

Church of Saint Bartholomew, Greens Norton, Towcester

Some brief historical notes for the use of visitors

COMPILED BY THE RECTOR

THE REVD. CANON J. F. WRANGHAM HARDY, M.B.E., T.D.

Honorary Chaplain to The Queen



SAINT BARTHOLOMEW, APOSTLE AND MARTYR

Saint Nathaniel Bartholomew, to give him his full name (for Bartholomew means son of Talmai), was the sixth of the Apostles and a close friend of S. Philip. "In whom is no guile" - this great tribute to his honesty and integrity was called forth by some episode under a fig tree. Speculation has been rife as to whether it was a secret sin, or an act of consecration. Whichever it was, it gave us the first Christian creed - "Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel." Legend has it that he preached in India and was martyred there. Pantaenus, head of the famous School at Alexandria, found a copy of S. Matthew's Gospel in India, in the Second Century, believed to have belonged to S. Bartholomew.

A TOUR OF THE CHURCH

The best approach is from the Towcester road under the old lych-gate. entering by the south door. To the left is the tower, Saxon and fourteenth century in the lower stages, crowned with a Renaissance belfry, and a spire rebuilt in 1807, and again in 1956.

Going to the centre of the Church we stand in the original Saxon building, very lofty and in a good state of preservation. Note the long and short work in the tower, the blocked windows high over the chancel arch, and the evidence of windows near the corners of the Saxon Church. Also the corner stones are clearly seen in the east part of the south aisle. We note that the old Saxon walls have been pierced by fourteenth century arches and pillars.

On the wall we note the original Arms of Queen Elizabeth dated 1592. Corresponding with them are the Arms of King George IV. Queen Elizabeth's Arms are sufficiently rare to be noteworthy, most of them being destroyed by Cromwell. The earliest known Tudor Arms are probably those of Henry VIII at Rushbrook in Suffolk, and of Edward VI at Westerham in Kent. There are about twenty known examples of Elizabeth's Arms in Churches in England. Others can be seen at Beckington in Somerset-"1574, God save The Queen"; at, Ludham in Norfolk-" Vivat Regina Elizabetha"; at Basingstoke, with ornamented borders dated 1596; and at Bramford in Suffolk. Note also the Arms of Saint Edward the Confessor.

The nave roof is Tie-beam, but going eastwards into the chancel, which was rebuilt in 1891, we note a very fine Hammer-beam roof. Notice a hole in the pillar beside the chancel screen where the Eighteenth century three-decker pulpit and sounding-board were fixed. Also the marks on the chancel arch where the rood-beam was fixed.

In the Chancel notice the fine monument to William Hicklinge circa 1620_30, good enough for the Nicholas Stone. Small kneeling figures below a baldacchino which curves forward. The draperies are lifted by two fine large standing angels, in the best Netherlandish Mannerist tradition. At the foot, two corbels in the shape of caryatid heads with Ionic Capitals (Nikolaus Pevsner).



Also in the Chancel, notice the fine East window in memory of Mary Pinckard, the piscina in the south wall and aumbry in the north wall, and the late seventeenth century Altar rails, and a further Renaissance Monument opposite to that of William Hicklinge.

Notice in the north aisle the tombs or monuments of Sir Thomas and Lady Philippa Greene (alabaster effigies), Sir Thomas and Lady Matilda Greene "(excellent brasses) and the fifth Sir Thomas and Lady Greene (the tomb-chest was inside a big recess with a four-centred arch and has shields in pointed quatrefoils).

In the south aisle notice at the east end the very fine oak parish chest. with its three locks for Rector and Churchwardens; the medieval paving beside the pulpit, and the memorial brass to the sixth and last Sir Thomas Greene. Only Lady Greene survives; and she was the grandmother of Queen Catherine Parr. Also note the parish war memorial and the list of Rectors of Greens Norton going back to Saxon times. There is a fine modern window in memory of Brigadier Peyton, which

includes the spire of the Church and his home, Bengal Manor. At the west end of the south aisle note the fine Norman foot, and the pillow-stone used for burials when the woollen shroud was the only legal coffin; also the blocked-up door of the old vestry whose outlines can be traced on the tower and west wall outside. Also the marble burial slabs of Nicholas Russell, Rector, and William Saunders, under the Royal Arms on William Saunders the west wall.

