



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

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ST MICHAEL'S
CHURCH

CLAPTON-IN-GORDANO
SOMERSET





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH
CLAPTON-IN-GORDANO, SOMERSET

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and be encouraged to see our other churches. Some are in towns; some in remote country districts. Some are easy and others hard to find but all are worth the effort.

Nearby are the Trust churches of:

BRISTOL, ST JOHN THE BAPTIST <i>Tower Lane (off Broad Street)</i>	BROCKLEY, ST NICHOLAS <i>9 miles NE of Weston Super Mare off A370</i>
BRISTOL, ST THOMAS THE MARTYR <i>St Thomas Street</i>	UPHILL, ST NICHOLAS OLD CHURCH <i>1 mile S of Weston Super Mare off A370</i>

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH

CLAPTON-IN-GORDANO, SOMERSET

by MARK McDERMOTT

'Clapton', from Old English 'clop-tun', means 'hill settlement', and the church, appropriately dedicated to St Michael, occupies a hillside position from which there are extensive views: westwards to the tapering head of the Gordano valley ('Gordano' probably derives from Old English 'gardenu', meaning 'triangular valley'), northwards across the valley to Portishead and north-east to the Severn estuary. The low-lying 'moors' in the flat valley bottom were drained for agricultural improvement in the 19th century and there are disused coal-pits in the wooded hillside above the church. To the south-east of the church, beyond the M5 motorway, are the former rectory and Naish House where Bishop Thomas Ken (1637–1711) often visited the devout Kemeys sisters. A description of the church in 1830 as 'remarkable for the beauty of its Architecture and its quiet secluded situation embower'd among trees and delightful scenery' is still appropriate despite the noise of motorway traffic.

THE MANOR

St Michael's church is detached from Clapton village but below the church is Clapton Court which retains some mediaeval features. Domesday Book records that the manor of 'Clotune' was held by Algar before the Norman Conquest and by Herlwin, a subtenant of the bishop of Coutances, in 1086; but from the 12th to the 16th centuries the manorial lords were members of the Arthur family whose arms appear on the front of the house. In 1226–27 the abbot of Keynsham, perhaps the previous patron of the living, acknowledged the Arthurs' right to the advowson (the right to present a priest to the benefice), and at least two mediaeval rectors were themselves Arthurs. The Winter family acquired the manor (and advowson) by marriage but sold it in the late 17th century. The appointment of

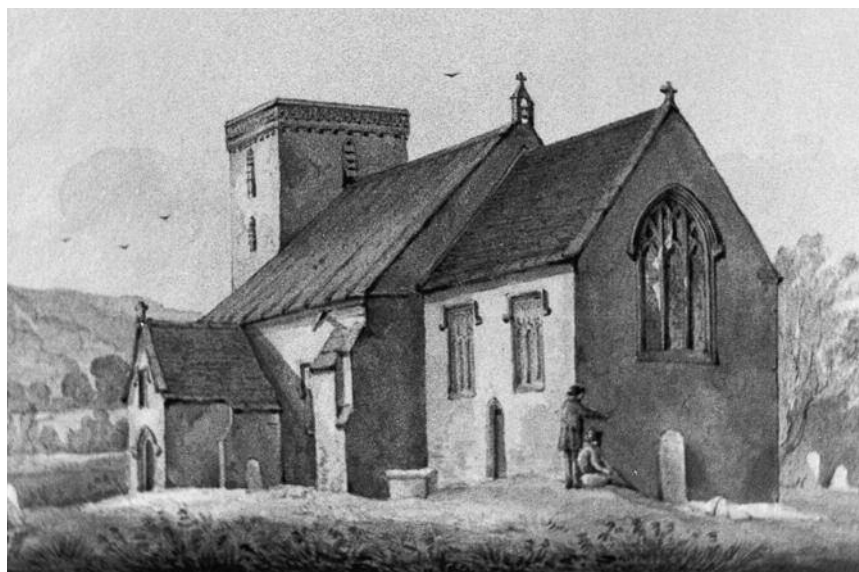
rectors implies the existence of a church from at least the early 13th century, but the earliest reference to the building is in 1448 when the chancel had been neglected by the previous rector.

