

# Entertainment

## 'Villager' recounts her role in TV blockbuster

JAINE BLACKMAN meets a woman who played her part in the success of historical drama



Extra Esther Hepworth, who was born in the village, outside Bampton Church

**E**sther Hepworth grew up in Bampton and her grandparents and great-grandparents lived there. So it seemed fitting to volunteer as a villager in *Downton Abbey*, featuring in four of the award-winning series.

It meant that Esther, dressed as her great grandmother, would have walked the same streets: "I did find myself stood in the square thinking about my family, and when I'd see a sign saying 'Ripon five miles' I'd have to remind myself that I was meant to be in Yorkshire not Bampton," the 56-year-old laughed.

"I really enjoyed the whole experience and felt as if I was walking in my great-grandmother's footsteps, because our family lived in those very streets featured in the filming." And the highlight? "Lady Mary's first wedding in 1920," Esther says, the very church where Esther's grandparents – he was a carpenter and she was in service – were married in the same year.

Esther also witnessed Bampton being put firmly on the tourist map as a result of Julian Fellowes' ITV blockbuster. "People come from all over the world, but America especially," said Esther. "It's lovely meeting people who have taken so much pleasure from the show, their pilgrimage expected to last long into the future, despite the final credits rolling on Christmas Day."

*Downton* is, of course, inspired by events from Fellowes' own life – among them are the deaths of his grandfather and uncle in the First World War, his family's rigid sense of etiquette, and a relationship he had in his youth with a Jewish beau that mirrored the experiences of Lady Rose in the show.

But before the series was given

the green light in 2010, Fellowes had his work cut out convincing the rest of the team that the title was right. "The main hurdle was that we couldn't call it *Downton Abbey* because the public might think it was about monks," he laughs.

And while it's hard to imagine *Downton* at anywhere but Highclere, near Newbury, location scouts looked at 40 other castles before plumping for their initial choice.

The village-based segments are done in Bampton, of course, the upstairs scenes filmed at the opulent Highclere, and the servants' scenes all take place in London's Ealing Studios.

*Downton* has been a launchpad for many of its young stars: Dan Stevens, 'Cousin' Matthew', made his Broadway debut opposite Jessica Chastain in *The Heiress* and has starred in a string of films, including last year's *Night At The Museum*; Jessica Brown Findlay, who played youngest sister Sybil, picked up the leading role in BBC1's *Jamaica Inn* and appears alongside Daniel Radcliffe in *Victor Frankenstein*, while Lily James has played *Cinderella* on the big screen and will appear in the upcoming adaptation of Tolstoy's *War And Peace*.

*Downton* is the highest-rating UK drama of the past decade across any channel. Shown in more than 250 territories, it's the most nominated British show in EMMY history with 59 nominations and 12 wins.

But, with the show over for now, the final word should come from another Bampton villager Karen Cowan.

"It's been great having the *Downton* crew here," she said.

"It's a bit sad now it's all over but and we have all enjoyed them being here."



Laura Carmichael, Elizabeth McGovern, Allen Leech and Michelle Dockery



Actress Lily James returned to the show for the Christmas special



# Downton stars go extra mile

Cast of hit ITV series donate to appeal to restore Old Grammar School used on the show

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STARS of *Downton Abbey* have reached into their pockets to support a new appeal to save the Old Grammar School in Bampton.

For the past year campaigners have been trying to raise about £250,000 needed to restore the upper floor of the building, which is used as Downton Cottage Hospital in the show.

Now stars of the programme, including Hugh Bonneville, Laura Carmichael and Samantha Bond, have got behind the Downton Mile appeal.

It aims to collect the same number of £1 coins as would be needed to cover the one-mile tour of *Downton* attractions in Bampton – the equivalent of £70,000.

The sixth and final series of the show kicked off last Sunday.

Downton Mile spokesman and Bampton resident Robin Shuckburgh said: "The Old Grammar School was built in the 1650s and given to the village by Robert Vesey, a wool tycoon.

"At the moment it is only used as the Bampton village library and the



headquarters of the Bampton community archive.

"Our plan is to restore the top floor and put the staircase back in and have an exhibition about the filming of *Downton* in Bampton. It will be a local history centre and it will have all the mod cons.

"It is amazing that the stars have helped us. They have been extremely good guests in Bampton over the past six years.

"We have had some financial sup-



Above, Robin Shuckburgh at Bampton's Old Grammar School; left, fundraiser Jenny Chaundy with star Hugh Bonneville

port from the stars and they have been very good tweeting about our efforts."

The building's second floor has been left to rot since being declared unsafe more than 30 years ago and

the roof, which will be replaced before other work starts, has not been repaired in more than 100 years.

The Old Grammar School makes up part of a one-mile loop around the village which also includes fa-

mous *Downton* sites such as Mrs Crawley's House and The Grantham Arms.

Mr Shuckburgh said the trail, which is used by tourists visiting the sites of the series, had inspired the Downton Mile appeal.

