

THE STORY OF THE PARISH CHURCH  
OF  
ST PETER & ST PAUL FLITWICK



by  
Joan Brown

*Illustrations by*  
Marian Saville

**FOREWORD**

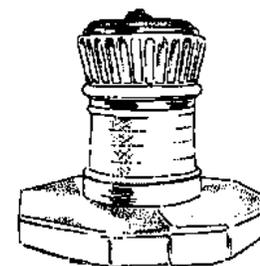
I am pleased to contribute a few words of introduction to this second edition of the History of Flitwick Parish Church. The first edition (1989) has proved to be a valuable resource to those seeking further information about this twelfth century church. The current population of Flitwick (2009) is now around 14,000 and Church life expresses something of the busy and lively community in which it is now set.

But the building has more than a history. Week by week services express the aspirations and devotions of people of all ages. Here the joys of birth and marriage are celebrated together with the tears of bereavement. Meetings, concerts, events and festivals regularly take place here, drawing people from all walks of life. All bear witness to the life we share with one another and above all, to the life God shares with us.

We are playing our part as Christians in this place in the work and witness of the wider Church. We are also doing our best to care for the fabric of this ancient parish church so that future generations may play their part too.

I hope that you enjoy looking around this parish church. Do please pause in your visit and pray for the continued witness and worship that is carried on here day by day and go on your way rejoicing:

