

The Parish Church of
St John the Baptist
Abthorpe

History
and
Guide

Introduction

England has many beautiful churches and cathedrals, and Northamptonshire, in particular, is noted for the tall spires and deep brown coloured stone of many of its churches. Our little church of St John the Baptist, set above the village green and surrounded by golden stone houses, could be considered to be as beautiful as any of its big brothers. The situation is so typically English and, at times, when there are no cars around, the casual visitor may think that the sight is more or less the same as it has been for centuries. They would be wrong. The church that can be seen today is almost entirely Victorian although read on and you will find that Christians have been worshipping in Abthorpe for a nearly a thousand years - maybe more.

This guide aims to document in an easily readable way the history of the church in Abthorpe and to provide a reference for visitors who choose to wander around this lovely building. You will read about how the church in Abthorpe was forgotten for years and was started on the path to resurrection by the villagers themselves, assisted by a wealthy businessman who wrote a very strange will and a lady who helped nearly 100 years after she died. Also, the story of an Abthorpe vicar who had the vision to re-build the church we enjoy today, but never saw the result.

Richard Tomalin

Abthorpe - November 2004

Origins

We have limited documentary evidence regarding the church here in Abthorpe before the 17th century. Add to this the fact that the original church was almost entirely demolished in 1870 and it is clear that the historian has very little to work with when considering the origins of the church here.

However, we are lucky enough to have some drawings and photographs of the church before the rebuild. Using these, together with knowledge of the development of rural churches in England, has allowed us to get a picture of how a church came to be built here and how it developed.

There is a long history of occupation along the Tove valley (or the Sowe as this stretch of the river was named in the past). Towcester was a very early settlement that was founded by the Romans as a staging post on the Watling Street. They built a villa (in fact one of the largest ever discovered in England) between Towcester and Abthorpe. During excavations in 1955, evidence of even earlier habitation was found at the same site, together with other substantial medieval habitation. It is clear that people have enjoyed living in this fertile valley for thousands of years.

In Abthorpe village many of the ancient field names are Saxon in origin, which shows that there was a farming community here before the Norman conquest.

There was a history of Christianity in Britain from very early times but this suffered a setback with the coming of the Saxons. However, after about 700AD when the Saxons were converted, the Christian faith spread rapidly in England with churches and monasteries being built everywhere.

Having established that people lived in this valley all those years ago, we must consider if the church has as long a history. The simple answer is that we do not know. However, there are some clues that

can help us. Firstly, consider the dedication to St John the Baptist. This is a characteristic of very early churches and chapels and particularly so for those built in a forest. Abthorpe was such a village, being in the centre of a very extensive forest area.

Secondly, the original nave and chancel together measure 66 feet by 16½ feet. What is the significance of this? It is some years since children in school had to remember the rule “5½ yards equals 1 rod, pole or perch” but this is relevant to us now. The perch is a very old unit of measure, widely used 1000 years ago, and the rod is still used today for determining the size of municipal allotments. The chapel in Abthorpe was exactly 1 rod by 4 rods, which is a further clue to its antiquity. For these reasons, it is considered reasonable to assume that a church stood on the present foundations 900 years ago.

The final clue is a surveyor's report from the 19th century suggesting that the building is ‘...of various ages of construction from the early Norman to the last centuries’. In 1859, Sir Stephen Glynne, the noted church historian, referred to the south door as being Norman, which further reinforces this assumption.

The fact that neither Abthorpe nor the chapel are mentioned in the Domesday Book has no relevance at all – it was more an inventory of property than a gazetteer and Abthorpe's dependency on Towcester probably means that they were assessed together. It has also been suggested that the shape and elevation of the churchyard indicates a very ancient, even Celtic, origin. These indications are not now considered a valid indicator of the age of Abthorpe church. When the original chapel was built, it was most likely to have been on common ground. It was sited away from the ancient manor house and this suggests that it was established by, or at the instigation of, both the community and the lord of the manor. Manorial chapels tend to have been built much closer to, or within, the capital message.

The current shape of the churchyard evolved as building took place around it. The original village was clustered round the manor house in the fields facing down to the river. The churchyard was almost certainly shaped in the way it is in more recent times and although the church is raised up, the general topology of the village indicates that the ground was not an ancient earthwork.

Early days

Following the Norman conquest in 1066, life must have changed considerably in Abthorpe. Once the Norman kings took up residence in England, they quickly appropriated large areas of land for hunting. One of these areas was the Royal Forest of Whittlewood and so Abthorpe (being within the forest) would have been subject to the harsh forest laws imposed by the Normans.

We must note when looking at the history of Abthorpe that it was part of the parish of Towcester until 1737, when the separate parish of Abthorpe was created. On his deathbed, William the Conqueror bequeathed the advowson of Towcester (the right to appoint the priest) and the income from church lands to the Abbey of St Wandregisile at Fontanelle in Normandy (near to Rouen). It is interesting to note that the last rector to be appointed (in 1294) by the Abbot of Fontanelle was Benedict Caetani, who went on to become Pope Boniface VIII. He probably never visited Towcester and was subsequently an unpopular Pope.

In the later 13th century, there was much strife between England and France and it must have been very difficult for the Normans resident in France to maintain their holdings in England. For this reason, there was an exchange of property in 1285 between the Abbey of St Wandregisile and the Augustinian Priory of Bradenstoke, which is in the parish of Lyneham in Wiltshire. Thus Abthorpe chapel came under this new control until the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century.

What of the chapel building in Abthorpe at this time? In 1859 Sir Stephen Glynne noted that the architecture of the church was a mixture of Early English, Decorated and Perpendicular styles. This points to development of the building from the mid 12th century to the late 15th century. By the end of this period the foundations followed the same plan as the main body (nave and chancel) of the church today. It was a relatively long and narrow building and it is most likely

that there was a heavy, square tower at the western end containing 3 bells. We have clues regarding the existence of this tower that will be explained later. Most similar chapels at this time had steep thatched or tiled roofs. This was probably the case at Abthorpe, although we cannot be sure. The walls were built from what is known as “coursed rubble”. The only remaining part of this masonry can be seen today in the lower part of the west wall of the nave. This masonry was probably plastered on the outside as well as the inside. The floor would have been simple dirt and rubble with no proper paving or flooring material. However, it is possible that inside there were wall paintings, similar to those still existing in Slapton, 1 mile away across the valley. The altar was in all probability a solid stone structure built against the east wall of the chancel. There would have been some seats in the chancel for the clergy, but the nave was most likely to have been unfurnished except for a rough bench or two against the wall for the use of the old and infirm (the origin of “going to the wall”). There was a door into the chancel on the north wall and a door into the nave to the south, with possibly a porch.

As the years went by, the church was repaired and rebuilt, with probably major repairs carried out in the mid to late 15th century, when it was possible that the roof was lowered in pitch and covered with lead.

