

Bampton and Weald, ancient history

21st century Bampton is made up of two separate ancient settlements: Bampton and Weald. In the 18th century the boundary ran north from the Talbot Inn, up Cheapside, down Church Street, down the western edge of the churchyard. This puts the church, the manor house and what we now know as Broad Street in Bampton, and the Deanery, Churchgate House and a large part of the Southwest section of the town in Weald. Conveniently this gives us a good idea of the division of the two settlements into the three separate medieval manors. Bampton Deanery, Bampton Doilly (northwest & southeast) and Bampton Earls (southwest, mostly in the Weald).

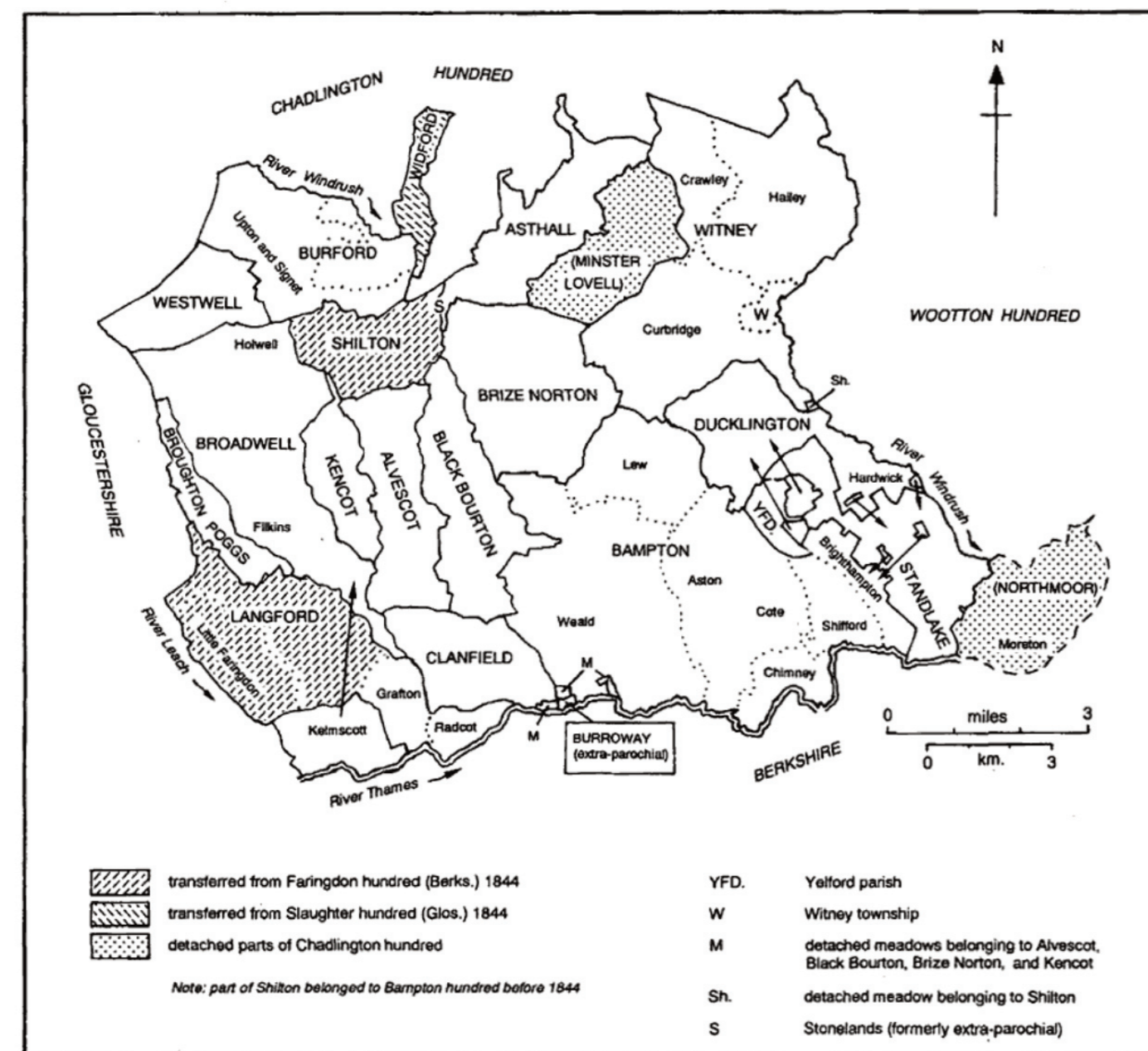
Bampton was the centre of an Anglo-Saxon royal estate and hundred, incorporating Lew, Aston and Cote, Shifford, Chimney, and Lower Haddon.

