

# Rutland Local History & Record Society

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## Exton Village Walk September 2025

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### INTRODUCTION

Exton village is about 5 miles north-east of Oakham. The area of the parish is 7.6 square miles and it extends from Rutland Water in the south-west to the Great North Road (A1) in the north-east.



*Exton parish outlined on the Ordnance Survey 1" to 1 mile map.*

The current Exton Park, which is about 2.4 square miles in extent, is to the east of the village and was the site of extensive ironstone quarrying in the 1950s and 1960s. The population of the parish at the 2021 Census was 582, but the highest population was in 1841 when it was 881.

Exton (Ox farm) was recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 when it was in the possession of Waltheof, Earl of Huntingdon. It is mentioned in 1185 as a deer hunting park when it belonged to David, Earl of Huntingdon. It was the earliest known park in Rutland and consisted of a woodland farm enclosed by a park pale.

The manor of Exton was first owned by the Haringtons in the early 16th century, when John Harington married Catherine Culpepper. Sir John Harington built what is now Exton Old Hall in the late 1500s and was created Baron Harington at the coronation of James 1st in 1603. By this time the Haringtons were the most important family in Rutland for influence, wealth and power.

However, following the death of Sir John in 1613, they became deeply in debt and this resulted in the sale of many of their Rutland manors. Exton was purchased by Sir Baptist Hicks, a wealthy London merchant and money lender. He did not have a son but his daughter Juliana had married Edward Noel, the 1st Baron Noel of Ridlington. Consequently, the Noels inherited Exton on the death of

Baptist Hicks in 1629. However, just before he died, Baptist purchased an estate in Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire, and was created Viscount Campden. On the death of Baptist Noel in 1682, Edward Noel became the 4th Viscount and was created Earl of Gainsborough. The titles became extinct in 1798 when the 6th Earl of Gainsborough died unmarried. He was succeeded by Gerard Noel, a nephew who assumed the names and arms of Noel, becoming Gerard Noel Noel and his title was revived as Earl of Gainsborough of the second creation. To this day an Earl of Gainsborough resides at Exton Hall.

### THE WALK MAPS

The maps attached to this walk are based on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25 inch to one-mile map of 1885. Consequently, later buildings, extensions and demolitions are not shown. Numbers in the text, [12] for example, refer to locations shown on the map as 12

### THE WALK

Please:

**Respect private property.**

**Use pavements and footpaths where available.**

**Take great care when walking along or crossing roads.**

**Remember that you are responsible for your safety.**

Follow the first part of the walk on **MAP 1**. It starts at the Village Hall [1] near The Green and across the road from the Fox & Hounds. The hall was opened in 1931 and the custodians are the Countess of Gainsborough and the Parish Council as joint Trustees. It is managed by the Village Hall Committee.

In the memorial garden next to the Village Hall is the Grade II listed Exton and Whitwell War Memorial [2] which was erected by the Earl and Countess of Gainsborough and unveiled by the bishop of Nottingham on 4th October 1922. It is of Clipsham stone and takes the form of a Calvary cross. On the south-east face is a metal sculpture of the Crucifixion beneath a stone canopy.



*The dedication of the Exton and Whitwell War Memorial on 4th October 1922 (Rutland County Museum 2002.6.1103).*

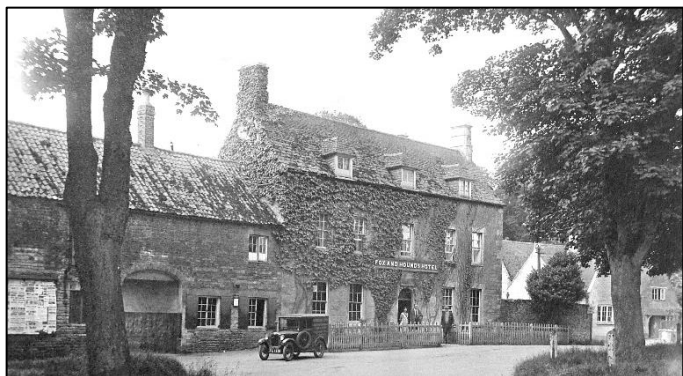
The memorial is dedicated to the memory of the men of Exton and Whitwell who lost their lives in the First World War.