The Registers date from 1565, and there are various Churchwardens' records, parochial documents and deeds relating to the Schools.

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Greens Norton, or Norton David (or Davey) as it was originally known, was a royal manor, held by Saint Edward the Confessor in due time and passing to William the Conqueror. The Church could have been built as early as AD 650, and certainly the present nave (the stone Saxon Church) would be standing in the Ninth Century. Typical long and short work can be seen on the walls; and traces of the head of the original Saxon nave window can be seen above the arch at the south-west corner near the font. Reference has already been made to the Saxon windows over the chancel arch. Norton David remained a Royal Manor until 1189, and the house lay about half a mile to the north of the Church and immediately behind the Rectory. There was an avenue of trees leading to the Litchborough Road (the old Welch Road), shown on maps of the sixteenth century. In 1189, the Manor was granted to the Earl of the Isle of Wight, passing through his descendants and the Mareschall family until 1355 (Edward III), when it was purchased by Sir Henry Greene and his son Thomas. The name of the village and parish was changed to Greene's Norton, evidence of the fame of this important family.

Sir Henry Greene of Boughton was Lord Chief Justice of England from 1361-65, and on his death in 1369, he was succeeded by his son, Sir Thomas, the first of the six Thomas Greenes who flourished in uninterrupted succession and great reputation at Greene's Norton. The last Sir Thomas Greene died in 1506, leaving two daughters and co-heiresses-Ann, wife of Nicholas Lord Vaux of Harrowden; and Maud, who married Sir Thomas Parr of Kendal, younger brother of Lord Parr of Horton. Of their three children, William became Earl of Essex and Marquis of Northampton; Ann married William Herbert, first Earl of Pembroke; and Catherine, who after marrying successively Edward Borough Esq., and John Nevill, Lord Latimer, became the sixth wife, and successful widow, of King Henry VIII. Later she married Thomas Lord Seymour of Sudeley. Albert Hartshorne maintains that there is every reason to believe that Catherine Parr was born at Green's Norton, and spent her early life here. She died at Sudeley Castle in 1548 and is buried in the chapel there. The Church formerly contained a most interesting series of monuments of the Greene Family, consisting of altar tombs with brasses and effigies. The tomb of the first Sir Thomas Greene who died in 1391, is at Boughton. The grey marble slab of the second Sir Thomas Greene (who died in 1417) has entirely disappeared (he may be buried at Boughton like his father). He married Mary, daughter of Richard Lord Talbot of Goodrich. The alabaster effigies at the east end of the north aisle are those of the third Sir Thomas Green (who died in 1457) and his wife, Philippa, daughter of Robert, fourth Lord Ferrers of Chartley. Sir Thomas is shown in a gorget of mail, epaulieres with neck-guards, now broken off, reinforcing plates, a plain cuirass with 'defaults' of mail, avant bras and brassarts circularly channeled, and large coudieres fixed by ties or arming points. To the cuirass are attached six tassets hinged on the left, buckled on the right side, channelled tuilles, with engrailed edges, are fixed by straps and buckles to the lowest tassets and below them appear the mail skirt. Round the neck is a collar of SS with a trefoil pendant; the bare head rests upon a tilting helm with the crest, a buck's head attired. The bare

hands are uncommon at this period. The lady also wears the SS collar a very unusual ornament for a lady.



The tomb of the fourth Sir Thomas Greene (who died in 1461) and his wife, Matilda, daughter of Sir John Throckmorton, has been entirely destroyed, but the Sussex marble slab containing five brasses of the knight, his wife, a child and two shields, one showing his arms impaling Ferrers and the other quartering Mablethorpe (the first Sir Thomas married a daughter of Sir John Mablethorpe) still remain. The long and complicated inscription has been restored in part. This Sussex marble slab was taken from the floor of the chancel in 1891, and placed in the despoiled tomb of the fifth Sir Thomas Greene, who was living in 1475. The tomb of the sixth and last Sir Thom\is Greene has also disappeared, but the marble slab stands at the east end of the south aisle between the pulpit and the fine Fourteenth Century Parish Chest, 2nd contains the brass of his wife, the grandmother of Queen Catherine Parr. He died in 1506. The brass shows his wife in Tudor dress. Matilda Green later married Richard Myddleton of Greens Norton and founded a Chantry in 1496 of which only the Chantry House remains.

