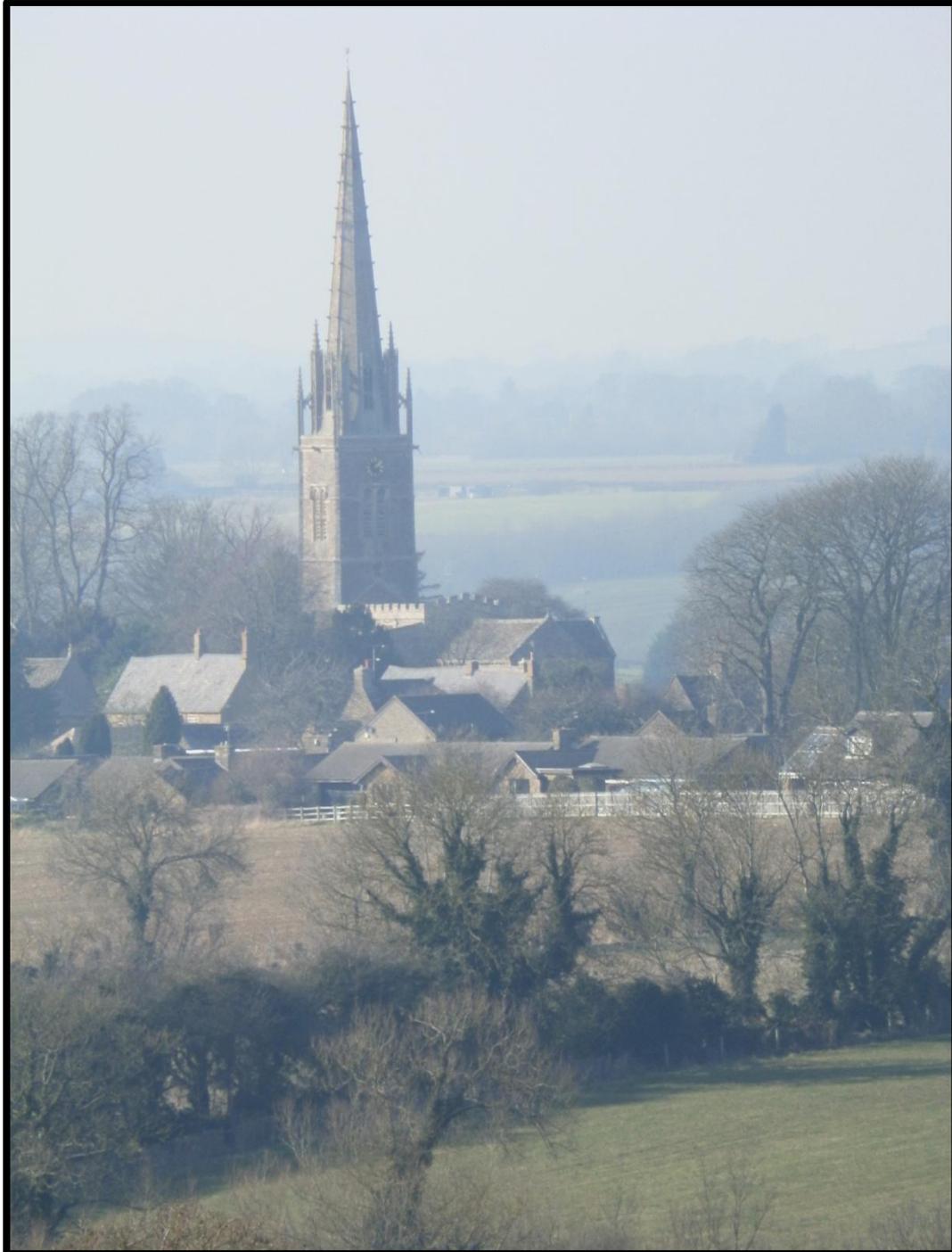


The Church of St. Peter & St. Paul

King's Sutton



A Historical Guide

Roger Bellamy

£1

The Church of SS Peter and Paul, King's Sutton a historical guide by Roger Bellamy

Rising to 198 feet with its numerous crockets, finials, bands of carving, diaper work, flying buttresses, splendid gargoyles, and symbols of the four Evangelists, the spire of King's Sutton is one of the most decorated in the country. It is this which earns it its acclaim in the local adage "Bloxham for length, Adderbury for strength, King's Sutton for beauty". Magnificent though the spire is, the building to which it is attached and which it so effectively advertises for miles around, is at least of equal merit and both the casual visitor and the seasoned 'church crawler' are richly rewarded for their efforts in journeying to it.