The large house at 4 Oakham Road [3], next to the memorial garden, is *Old School House*, the former Church of England school. When it was established in 1840, a parallel range was added to a mid-17th century house to



create the school. Prior to this it was an ale house. Note the sign *R Kimsey Druggist* above the side door.

This is one of several former schools in the village. There was also a Roman Catholic school in High Street (see later) from 1873. Both were closed in 1967 and amalgamated into the new primary school in Garden Road.



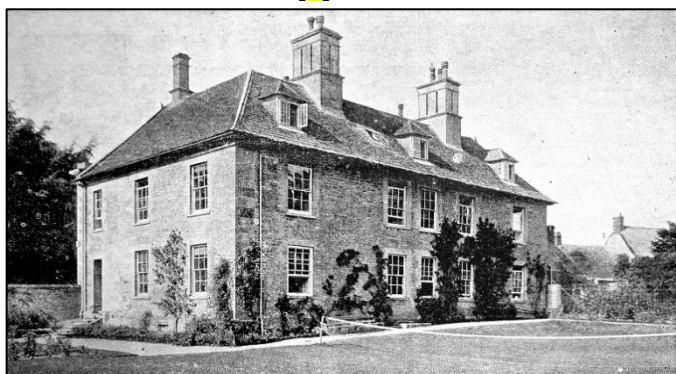
*The Fox and Hounds about 1925*  
(Rutland County Museum 2002.6.1092).

Cross Oakham Road and walk in front of the Fox and Hounds at 19 The Green [4], a handsome Grade II listed three storey early 18th century former coaching inn that dominates The Green. It was occasionally used by servants of important visitors to Exton Hall. The covered way with its segmented arch to the left leads to a courtyard with stables. Including the Fox and Hounds, there were originally four public houses in the village. The others were at 1 High Street, 19 Pudding Bag Lane and 4 Oakham Road.

Walk round to and down Malting Yard. Johnny Castle's bakery was at 3 Malting Yard [5] until 1955 when he moved to the old butchers' shop at 5 Stamford Road. In 1983 a late 17th century bellarmine jar, known as a witch bottle, was found buried in the hearth of a cottage in Malting Yard. It had been placed by the occupier to ward off evil spirits (see *Rutland Record* 35 pp 209-212).

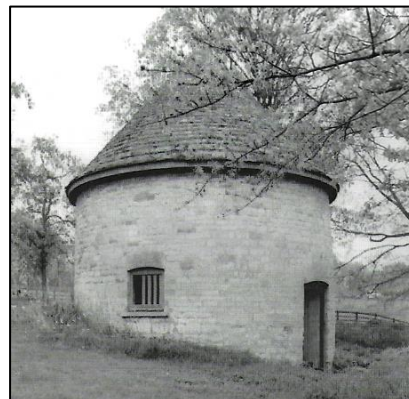
To the east of Maltings Yard is Tudor Cottage at 18 The Green [6]. This small Grade II listed property is probably late 18th century, but it incorporates earlier architectural fragments in the form of stone arches in the gable end walls, possibly taken from the Church when it was restored after the devastating storm of 1843. Tudor Cottage is shown as a school on the 1886 map and it served as a school for infants during the 19th century.

Walk back to the top of Maltings Yard and look over the gates on the right to see the former vicarage, now known as Barham Court [7].



*Barham Court in 1907 when it was still the vicarage*  
(Rutland County Museum 2002.6.1046).

This early 19th century house of coursed stone with ashlar dressings and angle quoins is Grade II listed. It is of two storeys with attics which have dormer windows, and the main room windows are all 12 light sashes. An earlier house is behind its fine 19th century front. It has been a private house since 1938.



*Barham Court dovecote, now converted into a stable*  
(Dovecotes of Rutland by McCann).

At the bottom of the Barham Court garden, but unseen on this walk, is a circular dovecote which has rubble stone walls and a conical tiled roof [8]. It is Grade II listed and probably early 18th century.

Now turn round and walk towards the start of Stamford Road. The last blacksmith in the village was Amos Smith and his forge was at the smithy behind Vine Cottage at 3 The Green [9]. He retired in the 1950s.

