

II. THE CAM, GRANTA AND RHEE







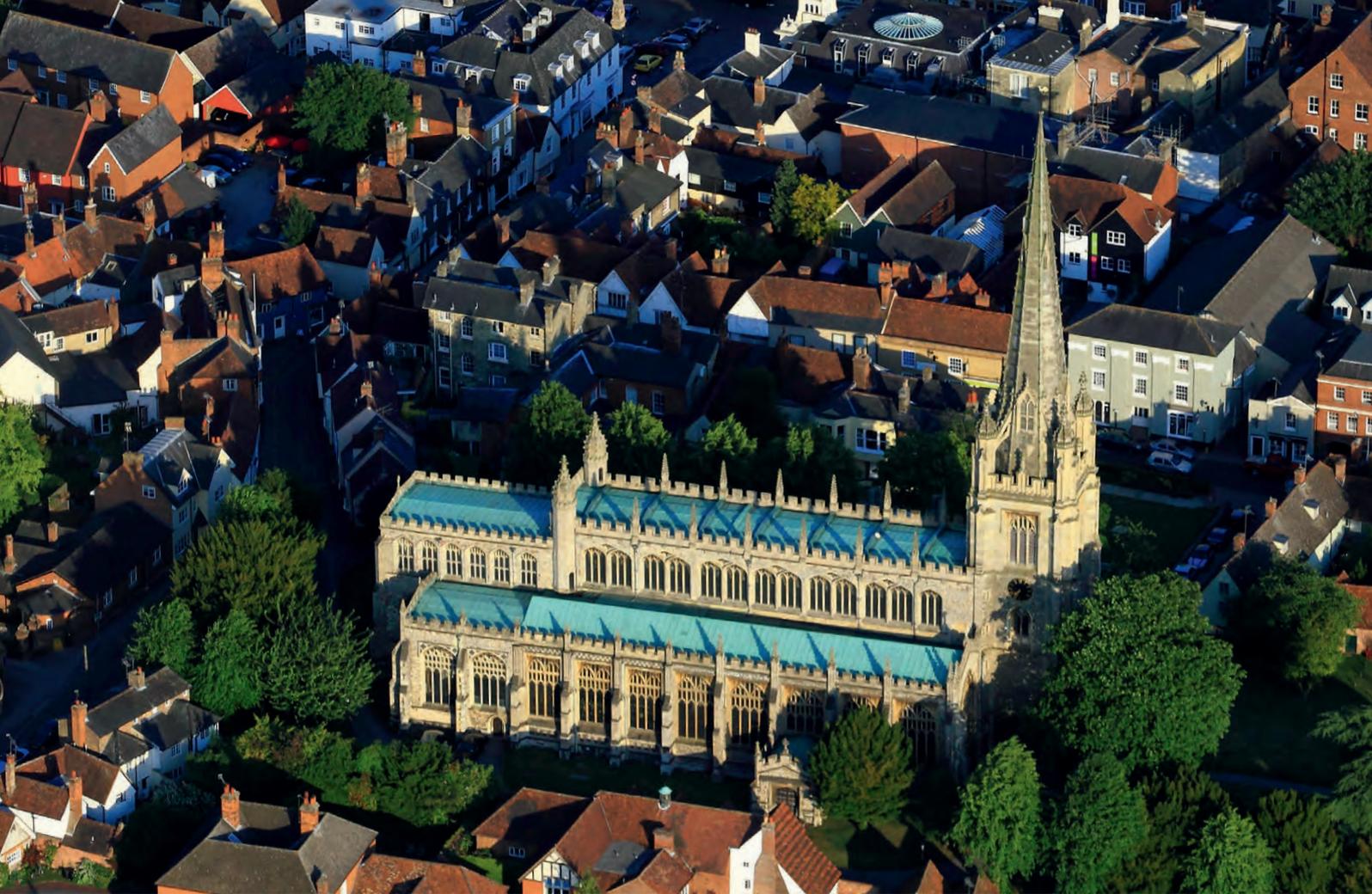
The Cam's most southerly source is five miles south of Saffron Walden at Uggley. From here it has a steady downhill run on its journey north to Cambridge. Strikingly, such a gentle slope is just what a railway also needs (p 24). The Cambridge line from Liverpool Street Station in London runs up the River Stort to Stanstead then, criss-crossed by the River Cam beneath it, runs down again through Newport, Audley End, Great Chesterford to Whittlesford and Shelford. The last three stops tell you in their '-ford' names that they were places where one might easily get across the river. This intertwining of river and rail is more elegant than the iron fist of modernity that drove the M11 on its parallel course (p 120).

Henry VIII gave the Walden Abbey to Thomas Audley in 1538. Audley End House, built 1603-1616, has the finest frontage of any house on the Cam outside Cambridge. The river was re-routed through the grounds in the 16th century. The first Baron Braybrooke in 1763 hired Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and Robert Adam to re-design the gardens and the bridges. Here, the Cam, its level carefully controlled by weirs, has been allowed to fill the lake which graces the Park. Behind the house, the superb geometry of the gardens speaks for its opulence and style. Lord Braybrooke sensibly kept the railway line at a distance to the west, in a tunnel through the hill.

The Arabic word 'Za-faran', for the spice, gave its name to Saffron Walden. Through the Middle Ages *Crocus sativus* was grown extensively around the town as a minor but lucrative industry. The crimson stigmas from the purple autumn flowers of the saffron crocus were greatly prized for their fragrant perfume and their deep yellow saffron dye: to make just ten kilos of saffron one needs a million flowers. The town's Church, the largest and probably the finest in Essex, is dedicated to St Mary the Virgin. Its spire is 59 metres high and so greater than the length of the entire building.

The wealth and patronage of Audley End is matched in the 21st century by the Wellcome Trust's Genome Campus. Set in the idyllic grounds of the Hinxtton Hall estate the campus plays host to scientific research, courses and conferences, and a publicly accessible nature reserve. Here the river has an area of wetland which might act as something of a sponge in times of flood. Otters are now resident on this stretch of the river.

Duxford is celebrated today for its housing of the Imperial War Museum's collection of aircraft. The links



above: Saffron Walden: The Church of St Mary the Virgin

below: Audley End House