THE CHURCH

The building consists of a chancel with a chapel on the north side (which will be referred to as the north-east chapel), a nave with a north chapel and a south porch, and a west tower of two stages with short diagonal buttresses. The walls are built of rubble (mainly red sandstone) with free-stone dressings, but only the chapels retain their external rendering.

The earliest architectural features are 13th century (Early English with some late Norman or Transitional forms). These include the mutilated tympanum over the south door, the blocked north doorway, the roll-moulded doorway in the chancel, and the corbel-table, belfry lancets and west window with dog-tooth ornament in the tower (the flat-topped para-

*Mid-19th century view of Clapton-in-Gordano church by W W Wheatley
Reproduced by kind permission of the Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society*



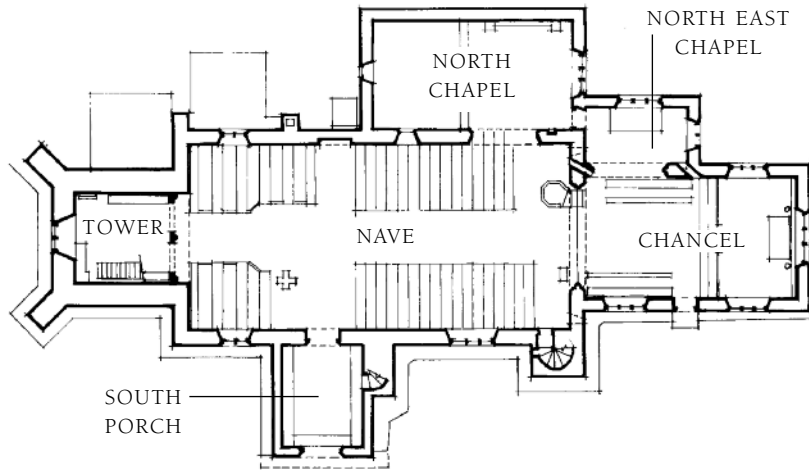
pet with cusped triangles is late mediaeval). The north chapel has a lancet, a blocked north window with Y-tracery and an east window with three cusped lancet lights, and must have been added to the nave later in the 13th century for it masks a lancet which Pevsner mistakenly describes as facing *into* the nave. The east window in the north-east chapel has geometrical tracery but a scratch-dial indicates that this window has been moved. The church was less affected by late mediaeval Perpendicular rebuilding than many in Somerset, but examples of that style are the east window and the flat-headed windows in the chancel, the north-east chapel, the porch and the nave, one of the latter having crockets on the label-moulding. The building was 'butified' in 1767 and underwent restoration in 1861–62, 1881–82 (when the architect, named Barnes, may have been E W Barnes of Bristol) and 1897, but the restoration does not seem to have involved drastic changes to its external appearance.

PORCH

The jambs of the porch entrance may pre-date the arch above, and the four-centred head of the late mediaeval inner doorway has been cut into an earlier tympanum which has traces of a painted consecration cross. In the east wall is the ogee-headed doorway of a blocked stairway to a former first-floor room or gallery (as at Weston-in-Gordano). The wagon roof has moulded wall-plates and above the inner doorway is an elaborately carved statue niche and an unexplained recess. To one side of the doorway is a mutilated holy water stoup.

INTERIOR

The mouldings and carved heads on the jambs of the tower arch are early features, as are the blocked north doorway and the nave lancet mentioned above. In the later mediaeval period the nave was heightened (the earlier outline and a blocked lancet are visible in the west wall) and provided with Perpendicular windows and a wagon roof (restored in 1881). In the south wall is a blocked stairway to the former rood loft. The small rectangular windows above would have lit the loft and the rood itself, and slots cut into the chancel arch suggest that a wooden tympanum was inserted during the mediaeval period or later. An altar may have stood in the north-



