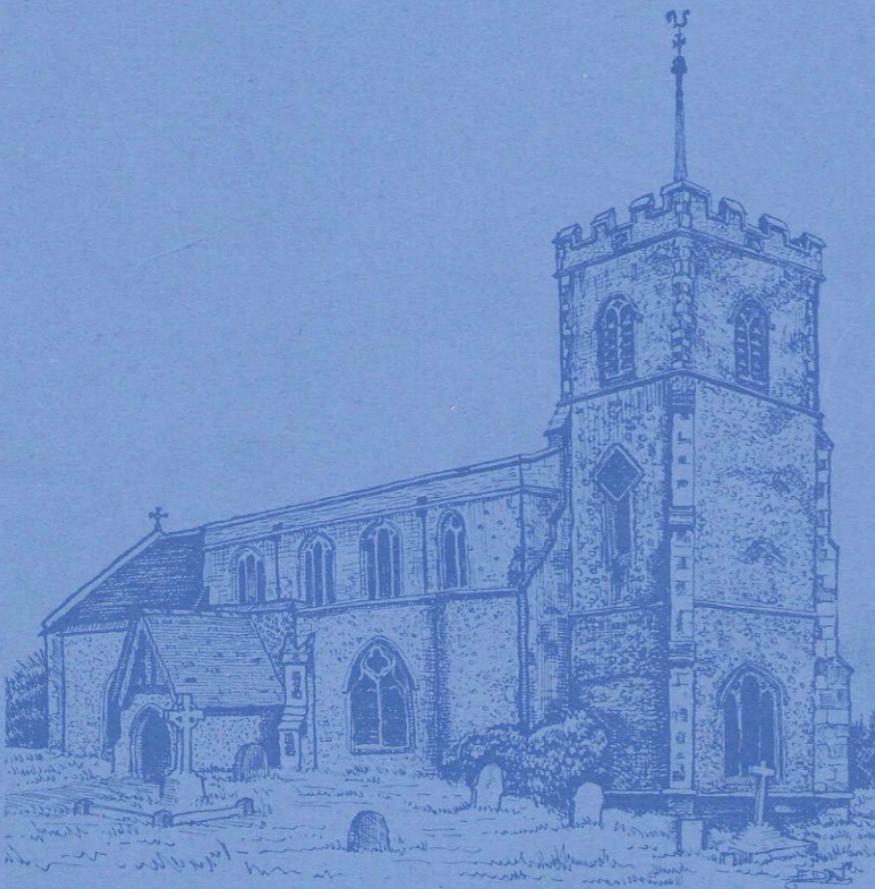


The Church of St Laurence, Foxton



A Short History and Guide

PRICE 50p

FOREWORD

The first edition of this short history of Foxton Church, printed in 1973, has sold out, and I am delighted to be able to thank those who have so generously given of their time and skills in helping to produce this second edition.

Thanks are due, firstly, to Mr Rowland Parker, author of 'The Common Stream' and of the first edition of this short history, who has revised some details of his original text for this edition. Secondly we are grateful to Mr D. Challis, churchwarden and production director of the Burlington Press, for his professional skills in printing this booklet. Thirdly we are grateful to Miss Jean Cassell for producing the typescript from which the printers have worked. Finally we are grateful for an anonymous loan to guarantee publication. Any profits from the sale of this booklet will go to the Foxton Church Restoration Fund.

I would like to end this foreword by repeating three sentences which the Rev. J.W. Pearson wrote for the foreword to the first edition. 'I am also indebted to Mr J. Cox of Foxton for the two excellent photographs of the Church ... I hope the parishioners of Foxton as well as visitors, will learn something of the Church's history. We have a lovely historic building, and it is our duty to pass it on intact to future generations.'

