Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire: archaeology and history (summary for visitors prepared by the Royal Archaeological Institute, 2017)

On the edge of Jurassic hills that provide high-quality limestone for building, including the local Ancliff Oolite, Bradford-on-Avon is overlooked by Budbury, an Iron Age hill-fort partly excavated in the late 1960s by Geoffrey Wainwright. Near to it is a Roman winged corridor villa, which Mark Corney investigated in 2002-3, finding mosaics, one cut by a circular feature interpreted as a Christian baptistery (Corney 2003). The hill-fort could have been brought back into post-Roman use: there is a twelfth-century reference to an Anglo-Saxon battle at *Wirtgeornsburh*, i.e 'Vortigern's fort', perhaps identifiable with a battle recorded as fought between West Saxons and British in 652 at 'Bradford near the River Avon'. To the north is a Roman road which runs between West and East Wansdyke. A church was built somewhere in Bradford by Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury, at the end of the seventh century; probably a 'minster'; it may underlie Holy Trinity (below).

Bradford-on-Avon: Barton Farm and town. By Pam and Ivor Slocombe

Shaftesbury Abbey acquired a large estate centred on Bradford in *c.* 1001, and retained ownership throughout the Middle Ages. Its demesne centre was at Barton (Slocombe and Slocombe 2016), where the two-tier cruck roof in the barn has a dendrochronological
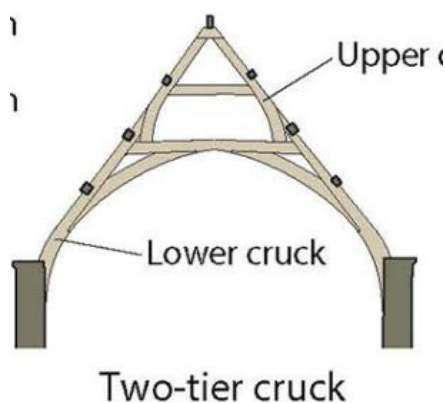

Air photograph of the Barton farm complex, with the great barn in the foreground, the steward's house in the background, and the 'little barn' on the left; excavation in the 1980s showed that that replaced a much larger barn at right angles to it (photograph by courtesy of English Heritage)