River transport was important from the early Middle Ages. An artificial watercourse west of the Deanery, 16m. wide, will have been part of a navigable canal feeding into Great Brook, and thence to the Thames at Shifford.

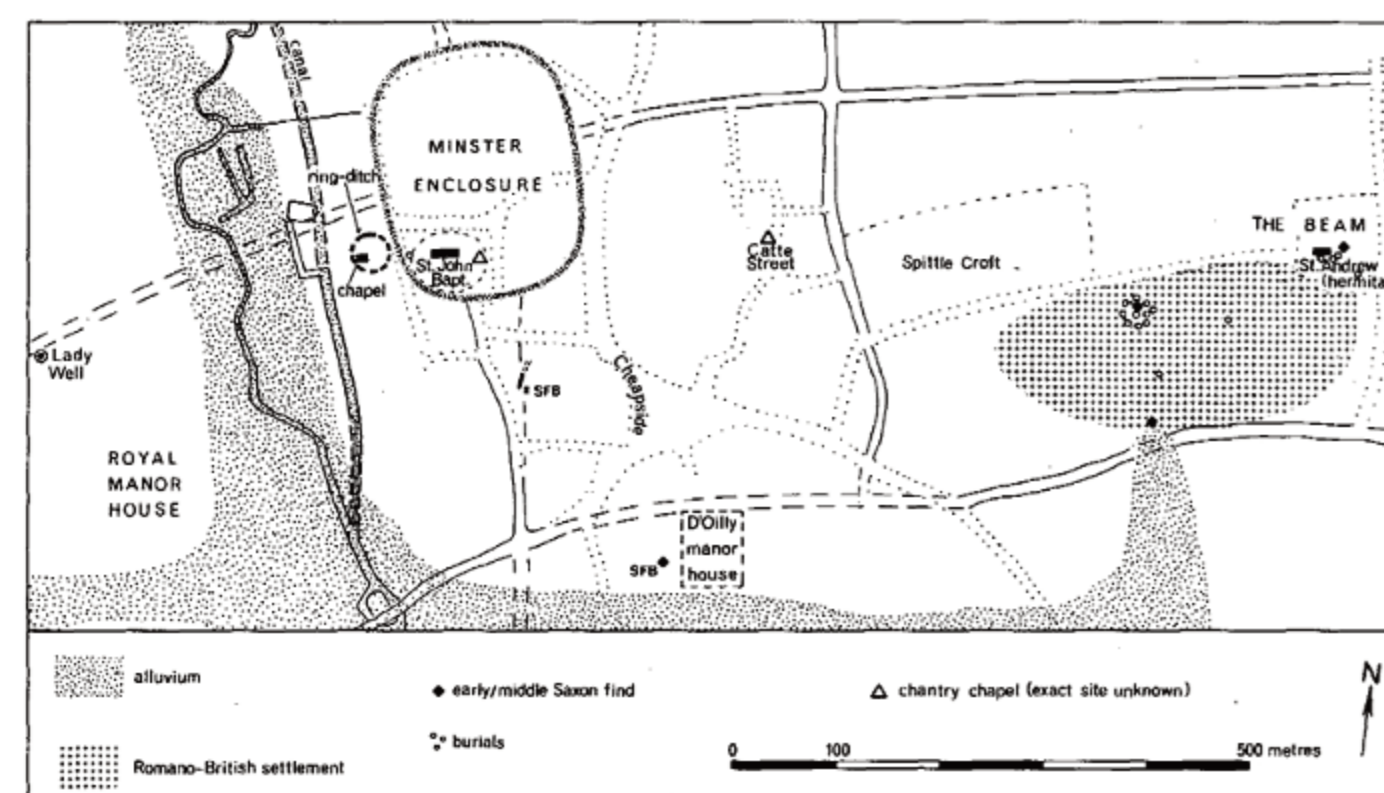


A Bronze-Age ring ditch surrounding the medieval Deanery west of the church marks the boundary ditch of the later minster enclosure, and will have survived as a visible earthwork in the Anglo-Saxon period. Burroway (i.e. burhieg), a gravel island in the Thames alluvium, is named from an Iron-Age defensive enclosure, whose ramparts, incorporating much burnt clay, survive as substantial earthworks, and a large Iron-Age and Romano-British settlement existed east of the later town around Aston Road and Calais Farm.