Enter the unnamed lane shown as [10] on the map. This area is still known as School Yard. Exton's first school, established under a 17th century charity, stood here on a site which is now in the middle of the road.

Continue along Stamford Road. At the corner of Stamford Road and Blacksmith's Lane [11] is *Courtyard Cottage*. Until 1950 it was a slaughter house in association with the old butcher's shop at 5 Stamford Road [12], where, as previously noted, Johnny Castle moved his bakery in 1955 from Malting Lane.

A single storey building at the end of 5 Stamford Road was a wet fish shop and in the Second World War it was the Exton Home Guard post, but it has since been demolished.

Walk back and turn into Blacksmith's Lane. 4 Blacksmith's Lane was the original blacksmith's cottage and forge [13].



*Blacksmith's Lane in 1910 with the blacksmith standing outside his forge* (Rutland County Museum 2002.6.1096).

The last blacksmith to work at the forge was Tommy (Thomas Richard) Royce, the son of William Royce, also a blacksmith who was living in Malting Yard in 1911.



Tommy was 26 in 1911 and he served in 'C' Company of the First Battalion Rutland Volunteer Regiment in the First World War. He died in 1918.

At the end of Blacksmith's Lane [14], where the new houses now stand, there used to be a threshing barn for use by the allotment holders.

Continue walking round the corner in Blacksmith's Lane and then turn left into Stamford Road. On the right is New Field Road [15], but not part of this walk. It leads to a bridleway across the park from where traces of the ironstone mining can still be seen.

In 1948, the United Steel Company leased Exton Park from the Earl of Gainsborough to quarry ironstone. *Sundew*, the world's largest walking dragline, named after



the winning horse of the 1957 Grand National, was used in the excavations.

*Sundew* worked in Exton quarries from 1957 to the end of mining in 1974, and then walked to a quarry near Harringworth, its final

resting place. *Sundew* was scrapped in 1987 but its cab can still be seen at *Rocks by Rail* (Rutland Railway Museum).

The houses shown on the map at [16] were demolished by Exton Estate to create Top Green, a new green at this end of the village.



*Stamford Top looking towards Top Street. The house on the right has been demolished and this area is now known as Top Green (Rutland County Museum 2002.6.1047).*

10 Stamford Road [17] is Sundial Cottage, a 17th century one-and-a-half storey Grade II listed building which was much altered in the 19th century. Note the pedestal sundial in the front garden.

8 Stamford Road [18] was the home of the village wheelwright and carpenter. As well as making and repairing wooden cart wheels, he was also the village undertaker and made coffins.

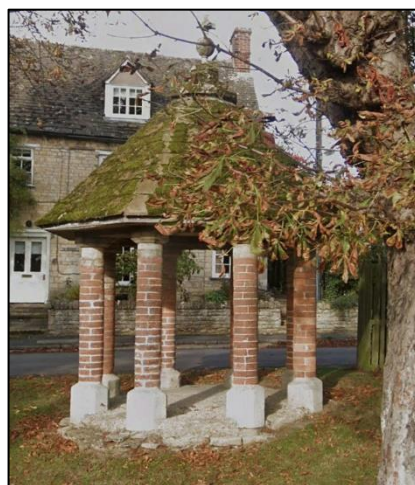
Continue into Top Street. The large stone house on the left at 9 Top Street [19] was built by Exton Estate as the village workhouse, a refuge for the poor and destitute. It was used as such for a few years until the opening of the Oakham Union Workhouse in 1836. 9 Top Street is now a private residence and is Grade II listed.



*9 Top Street was built by Exton Estate as the village workhouse. It is now a private residence and is Grade II listed (RO).*

Cross the road and enter Old Dairy Yard [20]. As its name suggests there was once a dairy here, but the site is now occupied by modern housing built in 2001.

Beyond Old Dairy Yard and as shown on the map [21], there was a Wesleyan chapel here. It was erected as a 'tin tabernacle' in 1908 and survived until 1939.



*Exton pump house (RO).*

Return to Top Street and walk along to the Grade II listed Town Pump [22] at the end of High Street. It is mentioned in the accounts of Exton Estate in 1760 as an established part of village life.