Foxton Vicarage
May 1983

Bob Burn



St. Laurence's Church, 1983

A R R A N G E M E N T

	Page
Church No. 1 Saxon, ca 980	1
Church No. 2 Norman, ca 1140	2
Church No. 3 Early English, ca 1240	3
Church No. 4 Decorated, 1318-1338	5
Church No. 5 Perpendicular, 1456-1523	7
Church No. 6 Restoration, 1876-1886	12
List of Vicars of Foxton	16
Chronological Guide for Visitors	18

THE CHURCH OF ST. LAURENCE, FOXTON

There has been a church on this site for more than a thousand years. Six churches, if one considers each re-building as a new church. The dates given for the first three are speculative.

Church No. 1 Saxon, ca.980

It is almost certain that a church existed here in Saxon times. It would have been very small, built of timber, wattle and daub, with a thatched roof. All that survives of its fabric is the bowl of the font, now incorporated in the present restored font. It is the rarest feature in the church, almost unique, remarkable only for its antiquity, for it is as crude an example of the stone-mason's art as one could ever hope to find. It could have been adapted from a block of stone which once formed part of a Roman temple or other monument.

This first church, like its successors, was dedicated to St. Laurence, who in 258 A.D. was one of the deacons of Pope Sixtus II in Rome. When ordered by the civic authority, then opposed to Christianity, to produce the "treasures" of the Church, Laurence assembled the poor people to whom he had distributed alms. Whether he was beheaded, or burnt on a gridiron - as popular legend says - Laurence died for his Christian faith and charity.

Church No. 2 Norman, ca. 1140

A more solid church was built in the first half of the 12th century. Much of it survives, but very little of it is visible. It was built of chalk, with infilling of rubble and window-facings of stone. Part of a double-light window can still be seen on the outside at the east end of the chancel, which was the nave of the Norman church. The original chancel has disappeared, except for a few traces of the foundations. There were four round-headed windows in the nave, two on each side; a round-headed door in the north side, and a west door in the centre of what is now the chancel-arch. The walls were three feet thick, as they are now. Outside the west door was buried a stone coffin, which was dug up in about 1730. William Cole, local historian, noted the remains of the coffin in 1742, also the presence of two Rayner memorial slabs "under the pulpit", which was then on the right-hand side. It is more than likely that this coffin contained the body of the founder or benefactor of this church, but his identity will never be known.

This church also was roofed with thatch. That explains why, despite the apparent solidity of the walls, decay set in rapidly when the roof was neglected, causing partial collapse and making necessary a re-building after a life of 100 years.

The former nave was left largely intact, to become the chancel of the new church. The west wall was taken down, and a new nave built as an extension of the old, to what length it is not possible to say. The most noteworthy feature of this re-building is still much in evidence and one of the architectural joys of the church today. The former chancel-arch was demolished, the window above it was blocked up, and the triple lancet windows inserted, with wide splay to give maximum light. A tribute to the then outmoded Norman style was paid by the mason - probably an old man - in the strip of "dog-tooth" ornament over each pointed arch. A double piscina was built into the south wall, to the right of the altar. Restored in 1880, only a few fragments of the original survive. Opposite, in the north wall, was made an arched recess, which may have housed the image of St. Laurence. The whole church would be painted in bright colours. Nothing whatever has survived of the nave of this church. It seems highly probable that it was rather badly built.

Who built it, or who paid for the building, we do not know. It could have been one of the Martin family, or one of the Bancs. Both were generous in the gift of lands for religious endowments. Indeed these endowments had reached such a point that even a humble parish church had by this time become a desirable commercial asset. The problem arose as to who

"owned" this asset. It was solved in 1274 - the date which marks the beginning of recorded history for Foxton Church - when it was appropriated by the Prior and Convent of Ely. Bishop, Archbishop and Pope all confirmed the act. The Abbess of Chatteris, Lady of the principal manor, agreed to share part of her pasture with the Rector. The latter must not be confused with the Vicar. The Rector, originally a cleric, later a farmer, was the man who bought or to whom was given the right to collect the tithes of corn, wool, beasts and hay.

The fiscal value of the church at this date was £12-12-11 per annum. The Vicar's stipend was about £4 a year - or less, if the Rector could find someone to do the job for less. This meagre income was supplemented by fees for burial, marriage and masses, and by the "small tithes" on such things as fruit and honey. The Vicar also had a small allocation of land which he himself cultivated, and a close of about one acre in which he might keep a cow or a few sheep.

