

EARLS BARTON CHURCH

WALK-ROUND NOTES FOR GUIDES

THE TOWER (c. 970 A.D.)

Foundations of limestone rubble only 20-30 cm. (8"-12") thick.
Saxon structure is complete up to a height of 19 m. (63'4") base of battlements.
Turned-in stones at top of corners suggest there was originally a pyramid roof.

Pilaster strips are not just surface decoration: they are the outer edges of blocks going 10 cm. to 40 cm. into the wall, which reinforce the structure. Design apparently derived from carpentry work.
Walls approx. 1.2 m. thick at the bottom, reducing to 0.8 m. at the top.

Evidence of many repairs over the centuries.

South face

Cross is apparently a consecration cross in a very unusual position normally 12 carved crosses outside church and 12 painted inside. Doorway in second stage was blocked for a long period but reopened in the Victorian restoration work. It has been used in the past for preaching sermons.

West face

Doorway formed of slabs placed on edge and running through thickness of wall. Carved miniature arcading below arch is unique.

East face

Marks of earlier roof above present roof (view from near churchyard gate): maybe roof of Saxon chancel.

Pointed windows (or doorways) on all four faces may have been observation points – tower commands a view on all sides.

Belfry openings with multiple lights are a distinctive Anglo-Saxon feature, but Earls Barton unique in having them on every face. Two round holes on east face are called "sound holes" but purpose not really clear.

Battlements, 15th, century, Northamptonshire "gingerbread" ironstone, were crumbling dangerously, and replaced in 1990/1.

THE NAVE AND AISLES

Porch is 19th. century. Fine late Norman doorway moved to this position when aisle was built. Ornamentation is repeated in chancel.

On inside face of tower note corner stones go right down to the ground, proving that a Saxon chancel (which we believe existed) was narrower (approx. square in plan?).

Tower arch: outer stones are re-used (13th. cent.?) from a Norman round-topped arch. They do not form a smooth curve.

Muscote brass (16th. cent.) and painting "Christ in the Streets" by Chris Fiddes nearby.

Nave areading on the lines of the original Norman walls. Foot of north-eastern column has zigzag carving. Octagonal columns on S. are Early English period; shafted columns on N. are Decorated. Masons' marks ("H") on underside of N. arcade are probably from the Victorian rebuilding.

Both north and south aisles have Decorated windows (13th. cent.). S. chapel, now war memorial, is of early date – piscina & aumbry. Lady Chapel in N. aisle: altar cloth by Mrs. Felicity Webber. Banner cupboard in N. wall, contemporary with wall and quite rare.

Pulpit 17th. cent. Jacobean said to be upper stage of a three-decker.

Chancel arch Early English on Norman jambs. Note the way they have been pushed outwards. Screen no later than end of 15th. cent. (with later repairs). Believed not originally made for E.B. church – said to have been thrown out of another one by Puritans. Painted by Henry Bird, 1935.

Saints from L-R are: Andrew (saltire cross), Stephen (stones of his martyrdom), James the Greater (pilgrim staff and scallop), Paul (tent and sword), Peter (book and cock), Mary Magdalene (empty tomb), Philip (basket of loaves) and Thomas (spear). Butterflies all locally-found species are a symbol of prayers rising to heaven (or of the resurrection of the body), but are also a tribute to the 19th.-century Vicars, the Knights, father and son, who were keen lepidopterists.

Note also the little carved faces on right hand tracery.

Plaque in the south aisle commemorates the Rt. Rev. G.F. Townley, a native of Earls Barton who rose to become Bishop of Hull, but maintained a deep affection for the village and its church.

THE CHANCEL

West end is Norman – see arcading inside and stonework outside. First four arches on each side are in original position. Priest's door was put in in 13th. century (?). Arches beyond have been moved, probably from original end wall possibly apse. Note also vertical ornamentation probably from earlier window frames.

East window and the north window of the Sanctuary are Early English; west and middle windows on the south side Decorated; south-east and north-west windows are Perpendicular.

“Low side” windows are more usually found only in the south side of the chancel, but Earls Barton has them in both sides. Often wrongly called “leper windows”. Probably used for ringing sanctus bell to be heard outside. Also for ventilation & light – hinges for shutters are still in place.

Typical late 18th. and early 19th. century memorial tablets to members of the Whitworth family who were for long Lords of the Manor (more in base of the tower and on outside of east end of the south aisle.)

Just for interest ...

