

An alabaster monument, with an inscription on a black marble tablet and commemorating Sir Clement Edmonds (d.1622) and his wife, was described by John Bridges in his *History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire*, 1791 when it was on the north wall of the chancel. It has not survived though a nearby Latin inscription on a brass plate with 17th-century brass figures does.

There are other 19th-century monuments and some ledger slabs of the late 17th and early 18th centuries.



Langham monument on north wall of nave

The hatchments on the west wall of the nave commemorate Langham Christie (d.1861) and his widow Margaret Elizabeth Christie (d.1866).

Churchyard

The earliest surviving gravestone is dated 1659.

The latest reference to the vicarage is in 1869. It was probably situated under the nurseries beside the gate where the path from the south door branches off.

The registers date from 1670 and are kept at Northamptonshire Record Office.

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THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

1 West Smithfield London EC1A 9EE

Tel: 020 7213 0660 Fax: 020 7213 0678 Email: central@tcct.org.uk
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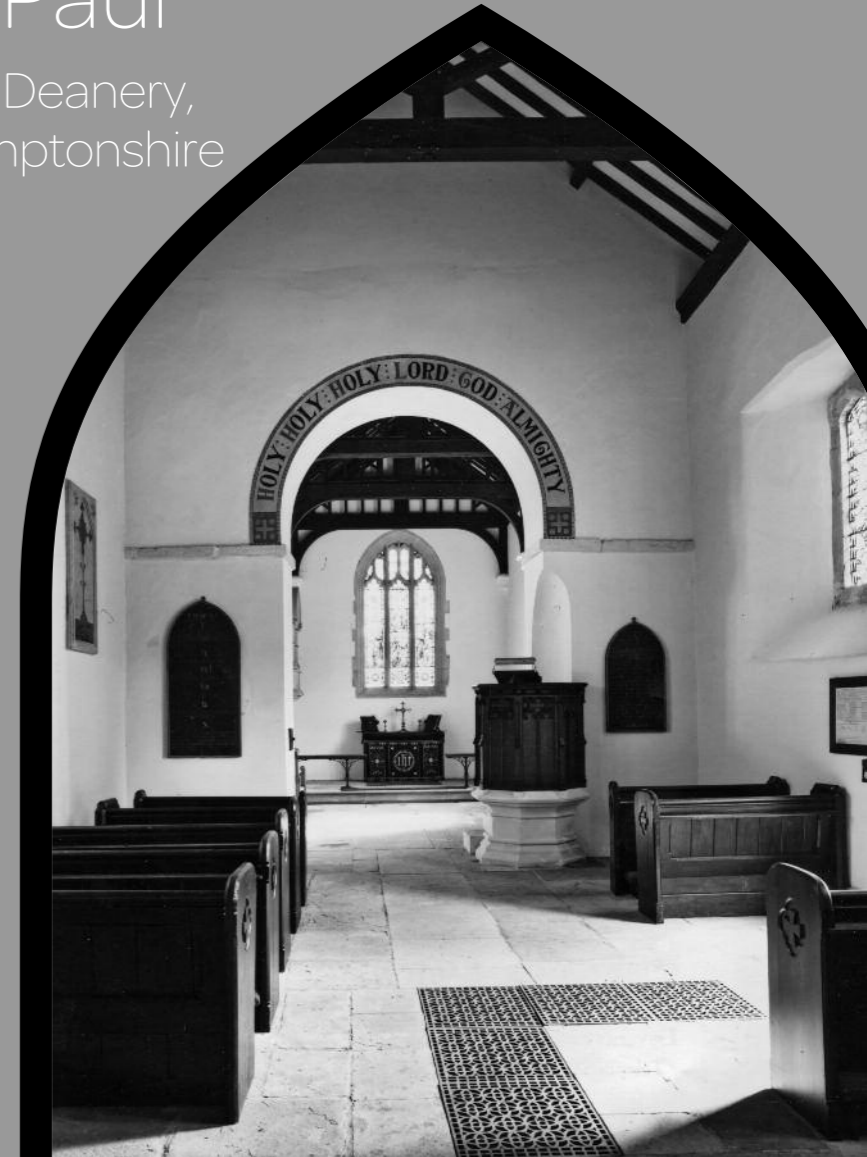
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Church of St Peter & St Paul

Preston Deanery, Northamptonshire



Church of St Peter & St Paul

by D E Friendship-Taylor and others

Introduction

Preston – the ‘priests’ farm’ was also known formerly as Preston juxta Northampton and Preston juxta Piddington. From about 1720 the current suffix was adopted, since the village had given its name to the local deanery, a division of the diocese of Peterborough. It is first referred to in Domesday Book (1086) as ‘Prestone’. In the 12th century it was owned by Gilbert and Michael de Preston. Later owners included the Hastings, Wynmer and Hertwelle (Hartwell) families. In the 17th century it came to Sir Clement Edwards and, in the early 18th to Sir Richard Newman. In the mid-19th century it was acquired by William Christie.