Turmoil

As we have seen, at the dawn of the 16th century the chapel in Abthorpe was a crude barn-like structure consisting of a chancel and nave, possibly still with its squat, square tower. Henry VIII was on the throne from 1509 and the village had its small Roman Catholic chapel tending to the needs of the local, agricultural population. This situation continued until Henry had been on the throne for nearly 20 years. However, there were great movements for change sweeping across Europe. Nowhere were they more felt than in England where Henry VIII severed ties with the Roman Catholic Church when he wished to dissolve his marriage to Katherine of Aragon. All this turbulence in the church led to successive monarchs swinging from one ideology to another. One may wonder why this would affect a small chapel serving a farming community in the heart of England. However, when a monarch decided on a form of worship, although it affected the towns and cities most particularly, ideas were enforced across the whole country and involved major changes to the decoration and layout of churches.

As a result, during the Reformation much damage was done to churches in England. Removal of items such as stained glass windows and other decoration was widespread immediately after the death of Henry VIII in 1547, only to be replaced where possible in the reign of Mary. Many churches were left open to the weather. This turmoil continued during the Stuart and Commonwealth periods.

In 1637, Archbishop Laud requested that a report be made on all churches in England. The resulting reports made for sad reading: many churches, particularly those in villages, being in a very sorry condition. The report for Abthorpe illustrates the neglect of the previous century and describes a building in poor state but at least not falling down. Examination of this short report on Abthorpe chapel clearly shows what the authorities of the time regarded as important. Apart from comments about a '*rotten*' roof, a '*foul*' nave and the floor

needing paving, there is also a note that the communion table is ‘...not cancelled in but placed at the East end of the Chancel’. To appreciate the relevance of this comment one must understand the reasons behind the altar movements during the restoration. When Edward VI came to the throne following the death of his father, Henry VIII, he moved the church into a Protestant direction. One of his first actions, in 1549, was to have the liturgy translated into English as “The Book of Common Prayer”. This necessitated a complete rethinking of church interiors because the benefit of having the service in English was lost if the people couldn’t hear the words. Thus it was required that services, except the Eucharist itself, were to be performed in the nave, where the congregation could see and hear. In the chancel, wooden tables replaced stone altars and were moved away from the east end of the chancel, sometimes even into the nave, so that everybody could kneel around.

In the reign of Charles I there was a return to some of the old ways and, in particular, Archbishop Laud required that the altar should be moved back permanently against the east wall and surrounded by rails. The comment in the Abthorpe report shows that the communion table was at the east end of the chancel, as it was supposed to be at that time, but that it was not ‘cancelled in’ – ie surrounded by rails. This shows that the congregation here were sympathetic enough to the Roman Catholic leanings of Charles I and Archbishop Laud to go some way towards doing as they were told. However, the comment that ‘*The bible is old and not of the last translation*’ suggests that they did not regard these things as too important. We must also bear in mind that Abthorpe was a mere chapel attached to Towcester church and as we shall see later, the clergy there did not pay particular attention to the needs of a little village three miles away across the fields.

It is impossible to move any further forward in the history of Abthorpe and its parish church without mentioning Jane Leeson, who was a maiden lady of considerable means, living in the village up to the middle of the 17th century. Her greatest legacy was the building of the village school in 1642. The tablet which still exists on the wall of the Old School states ‘*Jane Leeson hath builded this house as a free school for ever. Fear God, honor ye king. 1642*’. When Jane died in 1648, she left in her will several legacies to support the poor of this and other villages, although nothing for the church in Abthorpe itself. However, as we

shall see later, her endowment of the school with £8 per year and her establishment of a village charity were to be crucial for the future of the church in Abthorpe.

Some time before the end of the 17th century, a north aisle was built onto the Abthorpe chapel. There was probably a small chapel and altar at the east end of this aisle, although by the early 18th century this area had been partitioned off to form a vestry. The style of the exterior stonework suggests that the building was contemporary with the building of the village school. It is possible that Jane Leeson funded the building of the north aisle and that is why she left nothing to the church in her will. However, we do not know this and it is also possible that she was not kindly disposed to the church anyway.

Before we move on to the 18th century, let us consider what the chapel would have looked like at this time. The churchyard was smaller than it is now and very wooded. We know that there were at least seven ash trees growing there in 1695, because the vicar of Towcester requested the felling of them for use in the building of the Towcester vicarage. Also by this time it is probable that there was no tower at the west end of the chapel. This may have been removed when the north aisle was built, or earlier.

There was a continuing problem with the state of the church and reports from around this time continue to suggest that the chapel was not in good repair. A south porch had been built at some time, although we have no real clues to tell us when this was (although it was definitely before 1719). In 1709 a new font was purchased but we do not know why that was or what this new font was like, although we do know that the new font had no cover. It is possible that there was no font previously.

Independence

In the first fifteen years of the 18th century there was much building work carried out on the Abthorpe chapel. Some or all of the roof was renewed and the windows re-glazed. In these days, churchwardens were allowed to levy a rate on the owners and tenants of land in the village, to meet the cost of church repairs and it is likely that this was how much of the work was funded. However, just before the work started (in 1709) two of the three church bells were sold. The licence to do this cost £1 6s 8d, which was a considerable sum. This suggests that the amount raised by the sale was quite substantial and probably helped to fund the repairs. The decision to sell the bells may also have been stimulated by the fact that there was no longer a tower or steeple to house them. The old tower had probably suffered from being too heavy for the land on which it was built. There remained one old bell that was housed in a small bellcote. The two bells that were sold were taken to Towcester and there has been some suggestion that they were placed in Towcester church, although the evidence now disputes that.

We must remember that Abthorpe was still a Chapel of Ease attached to Towcester church. Although the wardens and the parishioners were doing their best to look after the building, the same could not be said of the vicar looking after the spiritual needs of the village. By 1720 the village had had enough and petitions were made to the ecclesiastical court to make Abthorpe a parish separate from Towcester. It is clear from the depositions of Mr Valentine Barford and Mr William Henson in 1721 that Abthorpe chapel had been seriously neglected by the vicars of Towcester, and in particular the Revd Charles Palmer, who was responsible for Abthorpe from 1685. Neither he nor his curates were in the habit of taking services in Abthorpe, and this situation had persisted for years. However, there was little that could be done until the Revd Palmer ceased to be the vicar because he was in total control of the chapel in Abthorpe and

would do as much or as little with it as he thought fit (including taking the trees out of the churchyard, as we have already seen).

In the meantime as much evidence as possible was collected and documented by the village. This included details of the neglect of the chapel by the Towcester clergy and descriptions of the state of the church building itself. In 1721 there were statements made to the ecclesiastical court regarding the poor state of the building. This is somewhat strange considering the amount of building work that we know was carried out during the previous 20 years. However, it is possible that the petitioners exaggerated somewhat to make a better case for the neglect by the Towcester clergy. The reports of this time also note that the Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments and the King's Arms were not displayed in the chapel. This was requested during the reformation and required after the restoration of Charles II and further underlines how the building and the congregation were neglected by the church authorities.

The villagers still had a big problem though. Even if the authorities were persuaded that Abthorpe should be a separate parish, money would have to be found to support a vicar. Abthorpe was a relatively poor village with no lord of the manor or gentry to support the church. How could the money be found?

