

***St. Andrew's Church,
Foxtton***

A Short Guide

A SHORT GUIDE TO

THE CHURCH OF ST. ANDREW, FOXTON

WHEN WAS IT BUILT?

That is a question people often ask – but it is impossible to give a simple answer.

Medieval churches like ours were not built all at once in a single year. They grew and developed over a period of centuries. The oldest parts of Foxton church date from about 1200, but the church, as we see it now, was not completed until about two hundred and fifty years later.

HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

The church is built on high ground dominating the village and is visible for a considerable distance.

About one thousand years ago, monks – probably from Daventry – chose this site as a centre for the religious life of what was then a primitive Saxon community. Here they set up a stone cross as the focus of their ministry.

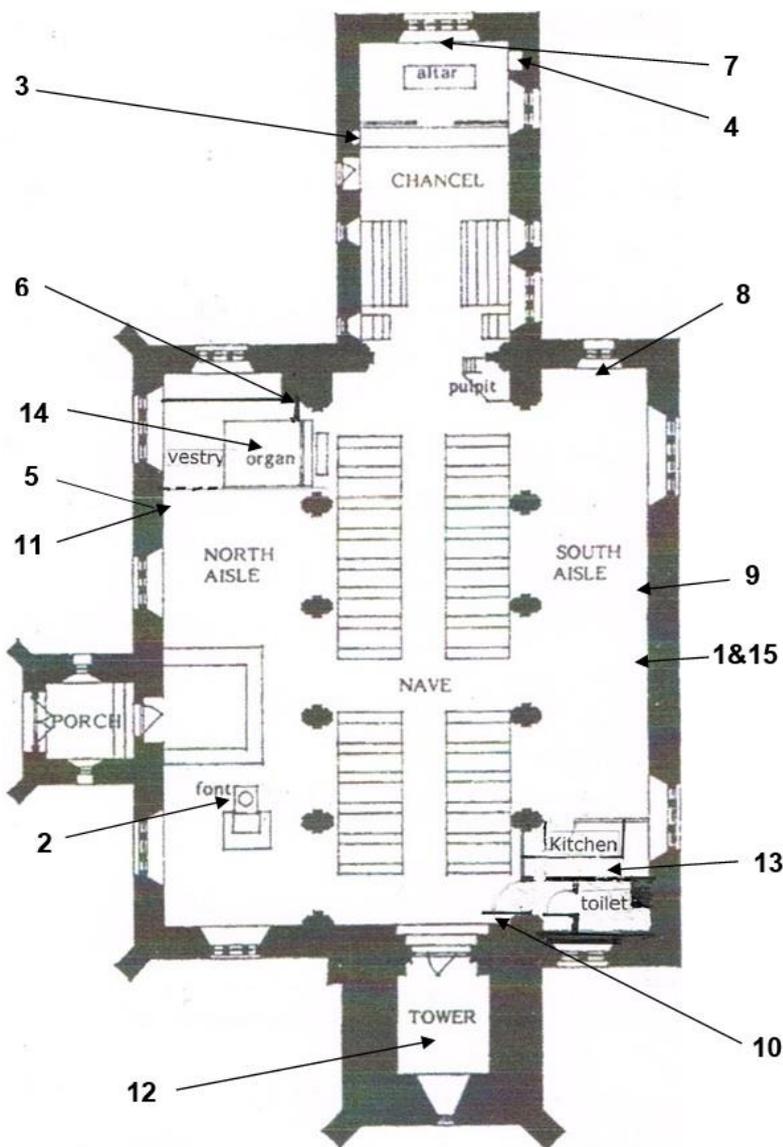
The shaft of the SAXON CROSS (1) is older by far than the oldest parts of the church. Sadly, it is no longer in one piece, although you can still see the shaft – the tall fragment of stone carved with the characteristic interlacing work of the Saxon period, standing near to the blocked up South doorway. There is no way whereby



it can be accurately dated, although it may be as early as 850AD. Certainly, it is no later than 1000AD.

Later, a small wooden church would have been built on the site, and perhaps a later one in stone. It is reasonable to assume that there was a church on the site by 1086AD because the Domesday Book mentions a resident priest in Foxton.

SURVIVALS FROM THE MIDDLE AGES



Note the LEPER'S WINDOW (3), now blocked up, on the north side of the chancel. Here the priest is said to have distributed alms, food and administered the sacrament to sick people who were not allowed inside the church for fear of infection.

In the south wall of the chancel, close to the altar, is a fine example of a medieval PISCINA (4). This was used at Mass for the 'ablutions' – washing of the priest's hands and of the vessels used for

communion. A tiny hole can be seen through which the water drained away into the earth.

