

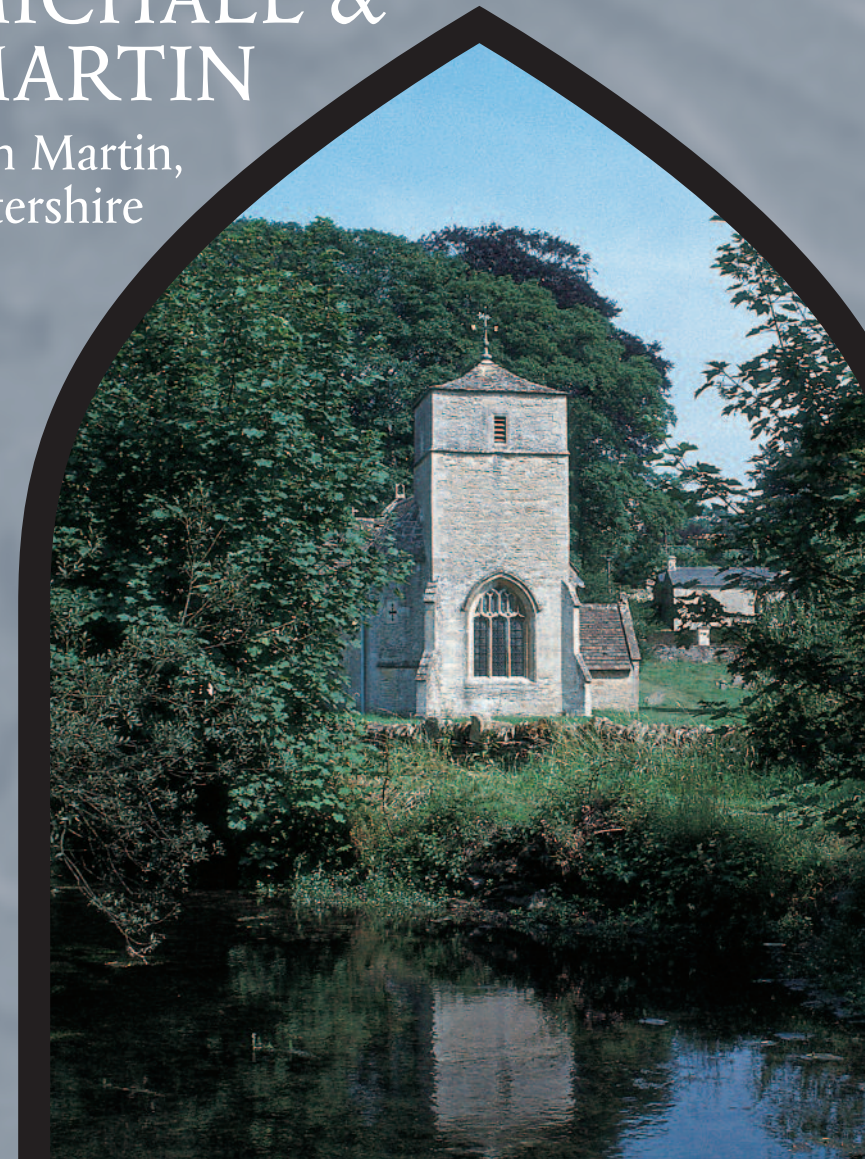


THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST



THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL & ST MARTIN

Eastleach Martin,
Gloucestershire



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

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Eastleach Martin, Gloucestershire

The Church of **ST MICHAEL & ST MARTIN**

by Andrew Pike (Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Field Officer with The Churches Conservation Trust since 1994; currently Regional Development Manager. Previously an archaeologist with Buckinghamshire County Museum Service)

HISTORY

Until 1935 Eastleach Martin and its twin across the River Leach, Eastleach Turville, were two distinct civil and ecclesiastical parishes. Since Domesday Book of 1086 the two villages have had entirely separate manorial histories. It is because of this that there are two churches so close to each other.

In Domesday Book Eastleach Martin is simply called *Lece* (Turville was *Lecce*). The place name is derived from the fact that the village is in the eastern part of the hundred of Brightwells Barrow and south-east of Northleach. The Leach means a stream flowing through boggy land. It passes through Northleach and Eastleach before joining the Thames near Lechlade, whose name is also derived from the river.

Eastleach Martin is also known as Bouthrop or Botherop. This alternative name is first recorded in 1310, but is likely to be much older, and means 'the outlying farmstead of the peasants'. The 'thorp' or 'throp' element of the name is interesting since it is almost certainly the same as the Danish word, found in many place names in the Danelaw part of England (the north and east), so one wonders whether there was, perhaps, a small Danish enclave in this part of Gloucestershire.

Front Cover: View of the church from the west, looking across the river (Christopher Dalton)

Left: Interior, looking east (Christopher Dalton)



Eastleach Martin seems always to have been the smaller of the two parishes, with the main areas of settlement around Coate Farm and the hamlet of Fyfield – indeed in the 14th century the parish was known as Eastleach cum Fiffide. At Domesday the manor was held by Drew son of Pons and later granted to Gloucester Abbey. The Dean and Chapter retained it until about 1820. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners, later the Church Commissioners, were lords of the manor from 1855 until 1953. The manor house was on the site of Bouthrop House, which lies adjacent to the church.

