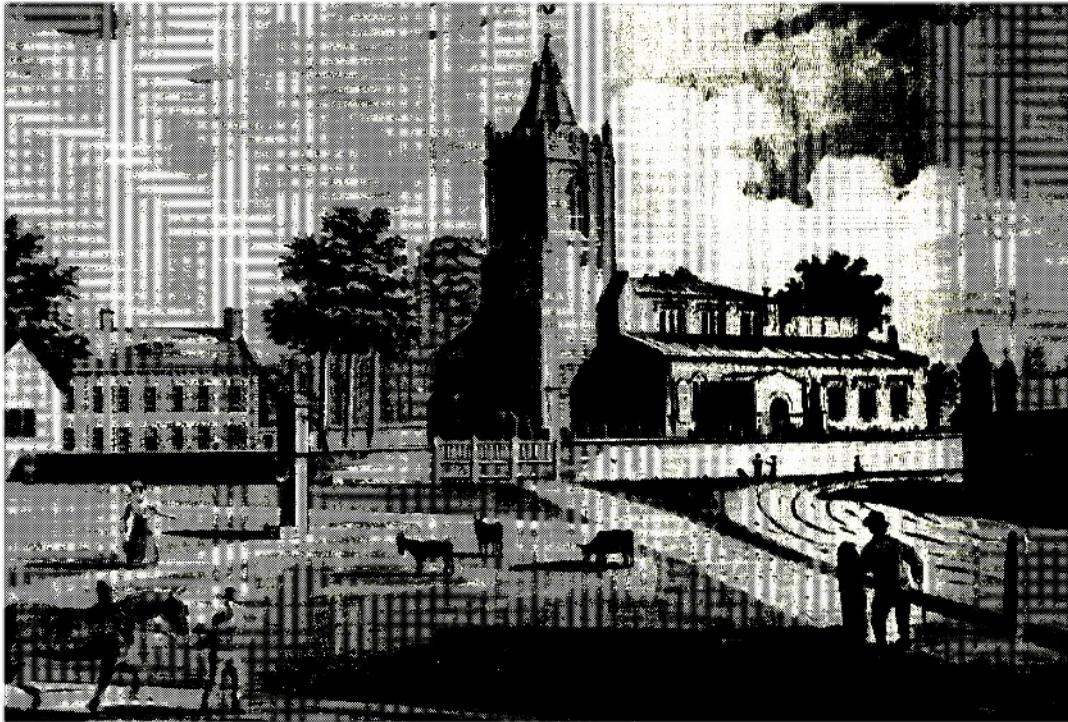


GREAT BOWDEN HERITAGE & ARCHAEOLOGY

The parish of Great Bowden is ancient and has endured many changes over the centuries. The Neighbourhood Plan is a means to secure a future for the parish determined by the residents themselves. This article was written by a member of the Heritage Group to support policies in the Environmental section of the Plan.



The Evolution of Great Bowden's Community

In 1849 life was pretty grim for many people in Great Bowden. Inspector William Lee reported to the General Board of Health on the lack of a sewerage system, drainage system or piped water and the general insanitary conditions of the poor in Great Bowden, Little Bowden and Market Harborough. His findings were damning and he demanded major changes which he felt could only be achieved if the 3 parishes joined for the purposes of Public Health. Very slowly things got better. Not until 1880, 30 years later, came the first meeting of the Market Harborough, Great Bowden and Little Bowden Local Board. In 1885 50 oil lamps were installed followed by a sewerage system in 1886 and piped water, gas lights and gas main in 1890.



The opening of the canal in 1809 had aided local brickworks and brick houses began to appear. The opening of the two railway lines, Rugby to Stamford in 1850 and Leicester to Bedford in 1857 had resulted in new better paid work opportunities and new brick housing for the railway workers. Many of these cottages still exist in the village. Towards the end of the 19th and into the 20th century the village saw many new amenities: an extended National School (started 1839), a restored parish church, a new Congregational church, a cemetery, recreational ground, post office and several shops.

John Henry Stokes made a significant difference when he brought his horse dealing business to the village, providing work opportunities, the village hall originally built for his grooms and erecting large hunting lodges for visiting customers who also hunted with the Fernie Hunt. But the centralisation of local services came at a cost. In 1927 Great Bowden and Little Bowden were incorporated into the civil parish of Market Harborough.

A number of social clubs and societies were formed including the Cricket Club, Tennis Club, W.I. and the Garden Society but it was the fear that Great Bowden's own identity was being lost and inappropriate development could occur that resulted in the formation of the Great Bowden Society in 1968. This group acted as an unofficial parish council for 28 years, adding improvements to the village where possible and scrutinizing planning applications.



Increasingly people wanted the village to have its own identity. Things came to a head when there were plans to site a refuse tip north of the village, now a SSSI nature reserve, and to route the northern by-pass close to the village. A petition signed by the majority of local householders was eventually sent to Central Government and the new parish of Great Bowden was created in 1995 with parish council elections in 1996. The new parish is smaller than the historic one but retains the land, mostly agricultural, north of the village.

