

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

PARISH CHURCH

Two pillars, said to be Anglo-Saxon, were recorded in the church in the 18th century.¹ The tithes of Norton Fitzwarren were among the endowments made by William, son of Count Robert of Mortain, when he founded the house of Cluniac monks at Montacute between 1091 and 1104. The gifts were confirmed during the 12th century, by Bishop Jocelin in 1239, in 1270, and recapitulated in the Taxatio of 1291.²

The present church building dates back at least to the late 13th century.³ It has a dedication to All Saints, recorded by Collinson in 1791.⁴ The register of baptisms dates from 1556, marriages from 1565 and burials from 1566.⁵

Advowson

In 1265 the right of presentation to the living was held by Peter de Chauvent (de Chavent) and Thomas de Aldeham (de Audham).⁶ In 1279 it was granted to John de Camoys and his wife Margaret, heir of Sir John de Gatesdon. In 1302 Hawysia, widow of Robert le Veel released her right in the advowson to William Paynel and his wife Margaret and it descended with the manor of Norton.⁷ Walter Stapeldon, bishop of Exeter, and his brother Richard bought the advowson with the manor in 1324.⁸ In 1346 the patron of the living was Queen Philippa of Hainault, consort of Edward III, during the minority of the heir of Peter le Veel,

¹ McDermott and Berry, Rack's Survey, 277–8.

² VCH Som. II. 111, 114; Cal. Chart. 1257–1300, 136.

³ VCH Som. II. 111, 114; Orbach and Pevsner, Som. South and West (London, 2014), 499–500.

⁴ Collinson, Hist. Som. III, 272.

⁵ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/2/1/1.

⁶ Holmes, Registers of Giffard and Bowett, 10.

⁷ Green, Feet of Fines 1196-1307, 319, 383–4; above, landownership.

⁸ Green, Feet of Fines 1307–1346, 93.

deceased.⁹ In 1383 and 1386 his son Peter gave the advowson, with 1 a. of land in the field called Wiklond in Norton manor to the prior and convent of the Carthusians in Charterhouse, London.¹⁰ The right of Charterhouse to the advowson was later lost, allegedly through the sharp practice of its enemies.¹¹ In 1404 and 1420 presentation was made by Richard Hankeford, lord of the manor¹² and the advowson remained with the lords of the manor until the Interregnum,¹³ although in 1578 the Crown presented during a minority.¹⁴ During the Interregnum James Farwell was presented by a committee of parliament, and he was presented again in 1661 by the Crown.¹⁵ In 1697 Jane Willis, widow, presented.¹⁶ In 1717 James Minifie bought the advowson from the Hon. George Doddington so that his son, also James, might have the living and the advowson remained in the family in 1768¹⁷ but in the 1780s the Revd James Minifie of Goathurst held the advowson for life only with reversion to William Hawker of Pitminster.¹⁸ In 1789 Hawker presented James Camplin, his son-in-law.¹⁹ In 1794 William Peachy bought the next presentation for £1,200 and in 1797 presented Joseph Guerin.²⁰

Hawker, by his will of 1804, left the advowson to his three daughters.²¹ In 1847 his heirs sold the advowson with the rectorial manor of Wooney to Thomas Arbuthnot Whitter for £4,500 to hold in trust for the Revd Arthur Anstey of Milverton.²² In 1848 Whitter and

⁹ Weaver, *Som. Incumbents*, 408.

¹⁰ *Cal. Pat.* 1381–85, 308; *Cal. Close* 1385–89, 252; E. Green (ed.), *Feet of Fines 1347–1399* (Som. Rec. Soc. 17), 132.

¹¹ *VCH Middx.* I. 159–69.

¹² Holmes, *Registers of Giffard and Bowett*, 52; T. S. Holmes (ed.), *The Register of Nicholas Bubwith, 1407–1424* (vol. 2), (Som. Rec. Soc. 30), 393; above, landownership.

¹³ *Cal. Close* 1468–76, 253–4; Maxwell-Lyte, *Reg. Bishop Stillington*, 60, 65, 117–18; Maxwell-Lyte, *Reg. King and de Castello*, 72, 140; Maxwell-Lyte, *Reg. Wolsey, Clerke, Knyght and Bourne*, 9, 70, 97.

¹⁴ *Cal. Pat.* 1575–8, 436.

¹⁵ *Particular Description Som.*, 45–6; Hawkins, *Sales of Wards*, 161–4; Weaver, *Som. Incumbents*, 409; TNA, QAB 1/12/11.