Archidiaconal records for the period 1278-1330 show that the church was adequately equipped as to muniments, books, vestments, etc. Vicars, despite their slender means, were generous in providing the necessities of their office. Their gifts include "a brocade cloth", "a complete set of vestments", "a third chalice", and "a pair of slippers".

Once more a hundred years of weather and neglect had done their worst. Yes, neglect - they loved and revered their church, but they would not repair that thatched roof until it was too late ! Once more the church was in danger of collapse. Since it had to be re-built, it was obvious that it would be built in a new style. And because the population of the village had increased enormously - from less than 200 to more than 350 - in the last century, it must be larger. It would cost a lot of money. Was there a man in Foxton wealthy enough, and generous enough, to undertake the task ? There was, and his identity is known. In the east window of the north aisle there still survived in 1742 fragments of the original glass, on one bit of which were the words "Thomas de Foxton me fecit. (made me)!" In the rolls of the manor-court for 1318 there are references to the building activity of Master Thomas. He was Rector, also Vicar for a time, and Chancellor of the University of Cambridge 1329-1331.

The chancel was left intact. The nave was entirely reconstructed and enlarged by adding aisles north and south, with pillars and arcades to take the weight of a wider roof, still thatched. The material was the same old chalk from the same pit on the hill a few hundred yards away. It was conveniently handy, it was cheap, and it was easy to work. It must have begun to crumble in places

within a few years, but the pillars and arches have survived, as has much of the fabric. The windows, including seven new ones, were the main feature of the new church; all fitted with stained glass, they must have given a blaze of colour, besides being an illustrated Bible for those who could not read. And few could !

For all its beauty, this church was destined to be the scene of tragedy. In 1349 came the terrible outbreak of plague known as the Black Death. Such little evidence as there is suggests that, in this and subsequent visitations of the plague, two-thirds of the villagers perished. There must be, somewhere near, most probably on the south side of the church, a mass grave of the victims.

In 1377 the "sanctuary" of the church was violated. A murderer was forcibly removed from the church and handed over to civil justice. The men responsible were excommunicated and later absolved. The Vicar at the time was another Master Thomas, son of the benefactor.

At about this time also was founded the Guild of St. Anne, and a chapel was dedicated to her in the north aisle, now the Lady Chapel. The church had by now become a place of minor pilgrimage, but it is not known whether the image of St. Anne or that of St. Laurence was the object of pilgrimage. Both were credited with powers of healing and protection.

The building of this church is very clearly documented. In 1456 Bishop Gray granted an Indulgence - that is, forgiveness of sins truly repented and confessed - to all who should contribute in any way to the "maintenance of the lights or any of the ornaments of the said church, or to the fabric of the Chancel, or of the nave or of the bell-tower." This time the cost of the work was more widely distributed, and the work took much longer. Contributions were still coming in sixty years after the appeal was launched.

The main part of the work of reconstruction - tower, clerestory and roof - was probably completed by about 1475. The church then had much the same shape and appearance as it has now, except that it was gleaming white on the outside. A porch was built at the S.W. corner, where the main door was sited. The clerestory windows added greatly to the light of the interior, and made the roof visible. Before completion there was, as frequently happened, a change of plan, or a delay in carrying out the plan due no doubt to a shortage of funds. The clerestory windows next to the tower do not match the other six. Crowning glory of the edifice was the magnificent oak roof with its carved bosses and angels, much of which is still there in its original form; its preservation has cost much money and effort. The outer covering was of sheet lead. A sound roof at last !

Work on the interior proceeded slowly. The Chapel of St. Anne was surrounded by an oak screen; bench pews installed, some of which survive; finally the magnificent rood-screen and loft were completed in 1523. Lady Anne St. George bequeathed 20 quarters of malt for this purpose. Most Foxton people who died between 1460 and 1540 made bequests in their wills "to the torches", "to St. Anne's light", "to the church-warke", "to the bellys", etc.

