



VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Enstone parish

Religious History

Enstone's large parish had its own church by the late 12th century, and in the Middle Ages there were parochial chapels at Chalford and Radford and possibly in some of the other hamlets. A modestly endowed vicarage was established following the church's appropriation by Winchcombe abbey in 1309, and was augmented in 1818. The church was adequately served, but after the Reformation there is little indication that church life was particularly vibrant, and Catholicism (associated with nearby Heythrop and Kiddington) had an impact from the 18th century. That was followed by a surge in Protestant Nonconformity which led to the establishment of a Wesleyan Methodist chapel in Neat Enstone, a Primitive Methodist chapel in Lidstone, and a Baptist chapel in Cleveley, along with a Catholic one (designed by A.W.N. Pugin) in Radford. All continued until the later 20th century, while the parish church itself became part of a team ministry in 2001.



Enstone parish church (Church Enstone).

Church Origins and Parochial Organization

Enstone church was established by Winchcombe abbey before 1175,¹ its dedication to St Kenelm (recorded from the 16th century) matching that of the abbey.² The possibility of a considerably earlier foundation is suggested by architectural evidence for a now-lost crossing tower, which would be appropriate for a transeptal cruciform church of a kind associated with the 12th-century refoundation of old minsters as secular college communities.³ The church was one of the best endowed in Chipping Norton deanery, assessed at 30 marks (£20) in 1254 and 43 marks (£28 13s. 4d.) in 1291.⁴ Winchcombe abbey secured an annual payment of 4½ marks, later increased to 5 marks,⁵ and in 1309 it appropriated the entire rectory estate save for the vicar's allowance, despite the bishop of Lincoln's opposition to a monastery outside his diocese acquiring one of its churches.⁶ The benefice remained a vicarage thereafter, and in 1964 was combined with neighbouring Heythrop.⁷ In 2001 both parishes were added to the united benefice of Chadlington, Spelsbury and Ascott-under-Wychwood, afterwards known as Chase benefice.⁸

Medieval chapels at Lower Chalford and Radford were possibly established by their respective early medieval lords, but Winchcombe abbey's control of Chalford chapel was confirmed in 1175, and Radford itself became part of the abbey's Enstone estate by 1279.⁹ The Chalford chapel was last mentioned in 1412, when it was dedicated to St James, and was apparently abandoned later in the century when Chalford was depopulated.¹⁰ Radford's chapel, too, almost certainly went out of use before the Reformation, and in 1634 its chapel yard (called 'Chapel close') was used as a common.¹¹ Nothing is known of how either chapel was served, and there is no indication that they had baptismal or burial rights.

Evidence for medieval chapels elsewhere in the parish is inconclusive. Earthworks at Lidstone (where 18th-century county maps incorrectly show an extant chapel) include an

¹ D. Royce (ed.), *Landboc sive Registrum Monasterii ... de Winchelcumba* (1892–1903), I, 24–6.

² e.g. OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 180.160; *Par. Colln.* II, 131.

³ Below, church archit.

⁴ Lunt (ed.), *Val. Norw.* 311; *Tax Eccl.* 32; above, landownership (rectory estate).

⁵ *Landboc*, I, 72–4 (confirmation before Becket's martyrdom in 1170), 370; *Rot. Gravesend*, 224.

⁶ *Cal. Pat.* 1307–13, 152; G. Haigh, *The History of Winchcombe Abbey* (1950), 89–92.

⁷ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1807/2.

⁸ *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 117.

⁹ *Landboc*, I, 24–6; M. Lobel, *The History of Dean and Chalford* (ORS, 17, 1935), 103; above, landownership.

¹⁰ Lobel, *Dean and Chalford*, 103.

¹¹ OHC, E36/3/1/E/1; *ibid.* tithe award and map, no. 104; J. Jordan, *A Parochial History of Enstone in the County of Oxford* (1857), 43, mentioning 19th-cent. removal of the banks around its yard. No medieval reference to the chapel has been found.

enclosure which could have been a chapel yard,¹² while at Ditchley a close just over the Spelsbury boundary carried the suggestive name 'Fenny chapel' in 1609.¹³ The remnants of a once substantial late-medieval stone cross at Gagingwell stood in a wedge-shaped site next to a spring, which is unlikely to have been a chapel yard.¹⁴ Re-used 14th-century masonry in a house at Cleveley (formerly belonging to the church estate) may be from Enstone church rather than from a local structure.¹⁵

