

# Chapter 15

## Upton Church

The Church of St John the Baptist is remote and its history is closely linked with that of Castor Church. It occupies a field to the East of the hamlet of Upton, close to woods. It was built in AD 1120 during the reign of Henry I as a Chapel-of-ease to Castor Church. Upton became a separate parish in 1851, and in 1903 was united with Sutton. It is now part of the Benefice of Castor with Sutton and Upton, and Marholm, retaining close historical links with Castor Church.

The right of recommending a member of the clergy for a vacant benefice or making the appointment, the advowson, for the chapel of Upton in connection with Castor was confirmed to Peterborough Abbey by Richard I and Henry III, but the chief right to it was held by the lords of the manor. According to Hugh Candidus, author of *The Peterborough Chronicle*, who lived during the reigns of Henry I, Stephen and Henry II and was ‘...at one time sub-prior of the Abbey, under Abbot Martin and then Abbot William de Waterville...’, a Papal Bull of Pope Eugenius III confirmed Castor and therefore Upton, to the Abbey of Peterborough, including ‘whatsoever goods and possessions...Castor with the church and the chapels adjoining the same church with the mills and all its appurtenances’ [1]. This was during the time of Abbot Martin on 17th December AD 1146. Upton is specified as ‘These estates which are held in fee from the same monastery...; the fee of Ascelin de Waterville: Thorp(Achurch), Marholm, and Upton, with all their appurtenances...’ [2].

Upton Church appears to have two dedications. In 1521 a John Strete of Upton left his body to be buried at Castor, but made a bequest to the ‘Chapel of St Helen of Upton.’ [3] Either the dedication of the church was changed about the end of the 16th century, or within the Church at Upton there was a side-chapel dedicated to St Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine the Great, the first Christian Roman Emperor. Constantine was born in York, and there is a legend that his mother Helen was British. It seems likely that the North Aisle was a chantry chapel dedicated to St Helen, hence the confusion.



Fig 15a. The Church of St John the Baptist, Upton. (Photo: J Tovey)



Fig 15b. Bell Cote

The twin-gabled church building consists of a nave and an aisle of equal width. A bell cote is situated behind a smaller central gable. It houses a single bell, weight 4cwt 3qrs, inscribed 'X T Hulman CW cast 1989'. T Hulman is thought to have been a Church Warden at Upton. This bell replaced two smaller bells and one hand bell that were recorded in 1552.

The aisle was added towards the end of the 12th century, and the capitals and responds of the arcade from that date still remain. The South and West walls of the nave were rebuilt in the 17th and 18th centuries, while the chancel was rebuilt in its entirety in 1842. The chancel arch as described in the *Northamptonshire VCH* has: 'twin half-round shafts on the jambs with cushion capitals, and on the West face a small nookshaft with a similar capital on the North side, the corresponding shaft on the South having been cut away to make room for the pulpit'.

The sanctuary is furnished in the Laudian style – although the furnishing pre-dates Archbishop Laud, who was executed by Parliament in 1645. The altar and altar rails are arranged for Prayer Book Worship of the Jacobean period. The octagonal pulpit is early Jacobean with carved arched panels, probably one of the finest remaining in the country. It is in such good condition due to the isolation of the church itself.



Fig 15c. Chancel Arch - the shafts with their cushion capitals are not later than 1120.

The Font, as it is now, is 17th century. The Altar table dates from c1620, and the altar rails are probably earlier. Behind the rails there are also two Jacobean oak chairs. The church plate consists of a beaker, possibly German c1610, and a paten c1680 bearing the Dove crest, the gift of Ann, widow of Thomas Dove, and a cup dated 1769.

The North Aisle was widened in the 1627 to include the stone steps, piers and balustrading to make space for the Dove family tomb, initiated by Sir William Dove, son of Thomas Dove, Bishop of Peterborough (1601-1630), and nicknamed by Elizabeth I as her 'silver dove' [4].

The tomb is built of Barnack stone with a canopy supported by four Ionic style pillars. On each side is a dove with an olive branch in its beak, the Dove family badge. Under the canopy is the armoured figure of Sir William Dove (died 1633), between his two wives. His first wife, Frances Downhall lies on his right; his second, Dorothy Neville, lies on his left. The tomb and effigies are thought to be the work of Nicholas Stone, Master Mason to James I and Charles I.