The effect of the Reformation on the church - whatever may have been its effect on the parishioners - was almost negligible. There were few "treasures" to be confiscated, though it looks as if the three chalices had gone, for a new one was acquired in 1569. This is now the sole item of "treasure".

From then on the documentation is so plentiful that the story could, if space permitted, be told in great detail. It is a story of the never-ending struggle against decay, against the elements, against human neglect and human folly. Here is a brief outline:-

1609: The churchwardens reported that "parts of the timber worke under the leads is in decay and cannot be repayered while such tyme as moore tymber maybe provided for yt." (That roof was not as weather-proof as they had hoped !).

1615: The churchwardens present "that they have noe Terrier." (No - nothing to do with rats in the belfry ! Simply an inventory of Church land and property.)

The Saxon Church as it might have looked



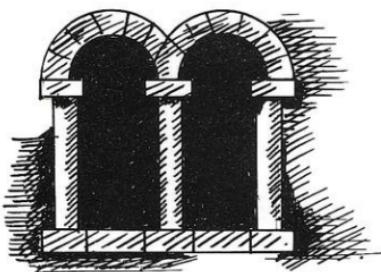


The Norman Church

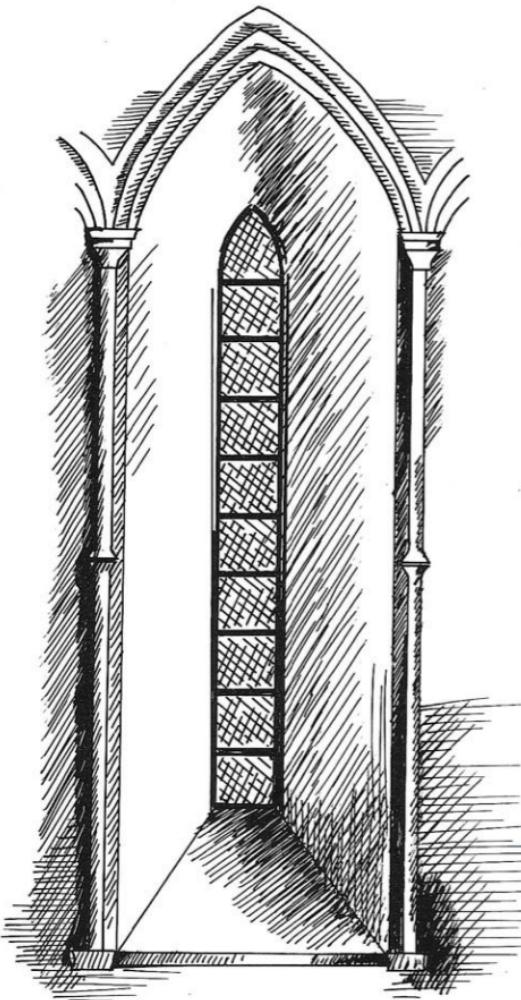


The 14th Century Church

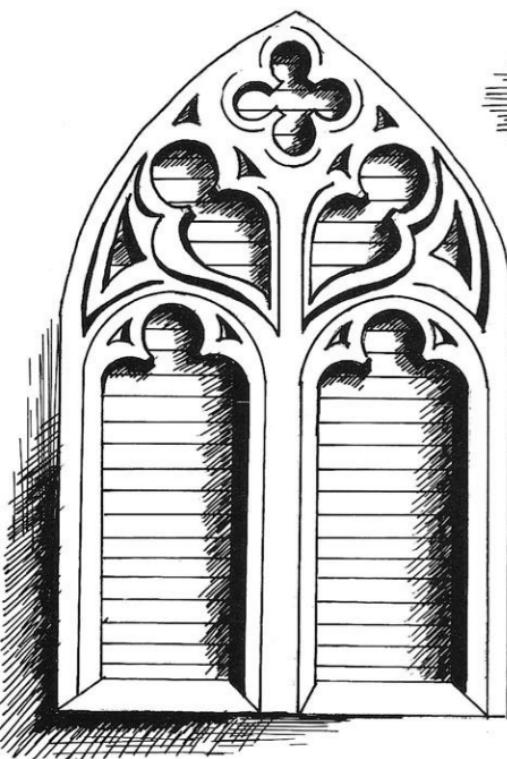
WINDOWS



Norman – not much light,
but plenty of air!