Advowson and Vicarage

Winchcombe abbey presented rectors from the early 13th century until the abbey's appropriation of the rectory estate in 1309. Thereafter it presented vicars nominated by the bishop of Lincoln, in return for him surrendering his episcopal rights over the church when it was vacant.¹⁶ In 1540 the advowson passed to Sir Thomas Pope with the manor, and was exercised by Enstone's lords or their representatives until 1933, when Viscount Dillon excluded it from his sale of the estate. His successor the 20th viscount gave it to the bishop of Oxford in 1963,¹⁷ and from the creation of the Chase benefice in 2001 presentations were made jointly with the dean and chapter of Christ Church, Oxford.¹⁸

The vicarage established in 1309 was valued at 15 marks (£10), and included a yardland of glebe in Church Enstone, small tithes, and 6s. 8d. a year from the abbey as rector.¹⁹ Even so in 1425 the vicar complained of its small value.²⁰ By 1718 it had risen to £40–£50, including a £13 pension from Christ Church, Oxford (the abbey's successor as rector), and underwood tithes from Box wood. An additional claim to the tithe of furze from Enstone farm was refused.²¹ In 1808 the living was worth £60 net including £16 from Christ Church, and in 1813 it was augmented by an £800 parliamentary grant under Queen Anne's Bounty, making it one of the county's better-endowed benefices.²² In 1846 vicarial tithes were commuted for a £300 rent charge (based on current corn prices), and in 1883 the 27-a.

¹² C.J. Reeves, 'A Medieval Village', *Oxoniensia* 36 (1971), 50; Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767), Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1799). Detailed local maps show the field name 'Church Path Close' relating to a footpath to Enstone church: Brasenose Arch., B 14.1/37a3; B 14.1/49a.

¹³ OHC, E36/1/1/D/8 and 10; *ibid.* Jo II/1; *ibid.* E36/1/10/M/1 (1726 map). For a later private chapel in Ditchley Park mansion, below, Spelsbury (relig. hist.).

¹⁴ OHC, tithe award and map, no. 172; HER, PRN 2569 (for the cross's remains).

¹⁵ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 310; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 48.

¹⁶ *Landboc*, I, 309–11; *Cal. Pat.* 1307–13, 230; Lincs. Arch. REG/10, ff. 343v., 350.

¹⁷ *L&P Hen. VIII*, XV, p. 403; Ch. Ch. Arch., MS Estates 72, f. 70; *Cal. Pat.* 1554–5, 90–1; *Par Colln*, II, 131; OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 1806; c. 1873; cf. above, landownership. For invalid grants to Christ Church: *L&P Hen. VIII*, XVII, p. 491; XXI (2), pp. 334–5.

¹⁸ *Crockford's Clerical Dir.* (2020–1).

¹⁹ *Landboc*, II, p. lxiii; Haigh, *History of Winchcombe Abbey*, 92; OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 127; *ibid.* E36/3/1/E/2.

²⁰ *Landboc*, II, 104–5, the editor supplying the word 'marks' after 'ten'.

²¹ OHC, E36/3/1/E/2.

²² *Ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 446, f. 87; Hodgson, *QAB*, p. 408; *Oxon. Atlas*, p. 133.

glebe was let for £40.²³ By 1899, however, the living's net value was just £186, rising to £240 by 1920.²⁴

Vicarage House

The medieval vicarage house occupied a small plot on the south side of the church, which by the 18th century was hemmed in by Enstone Manor Farmhouse and several cottages.²⁵ In 1635 it had three bays and a barn and stable, and in 1662 it was assessed on three hearths.²⁶ The house was repaired in 1786 using stone 'dug from the pit', and in 1805 included a small parlour with sash windows, and a small kitchen, pantry and brewhouse with bedrooms and garrets above.²⁷ Then or soon after it was occupied by the parish clerk (the incumbent living outside the parish), and in 1831 the vicar Joseph Sibley (1830–40) claimed it was 'a miserable hovel unfit for the residence of a clergyman'.²⁸



The former vicarage house, completed in 1833.

A double-depth Tudor-Gothic replacement was built by Sibley in 1832–3, at the north end of an enlarged plot. Designed by C.R. Cockerell, it is of limestone rubble with ashlar dressings, and incorporates a three-bay front with a central gable and 12-pane sash

²³ OHC, tithe award; *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883).

²⁴ *Crockford's Clerical Dir.* (1890 and later edns).

²⁵ OHC, E36/3/7/M/1; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 448, f. 58.

²⁶ *Ibid.* MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b. 40, f. 127; TNA, E 179/255/3, m. 29.