date of 1334x79, and documentary evidence shows its existence by 1367 – fourteenth-century investment despite widespread economic problems. Also part of the complex is a house (N.B.: private) probably used by a steward; the oldest part is the north wing of 1400, originally a separate chamber-block with a cruck roof. The hall range was rebuilt in the late fifteenth century. Other farm buildings include a 'little barn' of cruck construction with timbers of 1290x1325, but recently rebuilt after a fire, and a granary, a fourth cruck building on the site, dated to 1370x90.
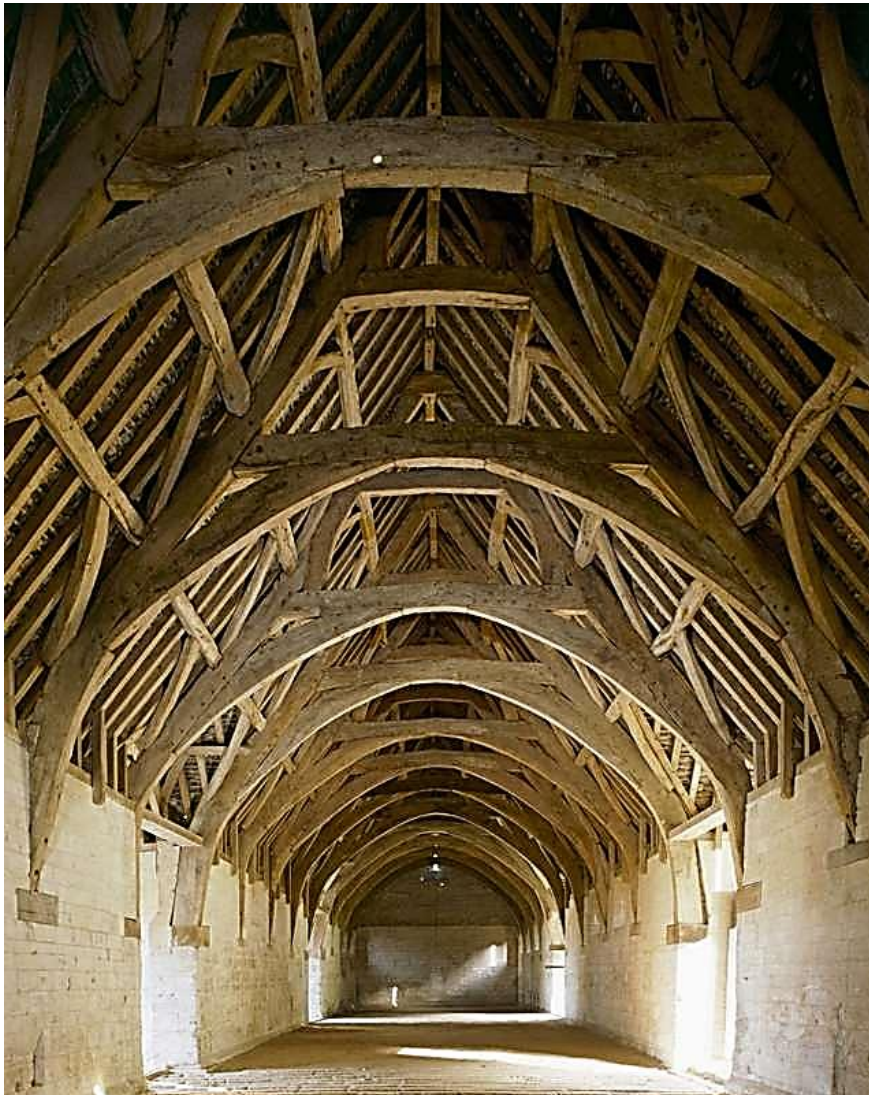
The complexity of the fourteenth-century timber roof in the great barn was designed to make the building as wide as possible without interior posts, making it easier to get carts in. As well as a store, the barn was a work-place; the floor between the doors was deliberately made rough so that grain could be threshed, separating the seeds from the chaff - which would be blown out of the barn by having the great doors on either side open. The curved timbers are crucks; the origins of this form of construction remain debatable, but by the end of the thirteenth century was increasingly used; 'full' crucks went right up to the apex of the ceiling, and usually went all the way down to the ground; the bottom ends of the barn's crucks may have been truncated. An unusual feature is that some of the principal crucks do not go right up to the apex, but support 'upper' crucks standing on the collar beam. (Illustrations by courtesy of English Heritage; compare Avebury on-line entry).

Two-tier cruck
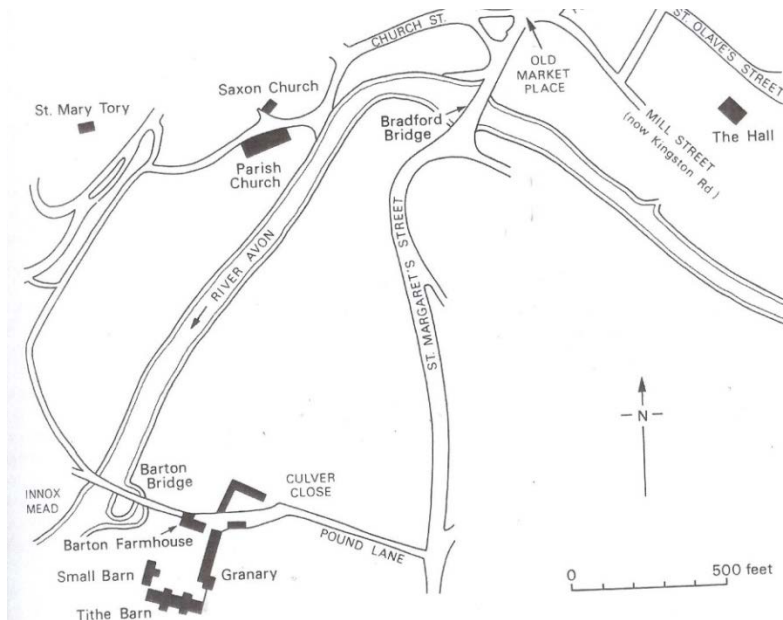
From Barton Farm, the church precinct is reached by a short river walk from which can be seen the vicarage, rebuilt in the nineteenth century, and the Chantry, a priests' house much enlarged and embellished by clothier families in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Slocombe, P. and I. 2015). A modern footbridge crosses the river and leads to the church.

