



The Hundred Parishes

An introduction to

BARNSTON



Location: 2 miles southeast of Great Dunmow. **Ordnance Survey grid square:** TL6419
Postcode: CM6 1LR. **County:** Essex. **District:** Uttlesford. **Access:** B1008.
Buses (each day): 42a between Bishop's Stortford, Stansted Airport, Great Dunmow and Chelmsford; X10 between Stansted Airport, Chelmsford & Basildon; X30 between Stansted Airport and Southend. **Population:** 850 in 2001, 947 in 2011, 930 in 2021.

Barnston is a small Essex parish to the south of the parishes of Great and Little Dunmow. There is some evidence of a settlement here as far back as the Neolithic era, but it doesn't really find its way 'onto the map' until its mention in the Domesday record of 1086, when it was known as Bernestuna. At that time, it appears to have had a population of around 50. Its value to the lord at the time was the princely sum of £5. How times have changed.



Most available maps suggest that Barnston village has been, until recently, centred around the Parsonage Lane area of the parish where the church and some of the finest estates and dwellings remain. But that centre has moved. Today's visitors, looking for history but guided by modern maps, are likely to find themselves in the late 20th-century housing developments close to the former Roman road as it runs south-east from Great Dunmow. But this is to miss the essence of Barnston; better to try Parsonage Lane, or to take one of the many footpaths which criss-cross the fields and wooded areas north and east of Parsonage Lane towards the River Chelmer. The handsome Barnston

Lodge (pictured above and now a wedding venue) can be found here, close to the much older Barnston Hall and the beautiful Old Rectory (shown below): 18th, 16th and 17th-century respectively. All are Grade II*-listed, as is the nearby parish church of St Andrew. There are another 36 listed buildings across the parish as a whole, all listed at Grade II.

St Andrew's is a small Norman church of rendered flint with some intriguing features. There is much evidence of evolution and addition from succeeding centuries: the 16th-century door; an octagonal bell turret added in the 17th century and now supporting a weather vane; an 18th-century Bevington barrel organ in the choir gallery. The church is also home to the earliest known double piscina, probably a feature of the original 12th-century building.





Most ancient churches have a compelling history for those who know how and where to look, and many offer telling glimpses into the life and loves of bygone families and communities. St Andrew's has the Livermore family. The Livermores were a very large 19th-century family who lived at Barnston Hall and who now reside in a long bank of graves on the west side of the churchyard. Four of these were sisters who died very young within a few years of each other: Martha, Emma, Jane and Maria. Emma was 22; the other three were in their teens. They are accompanied on either side by relatives who lived to a greater age, but these memorials are four of a kind, each inscribed with a brief homespun

verse giving a poignant and moving insight into the pain, bewilderment and anger of premature bereavement. They have come to be known as the Livermore Tombs, captured in watercolour as a part of the 1940s 'Recording Britain' series by the Bardfield artist Kenneth Rowntree. The painting is now held in the Victoria and Albert Museum and can be viewed on its website (see below). The dominance of the Livermores in this church setting is reflected in the family window in the south wall, which is ornamented with brass memorial plates to no less than eleven family members.



Also commemorated in St Andrew's is the nonconformist Puritan preacher and author Thomas Watson, a remarkable number of whose theological works are still in print after nearly four centuries.

As in many small rural villages, community life has changed radically over the last 50 years, and this is certainly true of Barnston. A village hall was built in the 1960s to accompany the new housing development, and this remains the centre of community activities today. But the primary school closed in 1959, and the last shop burnt down in the late 1970s. The visitor on foot may wish to bring a picnic, as the necessities of life can only be obtained further afield. Closest is The Spotted Dog, just a bone's throw from the southern parish boundary in High Easter and open for lunches and evening meals.

Hospitality:

The Spotted Dog: 01245 231598. www.the-spotted-dog-bishopsgreen.co.uk

Barnston Lodge (wedding venue): 01371 872885. <https://barnstonlodgeweddings.com/>

Adjacent parishes: High Easter, High Roding, Great Dunmow, Little Dunmow, Great Waltham.

Circular walk number 134: 5.6 miles, goes through Little Dunmow, Barnston and Flich Green (to start from Barnston, see page 3)

Links:

Barnston village: www.barnstonvillage.co.uk

Livermore Tombs painting: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O17775/the-livermore-tombs-barnston-essex-watercolour-rowntree-kenneth/>

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