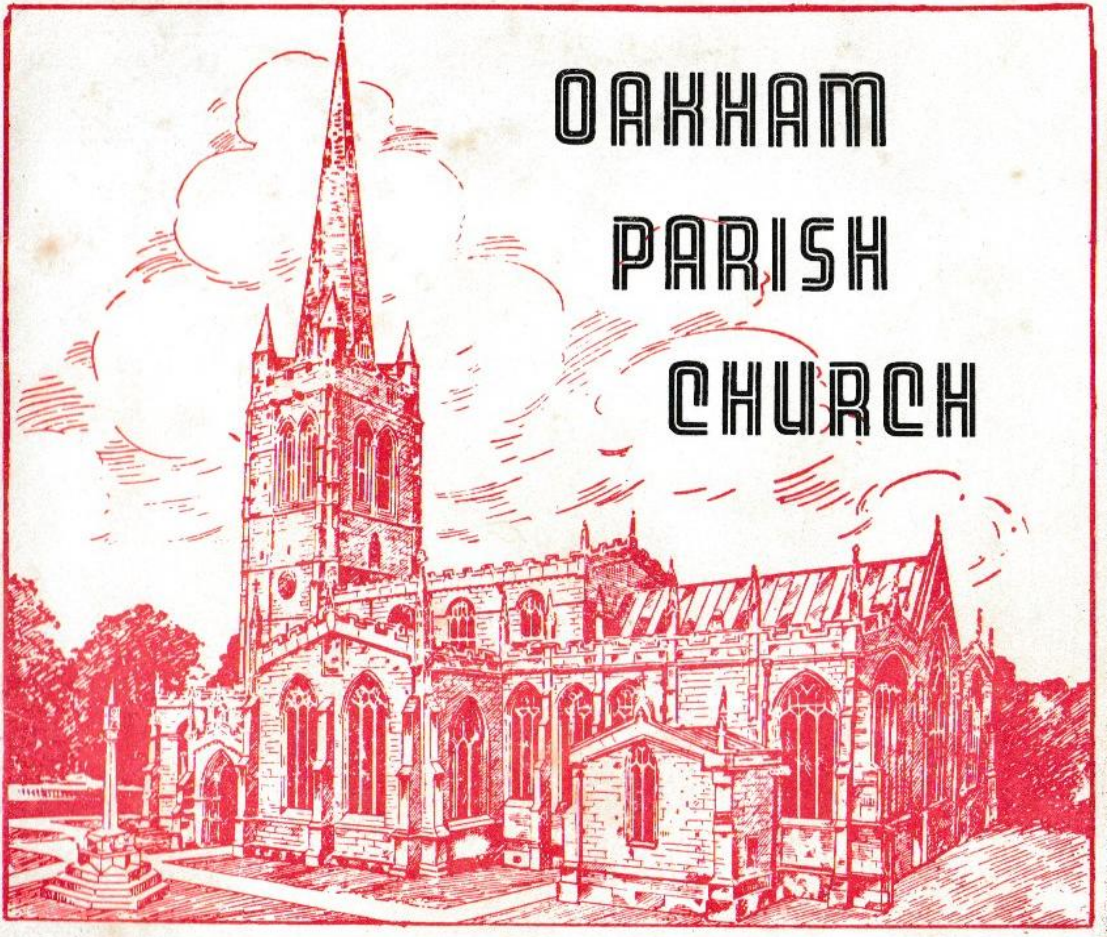

STEPHEN HADDELSEY

OAKHAM

Parish Church

BY

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This guide book has been sponored by:-

For

Johnnie and Patience Hanson – Lawson

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In early days Oakham was connected with the Saxon royal house, by dower land of the Saxon Queens. The twelfth century chronicler Gaimar says that it was assigned to Ethelfrith wife of Edgar, and to Emma wife of Ethelred the Unready and Cnut. More certainly, lands in the area belonged to Edith, queen of Edward the Confessor.

However, Edward granted to his new foundation Westminster Abbey "Rutland with all things appertaining thereto after the death of Queen Edith". This act of reversion was signed by the crosses of the queen, both archbishops, eight bishops, six abbots and several other worthies.

Domesday Book gives us further information about the church and manor. "In Oakham church-soke with its five berewicks, Queen Edith has four carucates of land rateable to gelt, the land is sixteen carucates. The King has there two carucates belonging to the hall, yet in addition there may be four other carucates. There is a priest with a church to which belongs four bovates of this land.....Albert the clerk has one bovate of the above mentioned land, and a mill there worth 16d yearly. The same Albert holds under the King the churches of Oakham and Hambleton and St. Peter of Stamford.....with the land belonging to the same churches that is seven bovates.... The annual value in King Edward's time was £8, it is now £10."

