

Parish Church of St. Andrew Sandford on Thames



There has been a church here in Sandford since Norman days. St Andrew's was founded on land owned by Abingdon Abbey in the late 11th C. by Gueres de Palances on the fee of Ralph de Sandford. There had been a settlement at Sandford, which is a natural crossing point on the Thames, since at least Roman times and the Abbey had built a water mill close to the crossing point of the Thames.

The church was a very small building constructed of local limestone rubble and consisting of a nave with a narrow Norman arched door on the South side and another on the North. The chancel was extended to its present size in the 13th C. and divided from the nave by a much narrower arch than today. At about that time a wooden box-like tower on the roof at the west end of the nave was built to hold the bells and in 1745 the church was described by Thomas Hearne as "a small thing and of mean building"

The original early porch was restored and repaired in 1652 through the generosity of Elizabeth Isham, whose philanthropy is commemorated in the inscription over the doorway which was composed by the Rev. Charles Forbench, Minister of St Andrew's and Vicar of Iffley.



"Thanks to thy charitie, Religiofe Dame, wch found mee old & made mee newe againe."

The majority of the improvement work which has resulted in the church looking as you see it today took place in the twenty-five years between 1840 and 1865. In 1840 it became necessary to carry out substantial repairs and the opportunity was taken to make improvements at the same time. The major external changes were the replacement of the old wooden bell tower with a larger stone tower built in the Norman style and the raising of the nave roof so that the pitch became the same as that of the chancel. A new aisle was built on the north wall of the chancel which served the dual purpose of buttressing that side and at the same time providing increased space for the growing congregation.

The only entrance to the church is the narrow Norman south door. The very narrow north door was that traditionally used for taking coffins out of church. It was



made narrow to obstruct the Devil and it was moved to the north aisle and blocked up during the 19th C. rebuilding. The other remaining Norman work still to be seen is the stonework of the east and south walls, with one remaining Norman window in the south wall of the chancel.



The large stained glass, trefoiled lancet east window in the chancel is the work of Mr Willement, a Victorian artist. It was inserted in 1840.

During the 19th C. rebuilding works, there was some re-arrangement to the windows in the church. The 15th C. square headed Perpendicular style window now to be seen in the west wall of the new north aisle was removed from the south wall of the nave to the east of the porch, where it was shown in

some early 19th C. drawings. It was replaced by a new double lancet window with stained glass and a new trefoil headed lancet to the west of the porch. Both were the gift of Miss Hussey, in memory of her father, Professor Hussey and her uncle, William Ley. They were installed in 1877.



The west window in the tower was placed there, by his children, in memory of Sir William Palmer (1803-1885) who had been a curate at Sandford and also a theologian and ecclesiastical antiquary. He had close connections with the Tractarians of the Oxford Movement. Apart from the war memorials of the 20th C., the other monuments in the church are to be seen set in the walls at the base of the tower. The tablet stones were removed from the floor in 1840 at the start of the building works and in the main commemorate village farming families.



Possibly starting the tradition of longevity in Sandford residents was Mary Hunt who died in 1683 at the age of 98 years, 6 months and 15 days.

The most distinctive monument is that to Sir William Powell who died at Tutbury, Staffordshire in 1656 and whose body was brought to Sandford for burial. The stone was erected in 1661 by his nephew, John Powell. A cornice of white marble above the black tablet, which is inscribed in Latin, bears a winged cherub and the Powell Arms. It is supported by two columns of black marble resting on brackets carved with cherubs each side of a winged skull. Traces of colour and gilding still remain here and there on the moulding and the coat of arms. The two floor-tablets commemorate Sir John Powell, who died in 1678, and Anna Betham widow of Sir Richard Powell, who died in 1692, aged 86.



The Powell family held Sandford Manor continuously from 1696 until 1760. The pulpit and font date from 1864, the font replacing the old 13th C. octagonal stone font, whose bowl (it is said) was removed to Iffley churchyard where it sits on the grass outside the west door. An octagonal base sits in the centre of Radley church's new churchyard.

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The great treasure in the church is the unique monumental stone sculpture mounted in the south wall of the chancel. It was carved from Barrington stone in around 1500 and is of the assumption of the blessed Virgin Mary. The carving of the Virgin is surrounded by an aureole with two angels below the figure holding a reliquary. Traces of colour still remain in the folds. The carving was discovered in 1723 upside down near the porch where it had formed a step. The Benedictine abbey of St Mary at Abingdon, whose seal bears the same device of Our Lady crowned and aureoled, (a rare combination), seems the most likely first home of the sculpture. It had probably been hidden to protect it from damage by Civil War iconoclasts and it was still in good condition when it was discovered.

There are 4 bells hung in the tower, the oldest dating from 1592, with the inscription "Prayse the Lord." Another is inscribed "This bell was made 1606" and the third is undated, but was found to have the date 1692 carved on the wooden hanger. The fourth is the small 'five minute' bell.



The churchyard was not enclosed until 1789-90 when the stone wall was built. The yew tree (planted on Good Friday 1800 by John Roberts, parish clerk who had been in post since 1782) was possibly planted at that spot to mark the position of the old churchyard cross, the stump of which still stands at the foot of the tree. The earliest remaining grave is dated 1684 because until then it had been the custom to bury the dead six deep and not mark the graves.



Elizabeth Isham bequeathed six pounds per annum for the relief of poverty and bread was distributed to the poor of the parish from the flat gravestone situated just to the east of the porch. There is a note in the Sandford Parish Register of 1657 that Elizabeth Isham was *'buried at Wittnam August 7th 1657'*