The beginning of the story of the Church in King's Sutton is in 662. In that year a prince was born here. His parents had travelled from Northumbria to visit the woman's father who was king of Mercia. The new-born baby immediately announced that he was a Christian and was to be baptised. This being done (by Winderinus, Bishop of Winchester), the child then preached a sermon on the Holy Trinity, the Latin text of which is reputedly preserved in the Vatican archives. He concluded with a prophecy that he would die on his third day, and that he was to be buried here for a year, then for a year at Brackley, and thereafter, for ever, in Buckingham. This is obviously an extraordinary tale but it reminds us of Jesus' words about becoming little children to enter the kingdom of heaven. Also we should recall that in mid-7th century England Christianity was still establishing itself over against the earlier Saxon paganism. The baby prince is known as Rumbold. We keep his day on November 3rd.

It seems likely that there would have been a church in the village from soon after this time, and some experts think that the shape of the church and its high nave walls indicate Anglo-Saxon origins. In 914, pillaging bands of Danes burnt the village and destroyed the church – which then lay derelict until the Normans came and started rebuilding it. The earliest structure that you can see is the chancel. It has rounded arches inside and the rows of small sculptures (called a corbel-table) on the outside: both indicative of the 12th century. We can imagine this chancel attached to the east of a nave, much the same size as the present one, but with solid walls where the arches are, and with a tower at the west.



The next stage of development, late in the 12th century, was the creation of arches on the south side and widening to include an aisle. This would probably have been only a few feet wide. A century later, arches and aisle were created on the north. You can see the difference in style. Then in the 14th century the church was enlarged to create the wide aisles, new windows were inserted in the chancel, and porches added to south and north. Finally, to crown it all, the tower and spire were added (1400 – 1450), and by the mid-15th century, the west porch, which may have been added to help buttress the tower.

In the 17th century the aisle roofs were altered. They had been gabled, but were made almost flat. This caused problems with the tops of the east and west windows. On the north side, they simply sliced off the top of the windows, but on the south they created a roof that went over the tops. It may have been at this time too that the clerestory windows - those high up in the nave, were inserted.

In 1866 Sir George Gilbert Scott was employed to restore the church, and he added the vestry and organ chamber to the north of the chancel, and inserted the south chancel door. From his time too dates the east window and the small one in the chancel.



The tour begins in the **south porch (c.1350)**. Notice the ball-flower decoration around the inner door. This is typical of the 14th century and you will see it again inside. The Holy Water stoup was found by Revd. Rennie, who spotted chickens drinking from what appeared to be a stone bowl in a farmyard in Mill Lane in 1922. The vicar recognized it as one of the two stoups, and had it dug up and returned to the church.



Inside, first turn to the left, for the **Font**. The bowl is obviously ancient with a splendid sturdy quality. It was discovered under a mound in the churchyard in the 1920s. A pinnacle had fallen into the churchyard, landing near a mound which boys used for leapfrog. When the vicar arranged for the pinnacle to be moved, he asked for the mound to be removed to enable the grass to be cut more easily. The mound yielded up the bowl of the current font. People thought that it was the font in

which St. Rumbold had been baptised. Drawings of the medieval font in the Northampton Record Office which date from 1824 show that this is not it. The earlier font had been replaced in Scott's restoration, but then having found this one, the 19th century one was removed and this one brought into use. The base is a mill-stone from Twyford Mill. Whatever its origins, it is a powerful statement of the Christian faith: ancient and strong.



The Chapel of Our Lady of Victories and St Rumbold (c.1220) forms the eastern part of the south aisle. It was set up in the 1920s from a design by Sir Walter Tapper. The originally planned screens and reredos were never completed. The altar, dedicated in 1924, is a single stone slab resting on huge oak supports. Above hangs a painting made about 1900 by a local woman, Sophie Ward. It is a copy of "The Virgin at Prayer" by Il Sassoferrato dating from the mid-17th century. Miss Ward died in 1946 and is buried in the village cemetery. Also notice here the carved piscina in the south wall (an 1866 copy of which is in the chancel), the tracery of the east and west windows, the Victorian glass, some monuments, and in the roof, bosses with M and R for the two saints, Mary and Rumbold.



The statue of Mary and the Christ child stands near a recess in which steps still remain which were once the access to a stone rood screen.

In the Nave there are the two sets of arches. As we have seen about a hundred years separates them, but the south ones have been altered in the 14th century, to make them nearer a match with the north ones. The clue for this is on the middle capital. There you will see ball-flower decoration; a tell-tale sign that we saw in the porch. You will notice too that there are four clerestory windows on either side, although only three arches. The arch from the tower is very fine, with small carved heads. The pews, made to fit the church, date from the 1840s. At the front of the nave, the pulpit is by Scott. It was made to stand on the north side and you can see how the reading desk has been moved.