A twelfth-century writer claimed that a church had been built in Bradford in the late seventh century by St Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury and the first bishop of Sherborne. Holy Trinity Church contains no Anglo-Saxon work, but excavation in 2016 by Wessex Archaeology located burials, from which an early radiocarbon date has been obtained,
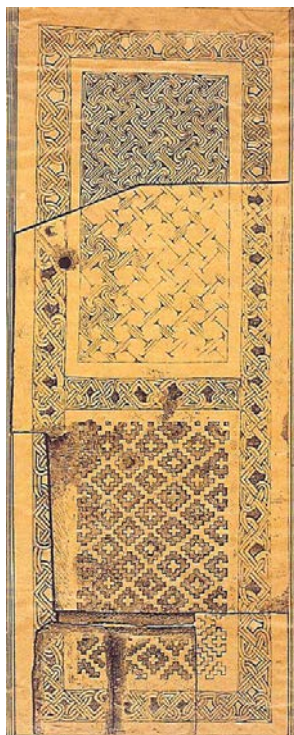

supporting the view that this was the site of the 'minster'. The church now has a partly Norman chancel, and a wide nave and side aisles. The north aisle contains the family chapel and chantry of Thomas Horton, and there is a brass commemorating him and his wife. An exceptionally long squint is cut through the north crossing pier; squints allowed a priest in an aisle to observe when a colleague at the high altar raised the Host during the Mass, but they may also

have allowed people to make their confessions through them to a priest seated unseen in the chancel. Bradford's, perhaps uniquely, has an inscription carved inside asking for prayers for Thomas Horton, the inscription making him an unforgotten 'presence' in the church (Roffey 2004).

Another indication of the early status of Holy Trinity is an elaborately carved seventh-/eighth-century slab found built into
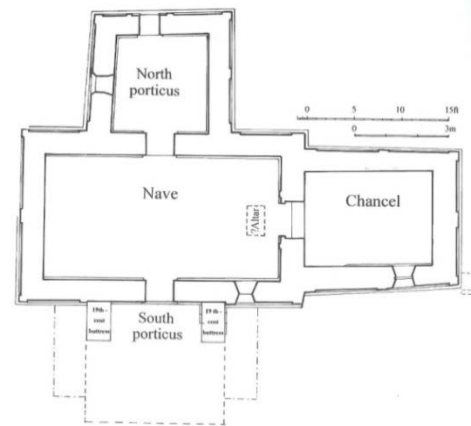
its fifteenth-century porch (Cramp 2006, 205); it is now in the Chapel of St Laurence (a modern dedication), with other Anglo-Saxon sculptural fragments. This much-studied building is almost incontrovertibly not Aldhelm's work, but can be ascribed to Shaftesbury Abbey soon after the nuns were given the estate. They had custody of the relics of Edward the Martyr, and may have wanted a refuge for them during Viking raids. Of finely-built masonry, it is very high in relation to its width, and consisted of a small nave and chancel, with two side porticuses, that on the south side having a crypt below it, now infilled (Hinton 2009).

