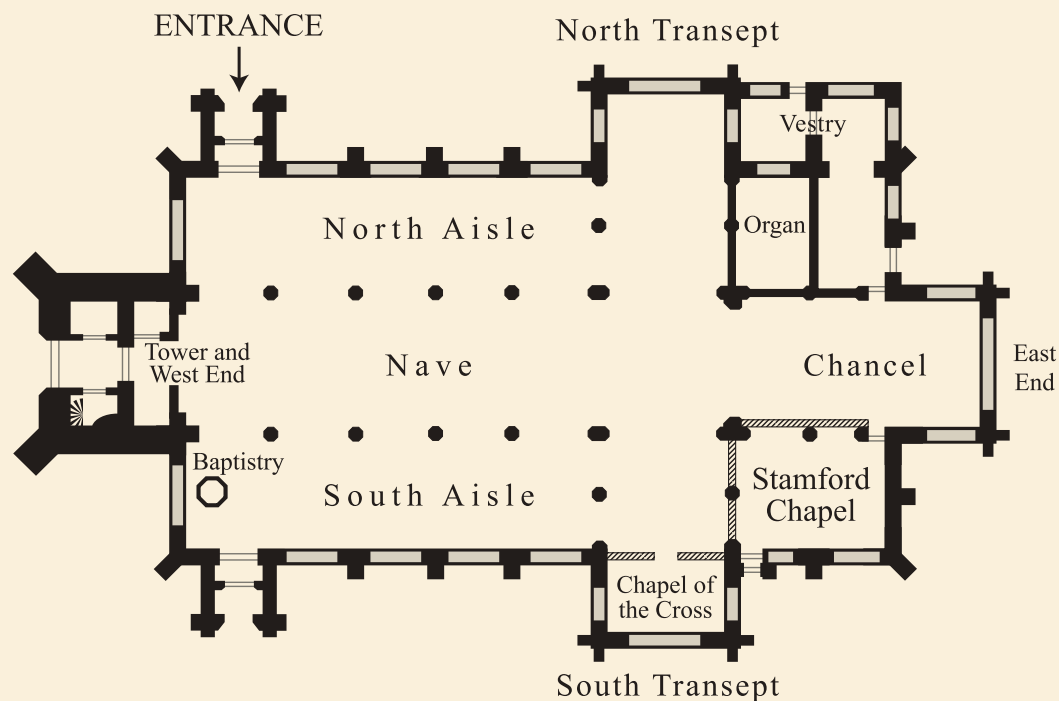


Guide to BOWDON PARISH CHURCH and the SURROUNDING AREA



Welcome to Bowdon and the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin

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An Ancient Church and Parish

The long ridge of Bowdon Hill is crossed by the Roman road of Watling Street, now forming some of the A56 which links Cheshire and Lancashire. Just off this route in the raised centre of Bowdon, a landmark church seen from many miles around has stood since Saxon times.

In 669, Church reformer Archbishop Theodore divided the region of Mercia into dioceses and created parishes. It is likely that Bowdon was one of the first, with a small community here since at least the 7th century. The 1086 Domesday Book tells us that at the time a mill, church and parish priest were at Bogedone (bow-shaped 'dun' or hill). It was held by a Norman officer, the first Hamon de Massey. The church was rebuilt in stone around 1100 in Norman style then again in around 1320 during the reign of Edward II, when a tower was added, along with a new nave and a south aisle. The old church became in part the north aisle. In 1510 at the time of Henry VIII it was partially rebuilt, but the work was not completed.

Old Bowdon church with its squat tower and early 19th century rural setting.



In 1541 at the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the parish was transferred to the Diocese of Chester from the Priory of Birkenhead, which had been founded by local lord Hamon de Massey, 3rd Baron of Dunham. The Parish Registers date back to 1628, with partial Bishops' Transcripts dating back to earlier in the century.

The parish of Bowdon was originally very large, covering an area from the River Mersey to the walls of Tatton Park and from Baguley to Little Bollington. However by 1911, seventeen new parishes had been carved out of the original area - all but one since 1852 - reflecting the rapid increase in population. They are as follows:

Ashton-on-Mersey, St Martin, 1304; Timperley, Christ Church, 1852 (church 1851); Dunham Massey, St Margaret, 1855; Sale, St Anne, 1856; Ringway (later St Mary and All Saints), 1863 (chapel circa 1515); Altrincham, St John, 1867 (church 1866); Altrincham, St George, 1860 (church 1799); Baguley (in part), St John, 1868; (Little) Bollington (in part), Holy Trinity, 1869 (church 1854); Dunham Massey, St Mark, 1873 (church 1866); Ashley (in part), St Elizabeth, 1881 (church 1880); Partington, St Mary, 1885 (church 1884); Carrington, St George, 1887 (church 1759); Hale, St Peter, 1906 (church 1897) and Broadheath, St Alban, 1911 (canal boat chapel 1852, church 1900).

The church at Bowdon was becoming too small to cater for nearby residents of the area, with its increase in population and rapidly changing character, from a rural hamlet to that of a wealthy commuter suburb of Manchester. This was because of the arrival of the railway in nearby Altrincham in 1849 and later at Hale in 1862.

In addition in 1854, the churchwardens reported that village rubbish lay against the churchyard walls. Part of the churchyard tilted upwards, so that a path had to be made downwards to enter the church. Wind and rain were coming through the roof of the south aisle and some internal walls were bulging ominously. The vicar of the time Rev. William Mann was unwell and Lord Stamford would not support any large expense, so only essential repairs were done. There was also strong opposition to the demolition of the old church with support from the famous architect and church restorer, Sir George Gilbert Scott, who advised repair instead.

The old church
in about 1858,
viewed from the
ancient route of
Church Brow.