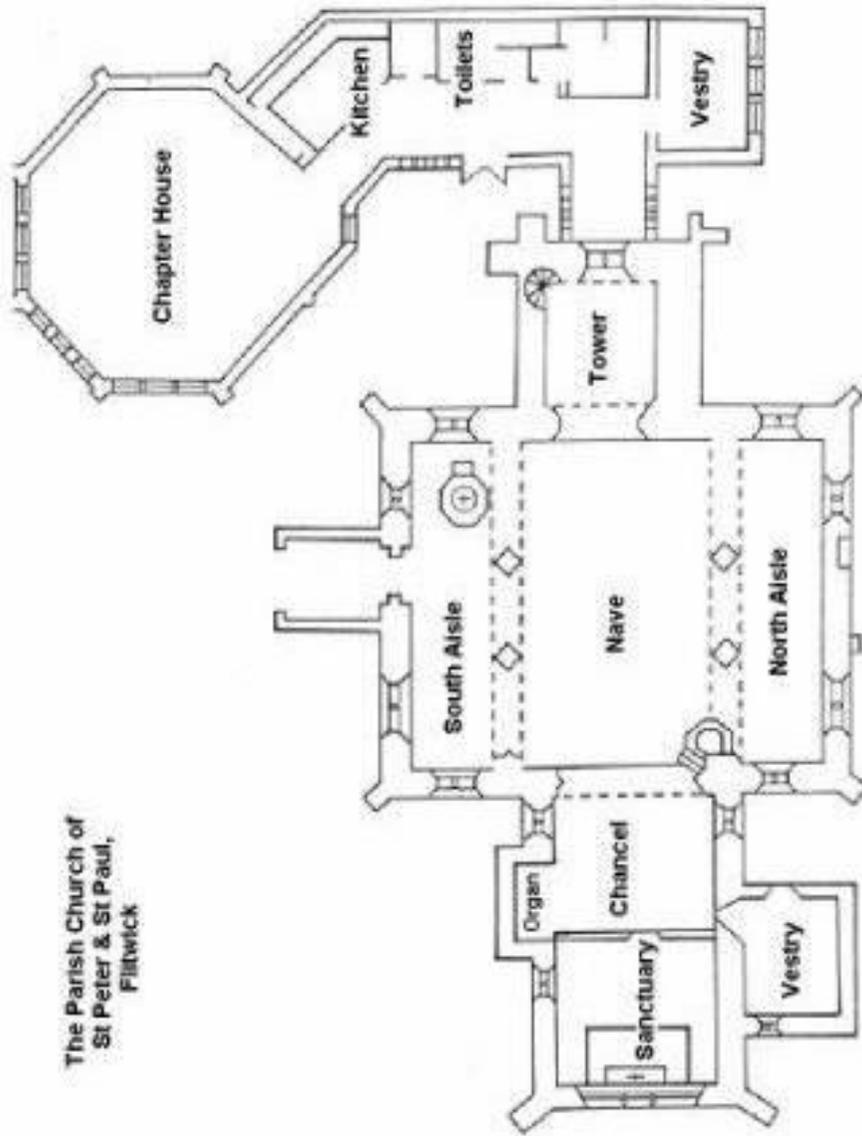
*Revd Canon Michael Bradley*



## THE STORY OF THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST PETER & ST PAUL, FLITWICK

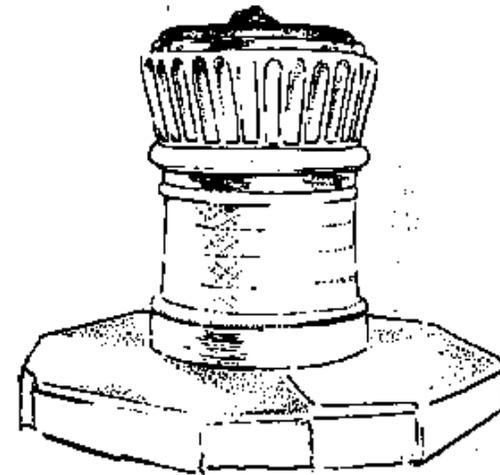
Welcome to the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul.

As you entered the church you may have noticed two carved stone heads on either side of the door. In several places around the church there are examples of these stone heads. Are the faces looking down on us the features of past incumbents, stonemasons, or even local inhabitants? That is a question we can never answer, but we can tell you something about our church. This guide is fairly brief so that you can spend your time looking around you. The history and further details are in the second part of the booklet for you to read at your leisure.



### INSIDE OUR CHURCH

#### 1. The Font



On the left as you enter by the south door stands the Font.

It is here that generations of children and adults have been baptised into the family of the Church, and that is why symbolically, fonts are usually found near the main door of a church. Originally our font was fixed against the pillar close to the south door. The circular fluted bowl of the font is Norman and dates back to the twelfth century. The circular shaft and base which support it are nineteenth century and were added when the font was moved to its present position.

In past centuries there was a superstition that sometimes evil spirits lurked in fonts and to keep them in some fonts had their lids sealed or locked on. The lid of our font was for many years securely fastened, but was opened and restored to its proper use one Whitsunday during the 1850's. During the time when the font was sealed a small vessel or basin was placed on the lid. Our basin had a small round wooden stand, the top of which is still preserved. On one side is printed round the circumference in Greek capitals the palindrome

NIYON ANOMHMA MH MONAN OYIN

A free translation of which is "Wash the sin not only the face." Lines such as these are known as Devil's Verses.

**2.** Near to the door is the oldest pew in the church. It is a good example of linen-fold panelling.

**3.** Go now to the centre of the Nave. During the 14th century the Chancel was widened, the south wall added and the tower built. Subsequently the porch was built and the roof of the south aisle flattened to allow for the three clerestory windows. At that time the north wall was brick with just one small window and a heavy rood screen divided the Chancel from the Nave. In 1858 the north aisle was built and in 1890 lamps were installed to replace candles. The roof was renewed in 1867 and the painted bosses are of various designs.

#### **4. The Pulpit**

Before the nineteenth century restoration a three-decker pulpit stood where our lectern now stands. At the base was the desk of the Parish Clerk, above that the deck for the priest, and the upper deck was the pulpit itself. This top part of the pulpit we still have, now moved to the opposite side of the chancel. It is a good example of a fifteenth century pulpit with linen-fold moulding.

**5. The Lectern** There seems to be no recorded history of our oak lectern. The colouring is similar to that on the pulpit. But more important than the lectern is the Bible which rests upon it. Lessons from the Bible are read at services throughout the year. Usually lessons in this church are read from modern translations of the Bible.

**6. The round table** near the Lectern was made during the 1950s as a project by a member of the Rover Scout movement and donated to the church when scouting was re-organised and the 'Rover Scouts (18 - 25 year olds) disbanded.