Ground plan of St Michael's church

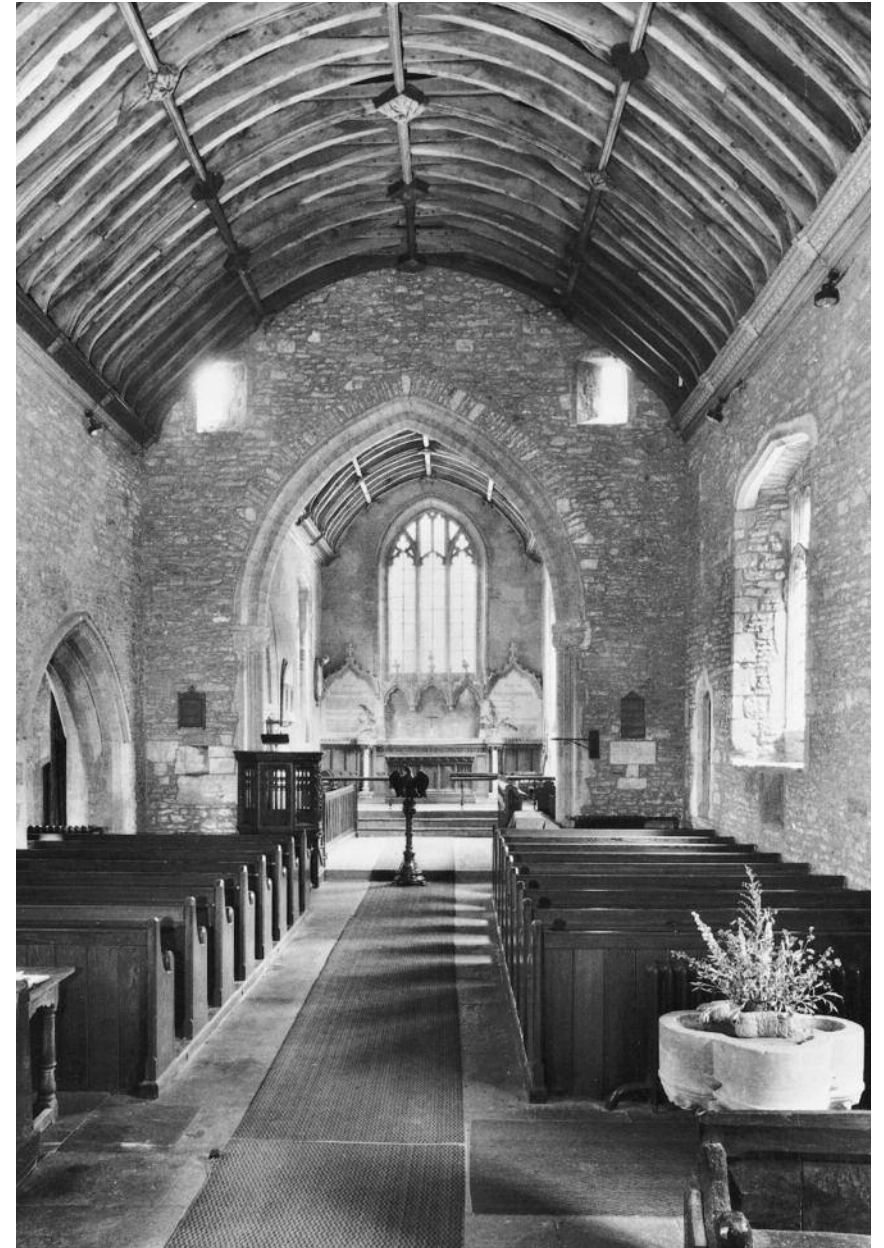
JOHN KEELING MAGGS RWA, RIBA, Chartered Architect

east corner of the nave where there is a squint, and possibly in the south-east corner also.

The north chapel contains the Winter vault and was probably a mediæval chantry chapel for the Arthur family. There is a piscina close to an opening into the north-east chapel which may have served as a squint, and a corbel on the east wall probably supported a statue. Another notable feature is an elaborate classical monument to Edmund, son of Henry Winter, who died in 1672 and is presumably represented by the effigy of a child holding a skull, with his parents kneeling on either side.

The chancel arch was altered in the late mediæval period and one of the capitals displays the Arthur arms. The chancel contains a piscina and against the east wall is a crenellated shelf or predella with fleurons, beneath which are reused columns with inverted Early English stiff-leaf capitals: these align with projections in the predella which once supported twisted latten candlesticks (now stolen) which were already 'ancient' in the 1780s. This structure may be a 17th century Laudian arrangement consisting entirely of reused stonework or adapting an existing late mediæval predella. The

Interior looking east, including the 13th century font, the doorway to the rood-loft stairs (on the right) and the reredos and predella behind the altar (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)





Monument in south aisle to Edmund Winter d.1672

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

reredos is Victorian, as is the heavy rendering, simulating stonework, on the chancel walls (and formerly in the nave also). A plaque on the north wall records the restoration carried out by the Revd Charles Wood, rector 1877–96, and completed by friends who restored the tower in 1897.