The pump was the only source of potable water for those who did not have their own well. Between the 1880s and 1914 the Earl of

Gainsborough introduced water standpipes to his estate properties and at the roadside. The ram pump for this was at Hawkswell spring, in the spinney near The Brooks on the south-east side of the village. This is still known as Ram Spinney. After the work was carried out the pump became redundant and was later removed.

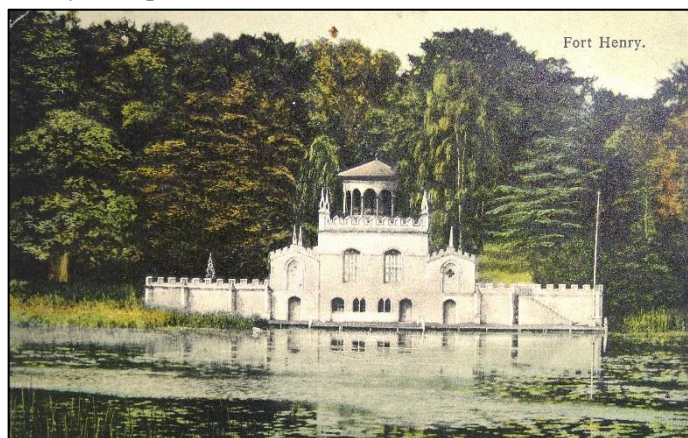


*The former village stores and doctor's surgery in West End about 1910 (Rutland County Museum 2002.6.1045).*



Continue into West End. On the left at [23] is the former village stores and doctors' surgery, now a private residence. There was a Methodist Chapel on the site of what is now Linden Cottage at 1 West End [24], but it closed in 1905.

Now turn right into a continuation of West End [25]. Beyond, but not part of this walk, is a section of Viking Way, a trail of 147 miles between Oakham and the Humber Bridge in North Lincolnshire. This track leads to the Exton Park ornamental lakes and the deserted medieval village of Horn. On the western shore of the upper lake is the Grade II listed Fort Henry which was built for Henry Noel, 6th Earl of Gainsborough in 1789 as a 'Pleasure House'. The lake was used by the Noels for the re-enactment of naval battles and Fort Henry, designed in a gothic style, is where the Noels entertained their guests and celebrated family events. A Bark Temple built of wood and covered in bark and moss was erected about 1846 behind Fort Henry, also for family celebrations. It finally collapsed in the winter of 1997/98.



*Fort Henry in 1907 with the Bark Temple behind (Rutland County Museum 2002.6.1072).*

From West End, turn right into Pudding Bag Lane to see the row of six late 18th century thatched sandstone Grade II listed cottages on the north side [26].



*Line of thatched cottages in Pudding Bag Lane (RO).*

Prior to 1860, Pudding Bag Lane was the main road to Cottesmore. However, after the construction of the new hall (see later), the Earl of Gainsborough cleared the area of houses, and moved the occupants into the main village, making Pudding Bag Lane a cul-de-sac.

There used to be a nursing home run by nuns at the end of Pudding Bag Lane [27] for mothers and babies from the village and also for babies sent from London. It was organised by Lady Agnes Noel and her sister, Lady Norah Bentinck, but it ceased during the First World War. 19 Pudding Bag Lane was one of four public houses in the village, but only the Fox and Hounds survives.

Retrace your steps and turn right at the village pump into High Street. On the right is a large house which was St Mary's Roman Catholic school [28]. It was built in 1873 by the second Earl of Gainsborough following his conversion to Catholicism in 1851. The Church of England children were then educated separately in the 'Old School' in Oakham Road (see [3] above). Both schools were closed in 1967 and amalgamated into the new school in Garden Road. Both buildings are now private residences.



*St Mary's Roman Catholic school closed in 1967, but the bellcote is a reminder of its past (Wikipedia).*

The headmistress of St Mary's from 1919 to 1953 was Helen Buchan who came to Exton from Scotland as a war widow with her three-year-old son, James. James was later the author of *Thatched Village*, first published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1983. In the book, Exton is 'Overton' and Oakham is 'Ashborough'. It is an accurate and entertaining account of life in Exton in the 1920s and 30s.