The Manor passed back into the Royal Family through Queen Catherine. and Henry VIII annexed it to the Honour of Grafton, and held both the Manor and the income of the combined benefices of Greens Norton and Whittlebury with Silverstone. The advowson, or gift of the Living, continued to belong to the Crown. The benefices were separated in 1853. The Manor of Greens Norton was given in 1673 to the Earl of Euston by Charles II, and he was created Duke of Grafton in 1675. The Duke of Grafton is still Lord of the Manor of Greens Norton. In 1948, on the death of the Rector, the Revd H. Vinning, who collected some of the notes of this history, the benefice was united with that of Braden; and the patronage is exercised by the Crown (two turns) and the Grant-Ives family, patrons and Lords of the Manor of Braden, (one turn). The present Rector, who is an Honorary Chaplain to The Queen, was presented by Her Gracious Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

Few churches contain a Saxon church enshrined within a fourteenth century medieval church, a Saxon tower, with Renaissance belfry and modern spire, and a ring of six bells, and a Norman font of outstanding design. At the end of each aisle there would be altars served by chantry priests who lived in the Chantry house opposite the Church. The parishioners used the south door. The north door was used for processions (and letting the devil out at christenings), and the great west door was reserved for the Bishop. The Church walls were plastered and probably painted with Stations of the Cross on the north side, and Old Testament pictures on the south side beginning

with Adam and Eve at the west end. A gallery was added all round the Church and an organ was placed in the west gallery in the 1826 restoration, given by John Elliott, Esq. at a cost of one hundred golden guineas. The paintings and "sepulchral effigies" vanished in 1826, but what remained were restored in 1891 when the galleries were removed and the Church restored and re-seated. The Chancel screen was added in 1911. Finally, in 1923 a vestry was added at the north-west corner in memory of a former Rector, the Revd R. A. Kennaway.

THE RECTORY

The Rectory lies to the north of the Church and may well be built on part of the site of the ancient manor or palace of the Greene Family. The centre part is Tudor, but in the Queen Anne east wing there is a very fine stone fireplace of the fifteenth century. This almost certainly came from the home of the Greens and Queen Catherine Parr would warm herself at it, as a small girl. There are both Tudor and Queen Anne staircases. The house was considerably enlarged by the Duke of S. Alban's son when he was Rector. The stabling was made out of the old Tithe barn in 1862. Set in a sweeping lawn and shielded by fine old lime trees it is a bit of old England.

GREENS NORTON CHURCH SCHOOL

The Dukes of Grafton, along with the Rector, provided the first Church school, either late in the Seventeenth- or early in the Eighteenth century; and the interesting little building known as the Reading Room at the top of School Lane survives from this period, and is still used for Church meetings. The school was endowed by William Pinckard in 1847, and by John Elliott in 1865. The school was not big enough for the growing community and was replaced by the "old" school, as it is now known, again on land provided by His Grace, the Duke of Grafton, in 1872, the Reading Room being used for some time as the Infants' School and from the forties until 1966 for school dinners. Finally, a further new school, incorporating all the latest equipment, was built in 1966 just off the Towcester Road. Mr. J. Harrison Phillip was Headmaster from 1905 to 1946, having succeeded his father, who was Headmaster from 1886 to 1905. An outstanding record by two generations of one family. Mr. John Phillip's two daughters also were assistant teachers.

Both the long history of the Church and School, and the size of the original Saxon Church, bear witness to the existence of a flourishing community from earliest days. A community with a long history, but also with an interesting future. So as you look around this ancient and beautiful Church, thank God for the faithfulness and devotion of those who during more than a thousand years have served Him in this place, and have left us this priceless treasure for our heritage. Pray also for those who now minister and worship here. S. Bartholomew's Day, 1967. Revised 1968.1967. Revised 1968.

This brochure was copied from an original provided by Revd Canon John Knight, currently the vicar at The Church of Saint Bartholomew, Greens Norton, Towcester. April 2004 (Note: all spelling retains its original form.)