Great Bowden, still today, is bounded by water courses and the earliest inhabitants would have travelled along these hunting and gathering their food. These early people have left no trace other than the knapped flints which are occasionally found throughout the parish. The earliest known settlements are on the higher ground on the hill separating present-day Great Bowden from Market Harborough. Excavations are continuing to reveal a significant population during both Iron Age and Roman periods.

Some evidence of Roman occupation within the present village have recently been found south-west of the village centre and in the Rectory House paddocks. Bowden was the original settlement, existing before the neighbouring town of Market Harborough and extended across the River Welland. Little Bowden on the far side of the river was lost to Northamptonshire when the Welland became the edge of the Danelaw in 920AD following King Edward the Elder's (son of King Alfred) conquest of Northampton. The river became the shire boundary after 942AD and remains so to this day on the eastern side of the parish. Bowden lay within the shire division known as the wapentake of Gartree during Anglo-Saxon times and probably later in the period became the caput administering a soke covering some of the surrounding area. This had the right to hold a court and impose fines and forfeitures.

Archaeological test pit excavations in the village have discovered Saxo-Norman pottery with quantities much higher than average for the eastern counties. Both the soke and the possibility of an early minster at nearby St Mary in Arden may have contributed to the rise in importance of the settlement and also account for the many roads and paths leading to the centre of the village which determine its present shape.

By the time of Edward the Confessor the manor was one of only 2 held by the King in Leicestershire and was valued at £10 2d. 61/2d. The manor was still held by the King in 1086 and in the Domesday Book are listed the soke lands in Medbourne, Cranoe, Shangton, Carlton, Illston, Kings Norton, Stretton, Smeeton, Foxton, Blaston and the lost village of Prestgrave. The most likely area for the manor enclosure is the land between Dingley Road and Nether Green. This would have included the church site which may have originated as a chapel to the manor. Royal patronage continued until the mid 14th century.

The Domesday Book also lists a second manor at Great Bowden belonging to Countess Judith of Lens (niece of William I) The manor enclosure site is unknown but a contender must be at Upper Green bounded by Green Lane and the curve on Main Street. Saxo-Norman pottery excavated on this site in 2013 supports this theory.

The open field system operated in the parish until the 1776 Enclosure Act. There were 4 fields, North, East, West and South. The present parish of Great Bowden occupies most of the North Field, all of the East Field with some of the South field under grass in the south-east corner of the parish. Thanks to satellite photography and Lidar imagery many of the original furlongs and headlands are visible and one

can imagine the landscape without our familiar field boundaries. We also know the names of most of the furlongs, roads and tracks from a translation, made in the village, of a document dated circa 1336 and held by the National Archives.

Since WWII Market Harborough has extended northwards covering most of the South field in housing. There remains an area of open land separating the parishes and considered in the village of utmost importance.

The church with its dedication to Saints Peter and Paul, often associated with royal estates, is first mentioned in 1220 and was able to acquire its first bell, still in place, in 1599 after the advowson was passed to Christchurch Oxford by Henry VIII. A chantry was established in 1472 but this was lost with Dissolution.

Mud houses or hovels housed the poor around the Greens until the 19th century. Today the village remains polyfocal in shape and, although the Greens have been much reduced over the years, they are all now protected as common land or registered village greens and form important local green space within the community. Larger houses were constructed of stone and later of brick and the principal survivors from the 17th century or before are: Rectory House, Sutton Rd (1510), The Laurels, Manor Road (1598), the Old Bakehouse, Main St.(1614), part of Welham Bush Farm, Sutton Rd (early 17thC), The Old Hall, Main St and 5 Manor Road, (both 17thC), Stone House, Main St (1671), Upper Green Farmhouse (1675), Tinkers Thatch, Main St (c1690) and the cruck cottage, Tudor House, Manor Road (probably 17thC). A number of houses from the 18th century also survive.

The village had several inns and taverns of which only 2 are still open for business. These are the Shoulder of Mutton on the Green founded in 1752 by a butcher and victualler and the Red Lion on Main Street. Old inns now converted into private dwellings or commercial businesses include the Britannia Inn, Royal Oak, The Queen and The Three Horseshoes and later The Countryman. Additionally on the western edge of the parish there was The Bowden Inn on the old turnpike road. Later the New Bowden Inn was built which became part of the bone mill works alongside the canal. This factory, a former brickyard, was an early example of the moving of industrial sites issuing nuisance away from main areas of population although its stench was well known in the village.

Agriculture dominated the settlement even after the fields were inclosed in 1776 with a move towards finishing cattle for market on the rich pasture of the Welland Valley; a practice that continues today. Farming may have been improved but there



was a detrimental effect on the poorer people in Great Bowden . In common with other communities their rights and their subsistence form of agriculture were inadequately compensated and the wastes and common land reduced. The new farms and particularly those with pastures needed fewer workers. The pitiful conditions that William Lee found in 1849 were possibly worse than those experienced by the ordinary working people in the village for many centuries.
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