At this time, Mr Thomas Nichol, a prosperous businessman from London, who was a descendant of Humphrey Nichol, the master of Abthorpe school from Sept 1662, made a will in which there were charitable bequests to several villages. This will included a bequest to Abthorpe church that had severe conditions. He left the church £200 on the condition that within 3 years of his death, or within 3 years of the death or resignation of Revd Charles Palmer, that Abthorpe be made a separate parish. He also left 20 guineas towards the cost of communion plate and several pounds to the poor of Abthorpe, with the same conditions. These conditions, though undoubtedly harsh (particularly to the poor !!!) must have certainly focussed the attention of everyone concerned.

In December 1726 Mr Nichol died but there was still nothing to be done regarding the formation of a separate parish because Revd Palmer was still alive. He carried on as Vicar of Towcester (and Abthorpe) until he died in December 1734 (aged 72). One can imagine the unseemly haste with which the parishioners in Abthorpe

restarted the process of legally separating from Towcester. The Revd John Rodd succeeded Revd Palmer. It appears that he was supportive of the split because his name appears on the list of subscribers towards the expenses of the Act of Parliament that was required for the separation. These expenses were considerable and the list of subscribers is a long one. The parish had started the wheels in motion back in 1721 and it was not until 15 years later, in 1736, that the Act of Parliament was passed which gave Abthorpe its independence on June 24th 1737. Our chapel of St John the Baptist became Abthorpe Parish Church. The Reverend Robert Porter, the local schoolmaster, was appointed as the first incumbent. This was just 6 months before the time limit for Mr Nichol's bequest. There must have been much rejoicing in Abthorpe that summer.

The £200 that Mr Nichols bequeathed was for the purpose of procuring "Queen Anne's Bounty" which deserves some explanation. From before the Norman Conquest, clergy of the Church in England received income from their living. Tax on that income was paid to the Pope and, after the break with Rome in the 1530s, to the Crown instead. The poverty of many clergy prompted Queen Anne to use that tax revenue to set up "the Governors of the Bounty of Queen Anne for the Augmentation of the Maintenance of Poor Clergy" in 1704. Governors applied funds selectively to improve poor clergy's income and, in time, to provide and repair parsonages for incumbents of small livings. Mr Nichol's £200 was used to procure a similar amount which was then invested (in fact used to purchase glebe land in Abthorpe) to provide the income for the living. However, even with this doubling of Mr Nichol's bequest, there were still insufficient funds to satisfactorily maintain the living. What could the parish do? How could they raise even more money? At this point we return to Abthorpe's generous benefactor, Jane Leeson.

We have already heard how Jane Leeson built the schoolhouse in Abthorpe and the trust set up in her will endowed it with £8 per year to pay a schoolmaster. The fact that the first vicar of the Parish of Abthorpe was also the village schoolmaster is no coincidence. The trustees of the Leeson Charity had agreed that in the future the schoolmaster, whom the trustees maintained, should also be the incumbent. However, even this agreement together with the £200 from Thomas Nichol's will (doubled by Queen Anne's Bounty) would be insufficient to support an incumbent. To solve this dilemma the

trustees of the Leeson Charity devised an ingenious solution. The original will provided the trustees with land from which they secured a fixed rent of £48 per annum to satisfy the benefits to the poor of local villages and to pay the schoolmaster. The land produced more income than this and the balance produced a profit for the tenant. The solution was to make the incumbent the tenant who could then benefit from the profit, while the trustees still retained the land and received the annual rents to cover their obligations. This arrangement was enshrined in the Act of Parliament that created the new parish and thus a sufficient endowment was obtained. In this way, Jane Leeson supported the independence of the church in Abthorpe 90 years after her death.

It is clear that the parishioners fully recognised the debt that they owed to Jane Leeson. Although she had died in 1648, and was buried '*...near the pulpit in the chancel...*' the stone slab marking this spot had become almost unreadable by 1721. This was remedied in 1737, when a large stone tablet was erected in the chancel.

At this point it is also interesting to note that the Act also stipulated that the incumbent of Towcester could never be incumbent of Abthorpe at the same time. Towcester was not to be quickly forgiven for their neglect of Abthorpe.

We now return briefly to the will of Mr Thomas Nichol. His bequests to Abthorpe church included 20 Guineas towards the purchase of communion plate. This was purchased in 1738 and is still used in Abthorpe church on special occasions. A further bequest, directed to the poor of Abthorpe, specified among other things that the priest should '*...catechize the poor children every Sunday afternoon*'. This means that Abthorpe was certainly in the forefront of providing Sunday Schools for children, as this period was at the very start of this movement.

Once Abthorpe was independent the churchwardens turned their thoughts to repairing and improving the church. The building was still very much a rough medieval structure, with an assortment of benches and pews and a very rough and uneven floor, that '*...want[s] paving in manie places...*'. It should also be remembered that two of the bells had been sold in the last century and there was no proper bell tower left. Much work was needed to convert the old chapel into a parish church of which to be proud. How could this work be financed? At this time

work on the fabric of parish churches could be funded by a rate levy on all landowners and tenants and this was the practice in Abthorpe. There are many records of these rates being levied. However, we also have evidence of some reticence from villagers to pay church rates, particularly during this period. For example, we know that the churchwardens petitioned for new pews in 1745, but it was not until 1768 that a faculty was granted to do the work.

Despite problems with money much work was done on the church in the years between 1737 and the end of the century. This included completely rebuilding the east wall, re-glazing the windows, paving the floor, repairing the roof and painting. The main task was accomplished in 1768 when new pews were installed throughout the whole church. As was the custom at the time, most of the pews were purchased by subscription for the exclusive use of certain families. The poorer congregation were confined to specific pews or stood in the aisles. These pews would probably have been “box” pews, with doors to keep out the cold draughts. One of them even had a lock on it. This must have seemed like luxury to the congregation. Before this, the church had just two proper pews and some loose benches which ‘...fell over during services...’.

The 18th century ended with the purchase of a new bell to replace the ones sold ninety years previously. This bell was made in Leicester in 1792 and is still in use today. It was housed in a newly built wooden bell-cote on top of the west wall. There was one bell retained when the others were sold in 1709. It is not known what happened to this when the new bell was hung.

Major changes

By the early 19th century there was a need for more graveyard space and in 1828 the 4th Duke of Grafton granted part of the village green to extend the churchyard. It was a mammoth task to build it up into what we see today and required twelve loads of stone from Blakesley to build the new wall. It is also interesting to note that until this time the churchyard was not grassed but covered with gravel. This gravel was renewed or added to almost annually. The churchyard was also kept locked and there was a stile for access. Once the extension had been completed the churchyard was sown with grass and clover and other parts turfed. Thereafter, the grass was cut with a scythe until the late 1950s when a mower was purchased.

In 1832 the Revd Thomas Coldwell became vicar of Abthorpe. This was an era of much change in the Church and the Revd Coldwell was to initiate some of these changes in Abthorpe. In 1840 a new font was installed in the church. This may seem strange because the existing font was only acquired in 1709. However it was common at this time for the Victorian “Gothic revivalists” to regard existing architecture, particularly fonts, as “primitive” and many medieval fonts were lost in this way.