²⁷ OHC, MSS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. c 67, f. 130 (out of repair 1735); b 3, f. 66 (1786); *ibid.* MSS Oxf. Dioc c 448, f. 58 (1805); b 10, f. 43v. (1818).

²⁸ *Ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. b 38, f. 83.

windows, along with a (later) glazed conservatory porch. A single-storey rear service range includes a hipped-roofed coach house and stable.²⁹ The cost was met with £900 from Queen Anne's Bounty and £530 from Henry Dillon (d. 1832), 13th Viscount Dillon, who supplied materials and additional land and, with his son, demolished the adjacent farmhouse and cottages.³⁰ The house was sold in 1959, and a replacement clergy house built close by.³¹

Church Estate

An estate of c.68 a., used for church repairs and poor relief, originated before 1588 apparently through piecemeal late-medieval gifts, including one from two Gloucestershire men to the use of the churchwardens in 1486 for annual exequies (or obits). In 1603, when a commission found it had not been properly employed, it comprised a house with 2½ yardlands and 1 a. in Cleveley, 4 a. in Neat Enstone, and 2 a. in Radford. The rent rose from £11 2s. 6d. in 1687 to £24 5s. in 1777 and £112 in 1856, although the money was kept with that of a separate charity supplying beef to the poor, and successive vicars protested against its use to lower poor rates and pay visitation expenses.³² By the later 19th century the income was spent mainly on church repair, though small sums were given towards education of the poor and for coal and clothing. The charity was reconstituted in 2001 as the Enstone Church Building Endowment Fund, its income (c.£7,500 in 2021–2) no longer derived from land.³³

Religious Life

The Middle Ages

As a valuable living Enstone attracted some long-serving and highly qualified rectors in the 13th and early 14th century, amongst them the university graduates Geoffrey de Sancto Medardo (instituted 1272) and William de Wykeham (rector 1281–1304/5), who held property in Witney.³⁴ The church itself was substantial enough to host a chapter held by the

²⁹ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 309; NHLE, no. 1368064 (Old Vicarage and stable range). For improvements in 1939, OHC, PAR97/10/2D/1.

³⁰ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 436, pp. 215–23; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 154, 200; OHC, tithe award and map.

³¹ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1806; OS Map 1:2500, SP3825 (1976 edn).

³² OHC, PAR97/10/1D, esp. no. 9 (1345); *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 327, p. 102; *ibid.* PAR97/4/F1/1, f. 31v.; PAR97/4/F1/3, ff. 17v. and 20; Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. 4291; TNA, SC 2/175/1, f. 25; *ibid.* CHAR 2/221; *Rep. Com. Char.* (Parl. Papers 1820 (312) iv), 249–52; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 191–2, 264–84, 291; OHC, tithe award and map (61 a. after enclosure).

³³ E. Marshall, *An Account of the Township of Church Enstone...* (1868), 73–4; Char. Com. website, no. 1087623 (accessed Aug. 2023); above, social hist.

³⁴ *Rot. Gravesend*, 224; F.N. Davis et al. (eds), *Reg. John Pecham* (Cant. & York Soc. 64–5, 1968–9), I, 184; Hants RO, 11M59/B1/56.

archdeacon c.1210,³⁵ and occasional references to vicars suggest that some rectors were licensed absentees, the vicars presumably receiving a temporary share of the income as allocated by the bishop.³⁶ Lay piety was reflected in occasional gifts of land to the abbey,³⁷ and probably in support of substantial late 13th-century work on the church, including the addition of a north aisle.³⁸ A chapel dedicated to the Virgin, located presumably in one of the aisles, existed by 1341, when Winchcombe abbey supplied a house and land for the chaplain serving it.³⁹ Outlying religious sites included a 'holy well' in Cleveley's east field (mentioned c.1280), as well as the chapels at Chalford, Radford, and possibly elsewhere.⁴⁰

The last rector (William de Haustede) was a pluralist who secured an 80-mark pension from Winchcombe abbey in return for his resignation at the benefice's appropriation in 1309.⁴¹ The vicars appointed thereafter were commonly non-graduates, although most seem to have resided.⁴² The vicar Richard Maydegode was accused in 1391 of being a 'common disturber of the peace', but was still in post in 1415,⁴³ and some others were of local origin, in particular Thomas Watts (fl. 1425–9), a former villein from Brookend in Chastleton, who was said to have left Brookend manor without licence.⁴⁴ Assistant chaplains continued,⁴⁵ presumably helping to supply exequies such as those provided for in 1486, serving side altars and an elaborate chantry apparently established in the church's south aisle, and perhaps also serving the parish's outlying chapels, possibly (as with the chapel of St Mary) with financial support from Winchcombe abbey or local landowners.⁴⁶ By c.1530 there were six 'principal lights' in the church, one of them endowed with an acre of land,⁴⁷ and Brasenose College's obligation to supply malt suggests that church ales were held.⁴⁸

³⁵ B.R. Kemp (ed.), *Twelfth-Century English Archidiaconal and Vice-Archidiaconal Acta* (Cant. & York Soc. 92, 2001), 115; below, church archit.