Also of interest is the DOUBLE AUMBREY (5), with related jambs for hinged doors. This is located in the north wall. A chapel would have been situated here during the middle

ages. The aumbrey was used to keep the 'reserved sacrament' – the bread and wine consecrated at the Eucharist and used for the veneration of the faithful and also for communion of the sick and aged in their homes.

Perhaps the most interesting survival is the FLIGHT OF STEPS (6) leading up to the now-vanished rood screen (Christ on the Cross), over the chancel arch. This was clearly a very wide screen, as the opening in the wall indicates. The screen was probably destroyed during the Reformation, (16th Century), when so much of beauty was lost to our churches.

OTHER INTERESTING FEATURES

Look out for the DONATIONS BOARD (9), which is attached to the south wall. This board records the bequests of Lady Langley of £5 per annum, to be distributed annually on the Feast of St. Thomas, (21st December), to the poor of Foxton.

Also to be seen is an extract from the will of Miss Anne Tozer in 1777, bequeathing £250 for the same purpose – 'but by a mistake of the donor in overcharging her property, the aforesaid sum was reduced to the sum of £194.3s.4d, commencing from Christmas 1783'. THE TABLE OF KINDRED AND AFFINITY (10) next to the belfry door appears to have been made at the same time.

Among the memorial tablets in the church is one in memory of ROBERT MONK (11), who was a great benefactor to the village in which he was born. He set up a trust, which paid for the building of our fine village hall. This trust continues to maintain the village hall and also provides interest-free loans to parishioners.

There is a fine peal of six BELLS (12) In 1912, when the bells were recast, there were only five. A sixth was added in memory of a former vicar, the Reverend Thomas Widdowson. A detailed description of the inscriptions on the bells can be seen on a tablet by the belfry door.

The original VESTRY (13) was used as a Day School until a permanent school building was built for the children of the village in the middle of the 19th century. The old vestry

contained a fireplace and chimney. The new Vestry was moved to its current location behind the ORGAN (14) when the disabled toilet and servery were added in the 1990's.

The church registers date back to 1653 and contain a complete record of the many thousands of Foxton people who have come to this church to be baptised, married, and buried. These are now at the County Records Office.

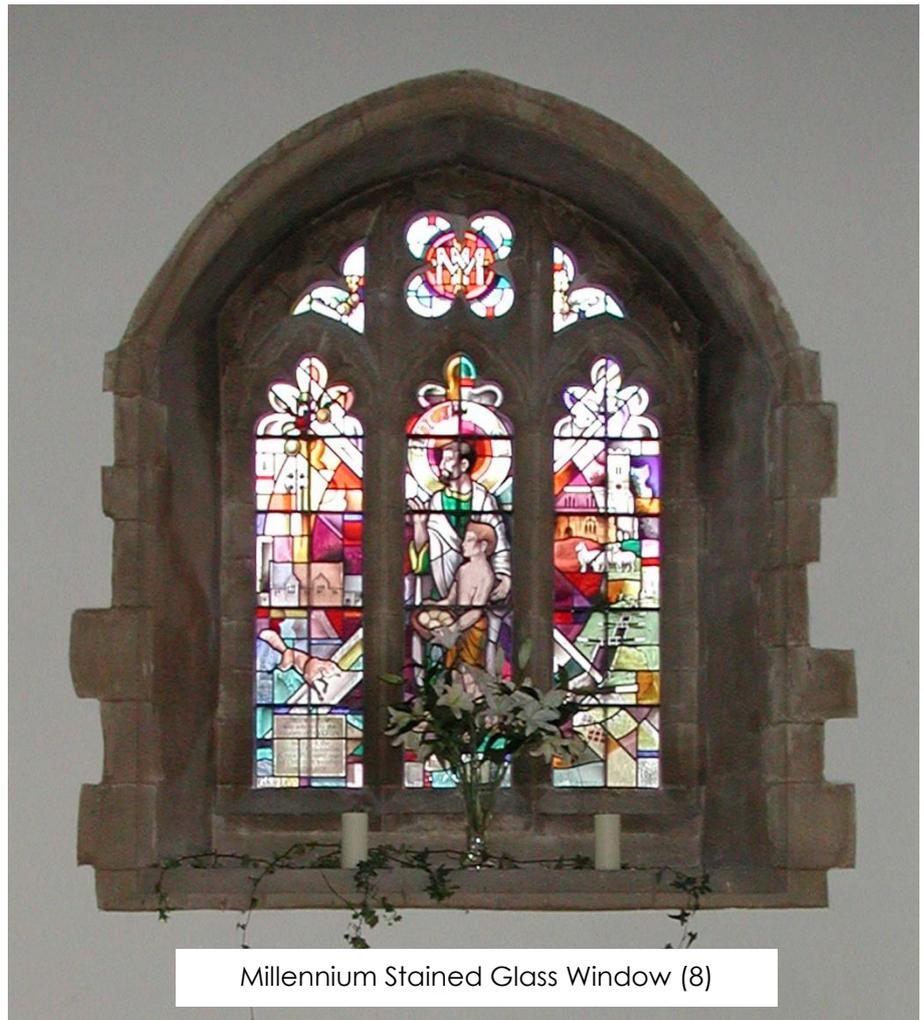
By 1806 the church was reported to be in good condition but after that it appears to have been badly neglected until 1890, although some minor work was carried out in 1842. In 1890 the state of the church was again so bad that it was either a case of pulling it down and building a new church or launching a massive campaign of restoration. Fortunately, the latter course was adopted – wealthy benefactors were forthcoming – and the whole building was completely restored at a cost of £2,750 (a fortune in today's money). All the church fittings, apart from the Saxon cross and the Norman font, date from this period: the pews, choir stalls, pulpit, (with its finely carved statues of Saint Peter and Saint Andrew), organ and lectern.

