



### Church Crawl on 3rd October 2015

For our 2015 Church Crawl I chose an area near the western border of Buckinghamshire, an area in which two of the parishes we visited have been moved between Bucks and Oxfordshire. Of the eight churches we visited, six had never been visited by BAS.

First we went to the small church of St Michael and All Angels in the very small village of Aston Sandford. The nave walls probably date from the 12<sup>th</sup> century as do the former capitals of the chancel arch, now forming part of the support for a wooden arch. These capitals are dated by most writers as 13<sup>th</sup> century, which was when the chancel was rebuilt. It still has a wonderful survival from that century, as the church is only one of four in the county to

have 13<sup>th</sup> century glass. Apart from some stonework of windows and the blocked north doorway, most of the architectural detailing dates from an 1870s restoration by Edward Bruton. Historically, Aston Sandford must be best known for its Rector for 20 years from 1821, Rev Thomas Scott, who became a prolific writer and famous evangelistic preacher. On display for us were volumes of "Scott's Bibles" in which he wrote his own commentary on the Bible, starting as weekly newspapers and ending up with many editions. I could not resist the opportunity of reminding everybody that Scott the Commentator came to a life in the church by accident, which I maintain had a considerable impact on 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture. His middle son (another Thomas) became perpetual curate at Gawcott, building his own church, and arousing the interest of his young son, who would become Sir George Gilbert Scott, who had such an influence on the 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic Revival. Having admired a 1969 window by Michael Farrar Bell, which is in memory of two members of the Good family, we were able to enjoy some memorable hospitality with coffee and biscuits in the splendid gardens of the Manor House, thanks to Mrs Good.

Our next church was St Nicholas at Kingsey, a building that I had to confess I had always driven past, but had never taken much notice of until a couple of years ago. It was built in 1892 to replace a Georgian church of 1780, which had replaced a medieval church. The man responsible for the new building was Philip James Digby Wykeham who had succeeded to the Tythrop Estate. The church's Oxford architect was Harry Wilkinson Moore. His work is an intriguing mixture of Decorated and Perpendicular styles, but with a definite Arts and Crafts feel to much of its detailing, particularly the leadwork on the windows. The style is not common in Bucks, but there are some good features in a few churches, and Kingsey certainly deserves a place on any list. The church is wide and light with a very attractively decorated timber roof. All the furnishings are good, and in particular the very finely carved reredos is memorable. The church has a large C E Kempe east window, and two later Kempe and Co windows in the west wall. As many items in the church, they remember members of the Wykeham family. In 1933, in order to tie up some complicated boundaries, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire swapped two adjoining parishes, so Kingsey came to Bucks, and Towersey went to Oxon.

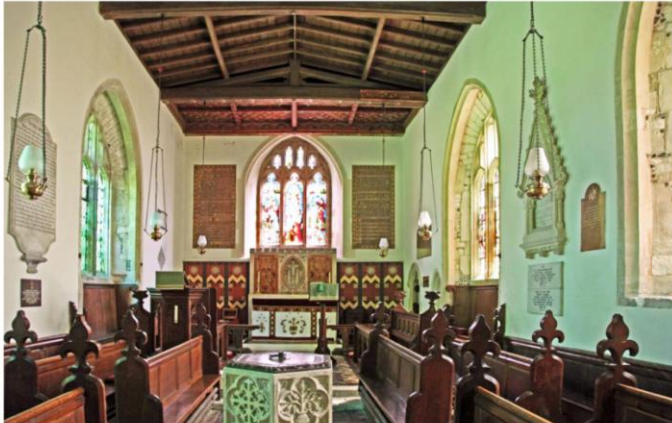
Towersey was our next church. St Catherine's is a wide church with no aisles. The oldest part of the building is the 13<sup>th</sup> century chancel, still with an original lancet window in each side wall. Around 1340 a new nave was built, complete with a new chancel arch flanked by eastern nave windows each side, as the nave is so much wider than the chancel. The chancel has a good medieval roof, but the chancel walls had to be strengthened with iron bars in the 1880s. Some of us with a more engineering mind started tracing the bars to see how they had been buried in the walls. The nave roof was replaced in the 1850s, when a bell turret was removed from the west end, and a new tower built which also serves as a south porch. The church is notably short of monuments, and its only stained glass is a new millennium window tastefully portraying village scenes.