The north aisle is the Chapel of St. Thomas Becket. His coat of arms is in the roof, and further west, the arms of the diocese of Peterborough. There was known to be a chapel dedicated in St. Thomas' honour in the medieval period, and probably from that, the story is told that St. Thomas prayed here before going to see Henry II in Northampton in the autumn of 1164. This meeting led to his six years in exile in France and his murder in Canterbury Cathedral on 29th December 1170. The altar and reredos were made in 1866 for the chancel and were moved here in the 1944. The reredos originally had plaster figures in each bay: the crucifix and figures of St. Mary and St. John survived and are now on the chancel screen. The others, probably of Peter and Paul were damaged, and Professor E. W. Tristram painted the nativity scenes and crucifixion in 1932 to replace them. The painting cost £100, and the decoration of the framework £30. Also in the north aisle are some low-relief carved panels - near the north porch door. These came from Lovells, a house in the Square, again in the 1920s, but remain a mystery. The piano which is now near the altar rail dates from 1873 and was made by Broadwoods. This was in a parlous state, standing on wooden blocks and severely rusted inside, to the extent that some experts regarded it as little more than firewood! Fortunately, generous donations enabled its restoration in 2006, and it is now used regularly for concerts and tuition.



The Screen is by Scott and has very fine carved tracery. In the **Chancel** you can see more of his work in the tiled floor and much restoration: the seats and pillars are original, but he replaced the arches. The doorways are his and the tracery of the east window. The memorials in the floor include those of Robert Kenwick who died in 1689, and a Vicar, the Reverend George Bullock, died 1906. The two statues below the East window were erected in 2011 in memory of churchwarden Sara Allday who died in 2008. They are carvings by Peter Ball and are made principally from driftwood from New Zealand. They have the traditional iconography of our two patron saints: St. Peter has a mitre, crozier and keys (to the kingdom of heaven). St. Paul has the book of his writings and the sword represents the sword of the Spirit and the sword of

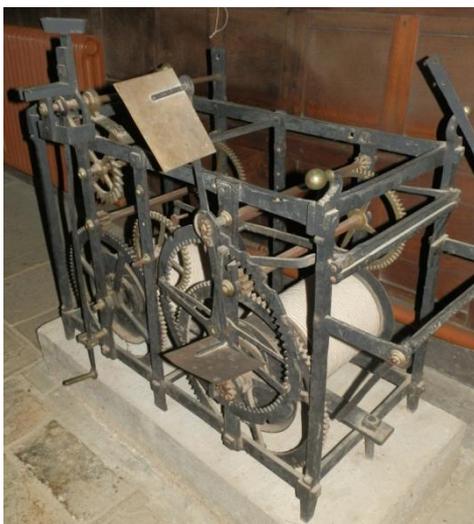
martyrdom. Above the south door is an extraordinary piece of memorial sculpture. It is a monument to Sir Thomas Freke and attributed to John Bacon the Elder. Freke died in 1769. The memorial features an angel observing the Risen Christ standing triumphant over a skeleton. The small window depicting Samuel is a memorial to Charles Knight who was 13 when he died in 1872.



The **organ** installed in 1866 by Walker was replaced by the present instrument during the 1940s. This was 'second-hand' coming from the Church of SS Mary and John, Cowley Road in Oxford. The rebuilding was carried out by Andre Noterman. It has 26 speaking stops. It was bought in 1942, but the work was delayed in 1943 because the organ builder had to give priority to admiralty work. The original blower was too noisy for the church, so another was procured from a blitzed church.

In the east wall of the south aisle are the stairs which led to the medieval **rood loft**. The blocked up doorway is to be seen in the south wall of the chancel. On the exterior there is a rounded stair turret.

Around the walls are images called 'Stations of the Cross'. These are thought to be of Italian origin, and came from a convent in Teignmouth, Devon that closed in the 1990s.



At the west end of the south aisle there is a **clock**. This was in the tower from the 1696 to the mid 20th century. It had no face until 1902, so you could only tell the time when the hour was struck. In the north-west corner of the tower, high up, is a doorway. This was an access from the tower spiral stair on to a platform under the tower. This may have been for a church band, or possibly once the bells were rung from that level. The tower has a ring of eight bells, plus the 'tinkler'. In 1936 this peal of bells was taken down and the old timber framework replaced with steel. A bell which was cracked was re-cast, the work being done by Taylors of Loughborough.

