

# The Time Travellers Guide To Bedhampton Village

---

## Important Notice

Thank you for taking the time to visit Bedhampton. This self-guided tour has been designed to give you just some of the fascinating history of this village and a few of the houses and locations that have helped shape its story. The numbers in the guide are just for reference. You can visit as many or as few as you wish and in any order. Please take care as you walk - keep your ears and eyes alert for vehicular traffic that shares the roads; much of the village was built before the need for pavements. All properties listed in this guide have been done so with the permission of the owners, but please respect property boundaries.

## Welcome to Bedhampton in the time of John Keats visit

Welcome to Bedhampton in the year 1819. It is only a few years since the glorious victory of our soldiers at The Battle of Waterloo and the end of the war with Napoleon and France in 1814. Since then unemployment, some bad harvests and rising prices for most food including bread are hitting hard in villages such as ours. The Poor House has become very busy in recent times, especially during winter months when the harvests have finished. Most of us local folk work on the farms, and there are plenty of those in this manorial parish. Quite a number of the men folk have chosen to join our glorious navy on a shilling a week, a daily tot of rum and a square meal; they are hoping to save their shillings to bring home to their women and children.

The Cosham to Chichester Turnpike Trust was established some years ago but whilst to the west and east of here towns and villages boast some quite good, firm roads, the road through our village suffers quite badly in wet seasons making it difficult for carts and wagons travel our rutted and potholed tracks. The locals on foot know exactly where to tread and drive their carts, but outsiders have no chance of getting through with dry feet.

### 1. The Church of St Thomas

The 12<sup>th</sup> century Church of St Thomas the Apostle (in Keats time it would have been known as St Nicholas Church) is believed to stand on the site of an earlier Saxon church. It was extensively altered during the Norman period and adapted, rebuilt and modified in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

When John Keats visited the village, the Reverend Edward Tew had been the rector since 1780 but had died in 1819. The villagers had seen very little of him during his incumbency, as he preferred to stay at Eton where he was the provost. The remote location of the village and its lack of wealth probably made this little chapel not so attractive to man of his stature. At that time the chapel was much smaller than you see it today. The width of the church was only as wide as the roof behind the 12<sup>th</sup> century Norman arch. The church's single bell was made by Clement Tozier and is dated 1679. As you leave, look back at the 'mass clock' (sundial) on the south elevation carved onto the buttress near the chancel arch.

### 2. Bidbury Mead

Stand on the elevated area near the present car park and look out across the Mead. At the time of Keats visit, you would have been looking at the largest single meadow in the parish. The Mead was predominantly a hay meadow providing the essential hay for over-wintering the local livestock. The size of the parish at this time had changed little since the medieval manor of Bedhampton was established. The parish of Bedhampton is a rectangular land strip that extends six miles from north to south and about a mile and half from east to west. At the extreme north lay part of the huge Forest of Bere, and Padnell Common – now the area around Padnell Avenue at Cowplain and in the south, Langstone Harbour.

### 3. Bidbury House

This imposing house, built on the corner of Bidbury Lane and Mill Lane, is dated from about 1760. It has been home to a mixture of clerics, tradesmen, military officers and gentlemen. The best-known was the distinguished Commander

William Snell RN, who bought it on his retirement in 1895. The Georgian frontage is very impressive and on the south side there is a range of successive additions to the property. The north wall (facing the church) displays characteristic local brickwork where warm red bricks are used in contrast with blue-black headers. This is known as Hampshire chequerboard pattern and can be seen on buildings throughout the Bedhampton Conservation Area.

#### **4. The Old Granary**

Situated on the west side of Mill Lane, it was built in 1868 as a grain store during the boom years of the corn trade. The grain hoist door can still be seen above the main front door. In the 1930s the Granary was converted into a squash court, but is now a private residence.

#### **5. The Biscuit Factory** (demolished)

The field opposite the Old Granary was once home to a biscuit factory making hardtack biscuits for the military. The precise location is a matter of dispute among local historians. The factory was active in 1854/56 supplying biscuits to the army during the Crimean War. The biscuits were meant to be part of a rationed diet of salted meat and biscuits, but often, due to the poor condition of the meat on offer, the biscuits were probably the only palatable item in their rations. The factory had its own railway sidings, one of which came up to level with the granary. The factory and sidings were demolished in the 1890s.