The appointment of the new vicar Rev. William Pollock in 1856 changed the situation. He was a man with the energy and the determination to undertake a complete rebuild.

In 1857 after a competition, Manchester and London architect William H. Brakspear was appointed to design a new church in the same overall style as the old, repeating most of its features allowing continuity with the past. However, it was made far higher, grander and more prosperous in appearance. He also added north and south transepts, extended the chancel and widened the nave and the two existing chapels. It was to be lit by gas supplied by the Altrincham Gas Company.

The Rev. William Pollock.





Photos taken by Joseph Sidebotham during the demolition of the old church in 1858.

The Tudor windows seen here in the south aisle, were recreated, while the two Booth monuments in the chapel beyond were kept and rebuilt (left).

The pointed arches and octagonal piers of the nave of the old church (below) were repeated on a larger scale in the new church.



A temporary brick church was built off Green Walk when the old church was demolished in 1858. Once the new building was underway, the contractor reused some of the pink and buff sandstone from the old church to offset the cost. Several carved stone fragments from the buildings and monuments of the earlier churches were uncovered, but ended up in the churchyard or rockeries of local gardens, before being gathered together in the mid-1920s.

The new building and its furnishings were completed in 1860 at a cost of £15,000, the bulk of the funds coming from its resident parishioners. The former Carrington chapel to the left of the sanctuary was in part separated off for a new vestry and then later fully taken up with a new organ. The Chapel of the Cross was formed out of the south transept in the 20th century. St Mary's is now a Grade II* listed building set at the heart of the Bowdon Conservation Area.

The new church in the 1860s, before the clocks in the tower were installed. An ancient yew tree can be seen in the churchyard.



The Church Guide

Please see the plan on the inside front cover.

This guide to the interior takes you round the church in an anti-clockwise direction, starting at the entrance porch on the north side of the church.

Inside, the church has an overall Gothic appearance. It consists of side aisles separated from the nave by five pointed arches set upon octagonal pillars (like the old church) with castellated capitals. There is a fine hammer-beam roof in the nave. The original north aisle wooden roof was rescued from the 16th century church and repeated in the south aisle. The main painted stained glass memorial windows have Perpendicular style ornate tracery, with pointed arches. The square-headed aisle windows are in the Tudor domestic style, the same as the 1510 church windows. The interior is stone-lined.

View from the sanctuary down the nave of the church in around 1970.



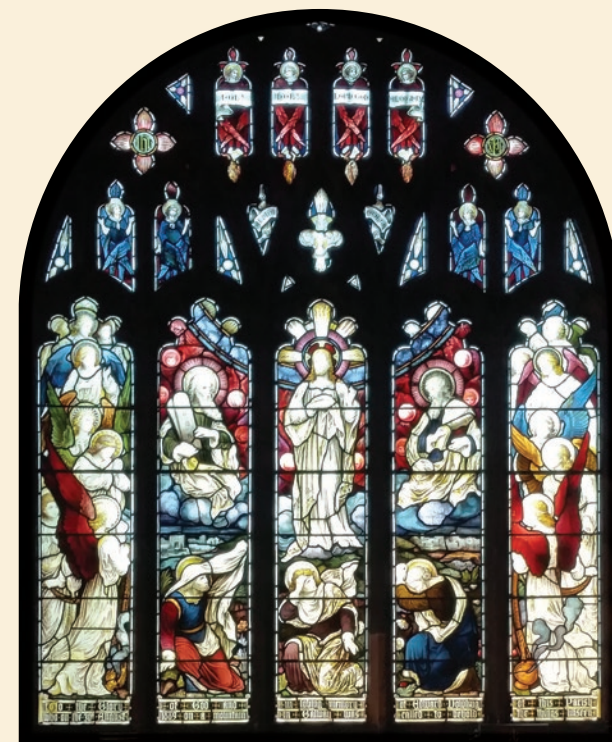
The **Churchwardens' Chest** is the first object of interest on the right of the main door. This ancient boarded or planked oak chest with iron straps is seven feet long and nearly three feet high and wide. It was used to store the Registers and valuable items. It may originally have been a domestic item from as early as 1550, with the carving covered with later ironwork. The 1604 Conference at Hampton Court required churches to provide chests with three locks. This one has four locks, one for each churchwarden who had to be present before a service could be held. Unusually, St Mary's has four churchwardens, two manorial and two parochial. At the front, the figures of the date of 1635 are made of inlaid black bog oak.



The oak Churchwardens' Chest.

The west window above the chest shows the **Transfiguration of Christ** on a mountain. Moses can be seen on the left holding the Ten Commandments and the prophet Elijah is on the right. This well-composed window is a memorial to Edward Dowling, who died on a mountain in Galway in 1889. Classical in style, it shows the use of a wider palette of colours, including purple and brown, typical of the late 19th century.

The Transfiguration Window.



The hanging depicting **The Risen Lord**, below the church tower on the wall of the bell chamber, was commissioned for the Millennium and is based upon the work at Turvey Abbey. The embroidered and painted patchwork quilt was undertaken by the Bowdon Quilters and church parishioners. It covers over the Royal coat of arms erected to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee in 1977. Another piece representing the **Orant Virgin** is by textile artist Jeanne Preston.

The **tower** was totally rebuilt and made much taller in 1858-60 because the old one collapsed when rebuilding was attempted. On each side of the door below, are the **churchwardens' pews** and holders for their staves.

The **bells** are rung by the parish team of bell ringers for Sunday services and weddings. They now number eight. The original six bells were cast in 1714 by Abraham Rudhall, bell-founder of Gloucester. The sixth bell was tolled for funerals, followed by all six bells rung three times each for a man and twice for a woman.