The church was granted by Richard son of Pons, who probably founded the church, to Great Malvern priory about 1120, and it was dedicated by the Bishop of Worcester to Saints Michael and Martin soon after Gloucester Abbey acquired the manor in 1144. A parson is recorded in 1200. The living was always a rectory and was united with Eastleach Turville in 1871, with Southrop added in 1930. There are records of incumbents from an early date. In 1277 the rector Henry was given leave of absence of three years for study – clearly an early form of sabbatical. The rector in 1532,



Richard Hill, was dismissed for being married. In the 18th and 19th centuries the rectors were mostly non-resident, the parish being served by curates. The church has been referred to on occasion as St Mary and St Michael and also just as St Martin.

The church was restored in 1880 and re-roofed in 1886. Some of the old roof timbers are said to have been used in the screen in the transept. By 1980 it had become clear that the repair and maintenance of two churches so close together were beyond the means of a small parish.

In November 1982, St Michael and St Martin's was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust. A further re-roofing and other repairs were carried out under the supervision of Mr Michael Bartosch of Cheltenham.



EXTERIOR

The church is built of limestone rubble, partly rendered, with ashlar dressings. It comprises a chancel, nave and north transept, south porch and west tower with a rather charming hipped roof. The present nave appears to be the original 12th-century one, with Norman south and north doorways (the north doorway is now blocked). The chancel was rebuilt or remodelled in the early 13th century when the chancel arch was renewed, using the Norman responds.

Above the east window of the chancel can be seen a large niche for an image or statue. The 14th century saw a major addition to the original church, with the building of the north transept, porch and west tower. The quality of the tracery in the three windows of the north transept and of the little carved heads where the mouldings stop is of a high standard for such a remote building. There is also a fine early Perpendicular west window in the tower. The



tower itself enjoys a happy relationship with the building behind it, emphasised by the stair turret. On the east side of the porch is a trefoiled niche. Further alterations made in the 15th century included a new west window, the tower buttresses and the addition of the innermost order to the Norman south doorway.

The attractive churchyard, surrounded by its drystone wall, includes the steps and part of the shaft of a 14th-century churchyard cross.

Left: Exterior from the north-west, looking across the river (Christopher Dalton)

Right: The pulpit of partly 17th- and partly 18th-century date (Christopher Dalton)

INTERIOR

The north transept was formerly occupied by the family pew of the principal tenant of the manor. There was, until 1864, a gallery along the west end of the nave, perhaps lit by the window (now blocked) in the west end of the north wall, the outline of which is still clearly visible on the outside wall.

The font has an octagonal bowl of the 15th century, with a 19th-century cover. Most of the pews in the nave are 16th-century, with some



Right: The 17th-century chest in the chancel
(Christopher Dalton)



Below: Interior looking east, showing the nave, chancel arch, font, pulpit, pews and lectern
(Christopher Dalton)

17th-century ones on the north side in front. The pulpit is Jacobean on an 18th-century base, and the lectern is made up of Elizabethan table legs or bedposts. The chest in the chancel is dated 1662.

There are small fragments of mediaeval stained glass in the transept, the north-east window of the chancel and the west window.

The bells are all old: treble by Abel Rudhall of Gloucester, 1730; second is 14th-century from

the Wokingham foundry; tenor is 16th-century, probably from the Leicester foundry, and a sanctus by Edward Neale of Burford, 1666. They hang in an 18th-century oak frame. Outside, over the gable of the nave, can be seen the much-weathered remains of a stone bell-cote which perhaps housed a sanctus bell.

There are faint remains of scratch dials on either side of the porch and at the east end of the nave.



JOHN KEBLE

No account of Eastleach would be complete without a reference to John Keble, a founding member of the Oxford Movement, author of many hymns and a major influence on the Church of England in the 19th century. Keble's father was vicar of Coln St Aldwyns, but resided at Fairford where John was born in 1792. He was educated at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and after being ordained deacon in 1815 became curate of Eastleach Martin, Eastleach Turville and Southrop until 1825. After his father became ill Keble looked after Coln St Aldwyns, declining offers of several livings. Eventually he was appointed to the living of Hursley, Hampshire, in 1836, where he remained until his death in 1866. Shortly after his death a fund to build a college in Oxford in his memory was instituted. Keble College opened in 1869.

At Eastleach Keble began a Sunday School and soon became a popular figure in the village. He would ride from his lodgings at Oxford on a Sunday and used to dine at a cottager's, for which he would pay. The food included, so Keble tells us, herrings and potatoes, which he said were good enough for any one. The clapper bridge between the two Eastleach churches is called 'Keble's Bridge' locally and each spring hundreds of people walk across it through the daffodils to the church.

*'Come near and bless us when we wake
Ere through the world our way we take;'*

John Keble is said to have written those words at Eastleach. Many visitors to the church will not be familiar with them. Yet one suspects that they carry away from their visit a sense of being blessed, together with a glimpse of Shakespeare's demi-paradise, if not of Eden itself.

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THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that the church is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

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St Saviour, Tetbury
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Right: Interior in 1901 looking east (Oxford County Libraries)

Back cover: The 20th-century lectern made from 16th-century woodwork (Christopher Dalton)