#### **6. The Railway Bridge**

As you proceed south along Mill Lane the road begins to climb. In John Keats time, this would have been a flat, level route to the Old Mill House. However, in 1845, the Brighton and South Coast Railway carved a route through the village. The climb takes you up and over the railway line via a most remarkable railway bridge for such a rural location. This huge, seventeen arch bridge would be more at home in a town or city, but why was it built in such a small village is still something of a mystery.

A news item published in the December 1846 edition of the *Hampshire Advertiser* read:- *The most remarkable of all the railway works between Chichester and Portsmouth is a bridge over the line, erected at a cost of £6,000, for the sole accommodation of Messrs. H. and J. Snook, of Bedhampton Mill, the extent and importance of whose business may be in some measure*

*inferred from their having made choice of this mode of access to its principal seat, rather than accept offers, really munificent, made by the Company for a level crossing. The bridge consists of seventeen arches, and is all the more noticeable and costly for the obliquity of its angle with the railway. We understand that the gentlemen for whose use it is made secured this compliance with their views and wishes by an agreement, made while the Bill was in Parliament, which they would otherwise have opposed.*

This explanation has so far, not been verified and work is still ongoing for more information that may tell the story of the great Bedhampton railway bridge.

#### **7. The Mill House** (Lower Mill)

There has been a mill on this site for more than 400 years, but the present Mill House and the former mill buildings were purchased by John Snook in 1796. The Mill itself and the associated buildings were demolished in the early 1900s, but the Mill House where the poet John Keats stayed in January 1819 remains. On the back wall of the house is a plaque that reads

“In this house in 1819 John Keats finished his poem “The Eve of St Agnes” and here in 1820 he spent his last night in England.”

#### **8. View to the east**

As you retrace your steps back up the railway bridge look over to the east. The main Lower Mill was south of the railway line along with a railway line spur off the main line into the mill complex. Thirty years ago the local authority cleared the bridge of ivy and brambles to show off the beauty of the bridge and in doing so, they uncovered the remains of a wagon turntable. Sadly nature has since reclaimed the bridge and the industrial archaeological remains... until the next time.

#### **9. Donkey Meadow and The Portsmouth Water Company** (no access, view only)

This field to the east is known locally as Donkey Meadow. On the far side you can see a complex of buildings belong to the Portsmouth Water Company. They are built over the area once occupied by the Upper Mill. At the time of Keats visit to Bedhampton this mill was a threshing mill with a somewhat shady past linked to smuggling. The Portsmouth Water Company bought the land with its plentiful supply of fresh water in 1889 and a water pumping station was opened.

In 1902 the capacity of the Bedhampton pumping

station was increased, and for the next 25 years the freshwater springs of Bedhampton were the main supply of fresh water for the people of Portsmouth.

### **10. The Poor House** (demolished in 1881) formerly known as **The Old Manor House**

The Old Manor House, dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, stood on the south side of Bidbury Lane and at the northern end of the Donkey Meadow. From the few images that survive, the house appears to have been a large, brick and half-timbered jettied house with a thatched roof on the main house and a tiled roof on the west wing. At the eastern end of the house were beds of watercress and a spring head. In the summer much of the view of this area from the road was hidden by a tangled bramble hedge.

### **11. The Manor House** (view from Edward Gardens)

The original Tudor core of this house was probably built by Sir Richard Cotton of Bedhampton and Warblington between 1542 and 1556. Sir Richard died and is buried at Warblington. During the time of Keats visit, the manor of Bedhampton and the Manor House was owned by Mary Bilson-Legge (1780 – 1863). In 1803 she married John Dutton 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron of Sherbourne and heir to the Sherbourne estate. On the death of Mary's father, Lord Stawell in 1820, she inherited the Bedhampton estate and the Hinton Ampner estate (National Trust), giving her the unofficial title of The Heiress of Hampshire. The existing facade and wings to the Manor House were added by Woodthorpe Clark who, in 1845, took a 14 year lease on the house, known then as Bedhampton Manor Farm. The last of the Barons of Sherbourne to stay in The Manor was Ralph Stawell Dutton the 8<sup>th</sup> Baron Sherbourne, who in 1935, moved in whilst his main home, Hinton Ampner, was being remodelled.