Foxton church is a typical example of a medieval church with a Victorian interior layout.

The church was re-opened after the restoration, with great ceremony in 1895, by the Bishop of Peterborough. There is a small stone tablet commemorating this event set into the north wall by the main entrance.

Old prints show that there was once a south door and porch. The porch was demolished during the restoration and the doorway was blocked up. Our WAR MEMORIAL (15) marks the place.

Until the year 2000 the only stained glass in the church was the EAST WINDOW (7). This was donated at the time of the restoration and installed in 1893 in memory of Dr Edward Ellis, who, after one hundred and fifty years became the first resident Vicar. He acquired what is now the Old Vicarage in 1889. This remained the residence of successive vicars of Foxton until 1984 when the new vicarage was built. To commemorate the MILLENNIUM a STAINED-GLASS WINDOW (8) was installed and can be seen at the east end of the south aisle.



Millennium Stained Glass Window (8)

THE COMING OF THE NORMANS

In 1109AD – just forty-three years after the Norman Conquest – Robert, the Lord of the Manor, gave away the rectory of the church to the Priory of Daventry. This meant that the monks became the owners of the ‘greater tithes’ (corn and wool).

One of the monks was appointed vicar and the ‘smaller tithes’ (live-stock, poultry, fallen wood, fruit, wax and honey) were for his living.

Robert had doubts about the generosity of his gift after a few years and revoked it. Still later, in great humility, he re-conveyed the rectory and ratified his act with a charter. Nicholas, then Vicar of Foxton, witnessed the Deed. A translation of the Deed can be read in a frame near the church door.



The Norman Font

One of the most interesting features of the church is the very fine NORMAN FONT (2), dating from the middle of the 12th century. In this font, babies and adults have been baptised into the fellowship of Christ's church for over eight hundred years.

The font and the shaft of the Saxon cross are all that remains from the days prior to the building of the present church.

CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

The church is built of ironstone, with some limestone facings.

As can be seen from the plan, it consists of a chancel, a clerestoried nave of five bays, north and south aisles and a west tower. The chancel was built first and the lower part of the tower (1200-1250). The aisles and the porch are approximately one hundred or more years younger (1350 -1380). The present nave and the upper stages of the tower, with its embattled parapet, are nearly a century younger.

The length of the church from the west end of the tower to the east end of the chancel is 108 feet. The width of the body of the church (nave and aisles) is 54 feet.

RESTORATION

Although the structure of the church has changed little since about 1450, the interior of the building has seen many alterations.

Some of the medieval features of the church give us an idea of how the church would have looked in bygone days, but there are no surviving records describing changes to the interior until late in the 18th century. We know that the church was in a poor condition in 1797, when it was described as very dirty. The seats were 'wretchedly bad', the roof leaky, the walls defective and the interior in need of plastering.

There is an interesting note in Nichols' "History of Leicestershire":

***'In an old church chest is a speaking trumpet
with a collection of old guns, swords, etc.'***

These would have dated from the Battle of Naseby, which was fought only a few miles from Foxton during the Civil War. Sadly, these relics have long since disappeared.



HOUSE OF PRAYER

We hope you have enjoyed your visit to our lovely little church and that you have found this simple guide helpful.

Please remember that it is much more than an interesting old building. It remains today what it has always been – a house of prayer consecrated to the worship of God.

Before you leave, sit quietly for a few moments and experience the sanctified peace of this place. Pray for those who worship here Sunday by Sunday and for the community, which this church has tried to serve for a thousand years. Perhaps you may wish to conclude your visit by saying this prayer:

*Almighty God, from whom to turn is to fall,
To whom to return is to rise again,
In whom to abide is to stand secure:
Grant us in our duties thy help,
In our perplexities thy guidance,
In our dangers thy protection,
And in our sorrows thy peace;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
AMEN*