The village appears always to have been small. Only six people are recorded here in Domesday Book. In the early 18th century there were just 10 houses and in 1801 the population was 70. Earthworks of the deserted village are visible south of the church. The Hall, partly built after a fire in 1872, but now mostly of 1933, stands north of the church.

History

Nothing is known for certain about the church before the 12th century when it was given to St Andrew’s Priory, Northampton, by Gilbert de Preston. But recording work by the Upper Nene Archaeological Society uncovered a decorated horizontal string course of limestone, running from the side walls round the inside of the chancel arch, dating from the late 10th or early 11th century. Under the paint, when cleaned, the south side revealed the carving of a snake, in a figure of eight, with dots along its body and a protruding tongue. On the north side are two birds with outspread wings and fanned tails, and an indeterminate animal. Each piece also has three criss-cross motifs and both have an ‘original’ chamfered bottom edge and a roughly cut top edge. The motifs are purely Viking in character, of the Mammen style. These pieces of stone may represent fragments of a churchyard cross. In reusing the stone, the Norman builders completed the frieze with further lengths of limestone, shaped to match, and added to the decoration with rows of simple chevrons.

In the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I the church became very ruinous. The Hartwells (Lords of the Manor) had demolished part of the church as well as the vicarage, sold the lead and bells and turned the chancel into

a kennel for greyhounds and the tower into a pigeon house. With the sale of the estate to Sir Clement Edmonds in the early 17th century the church was restored. A major restoration took place in 1901 and again after the church was taken into the care of The Churches Conservation Trust in April 1976.

Exterior

The church consists of a west tower, aisleless nave and narrow chancel, built in limestone rubble with ironstone dressings. The roofs are covered in blue slate except for the tower, which has a copper roof.

The west tower is 12th century in date and approximately 50 ft (15 m) high. It is of massive construction strengthened by a flat buttress in the middle of each face. On the east side, where two original 12th-century bell-chamber windows remain, the buttress is taken up between them, but on the other faces pointed windows were substituted in the later 14th century and the buttresses cut back. Elsewhere on the tower early 12th-century windows remain. There is a blocked round-headed doorway on the north side and on the east face may be seen the line of a former high-pitched roof. The tower had become dilapidated until, in 1927,

a new roof was constructed. The tower contains one small bell, cast by Henry Penn of Peterborough in 1710.

The nave is lit by square-headed windows in the north and south walls, with the main doorway in the south wall. All belong to the 17th-century restoration.

The chancel appears to have been extended to its present length in the 13th century. The east window was inserted in 1808, with the date and initials of Charles Newman placed above the keystone.

The north chancel window, together with the



Exterior from the north-east

north doorway, now blocked, date from the restoration in c.1620, but the similar window on the south side is modern though the blocked window beside it is 13th century. Near it is a round-headed priest’s doorway, probably part of the original chancel and also blocked. There are records of a former chantry chapel of St Saviour in existence by 1398 and an altar to the honour of St Edmund. One of these was almost certainly on the south side of the chancel where, in 1970, drainage work revealed fragments of window tracery and would have incorporated the tall, blocked ‘low-side’ window with a trefoil head, divided by a transom of c.1300. The other chapel was probably on the north wall of the tower where a 13th-century piscina (basin for washing the communion vessels) was inserted near the Norman doorway.

Interior

The nave and chancel have modern open-timbered roofs. The semicircular Norman tower arch is covered by plaster, as is the arch between nave and chancel – the latter embellished by a 19th-century painted text ‘Holy: Holy: Holy: Lord: God: Almighty’. The south jamb of the chancel arch has been cut away to accommodate the stair to the pulpit.

The chancel stalls, altar, communion rails and pulpit are all 19th century. The pews come from St George’s church, Edworth, Bedfordshire, also in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust. The oak sanctuary chair of 1631 is now in use at Emmanuel Church, Weston Favell.

Removal of a monument from the north wall of the chancel in the 1970s revealed the fine piscina, aumbry (cupboard) and sedilia (stone seats), now restored.

In Northampton Museum are three different medieval floor tiles, drawn by Sir Henry Dryden in 1841 when he visited the church. The 18th-century font with its octagonal bowl stands against the north-west wall of the nave.

The glass in the east window commemorates Langham Christie (d.1861).

Monuments

The fine monument of grey, white and black marble, now on the north wall of the nave facing the south doorway, commemorates Purbeck Langham (d.1773) and his wife Elizabeth (d.1756). The family’s coat of arms, flaming lamps and a large urn are featured. It is by Henry Cox of Northampton (1725–1810).