From 1941 to 1946 it became the offices of the Portsmouth and Sunderland Newspapers Limited, publishers of the Portsmouth Evening News.

### **12. King's Croft Lane**

Formerly an extension of Bidbury Lane, King's Croft Lane is a fine example of what is known as a 'sunken lane' (as is Lower Road). The sunken nature of the lane has been formed by the actions of running water, the passage of people and the driving of carts and animals along this route for

hundreds of years. This remarkable example remains a quite untouched feature of the village.

### **13. Brookside and Lower Road**

Lower Road in Keats time was known as Lower Way, although locals knew it as Somerway, possibly because it was much easier to pass along it in the summer months. Walking along it today you can see the signs to the left and right, of the 'sunken lane' status; a sign of its heavy use through time. Both Brookside and Lower Road were on the route of the Cosham to Chichester Turnpike Road until 1815 when the Bedhampton Hill Road was added, cutting right through *The Elms* estate making the Cosham to Chichester route much easier to pass all year round and avoiding the awkward series of sharp bends in Lower Road.

### **14. The Rectory**

Much of the original Rectory is hidden behind the high wall opposite St Thomas's Church, but from the elevated area in front of the church you can see the top of the square Georgian porch and the unusual flint dressed coach house at the back of the driveway. This imposing 18<sup>th</sup> century building has many interesting architectural details including blind windows. Over time it became too large for modern church use, and so the much smaller new red brick rectory was built next door (west) in 1953.

### **15a & 15b. Bedhampton Springs**

The fresh water springs that were so attractive to early settlers in Bedhampton are still in evidence and active today. The water-course that runs alongside Brookside crossing under Bidbury Lane is fed by a stream and a spring that surfaces in the rear garden of a house near the top of Brookside. The area where the children's play area on Bidbury Mead is located was once a major spring marked today by a concrete block that caps the spring off. Bedhampton was also popular with travelers and pilgrims where they could once have taken the water at its holy well called St Chad's Spring; possible named after the 7<sup>th</sup> century Celtic bishop, St Chad of Mercia.

### **16. The Elms**

The Elms began life as a farmhouse built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1802, the house was bought by Portsmouth wine merchant, William Turner. Mr Turner set about the gentrification of the house – turning it from a simple farmhouse into a fashionable gentleman's residence with a

striking 'Strawberry Gothic' facade. When John Keats visited the village he would not have seen the Waterloo Room and tower; not built until c1830, but he would have seen this impressive, fresh, bright, fashionable, gothic styled house complete with a large collection of stables and outbuildings.

The Waterloo Room and its distinctive tower were built in the late 1820s as a dining room by the next owner, Sir John Theophilus Lee.

**17. Manor Cottage**

Manor Cottage is one half of a pair of cottages. The missing half was demolished in the 1930s to make way for the building of Orchard Cottage.

**18. Orchard Cottage**

The driveway is built over the missing half Manor Cottage. The Arts and Crafts influenced house was built in 1938 on the site of the orchard that was once part of The Elms estate.

**19. Spring Lawn**

Spring Lawn is a grade II listed Georgian residence that was once the home of James Coldman, the proprietor of Coldman's Stores that stood on the eastern corner at the top of Brookside from the late 1800s until 1971.