From this evidence we can attempt to piece together a picture of the parish in the time of the Domesday Book. There was no town of significance here, but a church stood close to a manor, and served a rural population. The church building was presumably of wood. Together with other churches it had been granted to Albert the Lotharingian, a royal courtier. Albert, a 'rector', had the responsibility of providing

spiritual ministration, and an unnamed priest is a 'vicar' retained by him. While, perhaps in deference to the claims of Westminster Abbey, Oakham was termed Church-soke, it remained under royal control. Particularly, the hall and lands attached to it belonged to the King, and not to Edith.

When Edith died in 1075 the Conqueror honoured the Abbey's claims upon her part of 'Rutland'. Hugh de Port held her lands in farm from the king, but at royal command gave a tithe to Westminster Abbey, and accepted responsibilities towards the church of Oakham.

William Rufus issued a writ that the sheriff should do full right to the Abbot of Westminster concerning the church of Rutland which Hosbert (Albert) the Clerk had there, and should cause him to have all the customs as in the time of the king his father.

At a later stage the Abbey acted to obtain a more direct control over the church with its four bovates. Flete the historian of the Abbey states that Abbot Richard de Berkying (1226–1246) acquired the church at his own expense. This was confirmed by the Bishop of Lincoln, at the arbitration of the Abbot of Chertsey.

The former lands of Edith together with the former lands of Albert together constituted the Abbey's interest in the area. This became known as Deanshold, and was administered by a monk called a pittancer.

Meanwhile the manor of Oakham remained royal land until the time of Henry I, when it was created a barony. This became known as Lordshold.

In 1227 the Abbot presented Gilbert Marshall to the church. Marshall was another absentee rector, for at the same time the rights of

William the vicar were safeguarded. In 1228 Henry III granted Marshall freedom for his land from local feudal dues, as in the time of king John his father. This grant may be taken as again ratifying the special situation of Deanshold.

The appropriation of tithes by the Abbey or by its rectors was not regarded as an abuse. The medieval financial system was rudimentary and it was by such means that major public works were financed and leading civil servants were remunerated. Thus the Abbey was assisted by owning various churches and lands, a privilege which it shared with its lay landlords who farmed the lands in return for a rental. Left to itself the abbey not unnaturally preferred to cut out the middle man and as rector appoint direct to the vicarage. The great tithe accrued to the benefit of the Abbey, and the lesser tithes financed the clergy of Oakham and its attendant villages. The vicar also benefited from other sources, such as from the pilgrimages to the local St. Mary's Well.

The right to appoint a priest to a parish is called the advowson. When Westminster Abbey was secularised it retained this right. However, in 1550 Edward VI granted the advowson to Nicholas Ridley, Bishop of London. His successors held this until 1697, when it passed by exchange under Act of Parliament to the Earl of Northampton. Since then the advowson has remained under lay control, first of the Earls of Winchelsea and then of the related Finch family. When the Abbey forfeited the advowson it nevertheless retained property in the area. Deanshold was confiscated during the Commonwealth but restored after the Restoration. The Dean and Chapter have since sold these lands piecemeal, so that all traces of a separate jurisdiction have disappeared.

THE FIRST STONE CHURCH

All authorities agree that there was a church with stone features on this site in the thirteenth century. It was much rebuilt in the fourteenth century, and then modified and completed during the fifteenth. There is a difference of expert opinion on several precise features in this process. The experienced visitor is invited to be his own detective. We may however presume a continuous process closely linked to the availability of finance. This process divides naturally into three stages, roughly co-terminous with three centuries.

The first building to contain stone was erected on this site from around the year 1200, and during the thirteenth century. It probably replaced a wooden church, and itself possibly contained much wood-work. Its timber frames rested on walls of stone raised to window-sill height, and upon some stone arches. Before the advent of stone columns, wooden scaffolding would have supported the lower part of the nave roof and the apex ridge of the transept roofs. We can best imagine a church of the same width as at present, but not extending east beyond the line of the present chancel entrance. The present transepts were its side chapels, with the southern probably serving as Lady chapel. The porch, with more considerable stone features, was a modest promise of the later replacement of much wood by stone.