Other Roman settlements have been identified south-west of the town in Primrose field, where a stone altar carved with a figure of the goddess Fortuna was found.



Bampton Hundred



Bampton's early topography Inferred roads in broken line; later roads on dotted line



An early Anglo-Saxon Grubenhaus was excavated south of the market place in the grounds of Folly House, but the most extensive finds of that date have been further east near Calais Farm, on the edge of the Iron-Age and Romano-British site.



Bampton Markets

In 1086 Bampton had the only market explicitly noted in the county. It was held in the space which is now the back gardens of Church View, Church Street and Cheapside, however it wasn't a great success. In 1187 its contributions to the tolls had reduced by two thirds. Unauthorised markets created great competition and resulted in the Bampton Market's apparent failure.

In 1241 Henry III granted to Imbert Pugeys, then farming the royal manor, a weekly Wednesday market and an annual fair on the eve and feast of the Assumption (14-15 August), a grant transferred to William de Valence and his heirs in 1255. Market tolls in 1296 totalled 40s. a year, but by 1362 once again the market was proving unsustainable.

There is evidence from as early as 1317 that grain from Chimney manor, which, after all, is only a couple of miles from the Bampton Market, was being transported to Oxford. Clearly the market wasn't fit for purpose.

There is great evidence in Bampton, particularly around Rosemary House in the market square, of leather tanning works.

Robert Plot's description in 1677, repeated throughout the 18th century, of an unparalleled trade in fellmongers' wares, brought from Witney, made into jackets, breeches, and leather linings at Bampton, and sold to buyers from Berkshire, Wiltshire, and Dorset, is difficult to substantiate but considering the tanning pits discovered here it is seemingly likely that people were making a good living from this trade in Bampton.



Market Square as it is today

In 1669 the market house was in ruins. In 1673 the market was 'small' and apparently in decline, and by 1766 it had been discontinued 'for some years'. Presumably its decline resulted partly from the competition of nearby towns with better communications, though falling population in the late medieval period, combined with loss of the royal and seignorial patronage which had artificially accentuated the importance of the medieval town, may also have had an effect.

Periodic attempts to resurrect the market met with little success: it was revived in 1766 for corn, cheese, butter, eggs, fish, poultry, and other provisions, in 1800, toll-free, for corn and cattle, and in 1840, following the building of the arcaded town hall for use as a market house, for cattle, being held thereafter on only the third Wednesday of each month.



Market Square 1828



Broad Street Market



Bampton Horse Fair

Market Square 1950's

Most farmers in the late 18th century and early 19th attended more accessible markets at Witney, Faringdon, Burford, and Oxford, and at Bampton in the 1840s there were only a few dealers mostly in eggs and butter, though 'large numbers' of pigs were sold. In 1852 the market was almost in disuse, and though occasionally mentioned later as a monthly market for grain and stock it was finally discontinued in the early 1890s. Occasional horsefairs were subsequently held in Bampton but they do seem to have been unauthorised, or, at least unofficial.



The site of the original Market Square



West face of the Town Hall



Percy Hughes the butcher



Market Square today - view from the War Memorial

The Church of St Mary's

St Mary's church is one of the largest churches in West Oxfordshire, together with Burford and Witney. On the site of a Saxon minster, which contained the shrine of St Beornwald, it was later the centre of an exceptionally large parish which from the mid 11th century belonged to the See of Exeter.

It is largely the 13th and 14th century remodelling of a late Norman cruciform church. The herringbone masonry within suggests the 12th century tower space and the East end of the nave probably represent the East end of an 11th century nave.

Outside the tower was remodelled and the spire added in around 1270 using the remarkable technique of four statues on pedestals at each corner to make the transition from a square tower to an Octagonal ribbed spire.



The best surviving late Norman detail is the south transept south doorway. Its chevron carved stonework is typical.