¹⁶ Weaver, *Som. Incumbents*, 409.

¹⁷ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/3/4/1.

¹⁸ McDermott and Berry, *Rack's Survey of Somerset*, 277–8.

¹⁹ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/3/4/1; SHC, DD/HLM/Box 10.

²⁰ SHC, DD/CH/28, copy grant of 1 Dec. 1794; SHC, D/D/breg/32, 10 Aug. 1797.

²¹ SHC, DD/HLM/Box 10, will of William Hawker.

²² SHC, D/P/n.fitz/3/4/1.

Anstey conveyed the advowson (and presumably the rectorial manor) to William Hewett of Norton Fitzwarren.²³ Hewett left the advowson to his wife Mary, who, as a widow, presented their son John Prowse Hewett in 1864.²⁴ He left the advowson to his wife Elizabeth, and it was inherited on her death by their son William Prowse Hewett. On William's death in 1923 the advowson passed to his brother George Upcott Hewett, who in 1929 conveyed it to Archibald Douglas Sutton for £450.²⁵ By 1959 patronage had passed to the Martyrs' Memorial Trust.²⁶ By 2001 Norton Fitzwarren formed part of a united benefice with Staplegrove but remained a separate parish. The patrons were the Bishop of Bath and Wells and the Martyrs' Memorial Trust, and the Church of England Trust.²⁷

Income and Property

William, Count of Mortain and Alvred the butler granted a moiety of the tithes of Nortun by Tantone to the Cluniac monks at Monacute, c. 1091–1106.²⁸ That grant was confirmed by the Crown c. 1100–1118, in 1135–7 and in 1152–8²⁹ and by the bishop of Bath, c. 1135–66.³⁰

In c.1219 assize was held between William de Raleghe, parson, and John de Monteacuto, tenant, regarding land in the parish. William was to hold three parts of a virgate of land for life, or until he vacated the living, whereupon it would revert to John and his heirs. A half virgate of land held by Ailmer de Langeford was to be held by the church in perpetuity.³¹ In 1291–2 the benefice was assessed for tax at £20, of which 5s. was given as a pension to the prior of Montacute. The net worth of the living at £19 15s. made it the fourth

²³ SHC, D/D/ra/27.

²⁴ SHC, D/D/ra/27; SHC, D/D/breg/38, 264.

²⁵ SHC, D/D/ra/27; SHC, D/D/breg/41, 96.

²⁶ Crockford's Clerical Dir. (1959--60).

²⁷ Dioc. Dir. (2001–2).

²⁸ H.C. Maxwell-Lyte and T.S. Holmes, Cartularies of Bruton and Montacute Priories (Som. Rec. Soc. 8), 119–20, 185.

²⁹ Cart. Bruton and Montacute, 120–6.

³⁰ Cart. Bruton and Montacute, 191–2.

³¹ Green, Feet of Fines 1196–1307, 39–40.

most wealthy in the deanery of Taunton.³² In 1335 the church was reported to be 39s. 6d. in arrears of its dues to the Crown.³³ The clerical subsidy for the living was assessed at 2s. 6d. in 1445, and at 6s. 8d. in 1450, 1463 and 1468.³⁴

In c.1533 the rector was assessed for first fruits and tenths at 17s., and his curate at 6s. 8d.³⁵ In 1536 the rectory was worth £20 10s. 7½d. net. The lands were valued at £3, great tithes at £13, tithes of wool and lambs 17s., and offerings and other monies £4 3s. 4d.³⁶

By 1626 the rectory had 8 a. of glebe land, and the rector was lord of the manor of Wooney. The manorial holding consisted of ten tenements with a total of 76 a., and six cottages lying along the street near the church. The tenements and cottages produced an annual rent of £3 6s. 8d.³⁷ The probate inventory for Richard Jones (Joanes), clerk, in 1649, listed only household goods, which would suggest that he had not been farming the glebe himself but had let it to tenants.³⁸

In a survey of 1835 the rectory was worth £252 p.a.³⁹ In 1840 the tithe rent-charge was assessed at £283 15s.⁴⁰ In 1851 the living was endowed with a house and garden, tithe payments of £282, and 7 a. of glebe land, and fees and other payments came to £5. The manorial holdings consisted of 74 a. and 18 tenements leased for three lives.⁴¹

It is possible that part of the former rectorial holdings were sold in 1893, when the estate of the late Revd John Prowse Hewett was auctioned.⁴² By 1918 the glebe land and the manorial lands and property had become intermixed, and they were sold at auction in 1919.⁴³

³² Tax. Eccl., 198, 200.