The **font** stood in this first church, for it is a transitional Norman work of the late twelfth century. This circular bowl is ornamented with an arcading of intersecting round arches. The arcade is of imperfect proportion on the present north-west face. The font originally stood on eight shafts, the capitals of which remain. These capitals are carved with water leaf foliage. This graceful font is now ponderously masked by a modern cover, and by the pedestal of a modern drum resting on what has variously been described as an inverted Norman capital, and more usually

as the base of a fourteenth century churchyard cross.

The **south doorway** is attributed variously to the late Norman period c. 1190 and to the early thirteenth century. Its style is Norman, but we should allow for conservatism of style in these remote Rutland parts, and avoid over-precision. It is an unelaborate drop arch on half-round responds with fillet. The shafts have moulded bases and capitals with square abici. The capitals on the east side are plain, those on the west show water-leaf foliage.

Sections of the **south porch** exhibit the Early-English style. The porch has an outer arch from this period, leading to two colonnades of four blind arches resting on low bench tables. The nail head motif on unrestored capitals is a distinctive feature.

The second column from the south, in the east colonnade, is of Victorian marble. It was placed here in the hope of thereby encouraging a subscription for the complete restoration of the porch. Fortunately this intention was not realised.

The **blind arch** in the east wall of the **south transept** was later replaced at its greater height, and now contained a table of the commandments. Also to be noted from this period is the piscina, with its ancient wooden shelf, built into the south wall. The keel-shaped course at sill level marks the upper part of the stone walls. Similar features in the **north transept** are also accredited to the thirteenth century.

The pier found in the interior wall just east of the south doorway is so far short of the corbel that a carved lion has been inserted above it to support the beam. This may offer further evidence about the first stone church.

THE SECOND STONE CHURCH

The church was much rebuilt in the later thirteenth and in the fourteenth century. The purpose of this rebuilding was in large part the translation of the shape of the first church into stone.

The attention of the visitor is directed firstly to the framework of pillars and arches. This is the skeleton on which the structure of the second stone church rested.

The pillars and arches of the **south and north transepts** are of simple style. The piers are octagonal, their capitals simple and without foliage. The piers of the north transept are not so tall as those of the south. This is because the apex of the north transept was itself not so high as the south. Both the exterior stonework on the north side and the angle of spring of the arch linked to the nave column show this. Most authorities date these piers and arches to the thirteenth century. While allowing for economy, with ornate work reserved for the nave, and also for the survival of the style into the fourteenth century, one can at least suppose that these pillars were erected before those of the nave. The piers set into the south wall may be even earlier than the others.

By contrast with such simplicity the builders reserved pride of place and energy for **the nave.** The chancel arch and the lofty columns and arches are all of fine Decorated work. The capitals are ornate, those on the north side speak of the fall of man and of the powers of evil. Those on the south side address, with one exception, the theme of the restoration of man.

The themes of these capitals are:

Tower: north: the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden.
south: the pelican feeds her young (the Blessed Sacrament)

1st. Pillar north: grotesque heads and legs.
south: the legend of Reynard the Fox.

2nd. Pillar north: grotesque heads and a dragon.
south: four angels.

3rd. north: the Green Man.
south : the four evangelists.
chancel north: a beast with human head plays an instrument.
south: Coronation of the Virgin, the Annunciation.
chancel arch: damaged by Victorian rood screen.

The carving of Reynard the Fox is closely similar to one at St. Peters , Tilton on the Hill. At Oakham Reynard is seen on the north side of the capital with a duck between his jaws. The duck is half thrown over his back. Behind him are two other ducks, one pulling at his brush and the other pecking at his rump. A woman, with female head-dress, points with her distaff at the fox and runs after him. Above her distaff are two more ducks and below a bobbin of wool. A monkey is also drawn running away from the woman. He is fettered, doubtless being drawn from the artist's own experience. Finally, as a space filler, two snake-like creatures intertwine in a figure of eight, each biting the other's tail.