The original statue of John the Baptist, blown down in a storm in 1990, is now displayed in the north aisle.

With Thanks to Pevsner Architectural Guides



There are treasures within, including a 13th century piscina and sedilia, what's left of a tabernacle shrine to St Beornwald, a stone reredos of about 1400 and a wonderful Easter Sepulchre in two tiers, added in 1497 by a mason Thomas Martyn.



Tabernacle to St Beornwald



Easter Sepulchre

The 13th century windows throughout the church but especially in the nave aisles (triplets of graduated trefoil lancets) are a local pattern but nowhere else are they used to such effect, or so extensively.



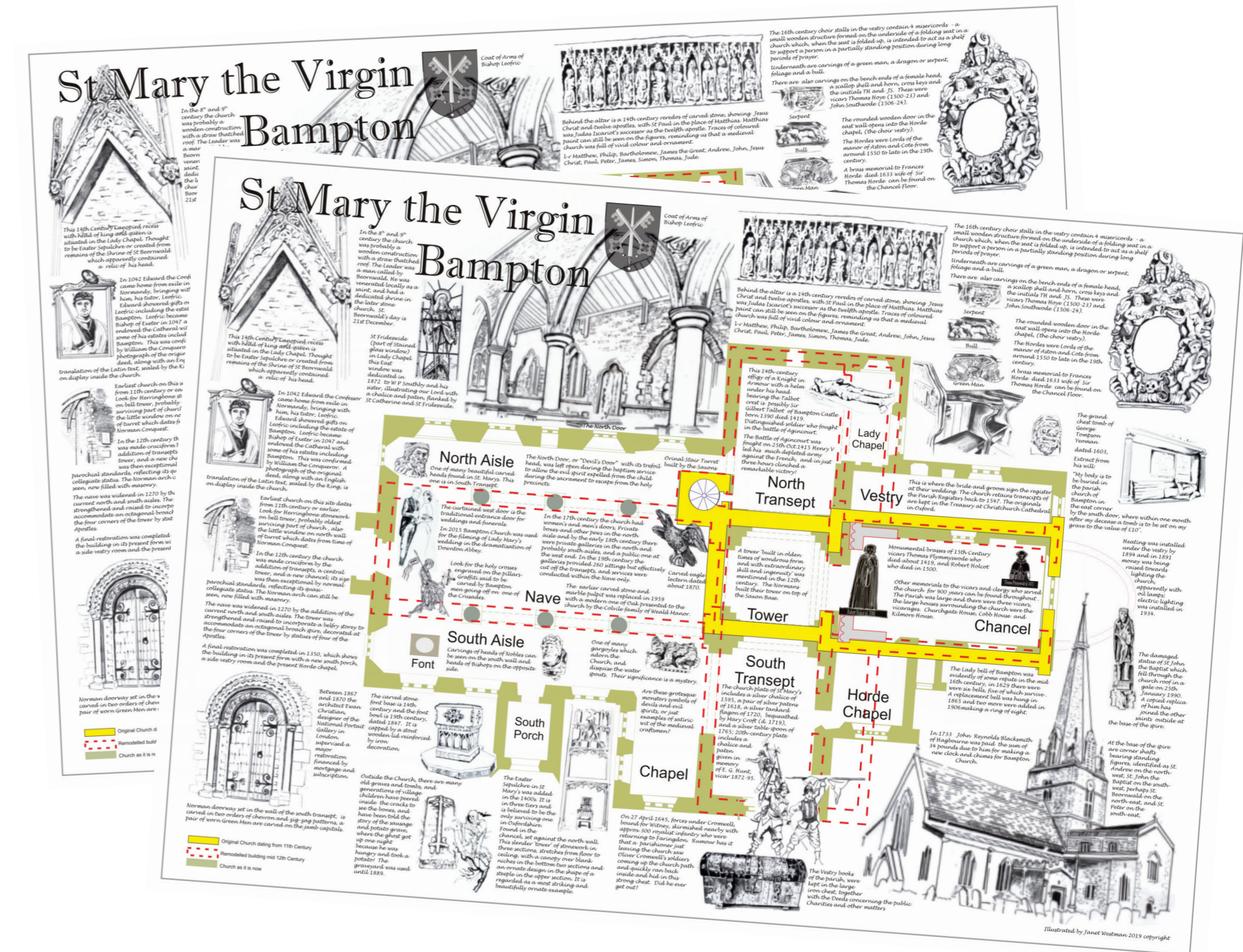
Aisles window



The churchyard has many late 18th and early 19th century chest tombs.