There are three sets of arms in the panels on the tomb chest. The West side is the Dove family arms 'of azure, a cross formy between four doves argent' [5]. On the East side the arms are a combination of Dove and Downhall. The quartered arms are 'azure, a cross formy between four doves argent, impaling quarterly one and four, gules, a bend dancetty sable, and Downhall quarterly in two a fesse between six fishes haurient argent and in three a gryphon segreant sable'. The South side join the arms of Dove and Neville, forming 'azure a cross formy between four doves argent, impaling quarterly one and four a saltire ermine; two and three, gules, fretty or, on a canton per pale ermine and or, a lymphad with three masts sails furled sable' [6]. The ship is included because the Nevilles trace their ancestry from William the Conqueror's admiral Neville. On the West wall of the North aisle there is also a wall monument to Mary, wife of Henry



Fig 15d. Pulpit: early 17th century semi-octagonal drum style, elaborately carved with vine leaves, grapes and flowers.



Fig 15e. Paten; engraved 'The Guift of Ann ye widdow of Thomas Dove Esqr of Upton 1683'. (Photo:



Fig 15f. Two Handled Cup: engraved with the sacred chi-rho monogram, assayed Newcastle 1769. 'Donated to the church by William Andrew, priest of Upton. On the tenth anniversary of his ordination in 1869'. (Photo: NADFAS)

Dove, died 2nd Feb 1749, and her daughter Grenvill (sic), widow of Wright Serjeant of Castor, died 15th Nov 1814, with the Dove family crest. The Wingfields, Lords of the Manor of Upton, also had a tomb in the church. According to Strype in his *Life of Whitgift*, Robert Wingfield was granted a licence to build a private family monument with a vault at Upton Church on 9 January 1601. The vault was made on the North side of the chancel. However, the vault was later taken down, or excluded by Sir William Dove. No trace now remains of a monument to any Wingfields in the church.



Fig 15g. Chalice Beaker, dated 1610-1620, possibly of German or Netherlands origin with three medallions of profile heads. (Photo: NADFAS)

Despite the fact that Upton Church is a small and isolated building, it has by far the oldest and most historically interesting wooden furnishings in the benefice. Indeed this may be due to its isolation, as it was by-passed by the Victorian fashion for replacing older fittings. In addition to the fittings already described, the Parish Chest is 17th century oak with iron straps. It is possible that the choir stalls were those shown in an old photograph in Castor Church chancel and moved to Upton in the 1890s. There are, in the church, some fine old brass and wrought iron candelabra brackets. The organ was made by Norman and Beard of Lewes Sussex in 1908. The lectern, serving as the Village War Memorial, was made in the 1920s.



Fig 15h. The Dove Monument: the North aisle was elevated and rebuilt to accommodate the memorial. There are 14 lead coffins in the vault below.



Fig 15i. Masons' Marks: these marks can be found in a number of places, including the balustrade, and appear to be associated with 17th century work in the North aisle. (Photo: NADFAS)



Fig 15j. Altar Table: dark oak, dated 1620, it includes the classic bulbous legs with cups carved with acanthus leaves.



Fig 15k. Chair: dark oak 17th century joined chair, with carved initials 'JD', incorporating older wood carvings. (JD is presumably John Dove).



Fig 15l. Chair: dark oak, engraved 'Joane Browne A WANTED NOT D 1700'; joined chair again incorporating older wooden panel.

Outside, there is an intricately carved sundial in the field South of the church – which formed part of an Elizabethan garden linking the church and the Manor – dating from the time of Charles I.

It is a pedestal with regular plinths and base mouldings. It is designed to show the hour of the day as the sun shadows each compartment during its course, but there was no gnomon on the top of the dial. The West elevation was believed to have given the hour seven times from the seven planes contained in the main compartment [7].

A local legend attached to the church suggests the presence of a tunnel linking the church with the manor house. The legend has it that the church was once a cell of the Abbey of Burgh, and that Benedictine Brethren accumulated treasure there, which was never accounted for when they left. According to the tale, a local farm worker who was sinking a post hole close to the church came across a stone slab, which when raised revealed a paved tunnel. One end was said to lead to a secret exit from the church and the other end was found to be blocked by a fall of stone. Could there still be hidden treasure in Upton? Who knows?

More recently a banner was sewn by Rosie (Mimi) Goodacre to celebrate the Millennium. The present Church Wardens, Michael Longfoot of Model Farm and Peter Harris of Top Lodge Farm, were both born in the parish. It is likely that Upton Church, in the near future, will revert to the status of its first 700 years, that of a Chapel-of-ease in Castor parish.