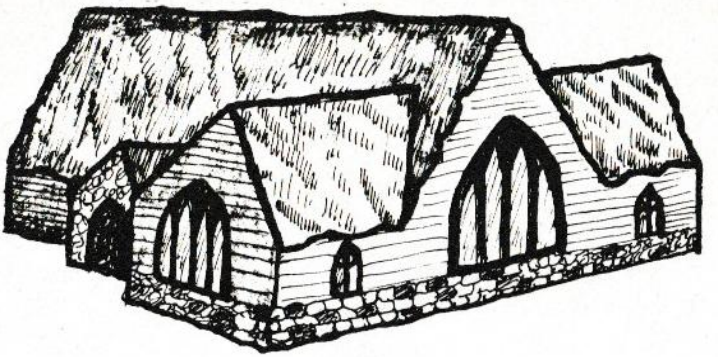
The local explanation was that the fox (the Abbot of Westminster) runs off with the goose (the great tithes) leaving the goslings (the lesser tithes). The fettered monkey is the local clergyman. The figure is meant to be a man with a broom (the Abbot makes amends by building the north chapel). The truth is however more prosaic. The capital represents that best seller of the time, Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale". In this the fox is named Daun Russell. The monkey is Zani, the Ape who aided Reynard in his medieval adventures.

The capital of the Green Man casts him here in the role of the Father of Lies, with the foliage of his mouth contrasting with the four evangelists opposite. He was originally a fertility god of pagan rites. He survived in mumming plays as St. George slain by the dragon and raised by a Wonder Doctor. His appearance in this church, as elsewhere, seems to be both a concession to the persisting tendency to represent him in folk art and an indirect attempt to discredit the supporting myth.

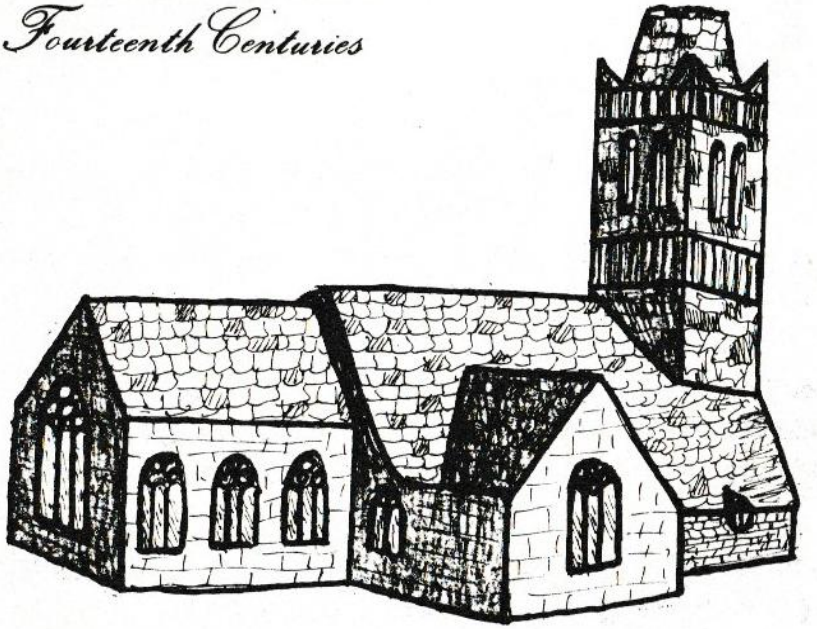
The **roof** of the fourteenth century nave was a steep affair, whose lines are indicated by the inverted V showing on the tower wall. This was carefully retained in the course of the nineteenth century restoration. This V is one of several clues to the original form of roofing. Others include the exterior stonework on the northern side of the church; showing that the transept roofs also sloped steeply. Further, the off-centred position of the decorated west window of the south aisles show that the aisles also had steep roofs.

The beams of the western end of the south aisle do not span its width. This is because the building of the tower had begun. **The tower with its spire** was begun over the span of this century and was completed in the fifteenth. The tower has five stages marked by string courses and a bell chamber whose lights are of Decorated tracery. The belfry lights of the west and south faces are eccentric to accommodate the staircase. Its massive 284 foot high silhouette dominates the town and valley.

There is fourteenth century tracery in the window above the west door. In the interior, the round piers of the northern tower arch suggest the re-use of an earlier doorway. An attractive feature of the western exterior is the set of statues of our Lord and of two saints, probably Ss Peter and Paul. The weathercock, Cock Peter, is said to have shown the way of the wind to the men of Oakham en route for Agincourt. Certainly Edward, Earl of Rutland, who had been confirmed to the Barony of Oakham by Henry IV in 1400, fell in that battle. However, the cock bears no older date than that of 1632, and others to 1910.



An Imaginative Reconstruction Of Oakham Parish Church In The Thirteenth And Fourteenth Centuries



THE THIRD STONE CHURCH

New found wealth from wool enabled a massive rebuilding operation, stretching from the later part of the fourteenth century into the fifteenth. The entire church was heightened, and two fine chapels were built on either side of the chancel.