The fifth bell was rung at eight o'clock every evening during the winter and possibly in summer as well. The practice used to be to ring for about ten minutes followed by a single bell chiming out the date, with one stroke for each day of the month. This curfew was a good signal to mothers who lived within earshot, to put their children to bed.

The bells were rehung in the tower of the new church and survived until 1923 when they were recast and two new ones added. These were all recast by John Taylor & Company in 1964.



The bells before being rehung in 1964.

The inscriptions from the original bells referring to the 1714 donors and the maker are as follows:

Bell 3. The gift of Old S^R Geo. Booth to ye Young Men of Y^S Psh, 1714.

Bell 4. Abr. Rudhall Cast us all in 1714.

Bell 5. Mathew Wood, Vicar, and Henry Hough, P^{SH}. Clerk, AR 1714.

Bell 6. SR Wm Meredith, Bart., and Frances Barlow gave 3 PND Each AR 1714.

Bell 7. Edwd. Legh of Bagulegh, Esqr., & Thos. Assheton, Esqr., gave 5 Pnd. each Aaron Warburton DD. Holt In Hankinson IMS. Heawood, Ch. Wardens, AR 1714.

Bell 8. The Honr. Ld Delamer was at XX PND cost Towards Ys bell, AR 1714.

In 1975 Rev. Edward C. Grey, assistant priest and bell ringer at the time, bought a small tolling bell from an antique shop in Nantwich. This bell, the smallest in the tower, is electrically struck, so avoiding dropping the ropes during the weekday services. It was used for a time to call the faithful to worship and became known as 'Little Ted'.

Look up to the left of the belfry tower, to see '**The Ringers Orders**' of 1743 on a painted board. They come from the old church and ensured discipline as follows:

You Ringers all observe these orders well
He pays his Sixpence that o'er turns a Bell
And he that Rings with either Spur or Hat
Must pay his Sixpence certainly for that;
And he that Rings and does Disturbe ye Peal
Must pay his Sixpence or a Gun of ale
These laws elsewhere in every Church are us'd
That Bells and Ringers may not be abus'd.

James Millatt. Ferdinando Laughton. George Wright.
James Fletcher. (Church Ringers)

Joseph Drinkwater. John Pickering. Aaron Eccles. Peter Pickering.
John Dean. John Holborn. [Parish Ringers]



The **Children's Window** is the west window of the church tower in the belfry. It is best seen from the centre aisle with your back to the altar. Dedicated to Margaret Annie Clegg, who died in 1859 aged six months, it illustrates passages relating to children from the Old and New Testaments including the Baptism of Christ and the story of the infant Moses. The window was painted by the firm of Charles E. Clutterbuck senior (died 1861) and his son of the same name, who took over from his father.

The Children's Window.

The **List of Vicars** on the wall on the left side of the tower names some of the vicars of Bowdon from the 13th century to the present. A similar list is above the choir stalls near the sanctuary. The earliest recorded date for the parish priest is 1210 for 'Gilbert'.

Turn to look down the nave towards the altar to get the best view of the stained glass **clerestory windows** above the choir stalls. The left one shows the Dedication of Christ. The right window shows Christ with Mary (kneeling) and Martha (standing).

The nave clerestory windows were originally of stained glass from the previous church. The move in 1906 to replace them with clear glass to allow more light into the church met with strong opposition from some parishioners. Lawsuits were threatened, but the modernisers won the day.

The **Victorian font** in the baptistry is of carved Painswick stone, cut to an octagonal shape and set on a shaft of Devonshire marble. It was a gift of Miss Joynson in 1862, for the new church.

The stained glass window above shows four scenes from the **Life of Paul**, including his preaching at Athens, the conversion on the road to Damascus and his defence before Agrippa II. It dates from 1879 and is dedicated to Peter Hartley, who was an Altrincham corn and malt manufacturer.



The Victorian Font.

The **brass plaque** near the door to the south porch, commemorates the rebuilding of the church in 1860 with the name of the architect along with the Rev. William Pollock and the churchwardens.

The south aisle wall also has memorials to parishioners from all backgrounds. To the far right is a marble tablet to **Hugh Kirkpatrick Hall** (d.1788) of the island of Jamaica and later from nearby Ashley, along with his wife Martha, whose remains were reinterred from London. He was one of five generations of slave plantation owners, importing to Britain sugar, limes and live turtles for eating.

Another marble tablet with a kneeling woman is to **Thomas Assheton Smith** (d.1774) and his parents who were local land owners. It is by Richard Westmacott, the father of his more famous son of the same name.

Particularly sad are the two brass memorials placed together halfway up the aisle in memory of the **Killick brothers**, who died in separate encounters a year apart during WWI.

The **four windows** along the aisle are mirrored on the north aisle. Their delicate floral design allows light into the otherwise dark interior. The stone windows with their square-headed frames are the same Tudor style as the old church. The wooden roof contains a great deal of 19th century material, but followed the original design and composition of the reused Tudor north aisle roof.

The south transept added in the 1858-60 rebuild, has been formed into the separate **Chapel of the Cross**. It has become known by this name due to the fragment of a **mid-8th century Saxon cross** with an interlaced design, which sits on the windowsill behind the altar. This, along with other Saxon, Norman and later carved stone remains, which are not currently on display, came from the earlier churches and monuments.



Windows by
Charles Kempe
with the Saxon
cross fragment.



A subtly-coloured east window by Charles Kempe dedicated to Sunday School superintendent Frederick G. Whittall in 1898, shows scenes from the lives of two saints. The first is **St Martin of Tours** in his bishop's robes, with the lower window showing the saint on horseback dividing his cloak to share with a kneeling beggar. The right-hand window illustrates the story of **St Christopher**. The top one shows the saint with the Christ Child on his back and in the lower one the saint is being greeted by the ferryman. Look in the top left border to see the wheat sheaf. This is Kempe's design signature which was taken from his coat of arms.