³³ Holmes, Register of Ralph of Shrewsbury, 238.

³⁴ H. C. Maxwell-Lyte and M. C. B. Dawes, The Register of Thomas Bekynton 1443–1465, I (Som. Rec. Soc. 49), 33, 140, 398; Maxwell-Lyte, Reg. Stillington and Fox, 27.

³⁵ SHC, D/D/vc/20.

³⁶ Valor Eccl. I, 172.

³⁷ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/3/1/3; above, landownership, Wooney.

³⁸ SHC, DD/SP/1649/77.

³⁹ Rep. Com. Eccl Revenues (1835), 146–7.

⁴⁰ SHC, tithe award.

⁴¹ TNA, HO/129/315, 55.

⁴² Taunton Courier, 6 Sept. 1893, 1.

⁴³ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/3/1/2; Taunton Courier, 22 Jan. 1919, 4.

The first known reference to a clergy house is from 1554, when the parsonage needed repair.⁴⁴ In 1626 the parsonage house had a hall, kitchen, four or five chambers, barn, stables and other rooms. In the hall was little wainscot with a bench.⁴⁵ It is not known where this early parsonage house was situated, but by 1840 the rector lived in a house in the present Rectory Road, and an early 20th-century postcard of the rectory shows a building clearly of much later date than the 17th century.⁴⁶ This rectory was sold before 1962 and a new parsonage house erected.⁴⁷

Pastoral Care and Parish Life

The Middle Ages The octagonal font is in the Early Decorated style and dates from 1272–1325.⁴⁸ A chapel dedicated to St Mary Virgin in the cemetery of Norton Veil is recorded in 1391, when penitents were enjoined to give alms to the chapel.⁴⁹

The earliest known incumbent is William de Raleghe in 1219.⁵⁰ Nicolas de Welewe, vicar of Axbridge, was presented in 1265.⁵¹ Nicholas Gavard was the incumbent in 1309 and John de Meysey (or Meisi) from 1314–46.⁵² De Meysey was regularly in debt including £100 owed Robert de Middleton in 1330 of which £40 remained unpaid in 1335. He was also rector of Heathfield and on his resignation from both livings in 1346 he was granted accommodation for himself and a servant within the Norton rectory outbuildings and a pension of 100s. annually from the rector and the same sum from Heathfield.⁵³

⁴⁴ SHC, D/D/ca/23, f. 30.

⁴⁵ SHC, D/D/rg/387/1.

⁴⁶ SHC, tithe award; SHC, A/BAV/5/16, 13.

⁴⁷ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/3/4/2; D/R/ta/24/1/817.

⁴⁸ H. Pridham (ed. A. J. Webb), Ancient Church Fonts of Somerset (Taunton, 2013), 12, 22, 120.

⁴⁹ Cal. Papal Regs, IV, 357.

⁵⁰ Green, Feet of Fines 1196–1307, 39–40.

⁵¹ Holmes, Reg. Giffard and Bowett, 2, 10.

⁵² Weaver, Som. Incumbents, 408–9.

⁵³ Holmes, Reg. Ralph of Shrewbury, 22, 49, 251, 405, 529–30.

An image of the Virgin Mary is recorded in the church in 1342–3.⁵⁴ In 1391 a papal indulgence was granted to penitents who on certain holy days visited and gave alms to the chapel of St Mary the Virgin in the cemetery of Norton Fitzwarren (Norton Veel).⁵⁵ In 1404 John Gorwell replaced William Hals and in the same year there may have been a chaplain called Robert in the parish.⁵⁶ In 1410 Gorwell (Gorewell) was licensed by the bishop to preach anywhere in the diocese.⁵⁷ A later 15th-century rector, William Fulford (or Foleford), being illegitimate, received papal dispensation to be in holy orders, and in 1435 to hold the cure of Norton Fitzwarren with any other benefice.⁵⁸

1500-1888 The church still has surviving 16th-century carved bench ends. A fine wooden rood screen dates from the early 16th century, bearing the name of Raphe Harris, churchwarden, who died in 1509. The lower part of the screen contains scenes showing hunting dogs, a man ploughing with an ox team, three naked men, and two representations of a dragon, one of which is in the act of devouring a praying figure.⁵⁹ The representations of the dragon are alleged to show the legend of the dragon of Norton hillfort, but may be allegorical, or relate to another legend.⁶⁰

In 1547 it was reported that the church lacked a bible in English, and that the chancel was ruinous through the fault of the non-resident rector.⁶¹ The chancel remained in decay in 1554, and the high altar was not hallowed.⁶² The rector Thomas Genyng was deprived of the living in May 1554, during the reign of the Catholic Mary Tudor.⁶³ The church continued to

⁵⁴ Glos. Archives, MF1418 (Berkeley Castle Muniments BCM/A/3/14/1 (GAR386)).