The southern lady chapel **(now the south transept)** was thus modified by heightening, as the church began to be transformed from its general barn-like appearance.

The present **north chapel,** dedicated to the Holy Trinity was built around the turn of the century. It is stated that this was sponsored by Westminster Abbey, and it is suggested that this was because they had come into a fortune by bequest of Simon Langham, Simon, their former Abbot and later Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury (1366 – 1376) was a great reformer, and treasurer and chancellor to Edward III. He indeed defeated the medieval financial system to leave a fortune which would have astonished St. Benedict.

An arcade links the chapel to the chancel. This arcade continues in its piers the style of the nave. However, the chapel necessitated the simultaneous reconstruction of the present north transept. Some have alleged traces of an earlier chapel.

The Heightening of **the north transept** was accomplished by modifying the angle of its arches, while preserving their style. New windows were built into its northern and eastern walls, while the windows on the western face was left with matching tracery.

The enthusiasm of the builders was directed to heightening and further lighting the remaining structure. The walls of **the aisles** were raised, enabling windows to be improved in them.

The windows of the south aisle are in a developed perpendicular style. The single frame in the north wall, now filled with perpendicular tracery, is unusually large. It is just possibly a re-used frame, transferred perhaps from the east end of the chancel. The tracery of the west windows was renewed.

The nave was lighted by the addition of a clere-story of pure Perpendicular style. The architectural problem was to replace the roof, itself also now of shallow pitch. This was achieved not by raising the corbel level of the former roof, but by resting new beams on tall wooden supports stretching down to the old level.

The roofs of the nave and north chapel are among those which still remain. The nave roof, in part restored, is of moulded ribs and panelling in four bays. The theme of grotesque heads found in its corbels is continued in its bosses. These may be observed by facing westward while inspecting the roof. There are also angels, but they have only secondary structural importance.

The south chapel, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was also built in the fifteenth century. It has an arcade, a western arch, and a very fine east window. This new lady chapel has a priest's door, outside which is a damaged holy-water stoup. It also leads to a vestry of the same period. There is no cogent evidence that this vestry was ever, as has been alleged, a priest's house.

The exterior of the church was embattled. String courses with attractive carvings were added beneath the battlements, and some buttresses were ornamented. The purpose of this ornament was to unify the fabric, to give it that final proportion and balance which it still enjoys.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE FAITHFUL

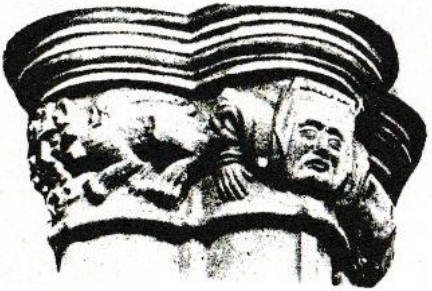
This medieval building is the gift of both rich and poor to God. Although the occasional will of the wealthy has survived, with details of their legacies for church fabric and for church activity, it would be a mistake to over-estimate these gifts.

It is, for example, often alleged that Roger Flore was responsible for the tower and spire. Roger Flore represented Rutland in twelve parliaments between 1397 and 1419 and was four times Speaker of the Commons. He married Katherine, the daughter of William Dalby of Exton; William was a Calais stapler and the founder of the Hospital of St. John and St. Anne still standing in William Dalby Street. Certainly Flore contributed suitably to the spire. In his will executed in 1424 he left 5 marks (£3.6.8 old style) to the mason, a noble (6/8 old style) to be paid in earnest money, if the contract between them for rebuilding the vault of the steeple was not fulfilled before his death. Yet this gift is seen in perspective when it is recalled that he left personal legacies amounting to over £500.

William Waryn was another merchant of the Calais staple. He helped build the south side of the chancel. In a will dated 1499 he left a large fund for requiem masses, a small gift for pious guilds and £5 for the High Altar. He also left his home, on certain conditions, to the vicar and churchwardens.

Persons of a far wider range of class could join such men, as members of guilds aiding specific chapels. The Guild of St. Mary was connected with the Lady Chapel(s) and with a former chapel of St. Mary which stood seperately in the churchyard. The Guild of St. Michael the Archangel also maintained a separate chapel building. This was later sold to Oakham School. The Guild of All Saints supported the High Altar, and the Guild of the Holy Trinity made bequests in 1404 and 1499.

Medieval Capitals in the Church.