The 67-year-old added: "We wanted *Downton Abbey* fans to be able to make a contribution to our scheme.

"If we have not raised the money by January we will launch it again in America for fans over there."

Since the series was first screened in 2010 Bampton has become a major tourist destination and Mr Shuckburgh said 35,000 visitors were expected to pass through by the end of this year.

Last year the figure was about half that total but even more are expected next year.

If the Downton Mile raises as much money as organisers expect they hope benefactors such as the Big Lottery Fund will get involved.

Mr Shuckburgh said: "Bampton has never, ever been a tourist destination of any kind and suddenly it became one overnight.

"There is a real blurring of reality and fiction, which is amazing."

To find out more about the Downton Mile visit [downtonmile.co.uk](http://downtonmile.co.uk)



# Star location to get a £20k grant

AN AGED building in Bampton that has been the star of popular TV series *Downton Abbey* has received a £20,000 grant to go towards vital roof repairs.

The hefty sum has been donated by West Oxfordshire District Council to help restore the 17th-century Grade II listed Old Grammar School in the village.

The building is well-used by the community as it houses the village library and archive. It also has a small shop selling tourism memorabilia.

In recent years, it has doubled up as a film location for the hospital scenes in *Downton Abbey*. Thanks to this it has become a popular tourist attraction, helping to bring more visitors to West Oxfordshire.

The £20,000 grant award by the council's cabinet will go towards the £110,000 cost of repairing the roof.

It will be the first stage of a larger project that will involve re-installing the upper floor and

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staircase, as both have been unusable for decades.

Chairman of Bampton Community Archive Robin Shuckburgh said: "As well as being one of the best examples of a 17th century boys' school in the county, this unique and now famous building has always played an important role in village life.

"The project to restore the upper floor for public use is the very best kind of charitable endeavour in that any donations go towards the extremely worthy initial aim of restoring a lovely old building, but at the same time enabling a substantial tourism income, entirely for the benefit of the village charities and other organisations, for many years to come."

The grant follows the Downton

Mile appeal launched earlier this year and backed by stars of *Downton Abbey* including Hugh Bonneville, Laura Carmichael and Samantha Bond.

It aims to collect the same number of £1 coins as would be needed to cover the one-mile tour of Downton attractions in Bampton – the equivalent of £70,000.

At a meeting on November 11, the council's cabinet also awarded more than £4,000 towards a project to install an accessible toilet and access ramp to the church room in St Martin's Church, Bladon.

Members also agreed to give nearly £17,000 towards the £75,000 cost of replacing playground equipment at Bampton Recreation Ground and £1,625 towards the costs of installing an artificial cricket wicket at Chipping Norton and District Cricket Club.

They also gave more than £12,100 to Chipping Norton Lido, as part of its refurbishment and modernisation project.



Robin Shuckburgh outside the Old Grammar School in Bampton  
Picture: Jon Lewis



December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015

# Downton stars' prized sausages win awards

A BUTCHERS famed for its sausages endorsed by stars of the hit ITV period drama *Downton Abbey* has landed leading honours at an awards ceremony.

Bampton's Patrick Strainge Butchers won five golds for its products at the Q Guild Smithfield Awards 2015.

Its Scotch faggots and home cured back bacon received perfect 100 out of 100 scores from the judging panel, while its blood, sweat and tears sausage, Scotch eggs and home cured smoked back bacon were also given the gold accolade.

The blood, sweat and tears sausage, with its name represented by the ingredients of black pudding (blood), salt (sweat) and onion (tears), was inspired by the Rugby World Cup.

Manager of the family-run butchers, Oliver Weaver, said some of the products were entered into the competition after customers reacted well to it.

The 21-year-old added: "My staff play a vital part in what we do, so these awards are for the whole team.

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"A lot of hard work goes into the preparation of the products and it's great that we managed to win five gold and a silver.

"The customers suggested the Scotch faggots, which is a traditional faggot in the form of a scotch egg, but the egg is replaced with a faggot.

"You don't really know what is going to happen and the category is quite difficult, so to win is pleasing."

The Bampton resident, whose family took over the butchers two years ago, said the village was still popular with *Downton Abbey* fans.

The butchers proved a hit with some stars of the popular drama, which films outdoor scenes in the West Oxfordshire village.

Actor Rob James-Collier, who plays villain Thomas Barrow, was reported to be a fan of the butchers' sausages.



**Oliver Weaver, 21, a butcher and manager of Patrick Strainge Butchers in Bampton, which has won a host of gold awards**



## Downton Abbey wins award

**OXON:** *Downton Abbey* was named best drama at Wednesday night's National Television Awards.

The period drama, which aired its last episode on Christmas Day, ran for six series. It is the fourth time the ITV show has claimed the title.

Downton village scenes were filmed in Bampton, while the show's Yew Tree Farm was filmed in Witney's Cogges Manor Farm.

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