John Howard

### Notes

1. Hugh Candidus, *The Peterborough Chronicle*, Ed by WT Mellows, reprint 1997, published by Peterborough Museum Society, p51.
2. Ibid p53.
3. Wills in Northamptonshire Probate registry, Bk B fol 142. Noted in Northamptonshire VCH, p485.
4. Arthur Mee, *King's England*, 1945, p338.
5. Arms of Dove, Sir Bernard Burke, *The General Armory of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales*, London 1878, p296.
6. W Ryland Bedford, *The Blazon of Episcopacy*, London 1858, p89.
7. Rev Kenneth Gibson, *Antonine Itinerary* 1800, pp228-229 from a description given by John Carter FAS who drew several illustrations of the dial.

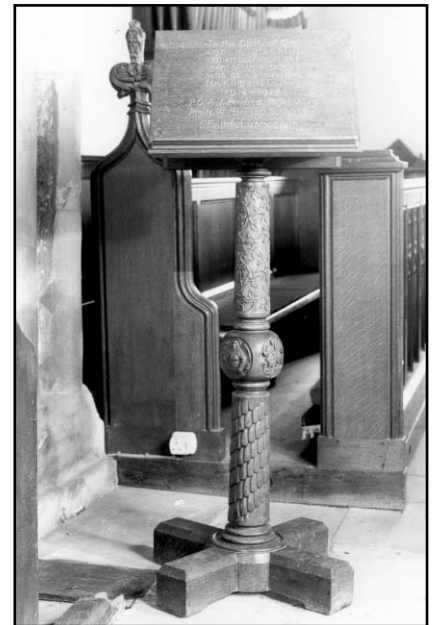


Fig 15m. Lectern: 1920s, in memory of PO AJ Pendred, Royal Navy, and Pte HW Hornsby, Suffolk Regt, with roundels carved on the column symbolising the four evangelists.

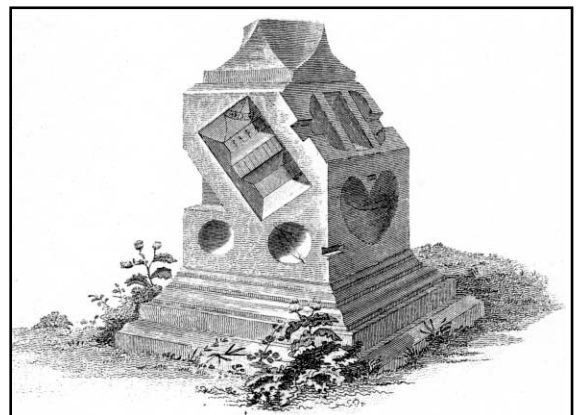


Fig 15n. Sundial: intricately carved sundial in the field South of the church dating from the time of Charles I. (As published by Bridges, 1796)