The west window shows Mary in four scenes from the **Life of Christ**. These are the Annunciation, Adoration of the Three Kings, Presentation in the Temple and Mary and John at the foot of the cross.

The colourful main window illustrating some of **The Miracles** is by Clutterbuck. The combination of figurative panels, text banners and medieval foliate windows, are typical of the firm's style.

The **oak altar** from St Mary's on the Hill, Chester (now St Mary's Centre next to The Castle) was brought here in 1977. It has three bays with Roman arches decorated with a gilt foliate and ribbon design.

The carved **oak screen** at this chapel and around the Stamford Chapel has Gothic arches. It was designed by Brakspear and is seen in his architectural drawings. The lower and simpler oak panelling is from the earlier church.

Outside the chapel hangs the **White Ensign naval flag** and below is a plaque to commemorate the adoption of His Majesty's Mine Layer 101 by the people of Bowdon in Warship Week in January 1942.

The **Stamford Chapel** (formerly Dunham) in the right-hand corner of the church is devoted to memorials of the Booth and Grey families. These two families were owners of nearby Dunham Massey Hall and Park, along with an extensive estate. This was bequeathed to the National Trust, who still use the former Stamford Estates Office in Altrincham town centre.

A separate outside entrance to the chapel allowed the family privacy. They also had their own door near the altar, so they could be first to receive communion.

The two outstanding marble monuments dating from the 18th century are the work of Andries Carpentière. These large works stood in a chapel in the same location in the old church and were kept in the rebuild.

The main one on the south wall dates from 1734 and includes the figures of Faith or Learning with a book and Prudence with a mirror and snake. It is to **Henry Booth, 1st Earl of Warrington and Baron Delamer of Dunham Massey** and his wife **Mary**, sole heiress of the Langham family. Henry was accused of high treason following the protestant Monmouth Rebellion and imprisoned three times in the Tower of London. He was tried before Judge Jeffreys (the Hanging Judge) in the House of Lords in 1685, but acquitted against the odds to become Chancellor under King William III. The inscription describes his turbulent life. He died in 1693/94 aged forty-one.

The Booth Monument (left) and the figure of Prudence reflecting in her mirror the coat of arms (below).



The second large Carpentière monument on the east wall, is to commemorate the two younger sons of the 2nd Earl of Warrington, **Langham Booth** (d.1724) and **Henry Booth** (d.1727). The work includes relief portraits of the two men, putti above and below and a magnificent achievement of arms with forty-eight quarterings.

To the left is a more modest memorial from 1977 by Donald Buttress to **Roger Grey, the 10th and last Earl of Stamford** (d.1976), who had inherited the title aged thirteen. An energetic and political man, he took a personal interest in the management of the Dunham estate and the affairs of Altrincham. He became Mayor of the town in 1937 and was a staunch supporter of the League of Nations, forerunner to the United Nations. Roger is buried in St Mark's churchyard in Dunham Massey, near his mother and family servants.

Memorial tablets to Roger Grey and his father, William, lie either side of the monument to Langham & Henry Booth (right).

The achievement of arms on Langham and Henry Booth's memorial (below).



A further tablet, in Neo-Wren style, is to Roger's father, **William Grey, 9th Earl of Stamford** (d.1911), who returned with his family to Dunham in 1906. The estate had been without a resident earl for more than 50 years.

The **heraldic windows**, some of which came partly from the old church, are decorated with coats of arms from the families. The boar heads refer to the Booths and the barry of silver and azure strips belong to the Greys. The **recessed round windows** above the Langham and Henry Booth monument are an attractive feature of the church.



Funerary hatchment in the Stamford Chapel.

High above, opposite the altar, is the painted canvas funerary hatchment of **George Harry Grey, 5th Earl of Stamford, 6th Baron Grey of Groby, 1st Baron Delamer and 1st Earl of Warrington** (second creation) (d.1819), showing his heraldic achievement. On the viewer's left-hand side (right in heraldic terms), the background is black and on the right it is white. This indicates that he was a married man, survived by his wife **Lady Henrietta Bentinck**, daughter of the 2nd Duke of Portland, with the depiction of the family's coat of arms of a silver cross on an azure background and lion supporter. The Earl's own coat of arms (Booth and Grey) with a unicorn supporter (Stamford) are on the other side. It would have been placed above the door of Dunham Massey Hall for a few months after his death, before being sent to the family chapel.

The chapel's magnificent **coloured and gilded roof** was designed by church architect Donald Buttress and painted by Campbell Smith and Company in 1973-75.

Two ancient effigies rest in the Stamford Chapel. The better preserved of these is thought to be **Sir William Baggiley** (or Baguley). Sir William, a knight recorded as purchasing property in 1320, was buried in Bowdon Church. However, some time later the effigy was removed and installed on a wall of a garden grotto in Partington. In the 19th century, two keen historians recognised it for what it was and had it moved to Baguley Hall, built by Sir William. His effigy was eventually returned to St Mary's in 1925.

The over-sized figure has lost its legs below the knees and the original face has been damaged and later crudely re-carved. He is wearing a coat of mail with a short stabbing sword. The gambeson or pleated undergarment, split for horse-riding, is below a surcoat, which along with the shield, bears the Baggiley coat of arms with what should be azure lozenges, repainted in red. Between the hands is an egg-shaped symbol representing the offering up of the soul to God in the hope of resurrection.



The Baggiley (or Baguley) Effigy.

The **second effigy** nearby was uncovered from under a pillar in the nave when the church was rebuilt. The right arm across the body, with the outline and point of his sword just visible, may indicate he was a

knight in service to the King. It dates from the late 13th or early 14th century. The effigy was broken into four pieces and spent some time in the churchyard, with great loss of detail as if it had been used as a seat or played upon.