There is no evidence that medieval Oakham was generally wealthy. The Domesday survey at the beginning of the period shows a population tied to the land, with little surplus income. The situation at the time of the Reformation can be assessed from a taxation survey called the Survey of Harness, made in 1552. Oakham had by now some trade and industry. William Plavis the pewterer was worth £200, but the whole Soke had only three men worth more than £40. Oakham was not an incorporate town, and there was no manufacturing. After the population had met this particular tax, 60% were left worth less than 20 shillings.

Many old towns boast several churches. Oakham's single great monument can in part be credited to the years of the Calais staple, and the occasional windfall from Westminster Abbey. Very properly one should credit the offerings of the poor as well as the wealthy, as over three centuries the townsfolk step by step built this permanent expression of their common faith.

THE YEARS AFTER THE REFORMATION

The Tudor propaganda machine was skilful, and the English people were quickly enamoured of a Reformation mythology. The more material actualities of the post-Reformation years were, however, frequently more gloomy. Many parishes were left with the lead stripped from their church roofs, treasures despoiled, and ordinary running repairs neglected. The records of Oakham Church also indicate a period of neglectful decline.

The Visitation of the year 1605 described the fabric of the church. "The seats on the south aisle all broken in the bottomand neither paved nor boarded. Pavements in the east and north aisles broken. The chancel and the chapel in the north aisle neither plastered nor whited. Many seats in the church broken, and neither boarded nor paved. Two bell wheels broken, but being mended. The communion table unfit. The linen cloths very old. The north door in decay. There dwelleth two poor folks in the churchyard in a lean-to made to the church, very inconvenient and noisesome to the churchyard."

The Visitation of 1619 and 1640 show a worse state than before. By the latter year there were defects in windows, roof, paving and pulpit. There was no complete prayer book in the church. The surplice was too old for use but not replaced.

Nevertheless a modest spiritual recovery was coming to the area. The work of Jeremy Taylor at Uppingham symbolised a new, if generally moderate, conscience among some people. Nor were gifts to Oakham Church lacking in these post-Reformation years.

An Elizabethan chalice is of silver gilt, 8" high and with a 4" diameter bowl. It has an egg and tongue ornamentation at the foot. It bears four hall marks: an A in a pointed shield (the London date letter

for 1578), a crowned leopard, a lion, and ? in a pointed shield.

Even in the lean years the church received a chalice "ex done Wilhelm Gibson de Barleythorp Armigeri 1638". A flagon of 1725, 12½" high was offered by H.W. "for the more decent communion of the blood of God our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ within the Parish Church of Oakham in Rutland." There is a paten of 1742 as well as two others without hallmarks.

Bells were renewed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Numbering them in the sequence of the present peal, they were inscribed:

3: (+26) GOD SAVE THE KING T MEKINGS TOBIE NORRIS CAST ME 1677

8: GOD SAVE THE KING TOBIE NORRIS CAST ME 1677 (later recast)

7: FRANCIS CLEEVE: WILL MAIDWELL : CHURCHWARDENS HENRY PENN MADE ME 1723 0 0 0

Tobie Norris was of the fourth generation of a Stamford foundry. He was buried in St. George's, Stamford, on 19 January 1698/9. This foundry was replaced locally by that of Henry Penn of Peterborough. He was tried at the assizes in 1729 for casting a bad bell for St. Ives. On being acquitted he fell from his horse in over-excitement and expired.

The bells were kept busy. The curfew bell rang from old Michaelmas Day to old Lady Day. The gleaning bell was rung at 8.0 a.m. and 6.0 p.m. during harvest. Shrove Tuesday had it's pancake bell. The Meeting Bell (later the seventh) summoned town meetings. There was a death knell at funerals, thrice for a male and twice for a female. The summons for divine service had sophistication. There was a Sermon Bell for those who preferred listening to prayer, and even a bell after the service as perhaps a signal to the cook. The priest's bell was rung just

before the service. This appears not to have been the vicar's summons to his flock, but a signal for him to enter the church and begin the service. These customs survived to the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1616 Anne Lady Harrington of Exton presented two hundred volumes of the Fathers, for the use of the vicar and local clergy. This **library** is now housed in two Jacobean oak presses in the transepts, and looks decidedly unread. The church also possesses an old Latin Bible "ex dono Thomo Pilkington". This is attributed to the very first part of the thirteenth century. It may be inspected in the south transept.

