be seen as a carving on the Town Hall.

Great Bardfield has had many royal connections across the centuries. There is evidence that Henry III owned Bardfield Park in the mid-1200s. A century later the Black Prince was entertained here by the noblewoman Elizabeth de Burgh. In 1460 it was made a royal manor by Edward IV, and during the reign of Henry VIII it passed in succession to Katherine of Aragon, Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard and Katherine Parr. But it was probably Elizabeth I’s Serjeant-at-Law William Bendlowes who has left the most enduring mark on the parish. Bendlowes was born and died at Place House in the 1500s and was arguably Great Bardfield’s greatest benefactor, contributing many charitable works such as building almshouses and endowing a school and chantry. Other benefactors include the Lumley family, the Smiths and the Lampets. The Lumleys endowed four almshouses, now private residences known as Lumleys; their manor house, Great Lodge, was demolished but the 17th-century service wing remains as the present Great Lodge, a Grade II* house in its own right, together with a 16th-century Grade I brick barn. The Smiths were 19th century Quaker landowners, perhaps best known for the Town Hall and the natural spring water fountain in Brook Street (pictured here), at one time the only source of drinking water for the village. The Lampet family, father and son, held the incumbency of the parish church for a remarkable 80 years until 1921.
Great Bardfield remains, as ever, a busy and vibrant community. There is a fair range of shops and activities for all. You might want to enter the annual Bardfield Boules competition outside the Town Hall, tread the boards with the Bardfield Players or sing with the Community Choir, play cricket or ring bells. There is a lot going on and you can find details of most on the parish council website.

Those after more leisurely pursuits might want to sample the menu at The Vine pub/restaurant or The Bell Inn. And don’t leave the area without a visit to The Blue Egg for breakfast, lunch or afternoon tea (cakes to die for!). This lovely barn also accommodates a post office, a small delicatessen and a gift shop, and a play area outside for the children with chickens, goats and possibly a pig or two.

**Hospitality**
The Vine on Vine Street, CM7 4SR - 01371 811822 - [www.vine-greatbardfield.co.uk](http://www.vine-greatbardfield.co.uk)
The Bell Inn on Dunmow Rd, CM7 4SA - 01371 811097
Cole’s Tea Room, CM7 4SP – 01371 810851
Between The Lines, book and coffee shop, CM7 4SR – 01371 810087
The Blue Egg (Knead Food Cafe) on Braintree Road, CM7 4PY - 01371 811716 (01371 811801), [www.theblueegg.co.uk](http://www.theblueegg.co.uk) (www.kneadfood.com)
Bucks House Bed and Breakfast, CM7 4SR - 01371 810519 - [www.bucks-house.com](http://www.bucks-house.com)

**Adjacent Hundred Parishes parishes:**
Shalford, Finchingfield, Stebbing, Bardfield Saling, Little Bardfield, The Sampfords.

**Links**
Great Bardfield Parish Council:  [www.greatbardfield-pc.gov.uk](http://www.greatbardfield-pc.gov.uk)
Film of village life in 1937: [https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-around-the-village-green-1937-online](https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-around-the-village-green-1937-online)
Great Lodge Vineyard and Anne of Cleves Barn:  [www.greatlodge.co.uk](http://www.greatlodge.co.uk)
The Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden, CB10 1BD - 01799 513779 - [www.fryartgallery.org](http://www.fryartgallery.org)
Warner Textile Archive. Braintree, CM7 3GB - 01376 557741 - [www.warnertextilearchive.co.uk](http://www.warnertextilearchive.co.uk)
The AA:  [www.theaa.com/walks](http://www.theaa.com/walks)

**Further reading:**
*Artists of Great Bardfield; Guide to where the artists lived; Great Bardfield Stories; The Manor of Bardfield; Smiths and Smiths of Great Bardfield; From Coaches to Classic Cars.*
All these booklets are published by the Great Bardfield Historical Society and are obtainable from the Community Information Point and Between The Lines bookshop.

This page was last updated 15 June 2019.