Furniture outside the chapels includes a **Bishop's chair** circa 1870, carved in Gothic-style dark oak. The fine Victorian **brass lectern** designed to hold the Bible for readings, has an eagle with outstretched wings representing divine inspiration, perched on a sphere representing the world, set upon a hexagonal stand supported by lions.

In the **Chancel**, the **main altar** at the end in the sanctuary is of light oak decorated with fleur-de-lys and roses. It is rarely seen as it is usually covered. Gilded angel candle holders stand on columns either side. There are two dark oak **17th century square armchairs**.

The subject of the large east window painted by Clutterbuck is of **The Crucifixion**. It shows Christ on the cross with Mary Magdalene, the two robbers and Roman soldiers. Moses with the brazen serpent represents Law. This is a memorial window to Mary who died in 1859, the wife of William Neild of High Lawn, one of the Bowdon mansions at the end of East Downs Road. William was Mayor of Manchester in 1841-42 and ran a calico printing works in Ardwick.

Either side of the altar are two fine enamelled metal plaques to William Morrell Neild (d.1933), with the one to the left depicting **St Christopher** and to right, **St Francis**.

The north window to Richard Alsop Warburton (d.1879), calico merchant, shows the Easter story of **The Resurrection of Christ** from his tomb. Like other painted windows of the period, it features carved white limestone canopies in Tudor style.

The window on the south side is in memory of Devereux Jones Nicholls (d.1835), an Altrincham solicitor and his wife Mary (d.1834). It is later than the dates suggest. The three Christian virtues of **Faith, Hope and Charity** are depicted.

The **choir stalls** dating from 1910, by leading ecclesiastical architect Temple Moore, are of Gothic revival style in hand-carved oak. The beautiful roof of this area is decorated in red trim with squares and gilded bosses.

Bowdon has a strong musical tradition. A Music Festival is held every year and often the church is a setting for events. The fifty five members of the choir sing in a different cathedral every year.

The chancel with the choir stalls, main altar and east window.





The list of **Vicars of Bowdon** from Gilbert (1210) to Arthur Gore (1873) is above the choir stalls on the north side. More recent incumbents are named on the list at the west end of the church.

The list of Vicars in Medieval style, above the choir stalls designed by Temple Moore.

The 1910 **pulpit** by Temple Moore, octagonal-shaped and of oak, is heavily carved and has six steps and a canopy on a back post. The **organ** by the famous firm of Jardine of Old Trafford, was installed in 1875 and rebuilt and enlarged by Walker and Sons of Ruislip in 1960.

The **Brereton Monument** is the main feature of the **north transept**. It was originally located in the old Carrington Chapel, moved to the sanctuary in 1860, before being relocated again in 1888. This is a fine canopied memorial in gilded alabaster to William Brereton (d.1630) and his wife Jane (d.1627/28) of nearby Ashley Hall.

The painted effigies are dressed in sober black gowns with white ruffs. A Latin inscription with a translation nearby, describes the couple and their exemplary lifestyle. Their eight children are carved in bas-relief beneath the effigies. The third son William died in 1632 and holds a skull, with baby Maria who had also died shown as swaddled.

The decorations include the eighteen quarterings of Brereton impaled with nine of Arley of Warburton, as Jane was the co-heir of Peter Warburton. Note the carved Warburton Saracen's head to the lower right. The Brereton muzzled bear is to the left. It comes from the family story of an ancestor who murdered his valet in anger because he interrupted his meal. As a punishment from the King, he had three days in prison to invent an effective muzzle or be killed by a bear. He was successful and survived.

The **Tudor font** was cast out into the churchyard after the Victorian rebuild, but returned inside in the mid-1920s, thanks to the endeavours of Frank Falkner and others. It was made around 1500 and although simple in design, would have had its octagonal sides painted in bright colours. It has a wrought-iron cover from St Mary's in Chester.

The Brereton Monument.



Other remains here include a carved **Caen limestone fragment** with Gothic blind tracery, probably from a tomb chest. It was retrieved from a nearby garden, but may not have come from old Bowdon church.

The **flags** include the Red Cross Standard which flew at a hospital staffed by the VAD Cheshire 50 during WWI in one of the five grand houses in the area loaned for such use. The other two are of the British Legion and the British Legion Bowdon Branch.

The jewel-like main window of 1861 by Clutterbuck, matches that of the south transept and shows scenes from **Parables** from the New Testament. The side window in a later style of the early 1900s, illustrates the **Parable of the Sower**. It is a fitting subject for William Warburton (d.1897), farmer at Oaklands in Hale Barns and his sister Sarah (d.1902).

The **north aisle** roof from the 16th century was reused here in the mid-Victorian rebuild. It preserves the original width of the medieval aisle and has some of the original colour work, including heraldic bosses.

On the way back to the church door where the tour started, there are **WWI and WWII memorials**, with the names of local men who fell.



The WWI Memorial.



The Exterior of the Church

The situation of St Mary's is particularly fine, set upon a high and long ridge. This was formed from very thick glacial deposits of sand and gravel, laid on earlier sandstone. Built at the crossroads at the heart of the original village, the church sits at the head of a very attractive sloping churchyard, overlooking the sunny and fertile Cheshire Plain. Ancient pathways outside the church boundary lead down each side to Langham Road. To the north are Victorian Italianate villas, built on a flat raised area of dry, sandy soil which slopes gently down towards the bustling 1290 Market Charter town of Altrincham.