**7. War Memorials** On the wall behind the lectern are the memorials to the men of Flitwick who died during the two World Wars.

#### **8. Leper's Window**

The small window in the south wall of the chancel is known as a leper's window although it is extremely doubtful whether leprosy was prevalent, and it could have been used by penitents who had been excommunicated. The lower half of the window, now bricked up, was made to open like a door, and hooks on which it hung still remain.

### **9. Mosaics**

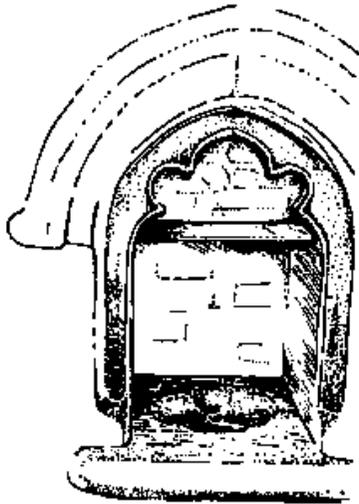
The mosaics on either side of the altar depicting Jesus as The Good Shepherd and The Light of the World were placed in the niches early this century, and replaced paintings of the same subjects.

### **10. Reredos**

This stands behind the altar and is of carved oak. It was given to the Church in 1897 in memory of Sophia Margaret, wife of John Hatfield Brooks of Flitwick Manor.

### **11. Piscina**

In a niche in the south wall of the sanctuary is a piscina - formerly used for draining away water used for washing the chalice during services of Holy Communion.



### **12. Altar**

Our Altar was made from the best parts of the Rood Screen which divided the Chancel from the Nave before the nineteenth century restoration took place.

### **13. Royal Arms**

The Royal Arms are frequently found in churches, and several attempts have been made from time to time to make them compulsory. Our Royal Arms hangs in the vestry and bears the date 1729, one figure appearing in each corner of the frame.

### **14. Organ**

Our organ was dedicated in 1879. It is a single manual chamber organ which has served us well through the years. It was made by Henry Jones & Son of South Kensington. The Sunday after it was dedicated the choir appeared in surplices for the first time.

### **15. Etching**

Moving back into the on the wall is an etching of building, the Norman doorway.

### **16. Incumbents**

On the west wall at the back of the church is a list of the incumbents of Flitwick, the earliest being 1260 Richard de Caudewell.

### **17. Kneelers**

Since 1983 members of the congregation have been busily engaged in making kneelers. When all the kneelers have been completed there will be over 200 in the church. They have all been individually designed and many have been donated in memory of loved ones.

## Windows

The stained glass windows of our church are of special interest. In chronological order they are:-

**1848** On the north side of the chancel is the first stained glass window to be installed in our church. The design is of the Virgin Mary with the Holy Child in her arms. It was designed by Powell and is in memory of the young wife and daughter of John Thomas Brooks of Flitwick Manor.

**1879** This two-light window in the south wall of the sanctuary represents the two apostles, St Peter and St Paul, to whom our church is dedicated. It is in memory of Mary Brooks of Flitwick Manor. Notice the wild flowers shown in the lower sections of the window - some of these still bloom in our churchyard. The unusual shields depicted were so shaped to accommodate the lances when charging.

**1886** This small two-light window at the West end of the south aisle represents two female figures depicting Charity and Faith. The window is the work of Pitman & Son.

**1897** The three-light window in the south aisle is the only window in the church by Franz Mayer of Munich. It shows our Lord sending out the Apostles to teach and baptise all nations, and is in memory of the Reverend Francis Asphitel, a former vicar of the parish.

**1900** The window at the east end of the south aisle is another design by Powell & Son. It shows the Sower and the Good Shepherd. When it was installed fragments of mediaeval glass were incorporated in the upper part of the window. It is in memory of the Reverend Frederick Bell Lipscomb, another former vicar of the parish.

