



ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

FURTHO
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.00



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH
FURTHO, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

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:

BROUGHTON, ST LAWRENCE

On edge of Milton Keynes, near Exit 14 off M1

POTTESGROVE, ST MARY

2 miles S of Woburn, off A4012

PRESTON DEANERY, ST PETER

AND ST PAUL

3 miles SE of Northampton, off B526

THORNTON, ST MICHAEL

4 miles NE of Buckingham off A422

ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

FURTHO, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

by ROY TRICKER

FURTHO PARISH AND PEOPLE

Furtho is one of the deserted villages of Northamptonshire. Of its ancient buildings only the church and a 15th century stone dovecote remain. It appears that the original manor house stood approximately to the west of the church and north of the dovecote.

The name was spelt 'Forho' in the Domesday Book of 1086, 'Fordho' in 1220 and 'Fortho' in 1254. It signifies a ford near a projecting piece of land (a 'hoh'). The Roman Watling Street (now the A5) runs about a mile to the south of Furtho and the Northampton road (now the A508) once ran due north of it, right through what was the village, until it was diverted as a result of the enclosure of the parish about 1600.

In 1086, Furtho was made up of three smallholdings, with a total recorded population of 15. It was in the early 1200s that the first of the de Fortho family became lords of the manor, and this family was to remain in residence here until 1640. It was Edward Fortho who enclosed the parish, diverted the road and depopulated the village. His rebuilding of the nave and tower of the church c.1620 has made it an interesting example of early 17th century church building. In 1640 the manor passed into the hands of Sir Robert Banastre of Passenham. It was later purchased by Edmund Arnold, an eminent lawyer of Doctors' Commons, London, who was born at Nether Heyford, baptised at Stowe-Nine-Churches in 1607, died at Kensington in 1676 and lies buried beneath the chancel here at Furtho. He directed in his will that on the death of his wife (in 1691) the income from the Manor of Furtho, together with other lands that he owned in Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, should be given to 'pious and charitable uses', particularly to give poor children apprenticeships in 'honest trades'. Money from this charity also benefited other needy people, including poor scholars at Merton College, Oxford. Grants were also made to certain clergy and people in other parishes in which he was interested,

including Nether Heyford, Stowe-Nine-Churches, Stony Stratford and Potterspury.

In 1791, only the manor house and church remained in the village, with four houses in Old Stratford and three in Cosgrove also within the parish. The population in 1811 was 16 and it fluctuated around this figure until it rose to 46 in 1871, dropping to 29 by 1891.

Edmund Arnold gave the patronage of the living to the Provost and Fellows of Jesus College, Oxford, and in 1789 it was consolidated with the living of Wigginton in north Oxfordshire. In that year the Revd Nicholas Dobree, DD, was instituted as Rector of Wigginton and Furtho, in addition to the living which he also held on the Island of Guernsey.

At the time of the restoration of the church in 1870, the Revd John Williams Mason (rector here 1813–1880) probably resided elsewhere, because the vicar of Potterspury, the Revd Robert Crawley, was curate-in-charge. The value of the living was then about £300 per year, together with 96 acres of glebe and an annual gift of £20 7s 6d from Arnold's Charity.

No village now remains here and when the new benefice of Potterspury, Furtho and Yardley Gobion was formed in 1920, this little church ceased to be a parish church and was only very occasionally used during the next 70 years.

In June 1990, it was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust (formerly the Redundant Churches Fund) to be preserved by and for the Church of England and the nation. During 1991–92 it underwent an extensive programme of repairs by Waymans of Coppingford, near Huntingdon, under the direction of Mr Ian Stewart (architect).

EXTERIOR

Half a mile of farm drive leads westwards from the A508 road to the buildings of Furtho Manor Farm, with the church standing a little apart from them to the north-east. The views as Furtho is approached along the drive are worth savouring, with the little church nestling in its rural surroundings and the tower of Potterspury church rising protectively in the distance behind it. From the churchyard can be seen the soaring spire of Hanslope church away to the north-east. The present farmhouse is less than 100 years old, but the circular dovecote may well have stood here for 500 years.

This small church, built of local limestone, is an unusual and distinctive building. The nave and tower were rebuilt c.1620 – a time when church-building in the country was rare.

The walls of the **nave** are capped with stone parapets, and set in the southern parapet is a shield which once displayed a coat of arms – possibly those of Edward Fortho, who was responsible for the rebuilding. The simple three-light Gothic windows date from c.1620, as do the north doorway (which is blocked, but still has part of its original door), the south doorway and the finial at the summit of the eastern gable. The north and south walls of the nave have been extended westwards to half embrace the tower, thus making the nave appear longer than it really is, especially with the addition of the two-light window in the south tower chamber.