Continue to walk down High Street. The open area on the right [29] was originally allotments. On the left, 1 High Street [30], a late 17th century Grade II listed cottage with an earlier core, was another one of the four public houses.

From High Street walk past The Green and continue down Oakham Road. The old Horse Pond [31] was on the east side of the road. It was used for washing horse's feet, for swelling the wood of cart wheels in dry weather and also as a sheep wash. The pond was filled in in 1960 after which *Greystone House* and other houses were built on the Church Farm site. The gas works [32] were built in 1870 and closed in 1914. They supplied town gas to Exton Hall,



*Helen Buchan and son James from the dust Jacket of Thatched Village.*



the vicarage, the schools and a few houses in what is now Church farmyard.



*The old Horse Pond was mainly used for washing horse's feet (Traylen, The Villages of Rutland Vol 1 Part 1).*

Continue to walk along Oakham Road away from the village and follow the second part of the walk on **MAP 2**.

Turn right into the lane signposted PARISH CHURCH [33] and walk towards the church along the lane [34]. Earthwork features [35] survive along the south side of this lane and the Exton tithe map of about 1807 shows houses at this location.

This area was cleared of houses by the Earl of Gainsborough to create open views across the park from the Old Hall, but it was severely damaged by fire in 1810 and later replaced by the present hall some distance to the north.

Nearer to the church is the Grade II listed Yew Tree House [36]. It is dated 1788 at the base of the west chimney stack and was the original rectory until the early 19th century when a new vicarage was built at Barham Court (see [7] above). Note the ornate central porch with a leaded roof.



*Yew Tree House (RO).*

Behind the church are the ruins of Exton Old Hall [37], a scheduled ancient monument, but not accessible on this walk. They can sometimes be seen from the churchyard through the foliage.

From the *Stamford Mercury*, Friday 25th May 1810 **FIRE AT EXTON-HALL** – About five o'clock on Wednesday morning [24th May 1810], a fire was discovered to have broken out in the extensive mansion of Gerard Noel Noel, Esq. in Exton Park, Rutland, which raged with great violence till nine o'clock, and destroyed one-half of the house [the South East wing], together with the furniture, pictures, books, and other property, to the amount, it is believed of at least £20,000. The cause of the conflagration is not accurately ascertained; but the fire is supposed to have arisen from some embers of a wood fire in the drawing-room having fallen beyond the hearth stone and communicated to the flooring of the room.

The family being aroused, the two engines belonging to the house were soon brought to bear on the fire, a third engine was promptly obtained from the seat of the Earl of Winchilsea, at Burley, and a fourth from Empingham. By means of these, and the active aid of numbers of the Colonel's tenants at Exton and the neighbourhood, the flames were got under by nine o'clock, after having destroyed all the apartments situated East of the gothic hall.



*Exton Old Hall in 1907, before the second fire in 1915 (Rutland County Museum 2002.6.1122).*

After the fire, the old hall was used as an estate workshop until it finally fell out of use after another fire in 1915. The present hall [38] was built in 1811 around a late 17th century farmhouse by architect John Linnell Boyd and extensively enlarged by C A Buckley in 1850.

The St Thomas of Canterbury Roman Catholic Chapel [39] was built at the East end of Exton Hall in 1868/9 to mark the Earl of Gainsborough's conversion to the Catholic faith.



*Exton Hall from the south in 1910 with St Thomas of Canterbury Roman Catholic Chapel on the right (Rutland County Museum.2002.6.1094).*

From the north-west wall of the churchyard, it is usually possible to see a late 1700s two storey listed octagonal dovecote across the field to the west [40]. It has a projecting loggia or cattle shelter around four sides.