A problem that was common in these days was one of accommodation in the churches. The population of the country was increasing, particularly in the towns but also in villages. In Abthorpe, the population in 1840 was around 500 with over 300 attending church on Sundays. We must remember that more than half of the pews in the church were allocated to families who had subscribed to them. This meant that much of the congregation had to stand in the aisles every Sunday. It was not easy to change this situation and therefore the Revd Coldwell resolved to increase the seating of the church by adding a gallery at the west end of the nave. He obtained some of the money to do this from the Bishop of Lichfield (who was at that time the Patron of the living)¹⁷ There was also a significant rate

levied in the village for the purpose of raising the £45 needed for the work. There has been a suggestion that Abthorpe church had a west gallery built in the early 18th century. There is no documented evidence for this and the only possible clue was a small window at a high level in the south wall. However, the request in 1840 was to build a gallery with no mention of an existing one and it is most likely that this was the first and only gallery in the church.

Although the churchyard had been extended in 1828, this small extension was not sufficient for long and a new burial ground was given to the village in 1861 by the 5th Duke of Grafton (who took the land from his tenants' gardens!!!) Various dignitaries together with villagers raised the £109 15s 0d necessary to instate the new churchyard and the first burial was of a child in December 1862.

On the 27th September 1863, the Revd Robert Willy was instituted as vicar of Abthorpe. He and his immediate successor were to have a dramatic effect on the church in Abthorpe. In the 1863 visitation reports, there is a mention that the church may be rebuilt – things were moving forward. Progress was slow, however, and it was not until 21st November 1867 that Revd Willy called a parish meeting to outline his plans. He started by describing the poor state of the church building. It is clear from the record of this meeting that the church was indeed in a very dilapidated state with insufficient seating, leaking roof and some walls almost falling down. He went on to explain that it was his wish to engineer major repair and rebuilding of the church. He had already contacted Mr Ewan Christian, who was the consultant architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Mr Christian himself came to the meeting in Abthorpe and explained that he recommended building a new aisle to the south of the nave and chancel and a matching extension to the north of the chancel, together with an arch to separate the chancel from the nave (a common feature of Victorian church architecture). It might be thought that the congregation would welcome these plans, but there was some dissent. This was partly because the Revd Willy had started the process without involving the churchwardens (or so they suggested) and partly because some villagers feared a large rate levy. The Abthorpe churchwardens had already petitioned parliament in 1860 for the abolition of the church rate (as had many other churches). The levy of church rates on all landowners and tenants, regardless of their religious beliefs, was widely thought to be unjust, even by the established

church which stood to gain from the practice. Church rates were finally abolished in 1869 and none of the rebuilding costs of this church were raised by rates levied on those who were unwilling.

It must be remembered that the surge of church building in the mid-19th century was partly in response to the fear of diminishing congregations. Nowhere was this truer than in Abthorpe. Church attendance had reduced, the church was damp and draughty and for many there was nowhere to sit. However, the Revd Willy had already secured the majority of the estimated cost from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, the Duke of Grafton, Lord Southampton and others. Sadly, the Revd Willy died in 1868, aged 51, without seeing the result of his work.

It was provident that the Revd Willy's successor, the Revd Arthur White, was as enthusiastic regarding the rebuilding. By late 1869, the plans for the church had become even more elaborate. Added to the earlier design was an imposing spire to the north-west (an unusual location forced by lack of space) together with an almost entire demolition of the existing church. The arch separating the nave from the chancel was omitted from the final design. It is not clear if that was to save money or a specific design choice. Although it was not usual for a Victorian "Gothic revival" church, it has resulted in improved acoustics for which choirs have been grateful in later years. As soon as the Revd White was instituted, he was working to gather together the final pledges for the necessary funds to complete the work. However, work started anyway in early 1870 without all the required funding (£2,275) being in place – a supreme act of faith. Although the church is described in various places as having been '*...re-built from the foundations*', this is not entirely true and it is clear from examining the current building that some of the walls which had been intended to be demolished to the ground in fact were left intact up to window level.

By February 1871, the builder, Mr Walpole of Stony Stratford, had almost completed work on the rebuilding of the church. However, as with building projects throughout history, it had run over budget. The expenditure was already £2,300 and they still had to find a further £400. The parish was in a serious financial state and needed more funds to complete the rebuilding of the churchyard wall. The Revd White wrote at this time '*...We have raised a very large sum from this*



Figure 1 - The old church from the south (mid 19th C)

The windows shown in the south wall of the nave date from between 14th C and 16th C, while those in the chancel date from 13th or 14th C. Notice the massive buttress on the southwest corner of the church. This is far too large to be needed to support the structure shown here and points to the existence of an early tower at the west end of the nave. The wooden bell-cote was constructed in 1794 to hold the current bell.



Figure 2 – The old church from the north (mid 19th C)

The north aisle was built later than the rest of the church and before the end of the 17th century. However, the windows in this wall are much earlier and were perhaps moved from the original nave. The east end of this aisle was used as a vestry, although was originally likely to have been a chapel.

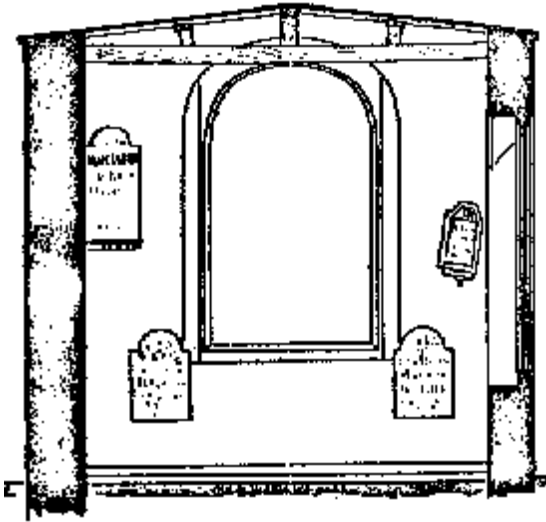


Figure 3 – The interior of the old church (1867)

This drawing is the only image we have of the inside of the original church. Ewan Christian drew it in 1867 before the rebuilding began. The drawing shows how crude and barn-like the church was. Despite its lowly appearance, we would never today contemplate the drastic work that was carried out to create the current building.