Herringbone masonry



Our unique Church Guides can be purchased in the shop - great to walk round the church with.

Bampton Schools

For over a thousand years education has been part of life in Bampton. It seems there was a religious community here, started and run by Beornwald, later to be canonised, where people of learning will have gathered.

The first building dedicated to teaching was that in which you are standing at the moment. It was built in the second half of the 17th century with a legacy from Robert Vesey, who also left an endowment for a school to teach boys Latin and Greek. It was not an uncommon thing for wealthy people to fund the creation of grammar schools as a demonstration of their wealth and to improve their social credentials.

In Robert Vesey's case it wasn't an entirely successful act of virtue signalling as it took decades and a good deal of legal pressure to extract the money from his estate. The rooms on the ground floor were used for teaching and the rooms on the first floor accommodation for the teacher.

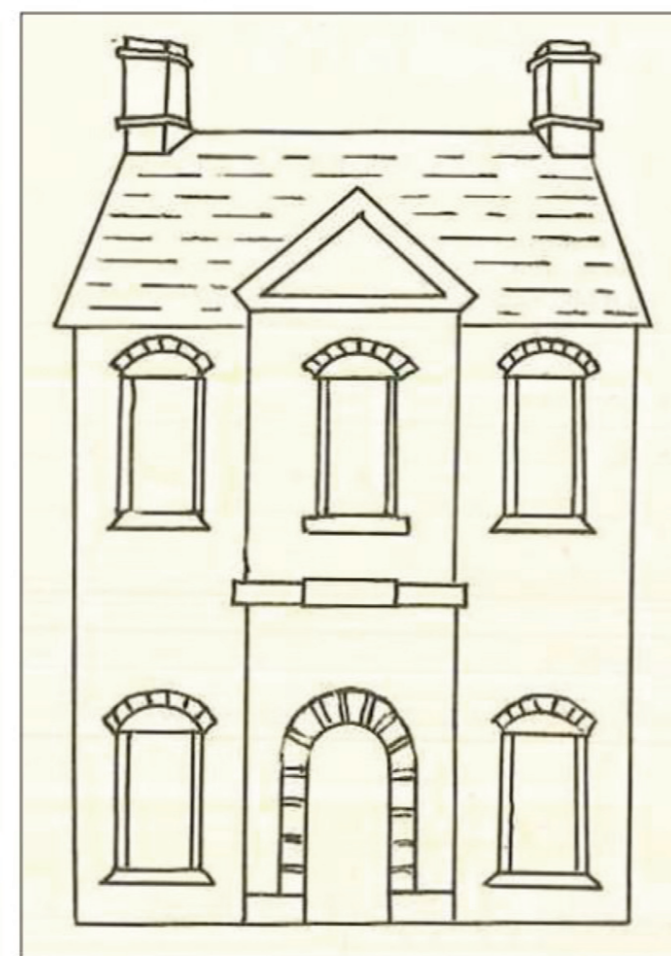
Towards the end of the 18th century it was becoming clear that the school was offering a less than satisfactory education for the local children, particularly the girls, and three formidable women, Mary and Susannah Frederick and Elizabeth Snell set up a school to teach local girls to read, and funded additional English and maths teaching in the grammar school.

The grammar school never really flourished however and the first national school was built in the village square to start the spread of education for all. The grammar school was finally closed in 1899, and the building put in trust to be used for any purpose linked to the educational needs of the village.



The Old Grammar School School

Perhaps the most successful private school started in Prospect House in 1836, moved to the Elms in the 1870s, and finally to Valetta in the high street, eventually closing in 1915 after educating three generations of young women.



First National School



Valetta

The first national school was founded in 1812 and built in the market square opposite the Talbot near the entrance to Rosemary Lane. When it became too small the Earl of Shrewsbury gave land in Church View for the building of a new school, opened in 1873. This, in turn, became too small and in 1961 a new primary school opened in Bowling Green Close, where it still thrives today. Church View secondary school finally closed in the 1960s.