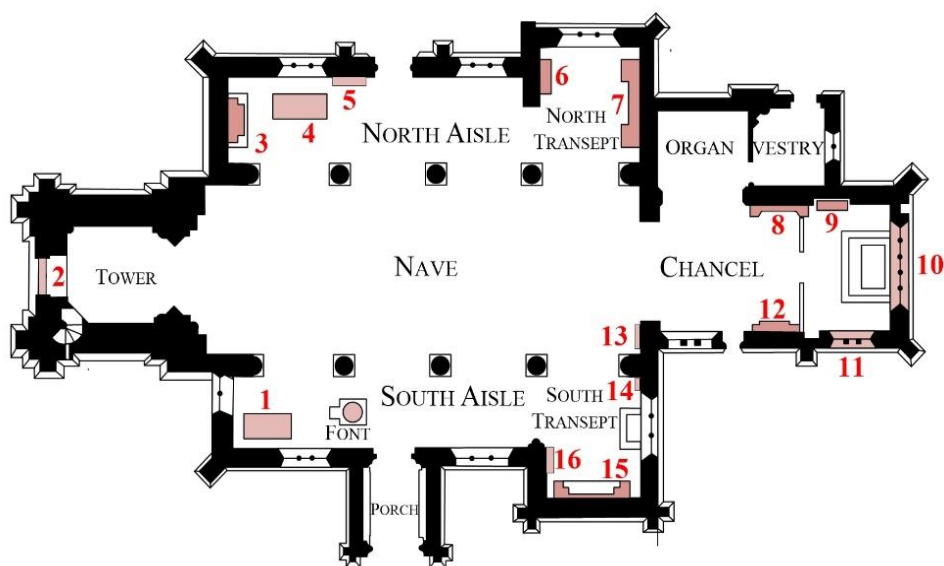




The late 1700s listed dovecote to the west of the churchyard (RO).

Now enter St Peter and St Pauls Church [41] to see the monuments and banners. This is the final part of the walk.

## Exton Church Monuments and Memorials



Clockwise from the font:

### South Aisle

**1.** This is the marble table tomb of John Harington and his wife Alice. He died in 1524.

### Tower

**2.** The Tower window is in memory of the Rev. Leyland Noel, former vicar of Exton parish, who died in 1871.

### North Aisle

**3.** This memorial by Nollekens is to Lieut. General Bennett Noel who died in 1766.

**4.** This black-and-white marble table tomb is of Anne, wife of Lord Bruce of Kinlosse. She was the daughter of Sir Robert Chichester and his wife Frances, one of the daughters of John Harington, Baron of Exton. Anne died in childbirth in 1627 at the age of 22.

**5.** This tablet memorial is to Tom Cecil Noel MC & BAR, of 20 Squadron Royal Flying Corps. He was killed in action in Flanders in 1918.

### North Transept

**6.** The marble effigy of James Noel, second Viscount Campden, who died aged eighteen in 1681.

**7.** This marble monument by Grinling Gibbons depicts Baptist Noel, third Viscount Campden, who died in 1683. With him is his fourth wife Elizabeth Bertie. The panels represent Baptist Noel's four wives and nineteen children.

### Chancel

**8.** This monument is to Sir James Harington and his wife Lucy Sydney. The arms of Harington and Sydney are above. He died in 1591.

**9.** This table tomb is in memory of Nicholas Green who died about 1379. It is the earliest monument in the church.

**10.** The Chancel east window is a memorial to Charles Noel Noel, first Earl of Gainsborough of the second creation, who died in 1860.

**11.** The chancel south window is a memorial to Louisa Hoare, the eldest daughter of Sir Gerard Noel Noel, Earl of Gainsborough. She died in 1816.

**12.** This monument by Nollekens was erected in 1790 in memory of Elizabeth, Countess of Gainsborough who died in 1771, and her two husbands, Baptist, the fourth Earl of Gainsborough, who died in 1751, and Thomas Noel who died in 1788.

### Nave

**13.** This tablet is a memorial to Frances Noel, Countess of Gainsborough, who died in 1885.

### South Transept

**14.** A tablet memorial to the men of Exton who died during the First and Second World Wars.

**15.** This marble monument has the effigy of lawyer Robert Kelway, who died in 1580. It was erected by his daughter Ann and her husband John, Lord Harington. They are kneeling on either side of a small altar tomb.

**16.** A memorial to Henry Lewis Noel of Ketton Hall, the 3rd son of Charles Noel Noel. He died in 1898.

### The Noel Banners

There are 21 banners with heraldic devices and coats of arms of the Noel family hanging high in the nave. These were presented to the church after funerals, but most are replicas of the disintegrating originals.

A new information booklet by Judy Swinfen about the banners is available in the church.