The inscriptions are:

1 and 2	The gift of Henry Smyth Esq of Charlton John Bryant Hertford 1793
3	Henery Bagley made me George Clarke Edward Williams C Wardens 1722
4	Ave Maria Gracia Plena Dominus Tecum (Hail Mary, full of the grace, the Lord is with thee.)
5	George Jones Edmund Carpenter C Wardens James Keene made me 1626
6	Know all men that doth me see James Keene made me 1626
7	Michael Darbie made me 1655
8	Bartholomew Attun made me 1602
9	E Hemis Fecit R Carpenter E Bennett C Wardens 1738

Most of the bells were made fairly locally: James Keene was at Woodstock, Bagley at Chacombe, Darbie at Oxford, Attun in Buckingham and Hemis at Bicester. Henry Smyth was not only a patron of bells, but practiced them too. The band of ringers he got together completed two peals in 1799 and 1802 each taking over 3 hours to ring: Bob Major and Oxford Treble Bob. In 1878 it was recorded that the Morning-bell was rung at 5am each day from Lady-day (March 25th) until Michaelmas (September 29th), again at noon, and the Curfew at 8pm. This last was the signal to put out fires and candles, in days when people were 'early to bed, early to rise'. If there was a fire in the village, the Sexton had to ring a small bell and a large bell from the belfry to raise the alarm.

The greatest glory of the church is the **tower and spire**, completed towards 1400. The whole structure is 200 feet high and the two parts are roughly equal. You will notice that the tower is mainly ironstone and the spire entirely limestone, although on the west side of the tower, somewhat obscured by the limestone porch, there has been some attempt to create a pattern of the different stones. The tower is not quite square, slightly deeper than wide (20' 3" by 17' 9"). There are four stages: the lowest rises to the top of the west window, and there are double doors, now within the porch. The second stage is the ringing chamber: on the west side there is a two light window with stone louvres. The next stage is where the



bells are hung and this has large stone-louvred windows and you may notice some small figure carvings. The fourth stage has the clock face and is topped by a frieze and parapet and splendid gargoyles. There are carvings of the four winged creatures, symbols of the four Gospel writers.



At the corners there are buttresses, which typically of the 14th century, stand at right angles. It is these which enabled the mason to create such a unified structure of tower and spire, for these buttresses become the four outer pinnacles. Set within these are four more pinnacles which are linked to the outer ones and the spire by small flying buttresses. The spire rises from within them, and is octagonal. On four of its sides, the cardinal ones, there are large, ornate openings which are known as lucarnes, and much higher up there is a second set. These are to help the spire cope with high winds. There is also a frieze, which again links it to the tower: this time in design. The stiff-leaf like carvings on the spire are called crockets, from a word meaning hooks. 'Crochet' has the same source. The spire is surmounted by a weathervane. Over the centuries the spire has had to be repaired many times. One early occurrence was in 1552. A cope and a vestment (probably a chasuble) of 'blew velvet' were sold to Anthony Fox Gent for 40 shillings to pay for the repairs. The spire 'was sore dispartyd by an extreme tempest of thunder that dyd set ye same a fier'. A large pinnacle on the southeast corner fell in 1896, and as a result the top 20ft of the spire was found to be defective, taken down and renewed. The top was again rebuilt in 1939. Most recently a pinnacle fell in a gale in 2000.



Other **sculptures** to look for are the dragon (carved in 1965 by George Carter, owner of Thomas Cakebread Monumental Masons in Banbury) on the end of the south aisle, and above it a sun-dial, and under the chancel eaves the small Norman carvings, most of which are badly eroded.

The **west porch** has a vaulted ceiling and there you will find the **War Memorial**. It lists all the men who went from the village to the First World War and adds a red cross by the names of those who did not return.

Often we are asked why there is such a large church in a modest size

village. It has to be said that many villages have much larger churches. They were built as gloriously as local funds permitted. One clue is in the name of the village. It means the king's southern estate. King Alfred who died in 899 mentions it in his will. The church here was a minster in the late Saxon and Norman periods, and it was mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. King's Sutton was the site of an ecclesiastical court when England had two forms of justice – one administered by the church, the other by the state. As a minster, it was a church which served a much wider area than its own parish, so there were many clergy – presumably as many as twelve since there were that number of seats. Estates in the village also formed the income, or prebend, of one of the canonries of Lincoln Cathedral, and although it was fundamentally a source of income and the canon certainly didn't live here, some of them might have taken an interest.