⁵⁵ Cal. Papal Regs, IV, 357.

⁵⁶ Weaver, Som. Incumbents, 408–9; R. Dunning, ‘Som. Parochial Clergy 1373–1404’, PSANHS CXIV, 93.

⁵⁷ T. S. Holmes, The Register of Nicholas Bubwith, 1407–1424, I, (Som. Rec. Soc. 29), 14, 96.

⁵⁸ Weaver, Som. Incumbents, 409.; Cal Papal Regs, VIII, 532–44.

⁵⁹ Orbach and Pevsner, Som. South and West, 499–500; McDermott and Berry, Rack’s Survey, 277–8.

⁶⁰ ‘Norton Fitzwarren church’, PSANHS 18.i, 42–3; F. Bligh Bond, ‘Screenwork in churches of the Taunton district’, PSANHS 54.ii, 146–7.

⁶¹ SHC, D/D/ca/12a, f. 60.

⁶² SHC, D/D/ca/23, f. 30.

⁶³ VCH Som. II. 66.

receive gifts made in wills during the turbulence of the English reformation. In 1547 the church was owed 20s. from a legacy.⁶⁴ Also in 1547 John Adams of Taunton left 5s. to the church, and in 1556 Peter Daberham left 3s. 4d.⁶⁵

Among the items listed in an inventory of 1574 were a communion cup, ‘a pair of Organs’, a clock and five bells.⁶⁶ A chalice was acquired in 1579–80, at which time the church also possessed a silver spoon. There is a record of Holy Rood wardens at the same date.⁶⁷ In 1577 Thomas Jennings (Jennynge), rector of Norton and Huntspill, left 2s. towards the church’s maintenance, and in 1578 John Shervy, gentleman of the parish, left 10s. towards repairs, which may indicate some concern about the state of the fabric.⁶⁸

A church house is known by 1574, when its inventory was recorded. The church house was let in 1612.⁶⁹ By 1646 it had fallen down, and a new one was to be built.⁷⁰

In 1594 four parishioners were presented for failing to receive communion at Easter, though two had the case dismissed on certifying that they had taken communion.⁷¹ The church was reported to be in poor repair in 1591 and again in 1606.⁷² In 1610 Oliver Ormerod, author of controversialist publications attacking both puritans and Catholics, was presented to the rectory, but he resigned in 1617 on being presented to the rectory of Huntspill.⁷³ In 1623 a woman was excommunicated for having an illegitimate child, although another parishioner was absolved from a sentence of excommunication.⁷⁴ These excommunications may have been related to a low standard of pastoral care, as in 1623 the

⁶⁴ SHC, D/D/ca/12a, f. 60.

⁶⁵ F. W. Weaver, *Somerset Medieval Wills 1531–1558* (Som. Rec. Soc. 21), 95–6, 183–4.

⁶⁶ S. E. Dodderidge, ‘Inventory of church goods at Norton Fitzwarren, 1574’, *SDNQ*, XX, 153–4.

⁶⁷ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, churchwardens’ accounts of 1579–80.

⁶⁸ Siraut, *Somerset Wills*, 138, 206–7.

⁶⁹ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, 1574, 13 Apr. 1612.

⁷⁰ Warws. RO CR 2017/L1/(a)11.

⁷¹ D. Shorrocks, *Bishop Still’s Visitation and the ‘Smale Booke’ of the Clerk of the Peace for Somerset, 1593–5* (Som. Rec. Soc. 84), 98, 103.

⁷² SHC, D/D/ca/98; D/D/ca/151.

⁷³ *ODNB*, Ormerod, Oliver (d. 1626), accessed 17 May 2017.