The circumstances of these memorials may not have been as serene as they now seem. In the Parish Register for 1794, the then Vicar, Rev. R.H. Knight, wrote:

“1794. The Chancel from the Altar to the Communion Rails has been of late repeatedly repaired by the Parish, & I look upon it that in this case the Vicar has as just a claim to a Fee for Burial therein, as he has for a Fee for Burials within the Church, notwithstanding Mr. Whitworth and others claim a Rjgftt to bury in this Part of the Chancel without doing any Repairs thereto ... The “others” referred to would no doubt have included the Gaudern family, whose memorials also appear in the chancel. Knight evidently a contentious person also complains that John Gaudern and others have attempted to deprive him of his “Road to the Street by the Pidgeon House”! It should be remembered that, by custom, the congregation was responsible for the upkeep of the nave, whilst the chancel was the responsibility of the Vicar and Church Wardens.

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, EARLS BARTON: SIMPLIFIED CHRONOLOGY

Saxon period

970

TO SEE:

Generally accepted date of the tower. Possible eastern extension.

Outside of tower except battlements.

11th. Century

1086-7

Domesday Book; E.B. appears as BARTONE/BUARTONE

12th. Century – Norman

Norman nave & chancel built by Simon de St. Liz (Senlis), Earl of Northampton (also founder of Delapre Abbey).

c. 1180

South doorway (but not in present position).

TO SEE:

Blind arcading in chancel Norman stonework on outside of chancel South doorway (moved c. 1230-50). Norman stones re-used in tower arch inside church. Base of NE column (nave arcading is on line of Norman walls).

13th. Century – Early English

c.1250

Extension of chancel and E. windows put in. S. aisle then N. aisle built (note difference in pillars). Norman S. door moved out to new wall.

TO SEE:

Nave arcading (but has been reconstructed since). East window (not glass). Priest's door in Chancel!. Re-used pieces of chancel arcading.

14th. Century – Decorated

1320-30

N. aisle rebuilt because of danger of collapse.

1340-50

Chancel arch rebuilt on original pillars. New windows in S. aisle.

TO SEE:

Chancel arch. Nave windows (south ones have ogee heads on outside only). 2 windows at west end of chancel south side.

15th. Century – Perpendicular

Nave raised and clerestory inserted (roof is believed to have remained in place until 19th. cent. restoration). More windows in chancel.

c.1450

Battlements on tower.

v.late 15th.

Rood screen.

TO SEE:

Clerestory windows - apparently made to match 2 earlier ones chancel. Screen - not originally in E.B. church but source unknown

16th. Century

TO SEE:

1512 Muscote brass memorial - earliest item in church bearing a date.

17th. Century

1637

Oldest surviving written document about the Church, includes the comment that the tower is in need of repair.

1650/5

First clock installed and rent endowed for its upkeep (Clock Close, next to industrial estate on Wellingborough Road).

TO SEE:

Pulpit (part of a 3-decker; not now in original position).

18th. Century

1720-75

6 Bells installed.

19th. Century

1848

Western musicians' gallery removed; organ installed in chancel

1868-75

Major rebuilding programme: nave arcading rebuilt using original material. Roofs renewed. Porch rebuilt. New seating. Stained glass windows put in. Mediaeval murals found then re-covered. External stonework and windows restored. Organ removed to new chamber on N. side of Chancel. New font in C13 style.

1892-3

Rood screen restored and given new canopy.

Vicarage - now Saxon Lodge.

TO SEE:

Stained glass, especially East Window. Masons' marks under arcading of north aisle (presumed to be from Victorian rebuilding). Roofs. Font.

20th. Century

1904-7

Walls panelled.

1930-3

War memorial chapel and window. Rood (crucifix & figures) added to screen.

1935

Panels on rood screen painted by Henry Bird.

1935

Bells re-hung and 2 new treble bells added.

1945

Inner porch and tower arch screen (Peace memorials).

1960-90

Several new stained-glass windows inserted.

1979-80

Tower/South Aisle underpinned. Saxon burials discovered close to Tower.

1988

Lady Chapel altar cloth by Felicity Webber.

1991-2

Major restoration of Tower.

1995

Organ rebuilt.

1999

Virgin statue by Clare Abbatt in Lady Chapel.

TO SEE:

Paintings on screen. Lady Chapel window (Ewart Memorial). Lady Chapel altar cloth, Mothers' Union banner and pulpit frontal (all by Felicity Webber). Virgin statue in Lady Chapel. War Memorial window in S. Aisle. Paintings on screen. Other modern windows in N & S. aisles and S. wall of chancel.