It has elaborate blank arcading, and Jeremy Haslam has recently argued that details of this show that the building was left unfinished (2013); if that is correct, the intention might have been to build a larger nave to the west, so that the present one would have been a crossing. Discussion is made difficult by all the changes made when the chapel became a school at the beginning of the eighteenth century, with the west wall rebuilt, floors and chimneys inserted, and the south porticus demolished. The building's age began to be revealed when in the mid nineteenth century the two eleventh-century flying angels were found on the wall of the crossing (Cramp 2006, 203-4).

One of the two sculptures of angels found while the chapel was in use as a school, with a tentative reconstruction of a cross-section to show how the Anglo-Saxon work may have been intended to appear, with the main altar in the nave under a Crucifixion (Hinton 2009 for chapel illustrations).

An architect, J. T. Irvine, made detailed records of the chapel soon after its discovery. This drawing of the north side shows the chancel on the left, which in the 1860s was being used as a house, its door having cut through the Anglo-Saxon masonry, and its two windows showing how floors had been inserted inside. The ground had built up to the right, obscuring the plinth, and a drying-shed for textiles had been added to the end of the north porticus. The nave was being used as a school (Taylor 1972 for this and Irvine's other drawings).

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The drying-shed in Irvine's drawing underlines the importance of the woollen cloth industry to Bradford, from the thirteenth century to the twentieth. A fulling mill is recorded in 1249, a wool-monger and a wealthy dyer in 1332, when there were also weavers in the town. The fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were the period of the greatest prosperity; the stone house of the clothier Thomas Horton was built in about 1500 on the site of the medieval manorial court house, north-west of the church (N.B.: private). He also paid for the church house nearby.

Near the chapel, in Barton Orchard at the west end of Church Street, a terrace of woollen workers' housing dates from about 1775. It was built by Samuel Cam, a clothier living at the Chantry who also had a mill and dyehouse close by. Many clothiers lived close to their works, as there were no fumes from steam engines until the 1820s. The two upper storeys of the terrace were separate tenements reached from the hillside behind, and the top storey has long windows to provide light for the domestic workers. Further up the hill is the monumental Seven Stars Brewery, built into a quarry. The west end is of about 1840 and the long malthouse was added in about 1856. Next to it behind a wall is Lady Well, a medieval holy well from which water was ducted in several directions by a clothier in the mid seventeenth century.
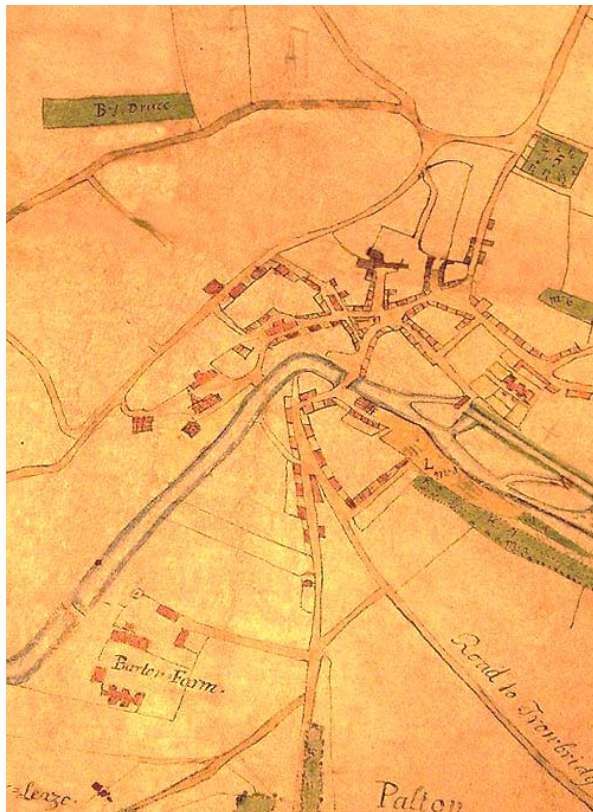
The hillside above the chapel has three tiers of houses; plots were leased for building by

clothier Anthony Methuen between 1693 and 1703, and these were used for two terraced rows of houses for weavers and other artisans. Newtown is at the bottom, Middle Rank above. A third row, Tory, was added above them; the more imposing houses at the west end were added after 1796.

