

Pictorial History of Burnham

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Burnham is an ancient hamlet on the Bath Road, which may have been inhabited before Roman times. Burnham is mentioned in the Domesday Book and in Medieval times had a market and a fair.



A by-road leads to the 13th-century **St Peter's church** with its array of brasses and tombs, some of which date from the 16th century. The oldest part is the tower which is believed to date from about 1200.



Burnham Abbey founded in 1266 by Richard, Earl of Cornwall (King John's second son) stands south of the main Bath Road and is closer to Dorney Village than to Burnham. After the Dissolution, the abbey fell into ruins but it has been revived and is now the centre of a community known as 'The Sisters of the Precious Blood'. Lancet windows, early doorways and parts of the Chapter House and cloisters serve as reminders of the older foundation. Indeed, more survives of this abbey than of any other monastic institution in Buckinghamshire.

Adjacent to Burnham, is **Hitcham** whose small church has work of many styles and dates from the Norman period onwards. The brick tower is Tudor, the chancel arch is Norman and the chancel is of the 14th century. In the chancel windows is 14th-century glass showing the nine Orders of Angels and the four Evangelists. Nearby are the ancient walls and two huge iron gates which once enclosed the mansion where Sir William Clark entertained Elizabeth I the year before she died.



Close to Burnham Abbey is **Huntercombe Manor**, which is now a centre for the rehabilitation of young people who have had recourse to drugs. Although mostly of the 19th century, this Grade 1 Listed Building does contain a rather splendid 14th century beamed hall.

North of Burnham, past the golf course, is '**Dorneywood**', an estate of 215 acres owned by the National Trust. The house (built in 1920 and containing decorations by Rex Whistler) acts as an official residence for a Minister of the Crown traditionally the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Adjoining Dorneywood are **Burnham Beeches**, the habitat of a wide section of wildlife. The Beeches have long been the rendezvous of artists, poets and country-lovers. Thomas Gray was a frequent visitor during his time at Stoke Poges. Burnham Beeches are a relic of the great primeval forest that covered much of Buckinghamshire and they form the finest woodland tract anywhere near London. In 1878, the woods – 375 acres in all – were saved from despoliation when they were purchased by the City of London and in 1921 Lord Burnham gave the 65 acres of Fleet Wood. With adjacent Dorneywood, Dropmore and Cliveden, there is thus an area of well over 1300 acres here that is preserved as a natural open space for all time.