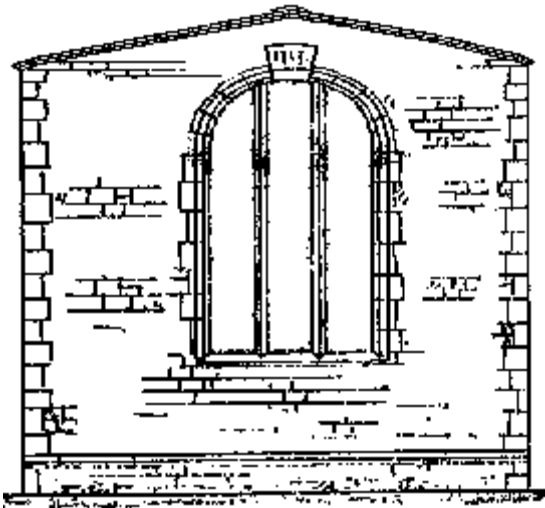
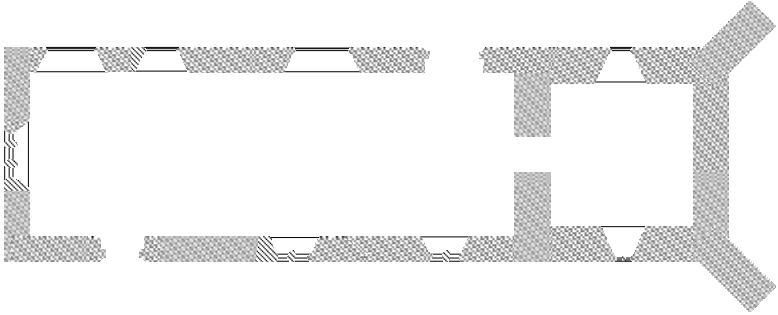


Figure 4 – The old church from the east (1867)

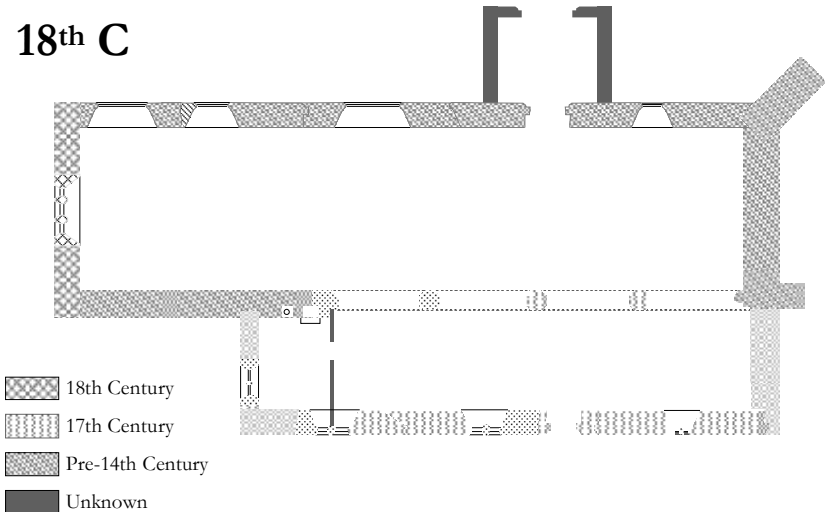
Again, drawn just before the rebuilding, this picture shows the east wall which was rebuilt in 1747.

The development of

15th C



18th C

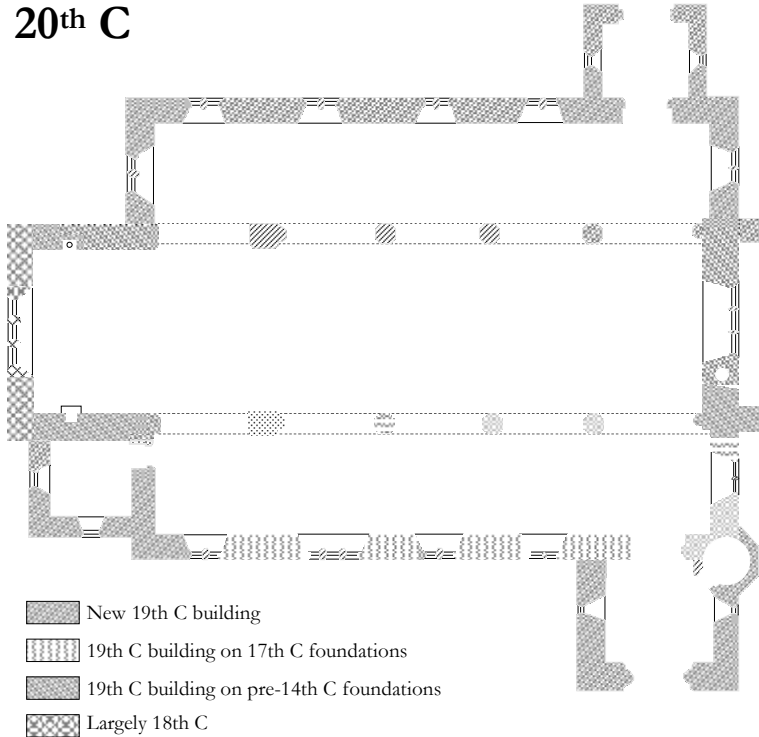


These drawings are based on Mr Ewan Christian's original plans together with descriptions and measurements of the old church by historians in the 18th and 19th centuries, Archdeacons' reports from 17th and 18th centuries and examination of the current structure.

The 15th C plan is an estimation of the structure at that time. We are confident that the church was this size and shape in that period. Although the

the church building

20th C



existence of the tower has no documentary proof there is evidence of its existence, as described elsewhere. There was a distinct division between the masonry of the nave and chancel, suggesting that these were built at different times.

The 18th C plan is correct based on the photographs and drawings included in this guide together with the re-pewing plan of 1767 and a plan of the chancel by Christian dating from 1867.

The 20th C plan shows the new Victorian building and the older stonework. The church has been described as having been totally rebuilt from the foundations in 1870. This is not quite true. There are some parts of the walls that have been retained just below window height. In particular the east wall, which is of ashlar stonework, is almost completely 18th century, with the new Victorian window replacing the original.



Figure 5 – Ewan Christian

Mr Ewan Christian was the architect for the rebuilding of Abthorpe church in 1870.

He was born on 20th September 1814 and died on 21st February 1895, aged 80.

An eminent architect, he was a Manxman by descent, belonging to the family of Christian, of Milntown. He

was President of the Royal Institute of British Architects and consulting architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners of England. During his long and busy life he designed about 40 new churches and 200 parsonage houses, besides numerous schools, country houses, banks, and business premises. He also restored nearly 150 churches and was responsible for the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Figure 6 – The rebuilt church (c1871)

This photograph was taken very soon after the church was rebuilt. Notice the lack of trees in the churchyard, and the state of the churchyard wall. When the rebuilding was complete the Revd White was still searching for funds to complete the project, which included putting the wall in good order. This work was carried out in 1872 and cost £27. Also note that there was no clock at this stage.





Figure 7 – The interior of the church (c1930)

Notice that the area now occupied by the Lady Chapel was still furnished with pews facing inwards. Also the church was still lit with oil lamps (electricity was not installed until 1932).



Figure 8 – North door fire box

This firebox, and a similar one by the chancel steps are still in place below the gratings and were last used around 1959, before electric heating was installed in 1961.

poor parish and neighbourhood, but still our deficit is large and our resources are now exhausted. This you will not be surprised at, when you learn that within a few years this little village has collected money to rebuild in a most efficient way the school of the parish, & has provided also a cemetery. We have still to rebuild the wall all round the church, which stands in the middle of the village green...'

There must have been much rejoicing at the completion of the brand new church, but much worry for those who had to raise the rest of the money. Various bodies came to the rescue, including The Incorporated Church Building Society, who had already given a grant and now stepped in with further money. It is interesting to note that the grants for the rebuilding from the ICBS were dependant on the seating in the church being "free" and not allocated by subscription to particular families.