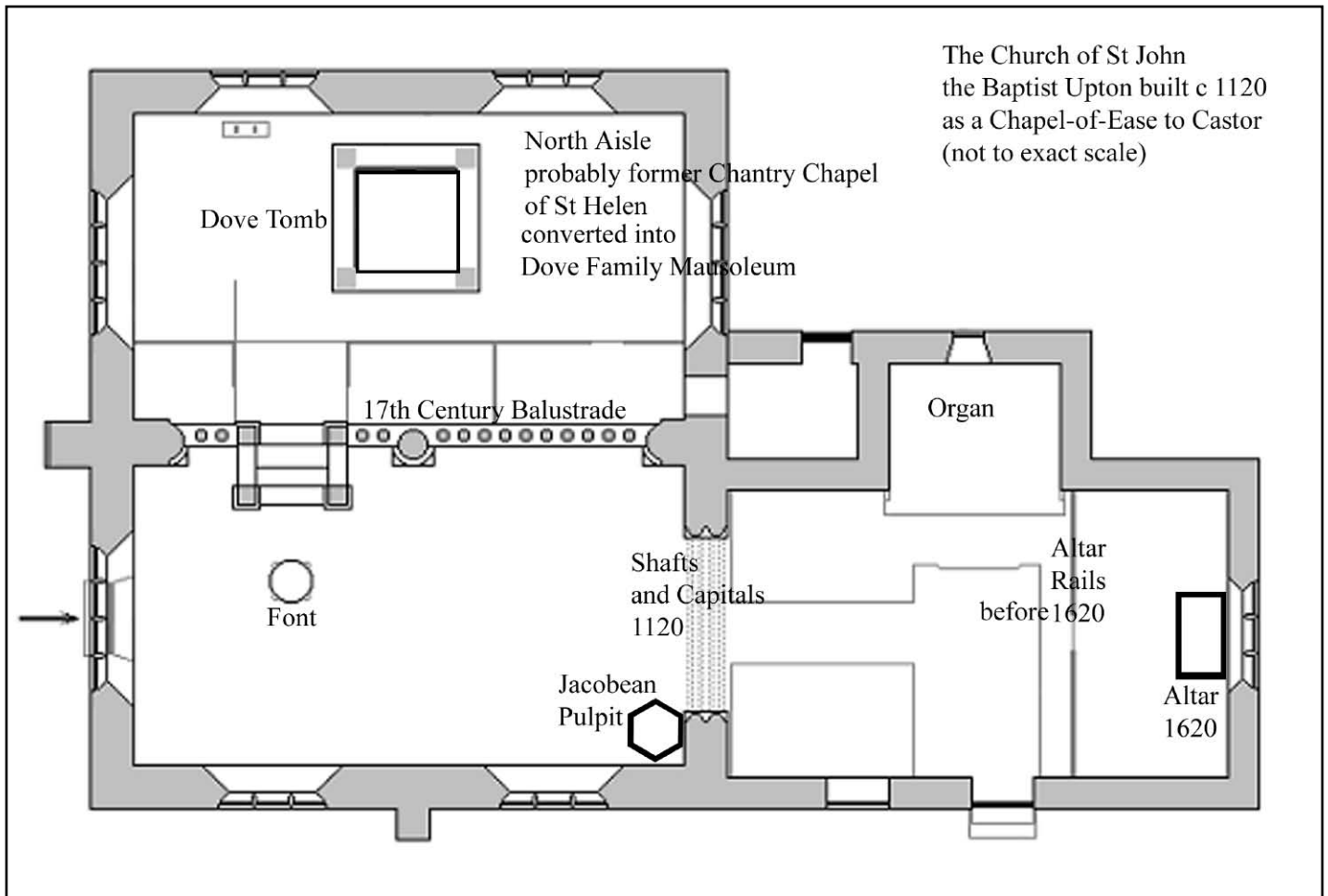


Fig 15o. Plan of Upton Church.