**20. Brookside House** (demolished)

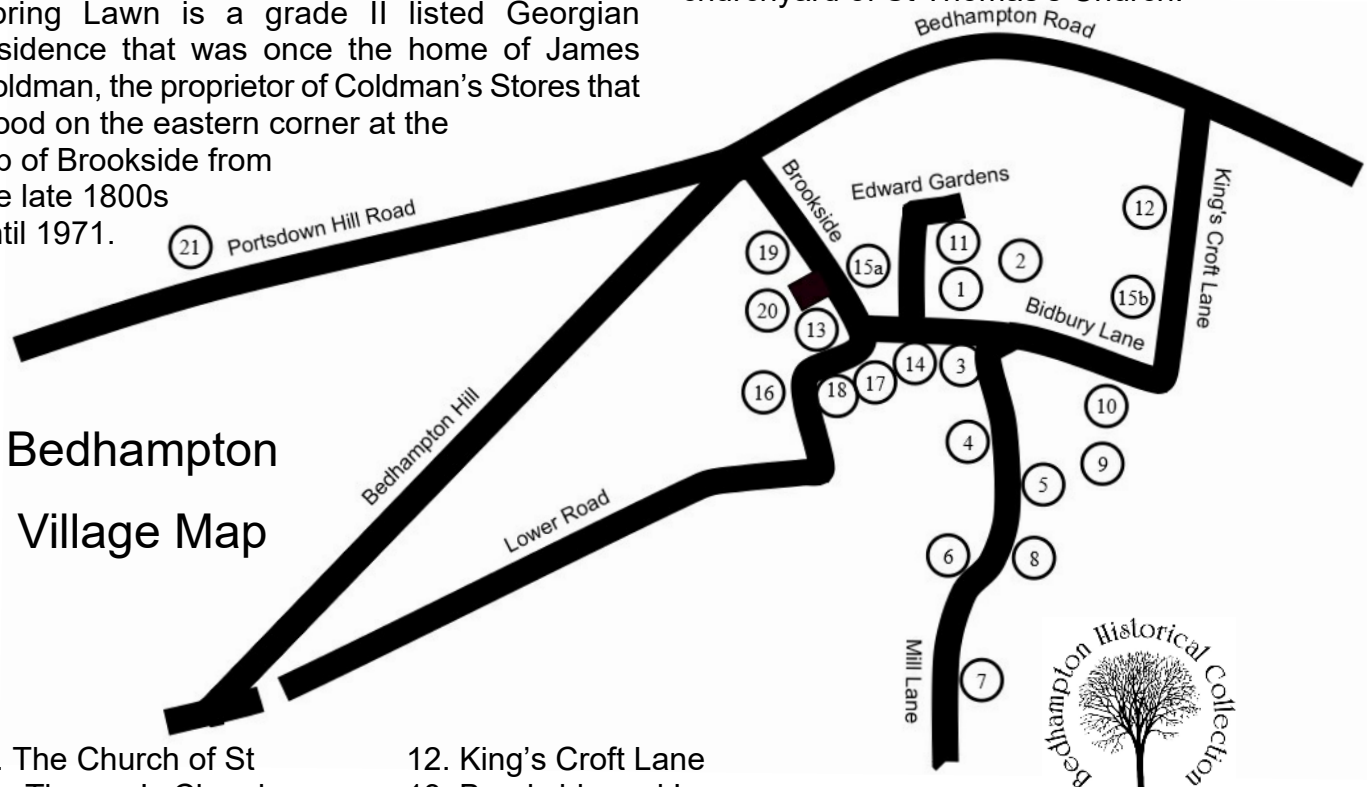
The high red brick walls you can see at the entrance to this cul-de-sac continuation of Brookside, mark the entrance to a substantial property and gardens called Brookside House - demolished in the 1960s.

**21. Belmont Castle**

Note: This location is outside the Bedhampton Conservation Area and across busy roads - Please take extra care when crossing roads.

This dramatic house, formerly known as 'The Towers', was built about 1800. It started life as a 'belvedere' (translates as 'beautiful view') - a room with a view where the owner of the Belmont House estate could entertain his guests for lunch with commanding views of Portsmouth and the Solent. Over time successive owners have added and extended the building to become the house you see today.

Its link to the Keats story is that John and Letitia Snook's son, John bought the house and died there on 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1887. He is buried in the churchyard of St Thomas's Church.



Bedhampton Village Map

- 1. The Church of St Thomas's Church
- 2. Bidbury Mead
- 3. Bidbury House
- 4. The Old Granary
- 5. The Biscuit Factory
- 6. The Railway Bridge
- 7. The Mill House
- 8. View to the east
- 9. Donkey Meadow
- 10. The Poor House
- 11. The Manor House
- 12. King's Croft Lane
- 13. Brookside and Lower Road
- 14. The Rectory
- 15. Bedhampton Springs
- 16. The Elms
- 17. Manor Cottage
- 18. Orchard Cottage
- 19. Spring Lawn
- 20. Brookside House
- 21. Belmont Castle

This guide is the work of the **Bedhampton Historical Collection**

If you have any comments, corrections or suggestions related to this publication or would like to know more about the group, please email: [bedhamptonhc@gmail.com](mailto:bedhamptonhc@gmail.com) or contact us through the Manor Trust office on 023 9248 4444