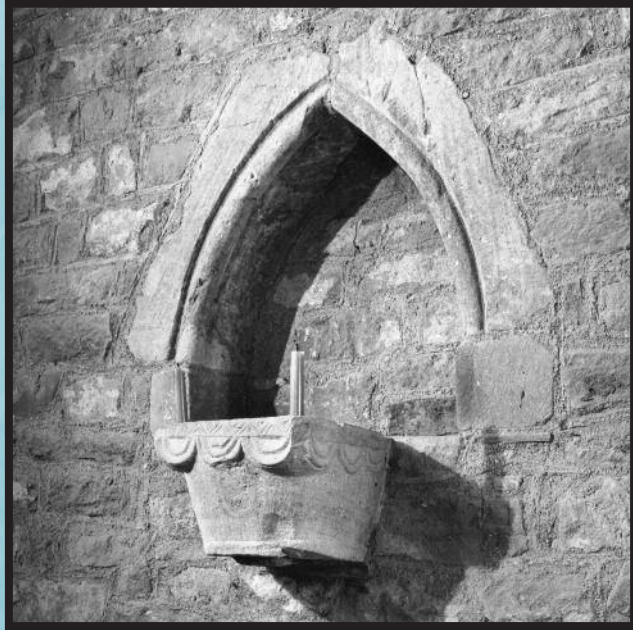




THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

CHURCH OF ST COSMAS AND ST DAMIAN

Stretford,
Herefordshire



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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£1.50

Stretford, Herefordshire

CHURCH OF ST COSMAS AND ST DAMIAN

by Kenneth Keenan (Lecturer and examiner in commercial law, and professor at Western International University, London since 1993)

HISTORICAL NOTE

Stretford is a small parish of 434 acres (176 hectares) some 11 miles (17.5 km) north of Hereford on the Roman road which runs from Caerleon to Wroxeter. The village takes its name from its position on this road or street and the ford over the river.

At the time of the Domesday Survey, the manor was held by Alvred de Marlborough and, after him, by two men, Torstin, probably Torstin de Wigmore, who married Agnes, daughter of Alvred, and Gilbert. When it passed into the family of the de la Beres is uncertain, but it was held by them under the de Bohuns early in the 14th century and in all likelihood much earlier.

The first de la Bere who is known for certain to have settled at this place was Robert, son of Sir Simon de la Bere by his wife, Sybil, daughter of Sir Henry Pembridge. Robert married Margaret, daughter of Sir William Gamage and presented priests to the living of Stretford in the years 1304, 1308 and 1334. He probably died not long after the latter date, as no further reference to him occurs.

At the beginning of the 16th century the owner was Sir Richard de la Bere, who married as his second wife Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Richard Mores, Serjeant of the Hall to Henry VII; she survived her second husband. After his death in 1518 the property passed to his niece, Elizabeth.

Vague earthworks in the vicinity of the church indicate a possible deserted village, although evidence is very slight. The only buildings near the church now are Stretford Court, the former vicarage, a modern bungalow, barns and other farm buildings.

*Front cover: The south porch
(Christopher Dalton)*

*Left: The 17th-century octagonal pulpit
(© Crown copyright. NMR)*



Chancel and nave looking west.
The screen is 16th century
(Christopher Dalton)