³⁶ e.g. Brasenose Arch., Lidstone 5 (Roger, vicar of Enstone c.1230).

³⁷ e.g. *Landboc*, II, 177–8, 188–9, 199.

³⁸ Below, church archit.

³⁹ Gloucestershire Archives, D678/1/M1/1/1.

⁴⁰ *Landboc*, II, 172; above (church origins).

⁴¹ *Cal. Papal Regs* 1305–42; *Landboc*, I, 259–60.

⁴² e.g. Gloucestershire Archives, D678/1/M1/1/1; Lobel, *Dean and Chalford*, 94, 108; *Subsidy* 1526, 264; *Visit. Dioc. Linc.* II, 45.

⁴³ E.G. Kimball (ed.), *Oxon. Sessions of the Peace* (ORS 53, 1983), 118–19; Lobel, *Dean and Chalford*, 108.

⁴⁴ *Eynsham Cart.* II. p. xxvii (also mentioning a relative and fellow villein who became a priest in Oxford); *Landboc*, II, 104–5.

⁴⁵ OHC, PAR97/10/1D/11 (dated 1349); *Cal. Close* 1377–81, 500–1; TNA, E 179/36/252 (dated 1419).

⁴⁶ TNA, SC 2/175/1, f. 25 (exequies); and for the chantry (whose founder is unknown), below, church archit.

⁴⁷ OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 178.61; 178.76; *Chant Cert.* p. 33; *Cal. Pat.* 1549–51, 85.

⁴⁸ *Visit. Dioc. Linc.* I, 136.

The late-medieval roadside cross in Gagingwell was perhaps used for preaching,⁴⁹ while a 'gospel bush' in the same hamlet may have featured in rogationtide processions.⁵⁰



The Reformation to 1840

The Anglican Church John Cryse or Crewys (vicar 1534–55), a pluralist Oxford graduate, oversaw both Edward VI's Protestant reforms and Mary I's reintroduction of Catholicism from 1553.⁵¹ His long-serving successor William Bourne (vicar 1555–82) subscribed to the Elizabethan settlement, and bequeathed money to the parish poor.⁵² Local wills include one or two Catholic invocations in the early 1560s but not later.⁵³ Bourne's cousin and successor Thomas Bourne (d. 1598), previously curate at Charlbury, was likewise a non-graduate and was described as 'no preacher'.⁵⁴ John Pring (vicar 1598–1626) weathered disputes over his claims to tithes, and was eventually buried in the church.⁵⁵ The churchwardens gave a silver chalice and paten cover to the church in 1580.⁵⁶

Later vicars, although university-educated, included pluralists who employed curates to perform some or all of their parochial duties. Poor oversight is suggested by a gap in the parish registers between 1626 and 1647, covering the entire incumbency of Nathaniel

⁴⁹ HER, PRN 2569.

⁵⁰ Bodl. MS C17:49 (111) (Gagingwell enclo. map).

⁵¹ Emden, *OU Reg. 1501–40*, 155.

⁵² Pearce, 'Clergy', 21; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 187.94.

⁵³ OHC, MSS Wills Oxon.

⁵⁴ Pearce, 'Clergy', 21; Peel, *Register*, II, 135; OHC, PAR97/1/R1/1 (Edm. Dearle, d. 1592).

⁵⁵ *Oxf. Ch. Ct. Deposns 1603–6*, pp. 9–10, 36–7; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 190.

⁵⁶ Evans, *Ch. Plate*, 62.