Early English
Light and grace



Decorated
14th Century.
A window to be seen,
but not seen through

1630: John Layer found the church "comely, lofty and fair."

1631: Work being done on the roof. The plumber found fault with the workmanship of the carpenter, and called him "a scurvie rascallie knave and told him that he lyed."

1638: Bishop Wren's visitation. Fault found with the position of the reading-desk, the fencing of the churchyard, and the absence of a terrier.

1644: Puritan "purge". William Dowsing acting for the Commissioner in the eastern counties, reported to Parliament "We brake 60 popish Superstitious Pictures and gave order to brake down and take down 2 crosses etc." Windows, images, crucifixes, mural paintings, crosses, rood-screen - everything of artistic beauty was smashed, defaced, thrown out. This vandalism put an end to "popery" all right. Actually the last Roman Catholic in Foxton had died in 1567. It practically put an end to religious observance, for a time. For the next thirty years the church was a neglected wreck.

1654: The three bells made by Miles Graye were cast. When they were actually installed alongside the two already hung is not known.

1666: Another visitation by Bishop Wren, now out of prison and back in office. Amongst the many defects noted were : "fyre-wood laying in the church", "chancell out of repaire", "chest to be repaired and 3 locks to be made for it."

1678: The situation had gone from bad to worse. Floors, windows and doors all needed urgent repair. The chapel in the north aisle was full of "lumber", "dirt, Dust and Tiles and straws" filled the nave. The font was "dirty", the "Side Isle" "nasty", and so on. Very little seems to have been right, even for that not very fastidious period. It is difficult to believe that Divine Service continued to be held in such a place. Yet it was held, for such as cared to attend, for those who had not abandoned the Church. Two-thirds of the people in the village were by now Dissenters. They held their meetings in the great barn at Mortimer's. There cannot have been many more mice and sparrows there than there were in the church !

1710: Slowly, very slowly, conditions improved. The Huttons of Longstanton, as impro priators of the Rectory (by virtue of the ownership of Mortimer's manor), the Hurrells of Foxton, as lessees of the Rectory, and the wealthier of the Rayners of Foxton - all played their part.

1742: William Cole, Vicar of Milton, paid a visit to the church and noted that it had a "decent aspect". His notes have made possible the writing of much of this story.

1783: The Rural Dean reported that the church seemed to be "in good repair, kept decently and properly provided." He also noted that "there is no School in the Parish, and consequently no poor children who can read."

1787: Land which had once been the Town Meadow and was given to the church in about 1640 was now being let for about £12 a year, and the money used by the overseers and churchwardens to supplement the Poor Rate.

1830: By the Enclosure Act, the overseers and churchwardens were allotted $6\frac{1}{2}$ acres in lieu of the former charity lands.

1843: Four single-roomed Almshouses were built in the north-east corner of the churchyard, next to the road. They were demolished in 1940.

1875: A.G. Hill made a survey of the church. The previous hundred years had, as usual, wrought havoc with the fabric and undone much of the good work which had been done. It has to be admitted that some of this "good" work had been done rather badly. The church and the poor had had to compete for the small amount of money available during two centuries, and both had suffered accordingly.

Mr Hill noted, among other things, that "the present chancel arrangements are of a most miserable and wretched type"; "there is no chancel-arch remaining, the present substitute being an unsightly wooden framing"; "the whole church is in a bad state"; "patched with brick"; "no monuments or reliques of interest".

Church No.6 Restoration, 1876-1886

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who by this time had assumed the assets and responsibilities of the Rector, had begun the much-needed work of restoration in 1876 by repairing the chancel. The exterior was faced with flint, so much more durable than chalk that it is difficult to understand why it was not used earlier. The brick buttresses were removed, the windows re-modelled in Early English style (the Norman arches by this time were mainly a hotch-potch of brick and wood), the floor re-paved and the piscina reconstructed. There ended their responsibility. The rest was up to the parishioners and the Vicar.