**1906** The west window in the tower represents Christ appearing to Peter and, like most of our windows, is by Powell. It was erected as a memorial to John Hatfield Brooks of the Manor

## The East Window

During the nineteenth century restoration work builders found small scattered pieces of stained glass which, when assembled, formed the coat of arms of Sir David of Flitwick. At least three generations of knights with this name held the Manor between 1248 and 1308 and the glass must date from this time.

Until recently this ancient coat of arms hung as a medallion in the centre of the small window on the south wall or the chancel. It depicts two leopards "passant sable". The East Window has recently been restored, and the mediaeval glass has been incorporated in the centre light.

The stonework of the east window had been cut away in 1859 to allow for the insertion of a stained glass window depicting the Resurrection, and this cutting away: together with the effects of time and weather, necessitated the restoration of the window. The stained glass no longer fitted in to the restored window, and has been replaced with clear hand-made glass.

## Graffiti

It may be of interest to note that there are some unofficial inscriptions on some of the clerestory windows. Some examples are:

Mr Snow set me here and bid me stand a hundred year 1789.

F Dillingham. J J Dillingham killed at Dover by an aeroplane  
1st August 1916 aged 27.

Frank, Harry, Jack, Dick and Jim Dillingham served in the army  
during this war 1914 to 1918.

## The Bells

Seven bells hang in our belfry, five of which date from the seventeenth century.

1. Treble - 1957.
2. GOD SAVE OUR KING 1637. This bell was re-cast in 1867.
3. Johannes Clarke hanc fecit Campanum 1608. Bells by this founder are very rare.
4. GOD SAVE OUR KING 1631 IK. IK stands for James Keene, bell founder of Woodstock MILES GRAYE MADE ME 1653. Miles Graye was founder from Colchester.
5. Tenor bell MILES GRAYE MADE ME 1654.
6. The small bell which used to hang in St Andrew's Mission Church in Windmill Road. It is now used as a Minute Bell.

## Chapter House

Under the tower is the door leading into the Chapter House. Two inscriptions are scrawled on the wall - "This doorway was stopped Mar 5 by M Evans, Pulloxhill' and "The wall that stood in front of these doors was knocked down and doors opened by A P Blunt, Flitwick on 14 March 1984." The doors which stood here are now leaning against the south wall at the back of the church.

In the early 1980s there was an urgent need for an extension to the church and for kitchen and toilet facilities. Our Chapter House was dedicated in May 1984. This modern octagonal building was designed by Bruno Hooker to blend in with the existing church.

## Churchyard

As you leave spend some time looking at the outside of the church. Notice the carved stone heads high up on the walls.

Now go round to the north side of the church to look at the Norman door.



Part of our churchyard is kept close mown but some areas are being maintained as conservation areas where you may find many specimens of wild flowers and creatures such as slow worms.

The churchyard was extended in 1864 and in 1869 the church was given another piece of land on the opposite side of the road. Although people have been buried here for many hundreds of years most of the headstones are relatively modern, the oldest dating from about 1759. The graves of some former Vicars are near the porch.

## **Lychgate**

Lych is a Saxon word meaning body. The purpose of a Lychgate is to shelter the dead on the way to burial while waiting for the clergyman. Our Lychgate was given in memory of the three sons of the Reverend and Mrs Francis Ashpitel and was erected in 1901. One of the oak posts has recently been renewed.

We hope that you have enjoyed the peace and beauty of our Parish Church. Before you leave pause for a moment to join your prayers with those of generations of people who have worshipped in this House of God. A church is not a museum, it is the place where the people of God meet to worship, and then go out to serve God and the community.

## **HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT**

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.

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.

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.

Gradually the little Norman church was re-built, 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.

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.

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.

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.

In the early 1990s 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.



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.

### *Bibliography*

Flitwick - The Story of an old Bedfordshire village  
The Reverend J L Ward Petley

### *Acknowledgements*

I am grateful to the following people for their help and encouragement:-

The Revd Roy Hubbard  
Mrs Pamela Saville  
Dr Tony Brown (Churchwarden)  
Revd Canon Michael Bradley  
Revd Sheila Morton



© 1989 Joan M Brown  
2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 1993