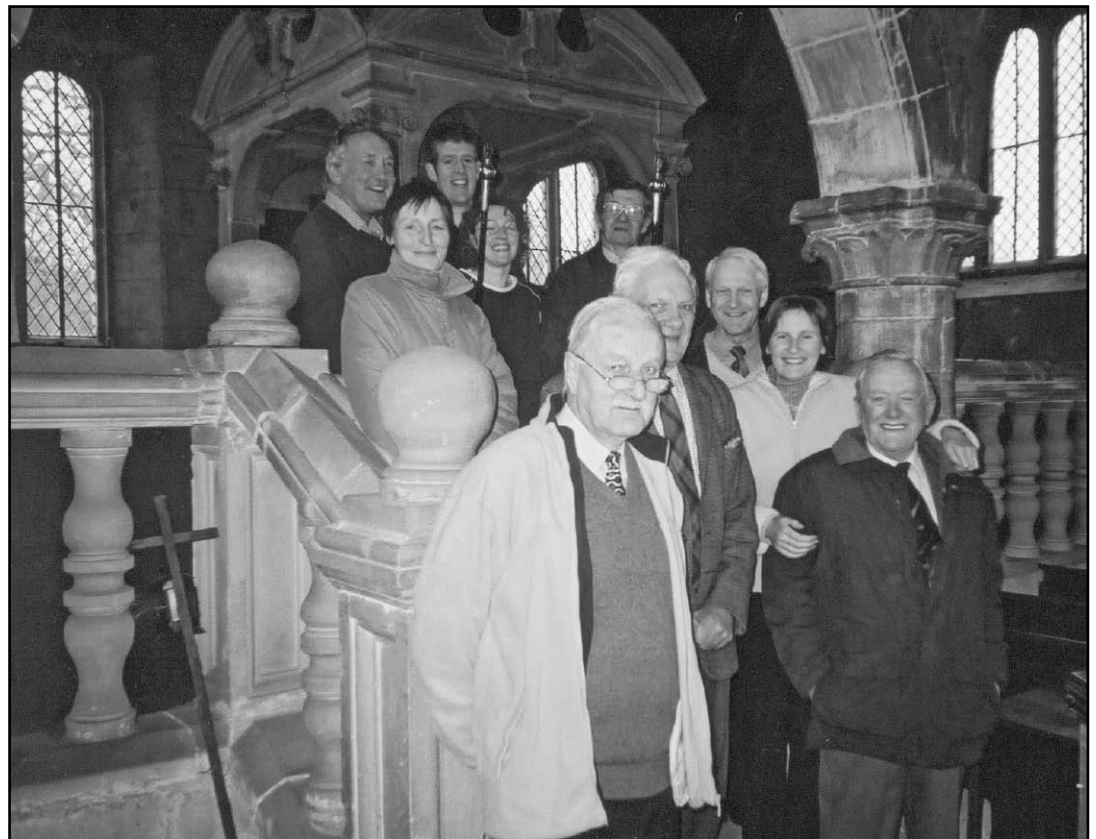
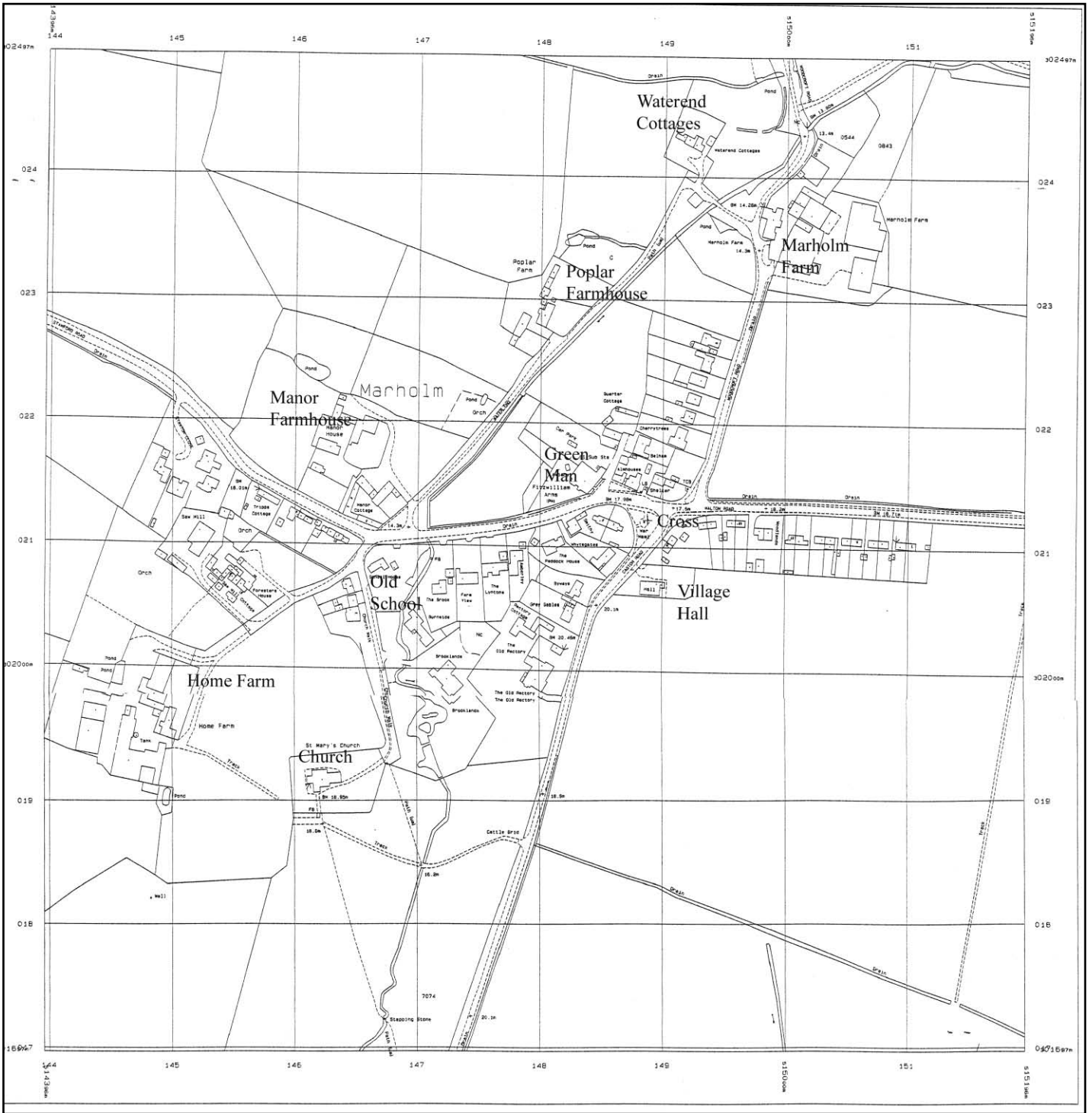


Fig 15p. Some Upton Church people 2004 (l-r)  
 Back: Peter Harris (churchwarden and farmer), Mark Blackmore, Claire Harris, Corinna Blackmore, Michael Longfoot (churchwarden and farmer); Front: left Basil Dean (organist), Keith Garrett, Chris Harrison-Smith (retired farmer), Anne Harrison-Smith, Allen Herbert (retired farmer).



Map of Marholm. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey mapping on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office  
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