### Sources

Exton church guide.

Exton Parish website.

Scottish Maps online.

Traylen *Schools of Rutland*.

Hartley, R, *The Medieval Earthworks of Rutland*.

Doe, V, *Improving Agriculture in 19th Century Rutland*.

### Acknowledgements

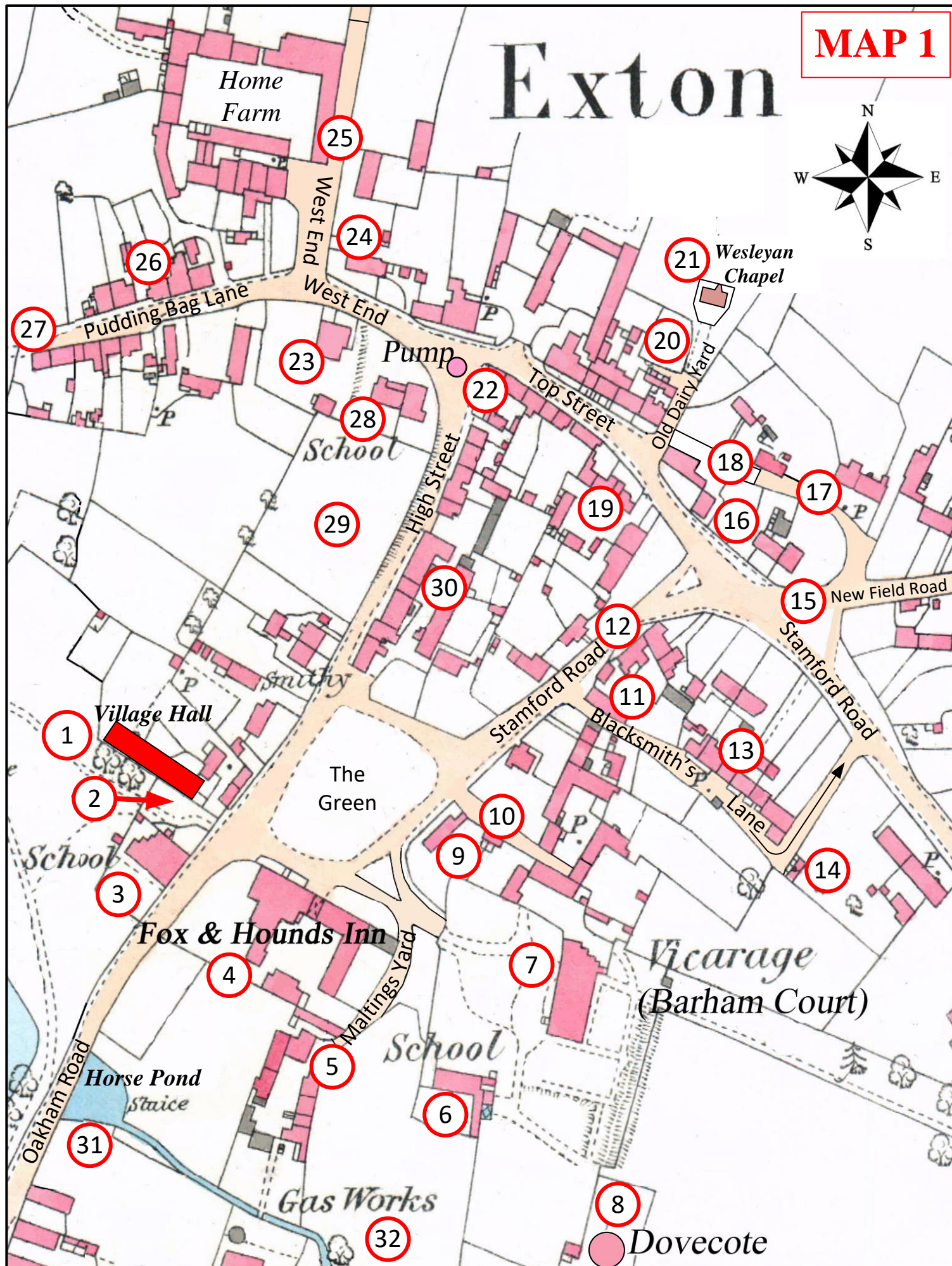
Tim Clough, Hilary Crowden and Sheila Sleath.

