



THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST



# CHURCH OF ST MARY

Hardington Bampfylde,  
Somerset



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1 West Smithfield London EC1A 9EE

Tel: 020 7213 0660 Fax: 020 7213 0678 Email: [central@tcct.org.uk](mailto:central@tcct.org.uk)  
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*Hardington Bampfylde, Somerset*

## CHURCH OF ST MARY

*by Henry Stapleton (Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, Dean Emeritus of Carlisle,  
and Trustee of The Churches Conservation Trust 1976–98)*

### HISTORY

Hardington Bampfylde is one of many places where the second part of the name is that of a family providing a special and distinctive identity. 'Hardington' is perhaps a 7th- or 8th-century place name indicating the 'ton' or village of Heardred's people. Bampfylde is the name of the owners who acquired this land in the 15th century and who lived here at the big house which they built. Their fortunes, for good or ill, are reflected in the fabric of the small church and, in particular, the memorial tablets. Osbert Lancaster, in that magnificent pastiche of parish histories, tells of the family history of the Parsley Ffidgetts in *Draynefleete Revealed*. The Bampfylde could almost be his model.

*Front cover: Exterior from the south-west  
(Boris Baggs)*

*Left: Interior looking east  
(Christopher Dalton)*

Hardington is a very small settlement. It was recorded in Domesday Book as being held by Ralph from the Bishop of Coutances. Later it came under the Abbey at Keynsham. Probably the Black Death of 1348, when two priests died within a year, marked the shrinking of the size of the village. But the arrival of the Bampfylde family in the 15th century and their building of the Manor House restored its fortune. The family was staunchly Royalist and it is reported that King Charles I came here. Certainly, it was given

special protection by the Royalist Army and its wealth in the 17th century is reflected in the monument to Warwick Bampfylde (d. 1694).

In the 18th century the parish was united with neighbouring Hemington. Services were rarely held and indeed it was reputed to be a peculiar – a private chapel for the family. However, in 1884 an illegitimate son, the Revd Charles F B Bampfylde, became rector and served here for over 40 years. The big house, damaged by fire in the early years of the 18th century, survived in



## EXTERIOR

part until after the Second World War. With the sale of the estate in 1859 the Bampfylde connection ceased and the community declined in size. In 1962 Hardington church lost its status as a parish church, becoming a chapel of ease to Hemington. Its fabric deteriorated until it was rescued by the Friends of Friendless Churches who carried out considerable repairs in the late 1960s. In 1971 it was formally declared redundant and vested in the Redundant Churches Fund, now The Churches Conservation Trust.

The church consists of a chancel, nave and small west tower. The earliest surviving parts of the building are the 12th-century Norman chancel arch and the font. The nave and its windows are late 14th century. In the early 17th century the nave ceiling was introduced and the north wall of the chancel rebuilt. A doorway was constructed in the classical style in the 18th century. A major restoration took place in 1888–89 under Sir George Gilbert Scott when the east and south walls of the chancel were rebuilt.



## INTERIOR

The interior of the church wears a Georgian air. The nave is furnished with box pews, possibly of 1815–30, with a larger one on the north side for the Bampfylde family. Opposite is the two-decker pulpit, with the clerk's pew below, of c.1780; the communion rails are of a similar date. The walls were once covered in texts and several are

still decipherable: 'Keep thy foot when thou goest to the House of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools'. The floor is of Keinton stone, much of it tessellated.

Over the chancel arch are the royal arms of Charles I, dated 1640 but repainted since. There is a small bell by John Packer of Bristol of c.1700.



### THE BAMPFYLDE FAMILY

Both fabric and monuments illustrate the close connection between the church and the Bampfylde family.

Mention has already been made of the first member of the family, John I. The church tower dates from about the end of the 15th century

and may have been built by Peter Bampfylde. More likely, however, it was built by his son John II (1469–1525) who built the Manor House and no doubt had an interest in the structure of the church too. It was he who inserted an heraldic window (now lost) depicting the arms of the Bampfylde family and their relatives.





Chancel looking east (Christopher Dalton)  
 Left: Monument to Colonel Warwick Bampfylde (d.1694) (Christopher Dalton)

He was a wealthy man and left his ten children well provided for. Sadly his memorial brass is now lost. During Thomas Bampfylde II's hundred years (1520–1620) the chancel arch was restored; he outlived his son John, who died in 1611, and was succeeded by his grandson Thomas Bampfylde III (d.1656) who gave the communion cup and cover in 1638. His son John Bampfylde died in 1661 and asked to be buried near the communion table.

The next Bampfylde was of a rather more colourful character. Colonel Warwick Bampfylde, an hospitable hunting squire, died without issue in 1694. There is a very imposing monument to him in the sanctuary, possibly by one of the Stanton family of London. Sir Charles Bampfylde, son of Richard Warwick Bampfylde and a friend of the Prince of Wales, succeeded to the estate in 1776, but was the victim of a murder in London in 1823. His monument in the chancel is

by Chapman. Sir Charles' wife is commemorated by a monument by the same sculptor and by the hatchment made at her death in 1832 which now hangs in the church.

Sir Charles' illegitimate son, the Revd Charles F Bampfylde, was a parson of some notoriety, famed for his riding boots peeping below his surplice. He also was incumbent of Dunkerton and was known as 'the Devil of Dunkerton'. His monument by Reeves is in the chancel. He was, however, wise in his appointment of the Revd Whitwell Elwin (1816–1900) as his curate. Elwin became a well-known man of letters and built the quirky church of Booton in Norfolk (now also in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust). For Elwin his time at Hardington was the happiest in his life.

In 1859 the estate was sold by auction and the family connection came to an end.

# THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the national charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource. In 2009 the Trust celebrates 40 years of saving historic churches at risk.

There are over 340 Trust churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from ancient, rustic buildings to others of great richness and splendour; each tells a unique story of people and place. All are worth visiting.

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We strongly recommend checking our website [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk) for the most up to date opening and access details and directions.

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

*Historic churches, due to their age and previous use, often have uneven and worn floors. Please take care, especially in wet weather when floors and steps can also be slippery.*

## MAKING A DONATION

Your donation, no matter how small, will enable The Churches Conservation Trust to save more historic churches across England. If you would like to make a contribution, please use a Gift Aid envelope located at the church you visit, see our website [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk), or contact our fundraising team on 020 7213 0673.

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