The Church here was much influenced by the Oxford Movement, dating from the 1830s and became 'high church'. What that phrase means has changed from time to time, but although it remains Anglican it uses 'catholic' practices: Stations of the Cross, the Statue, the Blessed Sacrament is Reserved, lots of candles, and incense at the Sung Mass. The local Roman Catholic community celebrates Mass here each Sunday too. Above all, it remains together with the Baptist Church, the place in which God is worshipped and the Gospel is proclaimed, as it has done many centuries, perhaps as many as 1350 years.

INCUMBENTS The early Norman incumbents (1276) were from the monastery at Peterborough. Until the 19th century the list is incomplete. Names are simply extracted from documents where the vicar is mentioned for some reason. William Bowles was the father of the minor poet, William Lisle Bowles, who was born here in 1762. He re-established the sonnet as a poetic form and had a considerable influence on Coleridge. Members of the Willes family were lords of the manor and much of the glass, and the restoration of the chancel are their memorials. Richard Leonard ran a school and there is a brass plaque to him in the north aisle. George Bullock died on St George's day, April 23rd, in 1906 and has a memorial in the sanctuary floor. The quotation on it from Dante was a kind of spiritual motto, for it also appears on the title pages of two collections of his sermons. 'La Sua Voluntade e nostra pace': In His will is our peace. (Paradiso III, 85). The present High Altar is made of stone, and was constructed in 1942 as a memorial to Revd. Harry Gibbons, who had died in office in 1941.

VICARS OF KING'S SUTTON

1276 – 7	Henry de Thornberg Richard de Mikletone John Attediche
1384 – 5	John Beckford
1389	John Wayte Richard Prowryng
1451	Richard Kynthorp
1461	John Coke
1514	John Bradley
1525	William Bannister
1543	Henry Matthews Edward Holden
1550	John Wade
1556	William Browne
1575	Richard Parr (resigned)
1601	James Smith (d. 1614)
1614	John Creeke John Creeke (son of above, d.1655)
1655	Robert Mansell
1704	William Bradley
1710	Thomas Kirby (born K.S., d.1714)
1715	Thomas Couch
1715	Nicholas Smith (d.1750)
1731	Matthew Herbert (d. 1759)
1760	William Bowles (resigned 1773)
1773	John Deacle
1810	William Willes (d.1822)
1823	Richard Leonard (d. 1861)
1862	Earnest Waller
1864	James Bruce
1873	Edward Urquhart
1886	George Bullock
1902	Hubert Frost
1912	Hugh Beard
1921	William Maxwell Rennie
1928	Francis Boss
1933	Ewen Blaxland
1935	Harry Gibbons (died in office 1941)
1942	Charles Kirtland
1948	Arnold Midgley
1962	Michael Bannister
1974	Brian Oman
1988	John Corbett
1998	Julian Gray
2001	Roger Bellamy

The first church magazine was produced in 1929 and sold for 2d a copy. It included parish news, and pre-printed stories, articles, adverts and 'instruction'. Electric lights were installed into the church in 1934.

Silver: The parish has a silver chalice and paten dated 1569. There is a chalice, paten and flagon given by Henry Hall in 1842 and an alms dish of silver with a handle in the form of a woman giving alms into a box. It has a Latin inscription recording it as a gift from Edmund Willes of the Queen's College, Oxford. That college were patrons of the living then. They appointed the vicars. Mrs. Leonard, the vicar's wife, gave an alms dish in 1842.

Two items date from 1936: a chalice made by Omar Ramsden and the Sanctuary Lamp that hangs before the High Altar. This is a memorial for Evelyn Risley. Fr. Midgley gave a small chalice and paten decorated with cut garnets. A. H. Tilbury (a former Schoolmaster and Organist) has two memorial pieces: the processional cross with gun metal crucifix and a ciborium given in 1938.

The **parish registers** which date from the 16th century are deposited in the Northampton Record Office.



You will find it worthwhile to walk around the older parts of the village. In the Square there are the stocks near the Manor House which dates from the 16th century and where the Kenwricks and Willes families lived. The half-timbered building is the Court House where the medieval court met. In Astrop Road the Lace House was once a lace school where girls were taught lace-making, a local cottage industry. Further along, opposite the Recreation Ground is the Old School dating from the mid 19th century. In Richmond Street, the former Methodist Chapel is now a house. The Baptist Church is at the top of Wales Street. The parish has a number of hamlets: Lower and Upper Astrop, the former now incorporated into the village. To the north, there are two hamlets: Great and Little Purston, and to the south, Walton. Each of these has few houses now and there are other outlying farms.

(If you are interested in the stained glass, please see separate booklet)

Photos: Sue Allen