

Flitwick Church History

Monastic beginnings

The monks at Ruxox provided priests to serve the church for about 200 years, the last brother to serve Flitwick being appointed in 1533. In 1540 the Prior of Dunstable surrendered the monastery to the King.

Wooden church

There is reason to believe that a small thatched wooden building dedicated to St Peter once stood on the site of our Parish Church. The evidence for this is the name given to the meadows which lie nearly a mile to the west of the church, 'preost leas' or priest's meadows, now known as Priestley Farm.

Doomsday & William Lovett

When the Domesday Book was compiled in 1086, the Norman, William Lovet, had displaced Alwin, who was the last Saxon owner of Flitwick. William Lovet almost certainly lived in a small castle surrounded by a moat, the remains of which still exist in Temple Field to the north of the church. William Lovet or his successor replaced the Saxon church on his estate with a stone building consisting of a small chancel and a low-roofed nave, entered from a small door in the north wall facing towards the castle.

Extending the building

Gradually the little Norman church was re-built, first by widening the chancel and adding the south aisle in the fourteenth century, as will be seen if viewed from the east side of the churchyard, and later by adding the tower in about 1380. The reason for the square tower is that the local stone is very soft and in fact most churches in this area have square towers. About 100 years later the porch was built and the roof of the south aisle flattened to allow for the continuation of the three clerestory windows.

Norman Font & Doorway

Experts have said that the oldest part of our church dates from the twelfth century. The Norman doorway dating from that time was removed stone by stone from its original place in the north wall of the nave when the north aisle was added in 1835. Every stone was carefully marked and replaced exactly in its original position. The archway itself is an almost perfect example of billet moulding and beakhead ornament. More important, its existence is proof that a substantial church existed on the site at least 800 years ago. An etching of the north door dated 1813 hangs on the north wall inside the church.

Ruxox

Documents of Dunstable Priory give the first authentic information about Flitwick. They record that about 1150 the Lord of Flitwick, Philip de Saundreville, gave to the Priory the Mill at Flitwick and the churches under his control at Flitwick and Husborne Crawley. He had already given the Priory some land at Ruxox on which to build a chapel dedicated to St Nicholas and a cell for monks. This was completed in 1162, and for nearly 400 years the religious life of Flitwick was under the supervision of the Priors of Dunstable.

Little altered

From the fifteenth century to the year 1858 there appear to have been no main structural alterations, although a certain amount of repair work was undertaken. In 1858 the north aisle and the vestry were added and the church was completely re-floored. New pews were added at this time, but one of the pews from the church prior to 1858 is at the back near the south door.

Victorian Restoration

In 1867 further extensive restoration work was done. The roofs of the nave and the south aisle were renewed and the windows in the south aisle restored and re-glazed. The porch was repaired and new windows added in the bell chamber and the tower. A doorway was made in the vestry leading into the churchyard. In 1885 the chancel was completely re-roofed, and in 1890 candles were replaced by lamps. In 1906 a ringers' floor was put in the tower, allowing for additional seating under the tower.

20th Century restoration

In the early 1990s a major programme of repair and restoration was commenced. This included the repair of the Nave Roof, re-pointing of the Tower, replacement of stonework of the South Aisle Parapets and re-tiling of the Chancel Roof.

Friends to the rescue

The Friends of Flitwick Parish Church has been formed in order to raise money to finance the work necessary to keep our church in good repair. The Parish Church exists to serve the people of Flitwick, as it has done for many centuries. Experts have said that the oldest part of our church dates from the twelfth century. The Norman doorway dating from that time was removed stone by stone from its original place in the north wall of the nave when the north aisle was added in 1835. Every stone was carefully marked and replaced exactly in its original position. The archway itself is an almost perfect example of billet moulding and beakhead ornament. More important, its existence is proof that a substantial church existed on the site at least 800 years ago. An etching of the north door dated 1813 hangs on the north wall inside the church.