The **church** has a four-stage west tower of ninety-one feet, half as high again as the old one. It has diagonal buttresses; four ornate clock faces; four-light belfry openings; gargoyles and a castellated top. It was built with pinnacles, removed for safety reasons in 1963. The church aisles and clerestory are also castellated. The pink and buff sandstone blocks are irregular in size and colour, in line with Pugin's Gothic principles. At the north-eastern corner, a matching extension was built in 1888 to provide more vestry space for the clergy and choir. The roof of the church is of decorated Welsh slate, the most common material in the area. It had been transported along the Bridgewater Canal since the late 18th century.

On Mothering Sunday, the congregation undertake the ancient custom of 'Yclepping', which is holding hands and embracing the church building.

The **War Memorial** from 1921 by Arthur Henning, has a figure of St George after Donatello's, with architectural detailing. Nearby is a much worn **large stone block** of an unknown former purpose, with remains of Gothic carving on all sides.

The **churchyard** was extended in 1815, 1859, and finally in 1876 down to Langham Road. It is a peaceful site with some fine Victorian monuments set among the trees. A large yew tree reputed to be used for the Domesday measurements was accidentally burned down and a new tree planted on the site in 1978.

An estimated 40,000 people have been buried here over the ages. There are approximately 5,000 grave sites and eleven war graves, four of them with War Grave Commission headstones with the others in family graves.

At the east of the church is an area for local vicars who played their part in shaping the fabric and society of the area. In particular, the imposing tomb of **Archdeacon William Pollock** can be seen. He was the driving force behind the building of the new church and an elaborate vicarage on Park Road, Bowdon. His successor in 1873 **Rev. Canon Arthur Gore**, had St Luke's Mission Church built in Bowdon Vale.

The northern custom before Victorian times was to have flat gravestones. The rebuilding of the church in 1858-60 led to the re-siting of some of the oldest ones around the church, so they are no longer over the original graves.

The oldest known grave is found on a long thin stone, five gravestones out south of the Stamford Chapel. It is that of **William Artinstall de Ringey** (Ringway), dated 1617. One of the many interesting graves belongs to Bowdon resident **William Wood** (d.1868). He is known as 'the Chimney Boys' Friend' and is famous for pushing through legislation to prevent children from climbing up chimneys and cleaning them, despite mechanical alternatives. His coffin was carried to his grave by six sweeps from five different towns. There is also a memorial to local man **Nick Estcourt**, the mountaineer, who was lost on K2 in 1978.



William Wood's headstone
(grave no. 1854).



The Surrounding Area

Please see the map on the inside back cover.

The wide area between The Griffin and the church, known as **The Square**, was used for bull-baiting until about 1820 when the practice was stopped by Rev. James Law, Vicar of St Mary's at the time. The most tenacious dog to tackle the tethered bull won a brass collar.



A busy scene in the centre of the village outside St Mary's church in the 1910s. The area with that of Rostherne, the Bollin valley and Dunham Massey was popular with walkers and touring cyclists.

From the 19th century, long strips of setts in the middle of the road formed cab-ranks, which meant commuters and day-trippers could link with the new rail routes. The **drinking fountain** was donated by Elizabeth Marriott in memory of her husband Francis Marriott, a solicitor who died in 1871. Along with a cab shelter and two trees with surrounding seats, it used to be in the centre of The Square.

The Stamford Arms and The Griffin, the two public houses in the Bowdon area, stand on the corner opposite the church. **The Stamford Arms** dates back to 1765 and was a watering hole for the gentry. The Pavilion was added later for dances. The Stamford Arms was used by SOE personnel who stayed in the area while training during WWII at RAF Ringway (now Manchester International Airport). They included **Violette Szabo, Odette Sansom and Yeo Thomas**.

While the gentry socialised, their servants relaxed in **The Griffin**, which may be an even older building because a pair of Civil War boots was found in the loft. The name comes from the coat of arms of the

Stamford family and over the years has changed from the 'Green Dragon' and later the 'Griffin and Bowling Green Hotel'. The bowling green was where the rear car park is now.



Billhead of Griffin innkeeper John Hunt, mid-19th century.

Church Brow, the steep curved road near the church entrance, leads down to Langham Road. The building of yellow brickwork and red sandstone is the **old Bowdon Police Station**, converted to housing in 1971. Church Brow has a number of interesting houses. The first entrance on the left leads to **Windyridge**, the vicarage from 1978. It was built in the 1930s in Arts and Crafts style by local architect F. H. Brazier, with the interior largely designed and furnished by Liberty's. The smaller white house a little further down was a forge and the coffin maker's house.

On the opposite side, the **cottages** hugging the curve of Church Brow mostly date from the 18th century. No. 7 is timber-framed and a century earlier. They were originally thatched and were the most popular subject of all during the early 1900s postcard craze. Many of the houses and cottages are listed. They were lived in over the decades by the blacksmiths, porters, carters, gardeners, dressmakers and coffee-house hosts who catered for the needs of their well-to-do neighbours and visitors to the area. The women who took in laundry; dairy farmers who delivered milk to homes; the market gardeners and brickmakers, tended to live and work in Bowdon Vale or Bow Green.



Church Brow in the early 1900s, with several cottages still thatched. 'John Hassell, Porter' can be seen over a door of one of them. A substantial Green Walk villa looms behind

On the ridge on other side of Church Brow is **Green Walk**, once a private coach road from Dunham Massey Hall to the church. It was put through in 1760 by Lady Mary Booth, Countess of the 4th Earl of Stamford, when the northerly New Park was being transformed.

The railway arriving in the area in 1849 was the start of a period of great change and development. Agricultural land in the higher areas became more valuable for housing, so the 7th Earl of Stamford began selling off parts of the estate he had recently inherited. The type of material, density and rental value of the houses to be built were specified.

Those along Green Walk built during the 1860s and 1870s, were the grandest of all. Many have been converted to apartments or in some cases replaced by new housing developments. They were occupied by the most able and successful middle classes, some known locally as 'The Cottontots', having made their fortunes in the Manchester textile trade. Some of the more notable old stone houses and their occupants are described below.