⁷⁴ T. F. Palmer, *Collectanea ii* (Som. Rec. Soc. 43), 88–9, 122, 170.

rector was reported as seldom catechising the parishioners, and by 1630 the rector Thomas Blitchinden was not resident. His curate Nicholas Street preached, but the churchwardens did not know if he was licensed.⁷⁵

Youngmen's wardens, formerly Holy Rood wardens, who were sometimes young women, continued to be appointed during the early 17th century, but after 1643 disappear from the record, probably as a result of the religious reforms instigated by Parliament.⁷⁶

Josias Alsop, rector of Norton Fitzwarren from 1638, left the parish by 1647 due to his fears of the Parliamentary garrison at Taunton Castle. In the interim the parish was served by Alexander Robinson in 1647 and James Farwell from 1654.⁷⁷ Alsop was preaching in London by 1649, where he remained.⁷⁸ He seems to have attempted to recover the living of Norton Fitzwarren from Farwell in 1664, but, although the validity of Farwell's first presentation to the living was in doubt, he had been presented for a second time by the Crown after the Restoration, and Alsop was unsuccessful.⁷⁹

By 1656 the churchwardens held a silver communion cup and cover and a silver bread plate, a communion table cloth and napkin, a pulpit cushion, and a leather glass bottle.⁸⁰ In 1712 Mary Prowse gifted the church a silver-gilt flagon and paten in memory of her husband James.⁸¹

James Minifie, rector from 1742 to 1768, held in plurality the living of Goathurst and the curacy of Bishop's Hull; and from 1754 a prebendary at Wells Cathedral.⁸² His son, also James, rector from 1768 to 1789, held in plurality the rectories of Goathurst and

⁷⁵ SHC, D/D/ca/235; D/D/ca/274, 200-1.

⁷⁶ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, 10 Apr. 1626, 29 Mar. 1630, 3 Apr. 1643.

⁷⁷ Walker Revised, ed. A. G. Matthews, 308; Calamy Revised, ed. A.G. Matthews, 412-13.

⁷⁸ Walker Revised, ed. A. G. Matthews, 308.

⁷⁹ SHC, D/D/vc/41; TNA, QAB 1/12/11.

⁸⁰ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, 7 Apr. 1656.

⁸¹ SHC, D/D/cf/1971/11/9.

⁸² SHC, D/P/n.fitz/3/4/1; D/D/breg/26, 41, 45; D/D/breg/27, 42; D/D/breg/28, 63, 64; D/D/BS/44, 19 Jul. 1750; D/P/stapg/2/1/3, burial 8 Apr. 1768.

Staplegrave.⁸³ In 1744 the vestry resolved to sell the old pulpit and erect a new pulpit with a canopy, standing 4 ½ft. further out than the old pulpit.⁸⁴ By the 1770s the church had around 20 communicants, and in the following decade the average annual number of christenings was eleven, with six burials. A gallery for singers at the west end of the church is known to have been in existence in the 1780s.⁸⁵ A Sunday school was proposed in 1789 in an effort to curb vice and immorality in the parish.⁸⁶

After 1800 Non-resident clergy remained a concern in the 19th century. In 1815 and 1827 the rector was reported as residing in West Bagborough, where he also had a benefice. There was only one Sunday service, though by 1827 the rector had an assistant.⁸⁷ By 1840 the incumbent was reported as being resident.⁸⁸

In 1828 Charles Corfield of Knowle Cottage gave the church at Norton Fitzwarren a silver salver and a large silver cup, to be used at the communion service.⁸⁹ An inventory of Somerset's church plate made in 1900 listed a silver-gilt paten and flagon inscribed with the name James Prowse and the date 1712. There was a silver-gilt cup and cover dated to 1740, a silver salver on three feet dated to 1810 and a cup inscribed as the gift of C. Corfield in 1828.⁹⁰

The 16th-century rood screen was recorded in 1829 as being richly coloured,⁹¹ and it was still painted and gilded as late as 1845, though later in the 19th century it was covered

⁸³ SHC, D/D/breg/27, 67; D/D/breg/28, 63, 64; D/D/breg/32, 99, 102v, 103.

⁸⁴ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, 3 Jan. 1743 [1744].

⁸⁵ SHC, D/D/vc/88; McDermott and Berry, *Rack's Survey*, 277–8.

⁸⁶ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, f. 98.

⁸⁷ SHC, D/D/Rb, 1815, 1827.

⁸⁸ SHC, D/D/va/1/12.

⁸⁹ *Bath Chronicle*, 24 Apr. 1828, 3.

⁹⁰ E. H. Bates and F. Hancock, 'An inventory of church plate in Somerset: Part IV', *PSANHS* 46.ii, 165–6.