Diagonal buttresses strengthen the western corners of the squat **tower**. The three-light west window and two-light belfry windows are similar in style to those in the nave. The embattled parapet is unusually tall in proportion to the rest of the tower, and hides most of the tiled pyramid roof. At the base of the western parapet, two stone water-spouts (one with foliage carving) throw rainwater clear of the walls.

As is the case in many English churches, the **chancel** has several differences from the rest of the building. Its maintenance and upkeep were the responsibility of the rector (the earliest recorded rector here was instituted in 1226), whilst the parishioners, including the lord of the manor, looked after the other parts of the church. Much of this chancel is mediaeval work and the tiled roof is more steeply-pitched than the slate roof of the nave. In the south wall are two double square-headed windows of the late 14th or early 15th century and a priest's doorway which, although probably renewed later, has two mediaeval faces supporting its hood-mould. Beneath the south-west window is a blocked rectangular 'low-side'



The western tower c.1620

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

window. This was originally provided with a shutter, which could be opened for the ringing of a bell at the climax of the daily Mass, to enable people working in the fields to pause for a moment and join in prayer. Externally there are no openings at all on the north side. The three-light east window (which is slightly south of centre) has attractive reticulated (net-like) tracery of c.1330. Parts of its stonework may have been renewed, but its 14th century design is very pleasing.

INTERIOR

The bright interior of St Bartholomew's reflects the rustic simplicity and charm of the building. The masonry is exposed in the walls (which may have been scraped of their plaster during the 19th century) and the floors have old flagstones, with areas of more recent concrete where the seating used to be.

The window-openings and doorways have unusual wooden **lintels** and belong to the c.1620 rebuilding, as do the **tower and chancel arches** which are rounded and rest upon half-octagonal responds, with moulded capitals and bases. Traces of **graffiti** on the tower arch include the date 1776. The spacious tower base has small chambers to the north and south, where the nave has been extended. The small bell which once rung from this tower was recast c.1870 and was later taken to Potterspurty church.

The small octagonal **font** was part of the 17th century work, as was its concave-sided **cover**, which is capped by an acorn finial. The shallow-pitched **nave roof**, with its tie-beams and short king posts, was erected at this time.

The **pulpit**, of Bath stone, with a circular shaft of red marble, was made when the church underwent restoration in 1870. It appears that the work was spearheaded by the churchwarden, John Bird, who lived at Manor Farm and presented the church with a new harmonium. At this time the old box-pews were replaced by deal **benches**, some of which have survived, and the present **lectern** was installed. The architect may have been EF Law of Northampton, who restored the churches at nearby Cosgrove and Potterspurty, and designed the new church at Yardley Gobion.

The mediaeval chancel deflects slightly to the north from the rest of the church, and its walls lean outwards. The length of the chancel (22 feet/6.7 m) is only 1½ feet (0.46 m) less than that of the nave.

Straddling the chancel, beneath its plaster ceiling, is a single cambered **tie-beam**, which may once have supported a central king post. Beneath the south-west window is the blocked **low-side window**, with a seat for the ringer of the sanctus bell. The blocked single **trefoil-headed window** on the north side, opposite, may have served the same purpose.

East of this is a low **arched recess** for a tomb. Beneath it many years ago (and already gone when John Bridges visited the church in 1791) was a slab with the brass effigies of a man, his two wives, an inscription and four shields. This almost certainly commemorated one of the de Forthos, who were lords of the manor in the Middle Ages.

The simple and functional **communion rail** was probably made in the early 1800s. The **piscina** in the south wall nearby dates from the early 1300s. Beneath its trefoil-headed arch is the drain into which water used at the Eucharist was poured, and there are remains of the credence-shelf, upon which some of the vessels used at the service were placed. The projecting **stone corbels** in the east wall may well have been pedestals for statues. The 19th century **altar table** was brought here in 1993 from the church of All Saints, Little Wenham, Suffolk. The previous altar was transferred to Potterspurty in 1920 and was finally disposed of in 1968.

In the sanctuary floor is a **ledger-slab**, inscribed 'Hic Jacet Edmundus Arnold Arm. Quondam Dominus (Sub Deo) Hujus Manerii. Qui Obiit 27 Marti 1676'. (Here lies Edmund Arnold, once Lord (under God) of this Manor, who died 27 March 1676). It marks the burial place of the London lawyer who left the income from his manor at Furtho for charitable uses. His charity still operates today.

Front cover: The exterior in 1980 from the south-east (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

Back cover: The interior today, looking eastwards (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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Series 4 no. 78

Revised May 1997