The registers date back to 1564. They tell their own stories. 1642 was a year of epidemic with 167 burials as opposed to 30 in the previous and 32 in the subsequent year. In 1753 there is a note under the marriages "separate book as by Act of Parliament". An entertaining entry is a note of March 29th. 1633, a licence for Elizabeth Tory to eat flesh in Lent, "being in a course of physic and troubled with infirmities for eight days". This is signed by Josiah Peachie, who by act of Edward VI received a groat for his pains.

The parish chest now stands on the floor of the north transept. Its contents were guarded by three locks. The vicar held one key and each of the churchwardens another.

Charitable bequests included Warburton's Gift, founded by the will of Revd. John Warburton in 1731. This was an annual gift of ten shillings per annum to the poor. The bequest of Anne Lady Harrington is commemorated by an old board on the wall of the vestry. In 1662 Mrs. Parthenia Lowman left ten shillings per annum for a sermon on Ash Wednesday.

The church is spared an excess of **Tombs**. There is a sixteenth century table tomb in the north chapel. This bears no inscription, but some have suggested that the carved ring weights on the panel sides signify a wool merchant.

Yet while none of the tombs is ancient in date, many are connected with the history of Oakham. The Latin memorial to Abraham Wright, who died in 1690 after thirty years as vicar, is of such local interest. He was the father of James Wright, author in 1684 of "The History and Antiquities of the County of Rutland".

The most poignant memorial is the small representation of Anne, daughter of Andrew Burton. This is on the west wall of the south aisle. She died in 1642 aged 15:

"Whose sweeter sowle, a flower of matchless price
Transplanted is from hence to Paradise".

The stone flags in the south chapel have been lying there with their inscriptions being worn away from before the nineteenth century restoration.

The picture presented by these years is of a gradual recovery of spirit after the dislocations of the Reformation. A period of neglect gave way to an eighteenth century of quiet piety. At some stage tiered galleries were added to supplement the box pews clustered around the tall pulpit. Nevertheless there were no major structural alterations to the church. Within its walls there is a picture of a quiet Biblical piety, rather than of the enthusiasms of religious zealots. If enthusiasm be a keynote, then the successors of the medieval builders were scarcely to be found in the parish church. They were to be sought in the various conventicles scattered around the town.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY REVIVAL

The nineteenth century shows a gradual recovery of momentum. In 1806 the enthusiastic churchwarden John Stimson, and his co-warden James Preston, made inventories and recommendations for the improvement of fabrics and furnishings. Even if the church seemed unduly equipped for town fire-fighting and for the seating in church of Members of Parliament., it did by then have its communion plate carefully under the care of the churchwardens between sacraments, two surplices and an altar cloth, bibles and prayer books. The choir was flourishing then as today, but then with a range of orchestral instruments to back their repertoire of psalms and anthems. John Stimson kept himself busy, whether attempting to recover the Grass Rights for the church, or duly paying the ringers for special peals. They received a guinea in 1805 for greeting Nelson's victory at Trafalgar. He had the grumble of all reformers, "the Parishioners in general seem in a state of lethargy or stupefaction, as they do not support the officers as is supposed they might."

The early nineteenth century worshippers found it all rather thirsty work. At a meeting of Thursday 7th. March 1822 the inhabitants assembled to hear charges of drunkenness on the part of three choir members. This led to a limit also being placed, of £15, on the "Singer's Feast". The cost of this had risen from £8.3.4d. in 1811 to £18.17. 0d. in 1821. Accordingly the singers themselves had to have a whip round in 1825 to defray the final cost that year of £19.8.6d. They had £4.6.0d. spot cash between them, and the church chipped in with the excess half-crown.

Others also had their needs. "Spent passing accounts 10/-. Spent letting the Church grass £1.14.6d. Spent when choosing fresh officers 10/-." Nevertheless the singers remained the driest. "Paid for ale when Mr. Heneage Finch first preached, 3/-."

However, by the days of Queen Victoria a new spirit was abroad. There was a rebirth of corporate piety, a deep sense of responsibility in religious commitment, a new interest in antiquities, and a moral certitude and self-assurance necessary to complete great works. Moreover there was the increased income at hand to finance such ambitions. The good citizens and their wealthier patrons hence set to work to repair the major structural neglect of the previous centuries.

The architect of the restoration was Sir Gilbert Scott. Messrs. Ruddle and Thompson of Peterborough proffered the accepted tender of £4,400.

Early in September 1857 the double-decker galleries and the old pulpit and pews were removed. A special subscription was raised to repurchase them from the contractors as fuel for the poor.