The first one is **Heather Lea** on the right, which was home to **Edward Coward**, merchant, bleacher and manufacturer who in 1881 was employing 1000 people. He was also a director of the Great Northern Railway Company and had charge of erecting the Manchester Goods Yard in Deansgate.

Green Walk with its gates and fence in the Stamford Estate style. Erlesdene on the left, was designed by Alexander Mills who lived at Newbie (demolished) which was also on Green Walk.



Erlesdene on the left was the home of calico printer and early amateur photographer **Joseph Sidebotham** and his wife Anne, the sister of Edward Coward. The couple's former home of The Beeches on Woodville Road in Bowdon was a partial donation by Joseph, so it could become a branch of the Manchester Hospital for Consumption in 1884. As a condition, it was named St Anne's Home after his wife who had died in 1882. Their son who took over Erlesdene, **Dr. Edward Sidebotham**, was a noted medical lecturer and researcher into bacteria. He was also an art collector and very involved in the Manchester and Whitworth art galleries.

Oakley was built in 1869 by **Henry Theodore Gaddum** who was in the silk-weaving business. It is still a single house. He was the first chairman of Bowdon Urban District Council and an active social philanthropist.

Next is **Bowdon Croft**. This was known as Brunswick House in the 19th century, after the area from which its then resident the naturalised German merchant **Henry Samson** had come. It became known as Raynor Croft and during WWI was loaned for use as an auxiliary military hospital.

The house and gardens of Raynor Croft (now Bowdon Croft), seen on a postcard sent in 1917 when it was a military hospital.



Woodside on the right, of which only the gateposts remain, was owned by **Jesse Haworth** who was a well-known cotton yarn agent. He sponsored Flinders Petrie and donated his ancient Egyptian collection to Manchester Museum, with the funding to hold it. Like the Gaddums and Cowards, he was an active member of the influential Bowdon Downs Congregational Church, off Higher Downs.

Four Beeches was completed in 2010 for **Elaine McPherson**, previous owner of fashion retailer MK One. In Scottish style, with a hint of Rennie Mackintosh, it is in the spirit of the other Green Walk houses, but with the addition of the modern luxuries of a swimming pool and cinema.

Bickham House on the left, originally Gorsefield, was built in 1863 for **Spencer Henry Bickham**, a manufacturer of devices for carding cotton and collector of herbarium specimens. In 1948 his daughter **Helen Bickham**, left the house and contents for use as a home for elderly or distressed gentlefolk.

At the end is **Hilston House**, also dating from the 1860s. It was owned by yarn agent **Abraham Haworth**. Coming from a humble background like his brother Jesse, he rose to join the mercantile classes. Having been helped by an education at Manchester Grammar School, he became very supportive of many of its pupils from poor backgrounds. He was a Liberal and a staunch advocate of the Non-conformist cause.

The end of Green Walk was blocked off to cars during the 1960s as the area was developed. However, you can still walk through and cross over the busy A56 Chester Road to the woodland path leading across the golf course to **Dunham Massey Hall and Park** (National Trust).

Denzell House and Gardens through the mock lych-gate, is one of the largest and most interesting of the Green Walk mansions. It was built in 1874 for spinning manufacturer **Robert Scott**. His wife Maria came from Cornwall, hence the Cornish name. The ten-acre grounds which are open to the public, show a strong Italianate influence. They were further developed by the second owner **Samuel Lamb**, who left it all to Bowdon Urban District Council when he died in 1936.

Denzell became the Lamb Guildhouse weekend school and then an evacuation centre for expectant mothers during WWII. After that it was an annexe to Altrincham General Hospital and is now used as a fine set

of offices. It has been identified as a house called Grosmont in the novel *All the Day Long* by Manchester author Howard Spring.

The Devisdale is a much used and enjoyed green open space. It can be reached through Denzell Gardens or from Green Walk, either down the footpath or through Green Courts. Davis or Devis was the name of a local family during the 17th and 18th centuries (Davis' Dole), but it was also land used for common grazing and collecting wood, as well as being part of the Stamford plant and tree nursery.

During the 18th century the locals gathered here each September for the **Bowdon Wakes**, to sell produce and enjoy races and games. The 19th century historian Ingham recorded a notice for, "A race for a good holland smock by ladies of all ages, the second best to have a handsome satin ribbon. No lady will be allowed to strip any further than the smock before starting."

The **Altrincham Show**, once the largest one-day event in the country, was held on The Devisdale from 1896 until 1966. Traders, farmers and visitors came from far away to display, sell and buy machinery, animals and farm produce. There were many competitions with nationwide entries. It was a grand occasion for the locals, with everyone expecting an enjoyable time.

Altrincham Show, late 1950s.



Back at the church to the north is **The Firs**, lined with pairs of mid-Victorian semi-detached villas on the western side. This is the old 'Burying Lane', scene of funeral processions through the ages from Altrincham town centre along an ancient route via Norman's Place, The Narrows and Bowdon Road.

To the left of the Stamford Arms is an **Edwardian garage** building, which serviced the cars of early motorists in the area.



The Firs in the early 1900s, with the trees which gave it its name.

The modern **Jubilee Centre** in the car park is due to be replaced. The **Bowdon Assembly Rooms**, an Arts and Crafts building designed in 1903 by local architect Frank Dunkerley, is in trust from the Bickham family for the use of the community. Behind is **Bowdon Croquet Club** the origins of which date back to 1873, at a time when at least seventy of the larger houses in the area had croquet lawns. It was a sport women could play in their cumbersome gowns. On the opposite side of The Firs around **Elcho Road**, were four ancient fields including 'Sparrow' in their name, because of the flocks of sparrows which once thrived there.