⁹¹ *Gentleman's Mag.*, pt. I (1829), 305.

with brown paint.⁹² Part of the screen is said to have been removed at some point in the 19th century and later recovered by the rector from a shop in Taunton.⁹³

In 1848 the sexton was dismissed for his conduct.⁹⁴ In 1851 there were 300 sittings in the church, plus benches for 50 children. There were 85 persons present at the Sunday morning service, and 51 Sunday scholars, while 112 people and 51 scholars attended the afternoon service. There was no evening service.⁹⁵ A new organ, built by Vowles of Bristol, was installed in the new chapel in 1865 at a cost of about £170, of which £105 was contributed by H. Gover of Courtlands.⁹⁶ The minister was reported as resident in 1870; he also catechised the school children. By 1898 the minister was reported to never miss a vestry meeting. There were three Sunday services, one of which was a communion service, and one service on each saint's day.⁹⁷

The bells had been recast and repaired on various occasions since 1574. In 1879 the ring of five bells was augmented by a sixth, tenor, bell. By 1899 Isaac Creed led a flourishing bell-ringing team, but this went into a decline after 1911, when Isaac and his brother Henry left to ring at St Mary's Taunton. There is photographic evidence of a ladies' bell-ringing team at this period. All six bells were restored or replaced in 1992–3, but with the loss of some material of historic interest, including busts of wolves' heads found on one bell.⁹⁸

In 1971 it was proposed that the silver-gilt flagon and paten gifted in 1712 be sold to raise money for repairs, but permission was refused as the flagon and paten were held to be closely connected with the history of the church.⁹⁹ A branch of the Church of England Men's

⁹² 'Norton Fitzwarren Church', *PSANHS* XVIII.i, 42–3; S. Glynne, *Sir Stephen Glynne's Church Notes for Somerset* (Som. Rec. Soc. 82), 250–2.

⁹³ 'Norton Fitzwarren church', *PSANHS* XLIV.i, 44–7.

⁹⁴ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/2, 14 Dec. 1848.

⁹⁵ TNA, HO/129/315, 55.

⁹⁶ *Taunton Courier*, 13 Sept. 1865, 6.

⁹⁷ SHC, D/D/va/21/12.

⁹⁸ D. Bryant, *The Bells of All Saints' Church, Norton Fitzwarren* (2000), 2–5, 7–9.

⁹⁹ SHC, D/D/cf/1971/11/9; SHC, D/P/n.fitz/5/4/2.

Society was formed in the parish in 1969–70 and ran until at least 1984.¹⁰⁰ In 2017 the church was part of the parish of St John's Staplegrove with All Saints' Norton Fitzwarren. Services at All Saints' church were held once on Sundays and occasionally at other times.¹⁰¹ The rector was resident in the rectory at Staplegrove.¹⁰²

All Saint's Church

The church was described by Rack in the 1780s as standing on a 'small eminence' north-west of the main village street. It had a nave, chancel, north aisle, south porch and tower with belfry. Between the nave and aisle were two large octagonal Anglo-Saxon pillars supporting an arch.¹⁰³ The north aisle arcade is late 13th or early 14th century. The tower is in the Perpendicular style, ornamented by grotesque animals.¹⁰⁴ Its North Curry sandstone possibly came from a quarry at Knowle Hill in the parish.¹⁰⁵ In 1851 a faculty was granted to enable the nave, north aisle and south porch to be restored.¹⁰⁶ These restorations were reported to have been carried out about 12 years before the restorations undertaken by C. E. Giles in 1865, when the chancel was restored and a new chapel opened, but parts of the medieval church remained despite the extensive 19th-century restorations.¹⁰⁷ A clock was installed on the south wall of tower to mark coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953.¹⁰⁸

Inside the church a gallery was at one time situated above the rood screen. By the 1780s had been closed up and replaced by one at the west end of church.¹⁰⁹ This gallery, or

¹⁰⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.a/23/1/6, AGM 20 Oct. 1970, 25 Oct. 1984.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.stjohnswithallsaints.btck.co.uk/> (accessed 8 Aug. 2017).

¹⁰² Crockford's Clerical Dir. (2016–17).

¹⁰³ McDermott and Berry, Rack's Survey, 277–8.

¹⁰⁴ F. J. Allen, 'Further notes on Somerset church towers', PSANHS LVIII.ii, 13–14; Orbach and Pevsner, Som. South and West, 499–500.

¹⁰⁵ H. Prudden, 'The geological landscape of Somerset in the late 18th century', PSANHS 158, 105.

¹⁰⁶ SHC, D/D/ca/444.