The chancel was floored in Minton's encaustic tiles. The exterior roof of the chancel and Trinity chapel, and the interior roof of the chancel and Lady chapel, were rebuilt. The chancel roof is of English oak, and enriched over the sanctuary. The chancel's east window was rebuilt in Derbyshire marble. Screens were placed in the chancel arcades, and an altar table and altar rail of wainscot were installed.

The chancel step was brought four feet beyond its original position, and was given a 3' 6" screen. An octagonal pulpit of finest wainscot and with traceried panels was placed by the chancel arch. A rood-screen was erected within the arch, but this was later removed as was the hood over the pulpit.

The main floors were retiled, as at present. All roofs, windows, arcades, tracery, piscinas and niches were restored, and the windows were reglazed. Carvings were cleaned and the whitewash was stripped.

The arch of the tower was re-opened. The south porch was somewhat restored. In the churchyard the gravestones were laid flat and allowed to grass over, an action which caused imaginative stories to circulate the town and the pages of the "Leicestershire Gleaner".

New seats were in part financed by "The Incorporated Society for the Building &c of Churches" who gave £200. This was on condition that 280 adult sittings were conveniently placed for the poor inhabitants, and 260 children's sittings reserved for the use of the church schools, both for ever. The pews are three feet high, and have poppy heads and other carvings with themes from trees and bushes. The chancel seats of the clergy were given more ornamentation, with carved arm rests and book rests.

The Revd. C. Stephens, the assistant curate of the time, recorded a story about this seating. Mr. Finch the patron had given about £800 towards the pews, which were to be of plain deal. A specimen carved end, with poppyhead, allegedly for another church, was placed against a wall in the hope that he would notice it. He did so, was suitably attracted, and donated a further £500. Fr. Stephens was more than a little involved in the restoration through the old age of the vicar, the Revd. Heneage Finch. He also recorded the alarm of one Sunday evening when because of alterations the north west pier of the tower began to give way. A message was sent to Peterborough, and by midnight forty men were underpinning this vital support of the tower and spire.

The structural modifications were completed in 1898, when the high altar sanctuary was beautified. A new reredos was installed, the work of James Forsyth. Its architectural portions are in pink alabaster, and its figures are in white. It depicts the Resurrection, angels, and the four evangelists.

Perhaps the architect was a higher critic, for the order of the evangelists from left to right is Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. At the same time the sanctuary was paved in marble, and the present brass altar-rails replaced the earlier wooden ones. The reredos masks an old centrally-placed niche in the east wall. This has no evidence of having possessed the doors necessary to an aumbry.

New bells were added in 1840, 1858, 1860 and 1875. Financed in part by rate and partly by subscription the clock was erected in 1860, with skeleton faces by Dent, and the chimes of St. Mary's, Cambridge. The brass eagle lectern was first used at Easter 1897. The present organ costs £740 in 1872. It was much altered in 1896 for the outlay of £380, then to contain 1,816 pipes. Its console now stands in the Trinity chapel. Modern stained glass is found in several windows. A pleasant statue of the Virgin Mary is found by the entrance to her chapel. A cavalry cross stands in the churchyard as a World War Memorial. The spire was repaired in 1930.

Victorian restoration was aided by a wealthy class to hearten its way, and by modest wage bills. Democracy and inflation have everywhere made for unified congregations and constant stewardship. It remains to be seen how the desire for a well ordered fabric and worship will express itself in the future. A twenty-first century D.I.Y. programme would not seem impossible. After all, the church has seen greater changes since the days of Albert the Clerk.

The illustrations on page 17 are reproduced from Arthur Mee's "Leicestershire and Rutland" by courtesy of Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton. The illustrations on page 13, which are intended to convey a general impression rather than complete architectural accuracy, were executed by Anthony Billings, Esq.

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Ten years have elapsed since this guide to Oakham Church was written. The author then talked about the possibility of alterations. A few conservative changes have been made. In 1980 two rows of pews were removed from right across the church to enable a platform and nave altar to be used at the Family Communion. At other times they are housed in the north transept and form a recreated Holy Cross Chapel. Some of the spare seating from the nave has been used to pew the Lady Chapel. Both this chapel and the Trinity Chapel have received new hangings. In 1979 the aumbry by Frank Knight was removed from its site in the piscina, regilded and inserted into the north wall of the Trinity Chapel.

Alan A. Horsley

Oakham, 1982