By the end of March, the Revd White writes that the building is all but complete and on April 12th 1871 the new church was opened and dedicated by the Rt Revd William Connor, Lord Bishop of Peterborough. Also in attendance were the Duke of Grafton and Lord Southampton, Lord Lieutenant.

In 1872, the Revd Arthur White left Abthorpe. He had been the incumbent for barely 3½ years but in that time had worked tirelessly on the rebuilding of the church and all congregations since have reason to thank him.

The Revd White's successor was the Revd Serocold Skeels, who in 1873 placed a beautiful stained glass window in the east wall, in memory of his parents and parents-in-law.

Also in the years following the re-building, an organ was acquired and installed in the north aisle behind the choir stalls and a clock was fitted in the tower.

As Queen Victoria's reign came to a close, the parishioners of Abthorpe could reflect on the great changes that had taken place in the 19th century; how a church of which they could be proud had replaced the rude building which served the parish in earlier times, all made possible by the strenuous efforts of clergy, churchwardens and congregations and the generosity of all.

Recent times

As we have seen, our predecessors in the 19th century furnished us with an almost completely new church building and so, as expected, there has been little change to it in the last 100 years.

The first addition was in 1912, after the death of the Revd Arthur White (who was largely responsible for the church rebuilding) when he bequeathed in his will money for a new stained glass window. This window depicts the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist and was placed in the east wall and the existing east window moved to the west wall.

When the church was rebuilt, oil lamps were installed for lighting, replacing candles that were most certainly used in the old church. Oil continued in use until 1932 when electricity was installed. The old oil lamps were taken to be used in the Reading Room. With the electric lights so easy to control, all but one were switched off during sermons to save electricity!!!

Around 1937, the altar rail was moved from its original position to give more room in the sanctuary.

In 1954 the then vicar, the Revd Thomas Hamerton, suggested that better use could be made of the area to the front of the south aisle. It was proposed to remove the pews from that area and make a small chapel, using a communion table that was given by Lois Weedon church. The Rt Revd Charles Ayles dedicated this new chapel on 8th July 1954. Bishop Ayles had been Bishop of Zululand and later of St Helena before returning to England where he served as an assistant to the Bishop of Peterborough. Following this, in 1959, a stained glass window depicting the Virgin Mary was installed in the east wall of the south aisle. Mr Reg Chapman donated this in memory of his mother. Later, in 1965, the altar rails and kneelers were installed, together with an altar frontal.

By the end of the 1950s it was becoming impossible to use and

maintain the old Victorian heating system that can still be seen underneath the gratings in the nave. As an interim measure portable heaters were used until electric heating was installed in 1961.

In 1962 a garden of rest was established on the north side of the church and in 1968 a wall was built around it.

On the night of 7/8th February 1984 disaster struck. High winds caused severe damage to the church spire. Stones displaced from the spire fell through the roof of the north aisle. The Abthorpe congregation joined those at Slapton until the church was made safe. Repairs cost £6,958, which was partly raised by fundraising and partly from insurance. On 28th November 1984, a service of thanksgiving was held for the restoration of the spire. However, in March 1986 the spire was damaged yet again and repaired for a second time.

By now the church was showing its age and the first major repairs were needed. The roof was in need of replacement. This was achieved in 2 phases – the south side in 1992 and the north side in 1998. The replacement of the roof cost around £25,000, which is nearly ten times as much as the church cost to build just over 100 years previously.

As a millennium project by the whole village, the clock was completely rebuilt and converted to automatic winding in 2000.

Thus we enter the third millennium with our little church still sitting on the high ground above the village green, much as it has for generations past and we hope for generations to come.

Incumbents of the parish of St John the Baptist, Abthorpe

Revd Robert Porter	1737 – 1739
Revd Richard Smith	1739 – 1778
Revd John Jones	1778 – 1793
Revd Pryce Jones	1793 – 1831
Revd Thomas Coldwell	1832 – 1853
Revd William Langston Scott	1854 – 1863
Revd Robert Charles Willy	1863 – 1868
Revd Arthur White	1869 – 1872
Revd Serocold Clarke Skeels	1872 – 1892
Revd William Smalley Law	1893 – 1895
Revd Charles James Gordon	1895 – 1899
Revd Fielding Ould	1899 – 1900
Revd George Basil Ashwin	1901 – 1928
Revd Julius Brockman White	1928 – 1935
Revd George Daniel Kenworthy Clowes	1936 – 1939
Revd Alistair George Brodie	1940 – 1943
Interregnum	1943 – 1953
Revd Thomas Patrick Hamerton	1953 – 1958
Revd Desmond J Smyth	1958 – 1977
Rt Revd Alan Rogers	1977 – 1983
Revd Douglas Bond	1983 – 1989
Revd Jack Smith	1990 – 1994
Interregnum	1994 – 1995
Revd Canon Bridget Smith	1995 –

A walk around the church

– outside

Let us begin our walk at the north door – the main entrance to the church. It is relatively uncommon for the main door of a church to be on the north side. In years gone by it was often the south side of the churchyard that was favoured for burials with the north used for children and the unbaptised. In the same way there was a tendency for north aisles to be built on the relatively unused ground, which was the case with this church, where a **north aisle** was built at a later date in the same position as the current north aisle. However, burials did have to take place on the north side of this church because of lack of space on the south. In fact one of the large graves near to the church on the north side is that of Revd Robert Porter, the first vicar of Abthorpe. Notice also that the **path** does not follow a line straight from the door. This is almost always the case with church paths, based on the superstition that the devil cannot turn corners and therefore cannot come up the path and straight into the church.

To the left of the tower is the **memorial garden**, which was created in 1962 to cater for the increasing number of people asking for the burial of ashes. The surrounding wall was built in 1968. Inside the garden is a **memorial slab** to George Pares and his wife and family. This slab was inside the church until it was rebuilt in 1870 and so this must have been an important family, although we know nothing about them now.

Walk down the path out of the churchyard and turn to the left. The **north gates** here were given by Miss Kathleen Webb in memory of her mother, and dedicated in June 1958.

Carry on around the churchyard wall and look at the **west wall** of the nave. This is the oldest masonry still remaining and could date from the 12th century. Although most of the church walls (both

Victorian rebuild and earlier) are 28 inches thick, this west wall is a massive 42 inches thick. This is one of the clues that suggest the existence of a very early tower. Also, looking at the picture of this wall in the mid 19th century photograph (Figure 1), there is a massive buttress which further suggests a much larger structure than was there at the time.

Before moving on also observe the stonework of the lower part of the wall to the left. This is mainly original masonry from the building of the **original north aisle** and its distinctive pattern of banded ironstone and limestone gives a clue to its date. You can see that it is very similar to that of the Old School and to the cottage “Rozel” further up Main Street behind you. Both of these buildings are 17th century.

From here walk up Main Street to the drive along the side of Rozel. This leads up to the **churchyard extension**, provided for the village by the Duke of Grafton in 1861. Before returning to the church, walk a few steps more along Main Street and examine the **wall at the front of Yew Tree Cottage**. This is capped with stone that was undoubtedly the mullions and other window parts from the original church. This house was built in the mid-19th century and so it is clear that there was a trade in unwanted stone at the time of the rebuilding of the church. It is almost certain that there is other material from the old church incorporated into homes and gardens in the village.