¹⁰⁷ Orbach and Pevsner, Som. South and West, 499–500; Taunton Courier, 13 Sept. 1865, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Bryant, Bells of All Saints, 6.

¹⁰⁹ McDermott and Berry, Rack's Survey, 277–8.

the west gallery, or both, were removed altogether in the alterations of c.1851.¹¹⁰ The east window, by Clayton & Bell, dates to the 1865 restoration. Several monuments are found in the church, notably an elaborate alabaster monument in the church in memory of James Prowse who died in 1672.¹¹¹

During the Civil Wars the churchyard rails were torn down, and not reinstated until after the Restoration. It was recorded in 1663 that bowls had previously been played in an unconsecrated part of the churchyard.¹¹² In the 1780s Rack observed that the churchyard contained a memorial to the Bult family, and three or four gravestones.¹¹³ In 1872 it was recorded that the south-west corner of the churchyard was used as a burial place for gypsies.¹¹⁴ The churchyard was extended by ¼ a. in 1895.¹¹⁵ There are five military graves listed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, one from the First World War and four from the Second World War.¹¹⁶

NONCONFORMITY

In 1576 Thomas Poole was presented as having not received communion for 12 months, and for absenting himself from the parish church. Several parishioners were presented for not coming to church in 1585, and in 1594 three persons were presented for having not received communion.¹¹⁷ Twenty parishioners were presented in 1612 for having not received communion, one of whom was dangerously ill, but no excuse was given for the rest. It was noted that Henry Harrison had not only failed to receive communion but had stated that he would not receive it.¹¹⁸ It is unclear if the parishioners presented in 1612 were objecting to

¹¹⁰ SHC, D/D/ca/444.

¹¹¹ Orbach and Pevsner, *Som. South and West*, 499–500; McDermott and Berry, *Rack's Survey*, 277–8.

¹¹² SHC, DD/SAS/C/795/PD/73.

¹¹³ McDermott and Berry, *Rack's Surve*, 277–8.

¹¹⁴ 'Norton Fitzwarren Church', *PSANHS* XVIII.i, 42–3.

¹¹⁵ SHC, D/D/breg/41, 156.

¹¹⁶ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, <https://www.cwgc.org> (accessed 28 Mar. 2018).

¹¹⁷ SHC, D/D/ca/57; D/D/ca/75; D/D/ca/104.

¹¹⁸ SHC, D/D/ca/175.

the doctrines of the Anglican Church or to the then-incumbent, the controversialist Ormond.¹¹⁹ There were further presentments in 1623, 1630 and 1636 for failure to attend church or receive communion, but only of one or two parishioners on each occasion.¹²⁰

Evidence for nonconformity in Norton Fitzwarren during the 17th and 18th centuries is sparse. Two licences applied for under the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672 for the houses of William Rodbeard (or Rodbard) and John Pitt as meeting places for Presbyterians in Norton, Somerset have been attributed to Norton Fitzwarren.¹²¹ Rack noted that Methodists were holding meetings in private houses in the 1780s,¹²² but there is no evidence of a Methodist chapel at this time.

In the 19th century nonconformity centred around the Congregational chapel, and at the very end of the century the Bible Christians established a short-lived congregation. Charles Noel Welman, lord of the manor, was a Roman Catholic, and several of his children were baptised in the family's private oratory at Norton Manor.¹²³

Congregational chapel

An Independent (or Congregational) congregation was established about 1819.¹²⁴ In 1821 a chapel was built in the village on the north side of the Wiveliscombe road. An early register of births and baptisms survives for 1826–37. In 1837 it was noted by the minister that the three Congregational chapels at Norton Fitzwarren, Kingston and Stoke St Mary had, until a few years previously, shared one minister.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ ODNB, Ormerod, Oliver (d. 1626), accessed 17 May 2017.

¹²⁰ SHC, D/D/ca/235; D/D/ca/274; D/D/ca/310.

¹²¹ G.L. Turner (ed.), *Original Records of Early Nonconformity*, I, 317, 363, 480, 613; II, 1094.

¹²² McDermott and Berry, *Rack's Survey*, 277–8.

¹²³ J. J. Howard and F. A. Crisp, *Visitation of England and Wales*, vol. 5 (s.l., 1897), 35–6.

¹²⁴ *Rep. Som. Cong. Union* (1896), 64.

¹²⁵ TNA, RG 4/2873.