Fortunately, there was at hand a wealthy benefactor; several in fact. The widow of Canon Selwyn, late of Foxton House, contributed £1200 in all. Mr Bendysh of Barrington, Lord of the three manors in the parish, gave £500. Mr Swan Hurrell of Harston gave £150. This was a splendid start, but it still left a lot to be done by the people of the parish. The great agricultural depression had begun, and money was scarce. The whole scheme of restoration cost well over £3000, a fantastic sum for those days in a village of this size, but a mere fraction of what it would cost today.

What the architect, Mr Ewan Christian, the builders and the contributors achieved was virtually a new church. The work

lasted five years, being completed in 1881, when the church was formally re-opened on June 30th by the Bishop of Ely.

The exterior was completely rebuilt with a facing of flints and stone quoins. Much of the patching-up of previous generations was either covered up or removed entirely, including the whole of the south porch. A new porch was built at the north door.

The rood-screen and pews were restored. The wooden gallery at the west end, seating fifteen children, was removed, as were a number of box pews. (These must have been installed in the mid eighteenth century, though I can find no evidence of it being done.) A new pulpit was provided, on the left-hand side, and a new lectern. The windows were largely re-constructed in their original style, with the few remaining fragments of stained glass incorporated, and a new window was inserted in the south-west corner. The floor was entirely re-laid. It is clear, from the amount of work done, that the church must have been in a very bad condition indeed, and that, if the work had not been done, the church would by now have been a pile of ruins.

A few of the memorial tablets and slabs were left in their original position; some were removed entirely.

Central-heating was installed, with a boiler-house outside on the south side. It served more or less well for fifty years before being scrapped as useless, being liable to flooding. (One wonders what it

was like in that seventeenth-century building, with no heating, no windows, and doors which would not shut !)

On the whole, the work was well done. "The church", said a reporter at the time, "is now one of the finest village restorations to be found within many miles."

It then looked, inside and out, almost exactly as it does now.

The bells, as usual, were last on the list. Two of them, the two very old ones, were re-cast and the whole peal re-hung in 1886. It is considered to be one of the finest-toned peals in the district.

That saved the church. It was by no means the end of the struggle. There is no end to the struggle, for there is no end to Time.

The minutes of the Parochial Church Council continue the story. It is a story in which financial difficulties play a constant and dominant part - as always:

- 1928 Roof of the tower repaired.
- 1929 The old Parish Room which had housed the Sunday School for many years, gave place to the new Village Hall.
- 1930 New heating-system installed, to be scrapped 25 years later.
- 1931 The old Parish Chest, dating from the 14th century, was found to be beyond repair, and was destroyed.
- 1932 The Almshouses were declared to be unfit for habitation, but were not demolished until 1940.

1934 Electric light installed.
1935 Roof and walls once more in need of repair.
1939 The inadequacy of the churchyard, noted some years before, was eased by the gift of an additional half-acre by Lady Walston.
1940 On November 6th an enemy bomb fell 30 yards from the S.E. corner of the church, doing minor damage only.
1948 The churchyard was further enlarged on the west side by a gift of land from the Vicar.
1959 The clock was replaced by the generosity of Mr and Mrs W. C. Smith.
1968 The roof was again repaired at a cost of £2000.
1973 More repairs to the roof, costing £1300. Two months later, 16 cwt of lead was stolen from the roof of the south aisle.
1974 The tower parapets were found to be in a dangerous condition.
1980 Completion of repairs to the tower. Installation of damp course in the chancel. Redecoration of the nave assisted by an anonymous donation of £1000.
1983 First of ten annual fumigations to control death watch beetle. Decayed flooring replaced. Chancel replastered.

And so it goes on. Time, weather and circumstances have done their worst. Mankind is doing its best.

The church lives on.



