

Elstow Green

Once part of the property of Elstow Abbey, this picturesque open space was the centre for the nunnery's annual commercial fairs, which were so large that they also occupied several surrounding fields. These rowdy markets were the inspiration for John Bunyan's "Vanity Fair", in his book "The Pilgrims Progress". The stone stump, at the western end of the green, is all that remains of the Market Cross - which denoted that the fairs were Royal Chartered markets.

Elstow Village

Elstow dates back, at least, to Saxon times but most of its present pretty timbered buildings are from the 13th, 14th and 15th century. Most of these buildings were probably constructed on the orders of the Abbess of Elstow, to provide homes for the Abbey's estate workers and shops and inns for the many visitors to what was then England's 8th richest Benedictine nunnery.

Abbey Church

This church is the remaining part of the 11th century Abbey and retains many Norman features. It is unusual in having a completely separate, 13th century, bell tower. More information about the Abbey and the Church is available in Moot Hall.

Website: www.elstow-abbey.org.uk
email: info@elstow-abbey.org.uk

Opening Times

Moot Hall is open to the public from 1pm to 4pm on Saturdays, from Easter (or the beginning of April) to the end of October. It is also open on all Bank Holiday Mondays.

Group bookings can be made for other times, on every day of the week, throughout the year.

Other places of interest

John Bunyan Church and Museum in Bedford gives a fascinating and vivid insight into his life and times. Visit the Museum and Bunyan Meeting Free Church in Mill Street, Bedford MK40 3EU.

www.bunyanmeeting.co.uk/museum
01234 213722 Open 11am - 4pm Tuesday to Saturday from March to the end of October (Closed Good Friday). Admission Free.

Moot Hall Disabled access

The lower floor has ancient timbers, which sit proud of the surface and may cause difficulty for some wheelchair users. The upper floor may be reached by stairs or stairlift. The floor of the main room is sloped.

Car Parking

Moot Hall's car park is immediately on the right, just as you enter the green. The Abbey's is at the far end of the green, on the left.

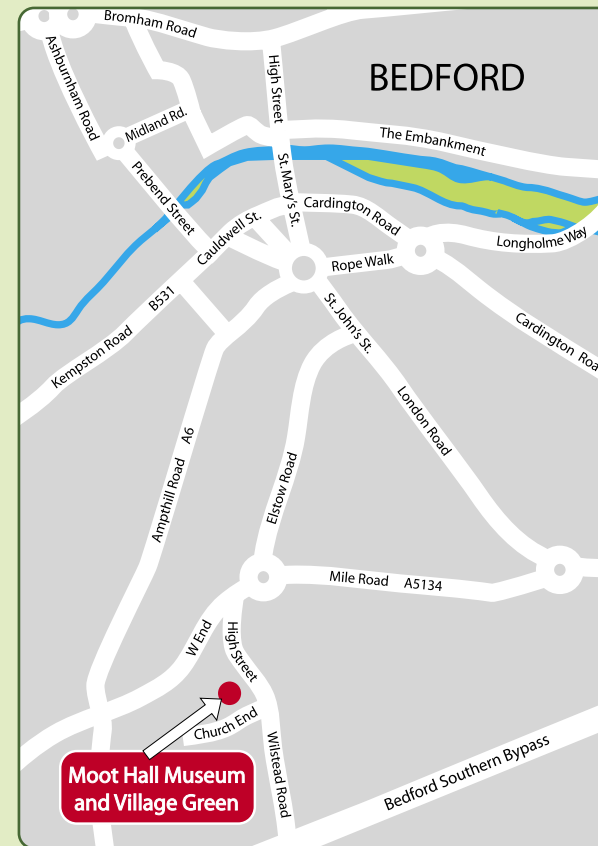
How to get to Elstow

Elstow is on the south side of Bedford and is clearly signed from the A6 and A421 - follow the brown Heritage signs for Moot Hall and the Abbey. Church End is off Elstow High Street, opposite the black and white Tudor cottages.