Robert Ovens, Rutland History Society





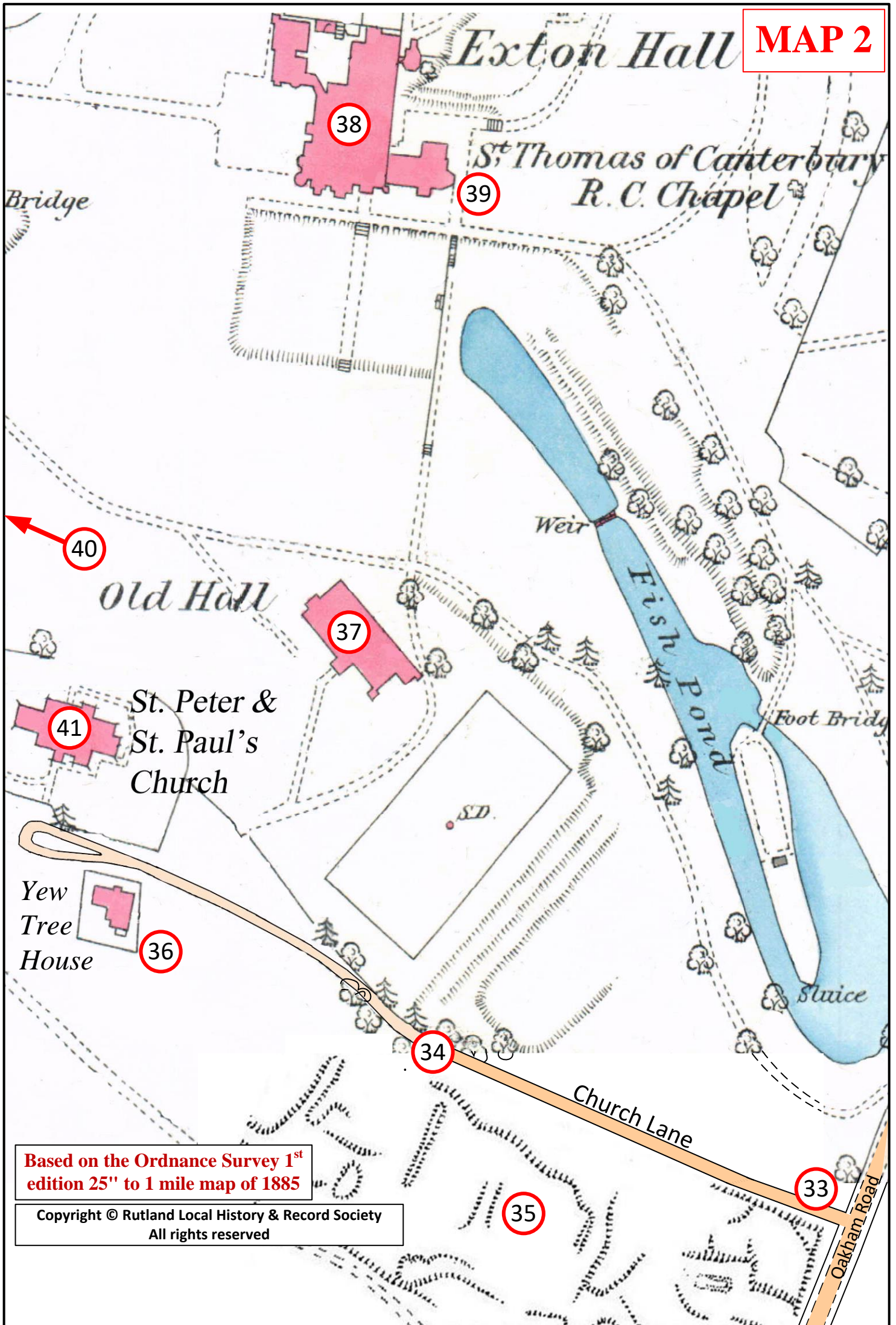
# MAP 1



Based on the Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup>  
edition 25" to 1 mile map of 1885

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Based on the Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup>  
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