Returning to the church, note the **south gates** that were erected in 1959 in memory of members of the Barrett and Rush families. Continue walking around the south side of the church. The **east wall** displays three distinct periods of building. At the very base, notice the white limestone. This is original, probably 14th century or earlier. Onto this is built the main east wall of ashlar stonework, which is the finest masonry of any of the church walls. The date stone above the window shows that this fine stonework dates from 1747. It is the only part of the original church that the Victorian architect Ewan Christian considered worth retaining. Above and around the window the masonry is from 1870 when the roof was raised in pitch and the new window installed as part of the rebuild.

You will see a definite change in direction along the **south side of the churchyard wall**. This shows the extent of the original

churchyard that was extended into the village green in 1828.

Continue walking round the churchyard wall until you reach the **war memorial** on the north-east corner. This memorial was dedicated on October 31st 1920. Unusually, it details (on the wall plaque) those from the village who served in the First World War and returned. The names of the fallen in both the First and Second World Wars are inscribed on the memorial itself. There are also two Commonwealth War Graves in the churchyard extension.

Return along the north wall of the churchyard and re-enter the church through the north door.

A walk around the church

– inside

The main entrance to the church is through the north door. The porch here is formed by the base of the tower, which is sited at the north-west corner of the church – an unusual site for a tower or spire which in this case was necessitated by a lack of space.

In the tower is housed a **single bell**. This is the same bell that was installed in the wooden bell-cote in the old church. It is marked “E Arnold fecit Leic 1792”. The bell weighs 2½ cwt, is 23” in diameter and is tuned to G#.

Also in the tower is a **clock**, which was installed in the church, by Walter George Bartle of Northampton, sometime between 1874 and the end of the century. We have a picture of the church newly rebuilt that does not show the clock and it is clear that a clock was not planned because the face is now partly obscuring a window. There is no mention of the purchase of the clock in the church records. It is therefore likely that it was paid for either by subscription or as a gift, possibly to commemorate Queen Victoria’s Diamond or Golden Jubilee. The weights that drove the clock were originally housed in the wooden cupboard that can still be seen in the corner of the porch. The striking mechanism failed in the 1970s but the clock continued to operate until the weight fell off in the 1980s. For the next 20 years the clock did not work at all. The village made the repair of the clock a project for the millennium and it was completely restored, converted to automatic winding and the face re-painted. A re-dedication service was held on the Patronal Festival - 25th June 2000.

The floor of the porch is paved, much of the stone being from the floor of the original church. In particular, just in front of the church door (under the doormat) is a **memorial tablet** to Mr Daniel Whitton and members of his family. Daniel Whitton was a guardian

of the Abthorpe chapel in the years leading up to the establishment of the separate parish in 1737. There are several other slabs making up the porch floor that may be either memorial tablets or gravestones, but they are now sadly unreadable.

Also to be found in the porch, on the east wall, is a **tablet commemorating the rebuilding of the church in 1870**. This details the principal persons involved in the rebuilding project and the dedication service, which was held on April 12th 1871. On the wall by the bell rope is a **wooden plaque** that is now quite difficult to read. This recognises a grant received for the rebuilding of the church from the Incorporated Church Building Society. Interestingly, it states that the grant was on condition that all the seating in the church should be free; this reflects the strong movement in Victorian times for the old traditions of private pews to be abolished.

Now enter the church and pause inside the door. Most of what you see in the church dates from 1870, but there are many interesting relics of the medieval church to be noted later.

Firstly, notice that you are standing on a metal grid. This grid runs to the centre of the church and down the centre aisle, and houses a most interesting **Victorian heating system**. In very early days, there would have been no heating at all in churches. In the 17th century, many churches installed “box” pews with doors to keep out draughts, and the pews installed in this church in 1769 would almost certainly have been of this type. We do know that, prior to the rebuilding, portable stoves or braziers were brought into the church for the winter and removed again during the summer. In common with many churches rebuilt in the 19th century, consideration was given to heating at this time. The system installed in this church consisted of two fire boxes (one by the north door and one in front of the chancel steps). These fed into horizontal ducts that meet under the large slab by the west wall and up a flue embedded in the west wall. There is a chimney at the apex of the west wall, which can be seen from outside. This heating system is still intact under the floor and was used until 1959, when electric heating was installed. The under floor heating was apparently quite efficient, particularly for those near to the gratings, but very prone to smoking. This was common with these systems and many have been removed from churches.

Walking to the centre of the church, notice the **arcades** of arches

separating the nave from the north and south aisles. To the casual observer these arcades appear the same, but the north arcade dates from the addition of the original north aisle before the end of the 17th century. The south arcade is a Victorian copy, which has been very well executed. Notice also the floors in the aisles and down the centre of the church. When the church was rebuilt in 1870, the inclusion of the heating grids meant that the existing stone flooring had to be re-sited. The **floor of the north aisle** is part of the Victorian rebuild, as is that in the centre of the nave. The **floor of the south aisle** can be seen to be older and more worn. This could have been from the original north aisle but is more likely to have been from the original centre aisle.

The **engraved slab on the floor at the back of the church** is a monument to Benjamin Key, who was a resident of Abthorpe and owner of land here and in neighbouring villages. He died in 1742. This slab was located on the floor of the sanctuary in the old church, which suggests that Benjamin Key was an important person in the village and in the church. It is very possible that he took a prominent part in the negotiations that resulted in Abthorpe becoming a separate parish in 1737. There was another memorial slab in the old church, commemorating other members of the Key family, but this did not survive the rebuilding.

The **pews** are typical Victorian pine pews. Notice that the backs are slightly sloping. Ewan Christian, the architect, specifically selected this design. However, the plans were submitted to the Architectural Society of the Archdeaconry of Northampton for comment and they did not approve the pew design. They recommended pews with straight backs because they take up less space and are more comfortable to kneel against. They were also of the opinion that straight backs were more architecturally pleasing. We are grateful that Mr Christian's opinion prevailed!!

From this position, also note the **stained glass window in the west wall**. It was purchased in 1873 by the then vicar, the Revd Serocold Skeels, in memory of his parents and parents-in-law and was originally installed in the east wall. It was moved in 1912 when the current east window was purchased. Notice that the main lights of both the east and west windows are of the same dimensions while the tracery above them is very different. Although we do not know the

maker of the west window, it is likely that Meyer of Munich, who made the east window, made the current tracery in the west window. The three roundels in the centre light have to be taken together to interpret the religious significance of this window. The top roundel represents the Holy Spirit and by extension Pentecost. The middle one represents the Pascal lamb and is often used as a symbol of the Resurrection. The lower one, the Pelican, represents self-sacrifice, as the old legend says that the pelican feeds its young on its own breast if it cannot find fish in the sea with which to feed them. It is often used as a symbol for the Crucifixion and Christ's self-sacrifice. So, taken together, the roundels represent the three major days in the Christian calendar. In the geometrical patterns there are also symbols, the circle for infinity/eternity and the triangle for the Trinity. There are also passion flowers in the left and right-hand lights.