Weavers' terraced houses in Newtown; the upper stories had large windows to light the looms inside (photograph by courtesy of Kingstons Estate Agents)

Directly above Lady Well is the hermitage chapel of St. Mary Tory, perhaps another candidate for the site of Aldhelm's church. From Tory on the southern edge of the hill-fort, there are magnificent views over the town. Returning to Newtown, the rear of the fifteenth-century Priory Barn (so-named in the nineteenth century), a warehouse with a gatekeeper's house attached, can be seen on the edge of the medieval borough.

Bradford market was worth 45 shillings in the late eleventh century; it might possibly have then been closer to the church, with a river crossing there. If so, it was relocated to a triangular site, now encroached on (compare Salisbury on-line entry), with a market house, the Tolsey, still identifiable by a fifteenth-century doorway, and with medieval and later buildings in The Shambles.

Early map of Bradford-on-Avon with Barton Farm lower left. Holy Trinity is on the north bank, with buildings behind it that unknowingly included the Anglo-Saxon chapel. Thomas Horton's house is the large precinct to the east, from which Church Street leads to the triangular market-place. A nearby textile mill was fed by a leet from the Avon, behind which is the mansion called the Hall. The map is dated 1767, but may copy an earlier one as only a single house in the Newtown development is shown (reproduced from www.freshford.com, 1917, believed to be a copy of Bristol Archives DC./E/27/33, now missing).

To the east of the town the Hall is a fine house, probably a remodelling of a medieval house soon after 1610. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was leased to clothiers and in 1807 Kingston Mill was built adjoining the river. In 1848 Stephen Moulton, who had bought the Hall, used the disused mill as a rubber factory. Other nearby mill buildings were later acquired.

A bridge is referred to in the late twelfth century, probably on the site of the present Town Bridge, which has nine arches with two original pointed and ribbed arches remaining

The bridge from the west, downstream side, showing the lock-up, with Kingston Mill in the background (photograph by Adrian Pingstone reproduced under common licence, accessed from Wikimedia)

at the south end (Slocombe 2013). The lock-up attached on the upstream side was a medieval bridge chapel mentioned by John Aubrey when he visited the town. A new building was constructed on the original base, probably in the early eighteenth century. The single room with a fireplace may have had various uses including a short-term jail. By the nineteenth century it was divided into two cells with iron beds. The bridge, only 10 feet wide, was doubled in width in 1768-9. Abbey Mill of *c.* 1875, is now converted into flats. It is architecturally ambitious, a mixture of Classical arcading with Gothic windows and machicolation. It was for steam-driven cloth-weaving looms, so the interior had to be well-lit.

Abbey Mill from the east. On the slopes in the background to the right are two terraced rows of houses for weavers and other artisans, built between 1693 and 1703. Tory, the row above, was built slightly later and the more imposing houses at the west end were added after 1796 (photograph by Jonathan Billinger reproduced under CC BY-SH 2.0, accessed from Wikimedia).

Some fine seventeenth- and eighteenth-century stone houses are on the south side of the river. Also on that side of the river is the Bradford-on-Avon Museum.

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These notes were originally prepared for the annual summer meeting of the Royal Archaeological Institute held in July 2016; see www.royalarchinst.org for further information. RAI members have access to the printed Report which contains syntheses of the significance of recent archaeological research to archaeological understanding of the county. The RAI is grateful to Pamela and Ivor Slocombe for their guidance when the RAI visited, and for the notes above. Other on-line entries can be accessed through the RAI web-site.