The chapel was extended in the mid to late 19th century to include a manse and a school building.¹²⁶ In 1851 the chapel, known as Norton Chapel, had a total of 180 sittings. Average attendance at the morning service was 53, with 76 Sunday scholars; 83 at the afternoon service, with 76 scholars, and 90 at the evening service.¹²⁷ The chapel was licensed for marriages in 1868.¹²⁸

Despite the attendances recorded in 1851, the Congregational chapel was not able to support its own full-time minister. By 1882, when the Revd William Gammon retired after 43 years' service, he was minister of Norton Fitzwarren, Bradford-on-Tone and Bishops Lydeard.¹²⁹ Bradford separated from Norton and Bishops Lydeard.¹³⁰ Gammon's successor, Revd Dixon, was embroiled in an unexplained controversy in 1889 when he was asked to resign from the church at Norton Fitzwarren. He remained at Norton but was dismissed from his post at Bishops Lydeard later that year.¹³¹

By 1928 the Congregational chapel was a mission station of Bishop's Hull, with 16 members.¹³² Norton Fitzwarren chapel remained united with Bishop's Hull, and in 1958 an agreement was reached in which the two churches were to share one full-time minister. They were to find £350 p.a. for the minister's stipend of £430, with the synod's maintenance fund making up the remainder.¹³³ Bishop's Hull left Norton Fitzwarren in 1967 to join the Taunton Congregational churches.¹³⁴ In c.1995–6 the chapel and manse were integrated to provide office space for the South Western Synod of the United Reformed Church, and services ceased to be held in the building.¹³⁵

¹²⁶ SHC, A/DIQ/53/121; C. Stell, An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in South-West England (London, 1991), 186.

¹²⁷ TNA, HO/129/315, 56.

¹²⁸ Western Gaz., 17 Jul. 1868.

¹²⁹ Taunton Courier, 1 Nov. 1882.

¹³⁰ Rep. Som. Cong. Union (1896), 64.

¹³¹ D/N/bl.c/3/2/1, 5 Sept. 1889.

¹³² Cong. Year Book (1928), 263.

¹³³ SHC, D/N/bhc/3/2/2, 16 Dec. 1958.

¹³⁴ See Bishop's Hull, rel. hist.

¹³⁵ Dinah Firmin, URC South Western Synod, pers. comm., 22 Jun. 2017.

Bible Christians

In 1897 the Bible Christians opened Providence chapel, a small iron chapel in the village on the south side of the Wiveliscombe road.¹³⁶ The Taunton Bible Christian circuit felt that there was inadequate nonconformist accommodation in the village, and they anticipated competition from the Wesleyan Methodists if they did not build a chapel first.¹³⁷ The chapel was initially successful, increasing its membership from 12 to 31 in the first two years, and setting up a Band of Hope group.¹³⁸ In 1904 demand was unexpectedly made for 1d. annual tithe for the land on which the chapel stood, despite the value of the living of Norton Fitzwarren being a reported £250 p.a.¹³⁹ Tithe payments continued to be made up to 1911.¹⁴⁰ Bible Christian churches united with other Methodist churches in 1907 to form the United Methodist Church.¹⁴¹ As with other country chapels, the number of members at Norton Fitzwarren remained small compared to the town meetings at Taunton and Wellington. Numbers declined after 1900, and in 1911 it was agreed that the chapel would be sold.¹⁴² The chapel debt was still being cleared by the circuit in 1920.¹⁴³ It was demolished c.1940.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁶ SHC, D/N/tmc/4/2/8, ff. 1r, 2v-3r; Kelly's Dir. Som. (1902), 341–2; Johnson, 100 Years of Norton Fitzwarren, 10.

¹³⁷ SHC, D/N/tmc/4/2/29, 18 Feb. 1897.

¹³⁸ SCH, D/N/tmc/4/2/29, 16 Jun. 1897, 16 Jun. 1898, 14 Jun. 1899.

¹³⁹ Wiltshire Times and Trowbridge Advertiser, 26 Aug. 1905.

¹⁴⁰ SHC, D/N/tmc/4/2/8, ff. 12r–21r.

¹⁴¹ M. J. L. Wickes, The Westcountry Preachers: A History of the Bible Christians 1815-1907 (s.l., 1987), 95–6.

¹⁴² SHC, D/N/tmc/4/2/29, 21 Sept. 1911, 27 Dec. 1911.

¹⁴³ SHC, D/N/tmc/7/4/1 (Temple Messenger, Jun. 1999, 12).

¹⁴⁴ Johnson, 100 Years of Norton Fitzwarren, 10.