Public transport

From Bedford Bus Station take the Stagecoach - S1 bus or the Grant Palmer X44 bus. These both stop in Elstow High Street. Alternatively, take the more frequent number 9 Shortstown bus from Bedford Bus Station, get off at the first stop in Mile Road. Cross the road and walk clockwise around the roundabout, past Wadsworth Court, until you come to the footpath/cycleway which leads into the top end of Elstow High Street.

For more info please contact 0870 6082608
www.stagecoachbus.com or www.grantpalmer.com
There is also a taxi service from Bedford Railway and Bus Stations.



Contact Us

Moot Hall Museum and Village Green

Church End, Elstow
Bedford MK42 9XT

☎ 01234 266889
(only manned when museum is open)

@ moot.hall@bedford.gov.uk

🌐 www.moothall.weebly.com



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Introducing

Moot Hall & Elstow Village Green

A medieval market house and museum in Elstow, Bedfordshire.



Welcome to Moot Hall and Elstow Village Green

Now a conservation area, here you can relive 17th century history and enjoy the tranquil place where John Bunyan grew up.

Moot Hall

Set in the ancient village of Elstow, near Bedford, on the picturesque village green, stands the Moot Hall. In addition to a collection of medieval furniture, the museum contains many items relating to the life and works of Elstow's world famous author, John Bunyan.

Originally known as the "Green House", Moot Hall was designed as a market house and built on the village green for the nuns of Elstow Abbey.

The Abbess had a royal charter to hold an annual four-day fair, from 2nd to the 5th May. These were not like modern-day fairs but were commercial events, where all sorts of products, livestock, clothes, food etc., would have been sold. In keeping with the size of the Abbey, Elstow's annual fair was large, occupying not just the present village green but also several of the adjacent fields. The Abbey gained a considerable income from these fairs by charging rents for stalls and booths and levying tolls for entry. The nuns may have also had their own stalls from which they sold produce from the Abbey, its gardens and fishponds.

Such was the scale of these fairs, that the Abbess ordered the construction of a building to house four shop units and which, between fairs, would be used to store all the stalls and other equipment that was needed. Hence, Elstow's "Green House" built; its timber frame constructed from sturdy green oak beams, infilled with bricks; the interior partitions were of wattle and daub and the roof clay-tiled. The building was extended about 100 years later, so that the ground floor contained two extra bays, providing two extra shops and two rooms, which may have been a 'hospitium', i.e., accommodation for important visitors to the Abbey.



The upper floor of the Green House was used during the fairs as a Pie Powder Court, where petty thieves and traders breaking weights and measures regulations were dealt with. This room was also used by Elstow's Manor Court.

With the dissolution of the monasteries, the Green House passed through the ownership of Sir Humphrey Radcliffe, Sir Thomas Hillersden, then to Samuel Whitbread who, in 1950, gave it to Bedfordshire County Council to restore.

Throughout the 19th century, the upper room had two uses - as a school and a chapel - by the Elstow congregation of the Bunyan Meeting Church. It was probably during this time that the Green House began to be referred to as 'Moot (meaning 'meeting') Hall'.