The north-east chapel is a late mediaeval addition but includes a reused 13th century east window (see above). The Arthur arms occur once again on a capital beneath the chapel arch, and the chapel contains a memorial to the couple who united the Arthur and Winter families (both died in 1632). There is a squint with an integral piscina, and a large plain slab on a raised base may be a former Easter sepulchre (where a crucifix would have been placed and vigil kept between Good Friday and Easter Day). Above the squint in the chancel is a painted consecration cross.

FURNITURE AND FITTINGS

The bench seats at the back of the nave, with their unusual profiles, are a remarkable survival from, it is believed, the 14th century but they may have been repositioned when the nave was partially re-seated (reusing early bench-ends on the new pine seats) in 1862. Fragments of Perpendicular panelling in the tower may have come from the back of a tall rear bench illustrated in 1860 and there is reused woodwork in the seats in the north chapel. In 1699 a pew was built 'between the Church Pew and the Chancel' for the exclusive use of the mixed 'Society of Singers'. This must have been the 'tall square pew' known as the 'Singing Pew' which stood in the south-east corner of the nave in the 19th century, and the hinged iron bracket nearby may have provided light (or held an hourglass for the preacher). The pulpit and lectern and the combined desk and stall in the chancel were set up as memorials in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the altar is dated 1914.

The font, with quatrefoil-shaped bowl, is believed to be 13th century with later carved faces under the bowl. The wooden screen of c. 1300 under the tower arch was rescued from the garden of Clapton Court and originally stood on one side of the entry passage there, to provide access to the service rooms or kitchen. It is an exceptional survival but the spandrels and some attached features are modern additions and there were formerly three spherical triangles in the roundel.

BELLS AND PLATE

In the tower are two bells of c.1550 by Henry Jefferies of Bristol, a tenor dated 1618 by Roger Purdue I of Bristol and three bells added in 1897 by Llewellins and James of Bristol. A rare survival is the sanctus bell in the bellcote on the east gable of the nave, which may have been cast at Gloucester in the early 14th century. The Latin inscription SIGNIS CESSANDIS ET SERVIS CLAMO CIBANDIS has been translated 'When the great bells stop, I ring for the feeding of the servants (of the Lord with his holy bread)', a reference to the Mass. Silver plate listed in 1993 included a chalice (1772); two patens and a chalice cover donated by WH Colston, rector, in 1819; and a flagon given in memory of Charles Ponting in 1953.

CHURCHYARD

A number of interesting 18th and early-19th century gravestones include that of a former parish clerk and his family near the south side of the nave.

CLOSURE

During the post-war period the rector ceased to live in the 19th century rectory and the church was grouped with others in the area. Efforts to maintain St Michael's as a parish church included renovation of the roof in 1985–86, but it was closed in 1994 and vested in The Churches Conservation Trust in 1995. Repairs, including some conservation of masonry and leaded lights, have been carried out for the Trust under the direction of the architect John Keeling Maggs. This has safeguarded a building which has a series of outstanding architectural and other features and in which services are still occasionally held.

SELECT LIST OF SOURCES

J Collinson *History and Antiquities of Somerset* (1791). Also the MS survey of Somerset by Collinson's collaborator, Edmund Rack (relevant part in possession of Mr R Simmonds).

N Pevsner *The Buildings of England: North Somerset*.

WJ Robinson *West Country Churches*, Vol. I.

E Wigan *The Tale of Gordano*.

Descriptions of the church in the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society, Vols. 10, 27, 45, 68 and 84; and illustrations in the Society's collections.

Mediaeval bishops' registers and feet of fines (Somerset Record Society).

Parish registers, vestry minutes, faculty papers, diocesan records and MS of HB Walters' 'Somerset Church Bells' (Somerset Record Office).

Architect's reports and other records in the possession of Mr CW Knight.

The writer is grateful for the assistance of Cecil Knight, David Bromwich, John Keeling Maggs, Tom Mayberry, Mary Siraut, Norma Knight and Mr R Simmonds.

Front cover: Exterior from the north-east, including the north and north-east chapels and the sanctus bell on the nave gable (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

Back cover: Screen in the tower arch (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

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