The Interior of the Church

Vicars of Foxton

1275	Gregesius de Bagneria
1298	John Bouks (? Banks)
1308	Reginald (? of Ely)
1320	Thomas de Foxton
1335	Reginald of Ely
1353	Robert Hudd
1360	Thomas Mutimur
1377	Thomas (of Foxton)
1393	William Kent
1398	William of Litlyngton
1404	John Cheekwold
1407	Robert Beche
1409	Thomas Geyst
1431	William Levyne
1445	John Baldwin
1456	Gilbert Ebchestre
1465	John Rich
1467	Edmund Aggis
1469	John Ayreson
1480	Nicholas Harte
1498	Robert Barton
1506	Richard Bryket
1516	Richard Birkenhead
1527	Francis Lancaster
1538	Robert Wright
1547	Robert Clark
1552	John Gray
1554	Robert Holt
1572	George Awder
1592	Henry Brampton
1600	John Gibson
1610	Samuel Nicholls
1613	Nicholas Staniland
1628	William Clarke
1629	William Vaughan

1660	Richard Whitlock
1663	Stephen Newton
1669	John Herring
1682	Thomas Leech
1691	William Smith
1696	William Woodruffe
1697	Thomas Hughes
1722	George Birker
1728	Mr Stewkes
1734	William Trant
1737	George Rooke
1740	Richard Shaw
1751	Robert Laxton
1755	John Davy
1764	Mr Rand
1765	Mr Cowper
1771	William Purkis
1773	Thomas Martyn
1776	Christopher Hunter
1792	Francis Goodwin
1798	Nicholas Hendry
1821	Butler Berry
1829	Joseph Walter Berry
1875	George Robson
1878	Henry Whittington
1896	William Greenwood
1907	C. B. Jennings
1912	M. L. Warren
1919	L. K. Kinder
1929	G. E. Childs
1939	E. W. Rowlands
1953	H. A. K. Baynes
1956	E. Parker
1960	H. F. Pettman
1971	J. W. Pearson
1975	G. A. Field
1981	R. P. Burn

Chronological Guide for Visitors

Despite the enormous amount of rebuilding, destruction and restoration which has been done, there is still a lot to be seen, reminders of the past, in the church today. Visitors to the church may find the following chronological list of some help.

10th Century		The bowl of the Font.
12th	"	Remains of window at east end of chancel, outside. Stones marking width of early chancel, east end. Fragments of stone coffin in chancel walls. The original door in north wall of chancel is not visible.
13th	"	Triple lancet windows at east end. Fragments of piscina, right of altar. Alcove left of altar, with faint trace of colour.
14th	"	Pillars and arcade of nave. Windows in north aisle with fragments of stained glass. Niche in south aisle with holy-water stoup. Bracket in Lady Chapel, once held statue of St. Anne, now that of B.V.M.
15th	"	Tiles in corners of chancel. Tower with staircase. Stairs to rood-loft. Clerestory. Roof of nave and chancel, (about two-thirds is original).

15th Century	Bench pews.
(cont.)	Screen of Lady Chapel.
16th "	Rood screen (a mere fraction of original). Chalice 1569 (not normally on view; ask the Vicar).
17th "	Three of the five bells.
18th "	Welbore memorial tablet. Rayner memorial slabs in centre of nave. Hurrell and Seddon memorial slabs in chancel.
19th "	More Hurrell memorials in chancel. Window in south-west corner of south aisle. Pulpit and Lectern. Many of the pews. Whole of the chancel-arch. Whole outside facing of nave, tower and chancel. North porch. Base of Font. Choir stalls. Windows north and south in chancel.
20th "	Statue of B.V.M. in Lady Chapel, given by Mr & Miss Illingworth. Figures over rood-screen, erected by various donors at instigation of Rev. E.W. Rowlands.

Brasses There are none.

Graffiti. There are no medieval graffiti to challenge the ingenuity of students, but there are many dating from later times, mostly in the base of the tower and on the pillars of the nave.

Registers. All the old Parish Registers are now at the County Records Office; they have been indexed.