The Restoration of Moot Hall

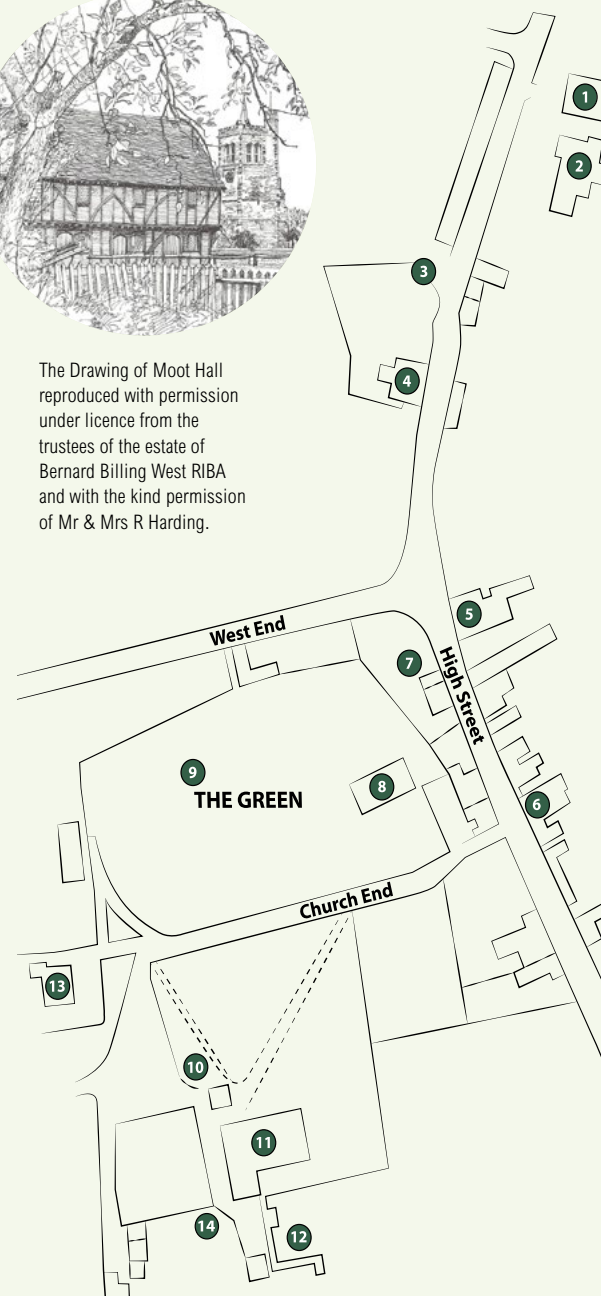
Moot Hall was restored to its original medieval form for the Festival of Britain in 1951, when it was opened to the public as a museum of 17th century life.

The building was taken back to how it was when first constructed. To ensure its long-term survival, Moot Hall was given some modern additions - damp-proofing treatment and electric power and heating. Wherever possible, reclaimed period materials were used and Moot Hall's existing materials re-used - the Hall still has its original roof, under a newly - added one. Where items, such as doors and windows, had to be newly made, these, together with all their fittings, were constructed to be just as they would have been in medieval times.

Map



The Drawing of Moot Hall reproduced with permission under licence from the trustees of the estate of Bernard Billing West RIBA and with the kind permission of Mr & Mrs R Harding.



1 Elstow Bunyan Christian Fellowship

2 Old School

The village school was originally housed in Moot Hall until 1873, when it moved to this site.

3 Site of Bunyan's Cottage

After serving in the Parliamentary Army, John Bunyan married and lived in Elstow High Street.

4 St. Helena Restaurant

Takes its name from the Abbey Church of St. Helena.

5 Red Lion Pub

Relax with a meal and a drink.

6 Bunyan's Mead

The black and white timber framed cottages were purchased by Bedford Borough Council in 1979 for £1 and renovated for use as sheltered housing.

7 Post Office and village shop

8 Moot Hall

9 Stump of Market Cross

John Bunyan used to play 'tip cat' here - a cross between rounders and keepy-uppy!

10 Bell Tower & Abbey Church

The present church was originally part of a much larger Abbey. The west door and tower are referred to in "Pilgrim's Progress" as the 'wicket gate' and the tower from which Beelzebub shot arrows. The tower is unusual and rare, in that it is separate from the church (no-one knows why). The only other example in Bedfordshire is in Marston Moretaine.

12 Ruins of "Elstow Place" and Hillersden Mansion

All that remains of Thomas Hillersden's 17th century mansion, formed out of part of the former Abbey's cloisters.

13 Vicarage

14 Summer Tea Garden

Open 11am to 4pm Friday to Monday, April to September