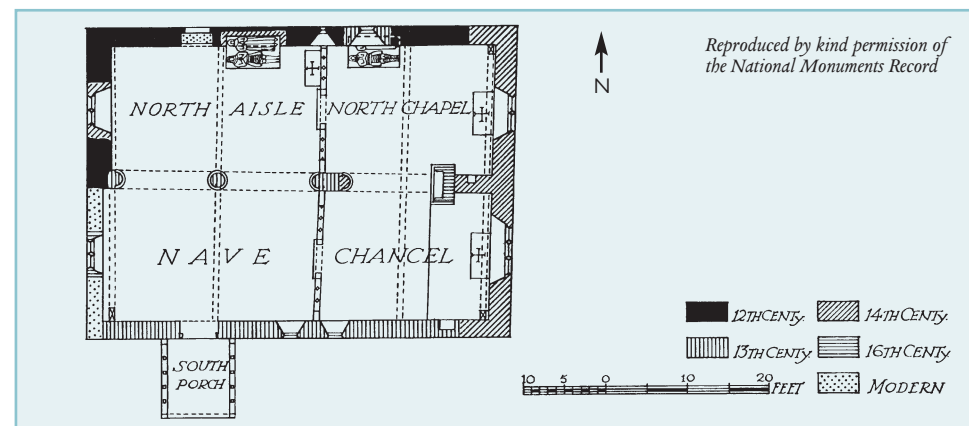
The CHURCH

DEDICATION

St Cosmas and St Damian were two 4th-century saints from Aegae in Cilicia and were venerated as patrons of physicians and surgeons. Although many legends have accumulated around them, their historical existence is vouched for by their being remembered in the canon of the Roman Mass, the central prayer in the Eucharist. In England there are only four other similar dedications – all in Kent and East Sussex. This church at Stretford is remote from the rest and originated in late Roman times. For a short period until 1920, the dedication of the church was changed to St Peter, but was restored to St Cosmas and St Damian in 1921. The saints are the patrons of the Royal College of Physicians and their insignia appear on the coat of arms of the Royal College to this day.

The building now consists of twin naves with chancels, divided by an arcade of three bays, all under a single span roof, with a timber bell turret and spirelet at the west end and a massive timber screen dividing the two chancels from the two naves. The walls are of local sandstone rubble, with dressings of the same material; the roofs are tiled.

The north wall of the north chapel and aisle is of early- to mid-12th-century date, as is the blocked north doorway. The existing chancel and nave were added in the first half of the 13th century with an arcade between. The south doorway is of the same date. About 1325 the whole building was lengthened about 7 or 8 feet (2–2.5m) to the east and the easternmost arch widened. The original double-gabled roof





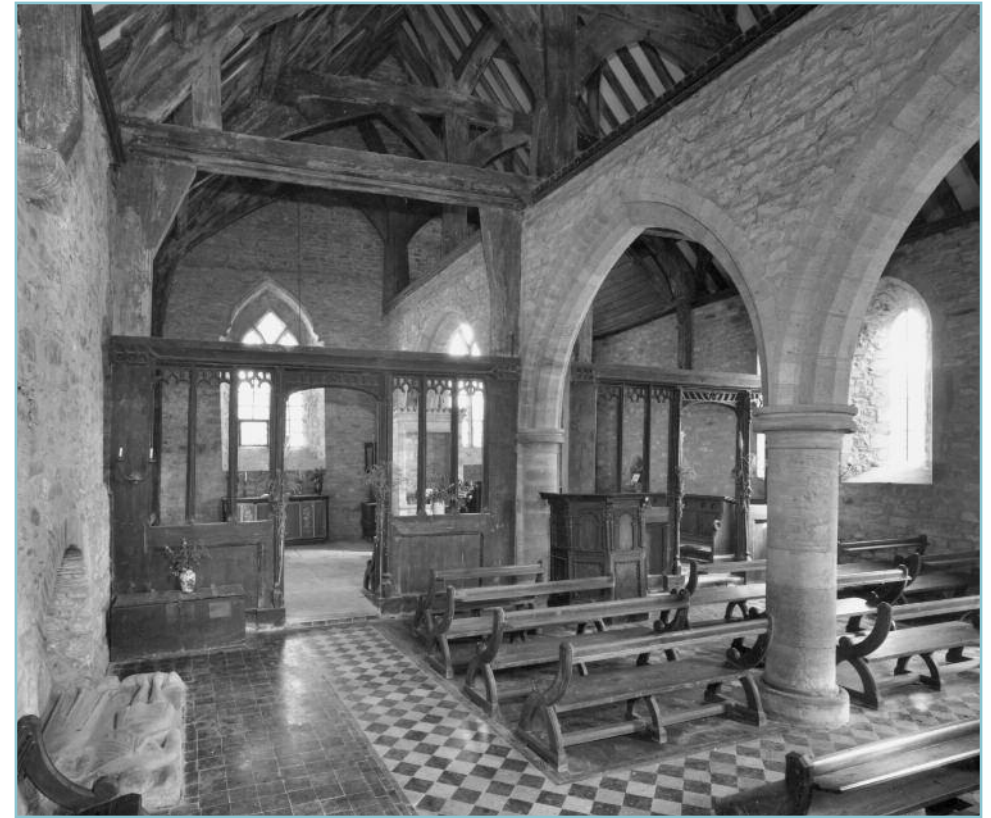
Exterior from the south-east (Christopher Dalton)

was removed around 1540 and replaced by the existing single-gabled roof covering the whole church, in which a bell turret was added at the west end. The south porch was built of timber in the 16th or early 17th century. In the churchyard is a comprehensive collection of gravestones from the 18th century to recent times. The church underwent a major restoration in 1875 by the local architect G C Haddon, when the plaster was stripped from the internal walls and the present seating, replacing pews apparently of the 17th century, installed. The west wall was rebuilt in 1922, the window openings being replaced in their original positions.