For our final church of the morning, we were truly into Oxfordshire, at St Andrew's in Chinnor. The church is large at 120 feet long and appears from the outside to be very uniformly of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Decorated style. However inside we find arcades of the Early English style from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, with the north being slightly earlier than the south. In the 1320s the chancel was rebuilt, undoubtedly making it longer, and it is probable that the aisles were rebuilt, making them wider, and adding the fine stone vaulted south porch. All this work has given the exterior its 14<sup>th</sup> century appearance. However the chancel has some remarkable original survivals, in the form of some stained glass and windows, and even its original chancel screen of timber dating from around 1320. It is a magnificent solid construction but in a plain style that could almost be a modern piece of work. At some time the screen has lost half its base and been lowered. The last medieval work was adding the clerestory to the nave in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. Nave and chancel roofs were replaced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and a large restoration was carried out in the 1860s. St Andrew's has a splendid set of brasses from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. No need to scabble about under carpets looking for them here, as in the 1930s they were all fixed to the walls above the choir stalls. More recently they have been mounted on wooden boards. The interior of the church is fairly dominated by very large paintings, they were the design cartoons by Sir James Thornhill for Wren and Hawksmoor's rebuilding of the

north transept rose window at Westminster Abbey. My talking about this church was rather difficult as it coincided with a sudden (and unexpected to me) visit by bellringers.

After lunch our coach climbed up onto the Chilterns to bring us back to Bucks and the church of St Paul at Bledlow Ridge. This church was built by David Brandon in 1868 to replace one further north in the village. It is a traditional Victorian church of the Chilterns with chancel and nave having a bell turret. However it is on a larger scale than most similar village churches, with a high roof, making it light and airy. Brandon was fond of the Early English style so the side walls have plain lancet windows, although the chancel ones are raised in importance by having a little added decoration. Nobody could fail to notice the contrasting three stained glass windows of this church. At the east end is a window of 1904 in memory of the wife of the first Vicar of St Paul's. It is by Mayer and Co of Munich and portrays The Good Shepherd. On the north wall is a window of 1926 designed by Frank Ernest Howard and made by Geoffrey Fuller Webb, it shows St Michael the Archangel. There is now an extension on the north side of the church, so the window cannot be seen with daylight from the outside, but the glass seems to have an unusual "metallic" look. Finally, the west window in the church was our biggest surprise of the day, the sort of work on which there can be very different opinions. Fitted in 1968, it was designed by John Piper and made by Patrick Reyntiens. The abstract design of discs and oblongs runs across the three main lights and the three quatrefoils in the tracery above, a common characteristic of Piper's large windows. All three windows are shown on the front outside and inside cover pages.

Next was the church of St Mary and St Nicholas at Saunderton, which is now hidden away behind other properties, but shares the names of two churches. The old St Mary's was the one chosen to remain in use when the previous



church of St Nicholas was abandoned. The six mile long parish had two Manors and each had developed its own church. In 1888 John Samuel Adler started a total rebuilding, although re-using as many of the old materials as possible. Large timbers dominate the west end of the church, which support the belfry. At the east end there are many medieval floor tiles, and apparently a vast number in the vestry, although they are all hidden under a carpet. There are a few wall monuments in the church, including one to Mary Gibbs, the wife of Robert Gibbs, an important 19<sup>th</sup> century person to BAS.

I was then keen that we should go to the church of St Michael and All Angels at Horsenden shown above. As the road was not suitable for the coach, I had organised the nearest parking place, so we could walk to the church. I think that everybody thought the walk was worthwhile, as the small church has a rather special character. Standing near to Horsenden Manor, it is mainly just the chancel of the medieval church. The Manor had come to the Grubb family in 1662. In 1765 the Nave and Tower of the church were demolished, and a new tower was built. In 1810 the Manor House was totally rebuilt by the Grubb's, although they sold it to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Buckingham in the 1840s. After the Duke's inevitable bankruptcy, the Manor was purchased by the Rector of Horsenden, Rev William Edwards Partridge, who with his wife refitted the church, and extended the sanctuary by seven feet. Responsible for this work was the architect William White. To me it always has the character of a miniature College Chapel, especially with the Perpendicular style of the former chancel. It is impossible to say how old the rest of the church had been. The church has many monuments, mainly to members of the Grubb family.

Our last church of the day was St Nicholas at Great Kimble. Its heavily battlemented exterior appearance always reminds me of a town church rather than a village one. Its look was the work of John Pollard Seddon who started restoring the church in 1876, finishing it 5 years before the only previous visit by BAS, in 1886. Inside, the most dominant feature is the Aylesbury Font which proudly stands raised up in the centre of the nave. To me it is the finest of all Aylesbury Fonts, despite the fact that a severe crack around the bowl shows that it was broken in half. We were told that because of Hampden family's dislike of infant baptism, the font was removed and hidden in the village pond, near the church. Not everybody believes this story, but it certainly seems to have been out in the churchyard early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The nave arcades date from around 1250, the chancel arch and the tower date from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. I am certain that the clerestory was added in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the north side still has three very small windows from that time, which are very unusual. Much of the nave roof also survives from then. I think the church has some interesting stained glass, by a variety of makers, including three by Sir Ninian Comper. There are also many attractive windows of patterned glass, which often tend to be ignored. I only hope that, despite all the information I throw at them on our days out, the good number of people with us that day did not ignore the splendid and vast Parish Chest that they would have passed on their way out. Dating from the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century it is as old as the nave arcades, and only around 70 years younger than Great Kimble's splendid font.

**Michael G Hardy**