The **font** at the western end of the south aisle dates from 1840 and was purchased to replace an older font that dated from 1709. It is not clear why a new font was required in 1840, although Gothic revivalists in many churches considered their fonts overtly “primitive” and they were replaced in the 19th century by fonts which were more in tune with their idea of Gothic. We do not know if that was the case at Athorpe. Neither do we know why a new font was acquired in 1709, or what was used previously. It is possible that the 1709 font was the first in the church, because not all churches had them (the Archdeacon’s visitation of 1861 records that neighbouring Silverstone had no font at that time). Notice the unusual oak font cover with its carved inscription reading:

ΝΙΨΟΝ * ΑΝΟΜΗΜΑ * ΜΗ * ΜΟΝΑΝ * ΟΨΙΝ

This text is an early Christian phrase, in Byzantine Greek, which translates to “**Wash (my) sin not only (my) face**”. It is a palindrome, reading the same backwards and forwards and was first inscribed on the Fountain of Purification in the Basilica of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in the 6th century. It can be found on fonts in other churches particularly in England and France.

Walk down the south aisle to the **Lady Chapel**. This area was fitted with pews until 1956, when the then vicar (Revd Hamerton) suggested that this area be turned into a chapel for use at weekday services. The **Communion table** was given by Lois Weedon church, after they obtained a new table₃₈ with elaborate hangings made from

brocade used in the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. The **stained glass window** was made in 1959 by Hardman Studios of Birmingham (which, incidentally, made most of the windows in the Houses of Parliament). Mr Reg Chapman gave it in memory of his mother. The window represents two events in the life of Jesus: on the left hand side the Annunciation and on the right hand side a post-nativity scene of the baby with his mother. The stylised rose above the scene on the left refers to the Catholic devotion to the Virgin as either the “Mystical Rose” or the “Rose of Sharon”. She is also depicted with a lily in her hand, representing her purity. This scene offers a view of the Annunciation slightly different from the normal, in that the angel is kneeling at Mary’s feet rather than standing over her. The figure of Mary on the right is shown in a mandorla – the almond shaped aura that is used in the depiction of saintly figures. The star above this scene may refer to the Star of Bethlehem or it may be connected with the Woman crowned with Stars mentioned in the Apocalypse. The tracery light is a radiant dove representing the Holy Spirit at the moment of Jesus’ conception. The circle round it represents infinity or eternity. The text at the head of the window is associated with the Visitation rather than the Annunciation.

The **altar rails** in the Lady Chapel were made locally and fitted in 1965.

Cross over to the centre of the church and notice the **slab on the floor in front of the priest’s desk**. This slab originally marked the burial place in the centre aisle of Revd Pryce Jones and his wife Sarah, and was moved to its current place during the rebuilding of the church. The **white marble tablets on the north and south walls of the nave**, above the arcades, are memorials to Pryce Jones and his family. He was vicar of Abthorpe for almost 50 years and was Welsh, although his wife came from Weedon, a few miles from here.

Crossing to the other side of the nave, you will notice the **large slab on the floor below the pulpit**. This is now almost unreadable, but has been transcribed onto an oak plaque that hangs just inside the north door. The memorial is to Mr Valentine Barford who was one of the principal forces engaged in the moves to create a separate Abthorpe parish in 1737.

From here step into the chancel. The **chancel and sanctuary floors** are a good example of Victorian decorative floor tiles, typical of

the floors laid in churches rebuilt or restored in the 19th century.

On the north side is the **organ**. Before the church was rebuilt there was no organ in the church. In common with many village churches, strings and woodwind provided accompaniment, the players possibly sitting in the west gallery after it was installed. We have several records of the church paying for instruments to be repaired and providing ale for the instrumentalists. When the church was rebuilt, this area was fitted with pews with a small place reserved for an organ. This position can still be seen where the wooden floor for the pews gives way to a small stone area against the east wall of the north aisle. The current organ was not new when installed in this church and it has an interesting history. It was made by JW Walker in 1853 and purchased for £120 by Mr Francis Pym. He was patron of St Swithun's church in Sandy, Bedfordshire and the organ was installed in the west gallery there. Mr Pym was a direct ancestor of Francis Pym who served in the government of Margaret Thatcher. In 1860, Sandy church was extensively rebuilt and enlarged, and during that time the organ was setup in a barn where services were held. The organ was returned to the newly built church and installed in the north aisle. It proved too small for the larger church and was replaced in 1872, being moved to Abthorpe sometime before 1879. The blower was converted to electric power in 1965.

Moving to the **sanctuary**, first notice the **piscina** on the south wall and the **credence shelf** on the north wall. These are old and were located in the vestry of the original church. This earlier position suggests that the north aisle of the old church was originally a separate chapel. The **altar rail** was moved to its present position in 1936 to make more room in the sanctuary. Its original position can still be seen from the marks in the side walls.

There are **four tablets** on the side walls of the sanctuary and, although in different positions now, were all in the sanctuary of the old church. On the south wall is a large marble tablet that is a **memorial to Jane Leeson and Thomas Nichol** who were important benefactors to the church and village. Although Jane Leeson died in 1648 and Thomas Nichol died in 1726, the memorial was not setup until 1737, after the Leeson charity and Nichol's bequests had helped to make it possible for Abthorpe to become a separate parish. The stone surround of the monument was new in

1871 and the monument was cleaned and re-gilded when the church was re-opened.

The tablet next to this is a **memorial to Revd John Jones** and his daughter. The Revd Jones was vicar of Abthorpe until he died in 1793, aged 41. His daughter died only 3 weeks after him (aged 15), which sadly suggests that they probably died of the same illness.

The large tablet on the north wall of the sanctuary is a **memorial to Revd Joseph Key**. He was son of Benjamin Key, an Abthorpe landowner, whose memorial slab is on the floor at the back of the church.

The smaller tablet next to this is a **memorial to the Revd Richard Smith** who was the second vicar of Abthorpe parish and was here for 39 years.

The **east window and the oak Reredos** were installed with money left in the will of the Revd Arthur White, who was vicar of Abthorpe for 3½ years from 1868 to 1872. The window was made by Meyer of Munich and shows the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. John is usually shown in the way depicted here holding a staff with a pennant and baptising Jesus with a scallop shell. There is no indication of the identity of the apostles/disciples on the right. Similarly, the angels on the left are there to simply balance the picture. At the top is God the Father with his right hand raised in blessing, and an orb in his left hand, sending down the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. The tracery lights include cherubs encircling the sacred monogram IHS (Iesus Hominum Salvator - Jesus the Saviour of Mankind).

Although the incumbent for only a short time, the Revd White played an important role in the history of Abthorpe church, overseeing the rebuilding in 1870. It was he who worked tirelessly to gather together the necessary funds to complete the work.

Thus ends our brief tour of Abthorpe parish church. Most visitors are surprised when they hear that the building around them was built as recently as the late 19th century. Maybe this can be attributed to the skill of Mr Ewan Christian, the architect who so expertly crafted this lovely building in the “Victorian Gothic” style. Please stay a while longer and savour the peace of this place and remember the many generations who have worshipped in this building and the ones before it.

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