THE ROOF

This striking construction is of the 16th century, covering the whole building, and of four bays; the truss over the chancel screens has a moulded tie beam, plain king posts and subsidiary posts and a collar. The four purlins on each side have wind braces, the two upper ranges curved and the lower ranges cusped. The wall-plates are carved with the shields of arms of the Baskerville and Devereux families on the south side and the de la Bere family on the north.

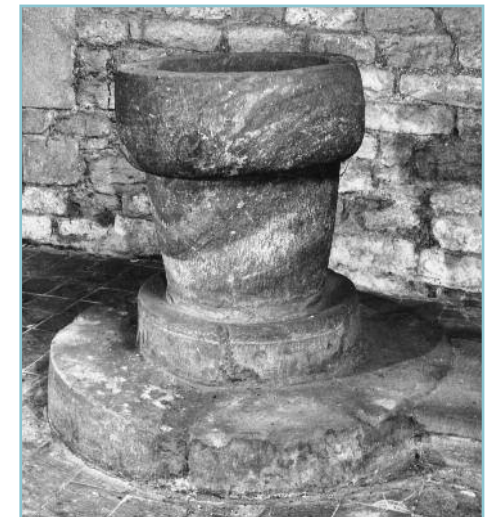
Right: The 12th-century font (Christopher Dalton)



North aisle and chapel looking east (Christopher Dalton)

FITTINGS

The shrine of St Cosmas and St Damian is set against the eastern respond of the arcade and appears to be of the late 15th or early 16th century. Its sill has been fashioned from a reused 13th-century carved coffin lid. The two screens date from the early 16th century. Also to be noted are the 17th-century octagonal pulpit, the 13th-century coffin lid set in the east wall, the font probably of the 12th century and the 17th-century chest in the north aisle. On the south wall of the north chapel is a damaged piscina (a basin for washing the vessels used at communion) of the 14th century; in the south chancel are the remains of a pillar piscina (a free-standing piscina mounted on a pillar). There are two bells, one from the 16th or 17th century and the other by Thomas Rudhall of Gloucester, dated 1774.



MONUMENTS

The north walls of the north chapel and north aisle each contain an arched recess, within which are the effigies of an armoured knight and a lady resting on a slab, carved out of a single piece of red sandstone. The arch in the north chapel has crowned male and female head stops; that in the aisle, which appears to have been altered, is plain. The figures are clearly products of the same local workshop, perhaps situated in Hereford, and can both be dated to the period 1320–50 by the style of the mixed mail and plate

armour worn by the knights and, especially, by their gowns (or coat-armours) cut short at the front. The armour on the legs and feet of the aisle figure, however, is more developed, in that it is entirely of plate. Similarly, though both ladies wear wimples and long-sleeved gowns, the lady in the aisle has a more elaborate wimple and, more fashionably, wears a sideless coat-hardy (a close-fitting sleeved garment) over her gown. Both knights have shields on their left arms carved with the arms of the local family of



de la Bere, and there can be little doubt that the figures commemorate Robert de la Bere (died after 1334) and his wife Margaret (Gamage), and their son John (died between 1340 and 1350) and his wife Agnes (Turberville), the latter probably being represented by the pair in the aisle wearing slightly more advanced armour and costume.

Of comparable interest, illustrating the sad mortality of the young in the 18th century, is the wall plaque on the north wall to members of Francis Hull's family. In the floor beneath are ledger stones, each with poignant verses commemorating the young dead.

RECENT HISTORY

In the 1960s the fabric deteriorated and the cost of the upkeep of the church became too great for the local community. By 1969 regular worship had ceased, and the last annual service of thanksgiving for doctors and nurses was held in 1970. In 1972 the Diocesan Pastoral Committee reported that 'the parish population has diminished to a handful. There is insufficient local support to maintain this ancient church'. St Cosmas and St Damian had been held in plurality for some years by the incumbent of Dilwyn, two miles (3.2 km) to the south-west, and in 1972 Stretford church was formally declared redundant. Being a building of such outstanding historic and architectural interest, it was placed in the care of The Churches

Conservation Trust in 1974. An extensive programme of repairs has been carried out since then, initially by Treasure & Son Ltd of Ludlow under the supervision of the late Roy Beard. Further repairs have been undertaken under the direction of Rodney Melville and Partners of Leamington. The roof was repaired by Emertons of Nantwich in 1984.

The Bishop of Hereford agreed in 1975 that the patronal festival service should be reinstated; a sung Eucharist is celebrated annually on the nearest Sunday to the saints' patronal day in September.

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THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

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