Private education was growing in popularity amongst the middle classes during the first half of the 19th century and Weald Manor was home to a school from 1820, and Wheelgate House hosted a school until 1914.



Wheelgate House



Weald Manor



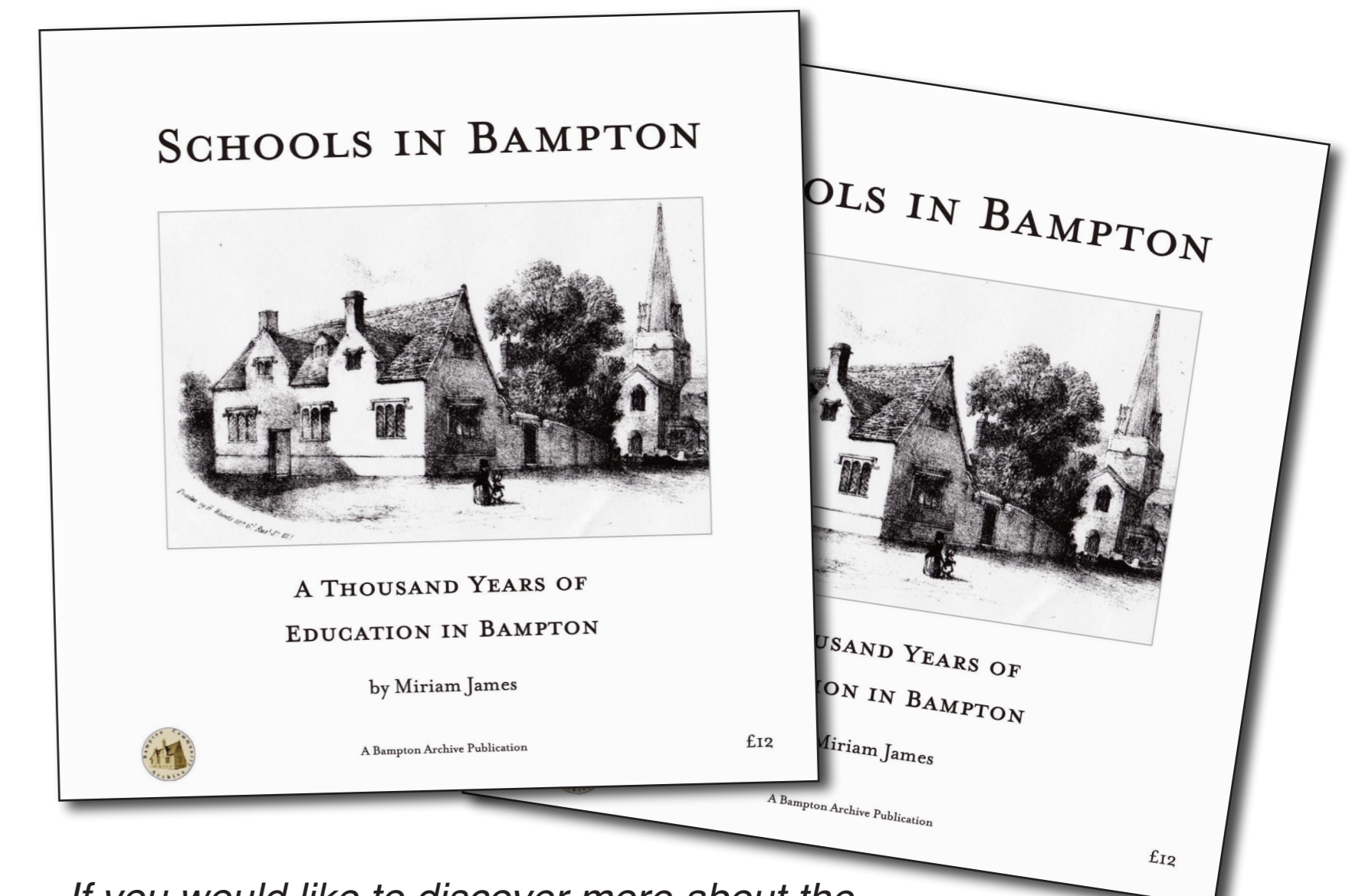
New National School in Church View



The Elms and South Elms



Prospect House



If you would like to discover more about the history of Bampton Schools you can purchase a copy of this informative book from our shop.