While the Cottontots enjoyed the fruits of their industry in their great houses on the ridge at the top of the hill, other parts of Bowdon are of interest for the talented, artistic and creative people who also lived here.

Further away north towards Altrincham, Wagner's secretary **Hans Richter** lived at 27 The Firs. He was the Hallé conductor from 1899 until 1911. At Inglewood on St Margaret's Road, the composer **John Ireland** had his home.

Alison Uttley and **Juliana Ewing**, both writers of children's stories, had houses on Higher Downs. The naturalist **Thomas Alfred Coward** also lived as a child with his family at 8 Higher Downs, then at Brentwood, 6 Grange Road in Bowdon Vale. **Helen Allingham**, the Victorian artist, lived with her family at Levenshurst on St John's Road (close to Higher Downs). **Hugh Wallis**, the art metal worker, had his studio in his house which was replaced by 80 - 80b The Downs.

Back at The Square at the east end is **Stamford Road**, which leads down to Ashley Road at the crossroads, then over the railway crossing into Hale village. It is lined with attractive Georgian and Victorian houses and terraces, increasing in size and grandeur as the century progressed. In 1871, brothers **William and Francis Crossley** along with their sister Emmeline, were lodgers at 24 Stamford Road (1 Bell Place), the house of local builder **Martin Stone**. This was before the Crossleys had their engineering breakthrough with the versatile Otto 4-stroke gas engine.



Stamford Road, one of several in the area taking the name of the local Lord.

Stamford Road used to be called 'Sandy Lane', but like some existing roads and many newly laid out on Stamford land, it took its name from the local family. Reading like an achievement of coats of arms, a map of the wider area would show the following names associated with ancestors and relatives of the family, including Lady Jane Grey:

Bentinck, Bonville, Booth, Bradgate, Catherine, Cavendish, Delamer, Davenport, Dorset, Egerton, Elcho, Enville, Grey, Grafton, Groby, Hamon, Harrington, Langham, Massey, Portland, St Margaret's, Suffolk, Theobald, Turnbull, Winton, Woodcote and Woodville.

Back at the top of Stamford Road to the east of the church, stands the imposing building of **The Polygon** dating from 1881. It was once the offices of Bowdon Local Board of Health, with shops below. The black and white timbered third storey included a photographic studio with north-facing windows. It was a base for five photographers, including **George Higginson** at the start and **John Thompson** from 1907 until the 1920s.

The Polygon in about 1910. It shows a group of children, who would have attended Bowdon Church School off to the right or else one of the many day and boarding schools in the area, famous for its fresh air.



Richmond Road known locally as Richmond Hill, runs in front of The Polygon down the steep slope towards Langham Road and Bowdon Vale. From the 1860s for nearly five decades, on the right-hand side at 1 Richmond Hill, lived widowed Yorkshireman **James Mudd**. He started out as a silk pattern designer, but went on to become a pioneering photographer of pictorial landscapes, commercial machinery and steam engines, as well as having a successful portrait studio in Manchester with his son of the same name.

Further down on the left is **East Downs Road**, an area known as 'Rose Hill'. The houses there were mostly built in the mid-1840s in three different types and sizes of white brick, on land sold by another major owner, Thomas Assheton Smith.

At 3 Laurel Mount on the corner lived **Dr Adolph Brodsky**, well-known violinist, friend of Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Elgar and Brahms and leader of the Hallé Orchestra from 1895 to 1929. **Gladys Vasey**, the portrait and landscape painter, lived at 4 Laurel Mount next door. **Thomas Pitfield**, composer, poet and artist, lived in the same road at no. 21 (house demolished). The Thorns was lived in by **Joseph Watson Sidebotham**, Conservative MP for Hyde, where he had inherited a colliery. He had a degree in Music from Oxford and was an accomplished organist.

Dr Adolph Brodsky and his wife Anna at their Bowdon home.



At the end of East Downs Road where William Neild's former home **High Lawn** can be found, a leafy footpath on the left between the houses leads to Stamford Road, whereas the picturesque route on the right with setts, goes down to Langham Road.

Back in The Square at the eastern side of the church, is the recently built and well-used **Parish Centre**, completed in 2007 at a cost of £1.25 million raised by parishioners and local people. The restored **Stamford Cottage** dating back to 1835, home of church officials in the past, stands in front of it.

Now reflect a while and perhaps take some refreshment, in the way that many have done before you over the centuries.



St Mary's Church in the heart of Bowdon in modern times.

Illustrations

Altrincham Area Image Archive: front cover, 1, 3, 4 (Joseph Sidebotham), 5, 6 (Stagshead Studios Ltd), 7b, 10, 12, 14, 15br, 16, 19 - 21, 24 - 29, 31 (Ian Gee), 32 - 36 and back cover; © Ashworth Maps and Interpretation Ltd 2016. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2016: inside back cover; Bowdon Parish Church Archives: 8; David Miller: inside front cover (plan), 7t, 11, 15bl, 17 and 22.

Front cover: St Mary's Church and The Square with waiting cabs, seen on a postcard from the early 1900s. To the right is The Griffin.

Back cover: View to the church in the 1920s from the southwest across the fields which were gradually covered by the houses of Eyebrook, Blueberry and Stanhope Roads.



Text by Judith Miller and Sue Nichols, 2016.

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Further Information

To find out more about the fascinating history of the local area and its inhabitants visit altrinchamheritage.com (late 2016).

For information on services and events at St Mary's Church and the Parish Centre in Bowdon, along with St Luke's Church in Bowdon Vale, please contact the Parish Centre Office as follows: email admin@bowdonchurch.org, ring 0161 929 1537, visit bowdonchurch.org or write to Bowdon Parish Centre, Stamford Road, Bowdon, Altrincham WA14 2TR.