Hodgkinson (1627–40),⁵⁷ although he certainly resided at least some of that time.⁵⁸ John Beckingham (1642–86) lived in Enstone despite being also rector of Heythrop,⁵⁹ though from 1654 to 1662 the benefice was sequestrated by Parliament and served by William Burnet. Burnet may have tolerated or even encouraged Protestant Dissent,⁶⁰ and in 1682 Beckingham discovered a printed pamphlet in circulation encouraging churchwardens not to present Dissenters, although by then he thought the parish only little affected by ‘fanaticism’.⁶¹ Continued investment in the church included the casting of a ring of five bells in 1661 and the churchwardens’ gift of a silver paten in 1672,⁶² while John Naylor (vicar 1689–1704) obtained a faculty for a deacon’s seat in the chancel despite opposition from the rectory lessee, who by 1718 owed the deacon an annual pension of 2 qrs of wheat, 2 qrs of barley, and 13s. 4d.⁶³

Eighteenth-century church life was undistinguished. The theologian Daniel Stacey (vicar 1708–21) was a lively preacher, but partly occupied by his academic duties in Oxford.⁶⁴ His absentee successor John Skeeler (d. 1763), vicar of Lewknor and chaplain to the earl of Lichfield at Ditchley Park, supplied well-qualified but poorly paid curates, of whom Edward Ford was said in 1745 to have taken ‘great care’ of the parish.⁶⁵ The curate George Sheppard (d. 1784) served from 1747 and succeeded Skeeler as vicar.⁶⁶ Parishioners in 1738 were ‘in general religiously disposed’, behaving in an ‘orderly’ manner during services,⁶⁷ although the number of communicants fell from 40 in 1738 to 20–40 in 1771, and there was no increase in the traditional pattern of services.⁶⁸ Protestant Nonconformity remained small-scale, while growing Roman Catholicism (although significant) was associated primarily with neighbouring Kiddington and Heythrop.⁶⁹

The long-serving Samuel Nash (vicar 1784–1830) served the cure mainly from neighbouring Great Tew, where he was rector from 1790.⁷⁰ Church fabric was maintained partly from the church estate (a later vicar criticising the ‘heavy’ and ‘ugly’ gallery and over-

⁵⁷ OHC, PAR97/1/R1/1–2; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 294.

⁵⁸ e.g. TNA, PROB 11/164/41; *Prot. Retns*, 86; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 298/1/48.

⁵⁹ Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 190–1; TNA, PROB 11/386/231.

⁶⁰ *Bp Fell and Nonconf.* p. 56 nn. 121, 126; *Calamy Revised*, ed. Matthews, 90; *Walker Revised*, ed. Matthews, 295; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 190–1.

⁶¹ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 430, f. 19; *Bp Fell and Nonconf.* pp. xxxvi–xxxvii, xxxix, 16–17; below (*Prot. Nonconf.*).

⁶² *Ch. Bells Oxon.* II, 128–9; Evans, *Ch. Plate*, 63.

⁶³ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. c 25, ff. 58v., 65; *ibid.* E36/3/1/E/2.

⁶⁴ *Alumni Oxon. 1500–1714*, s.v. Stacy, Dan.; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 194–5.

⁶⁵ *Secker’s Corresp.* 130; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 555, f. 201; *Alumni Oxon. 1500–1714*, s.v. Skeeler, Thos.

⁶⁶ Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 197–8.

⁶⁷ *Secker’s Visit.* 59.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 555, f. 203; d 558, f. 216; d 561, f. 215.

⁶⁹ Below (*Rom. Cath. and Prot. Nonconf.*).

⁷⁰ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 327, pp. 102, 275; D. McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy 1777–1869* (1960), 50.

tall pews which cluttered the interior),⁷¹ but provision remained limited to two Sunday services (one with a sermon) and communion four times a year, with holy day prayers dropped, and no catechism.⁷² Vestry meetings were held in the Litchfield Arms.⁷³ Nash's successor Joseph Sibley (1830–40) claimed on his arrival that long neglect had left 'the church deserted [and] the conventicles filled',⁷⁴ although he too was mainly non-resident, despite securing the building of a new parsonage house in 1832–3. The cure was left to curates such as William Chapman, who organised the building of a National school in 1836.⁷⁵

Roman Catholicism and Protestant Nonconformity The parish's growing Roman Catholic following was associated with the presence of recusant landowners and places of worship in neighbouring Kiddington and Heythrop.⁷⁶ The sole recusant in 1616 was the gentlewoman Francisca Ashfield,⁷⁷ and two Radford carpenters and their wives were reported in 1706.⁷⁸ However, four or five poor Catholic families were mentioned in 1738, and as many as eleven in 1767, comprising 55 adults and children including three gentlemen and a number of gentry wives.⁷⁹ A similar number was reported in 1780, and by 1790 Samuel Rock (d. 1839), the priest serving the Browne-Mostyn family's chapel at Kiddington Hall, had moved to Radford, where he established an attic oratory in a newly bought presbytery house in 1822.⁸⁰ Masses were also celebrated in a house in Neat Enstone c.1803–19.⁸¹

The only reported Protestant Dissenters in 1682 were three women at Enstone (including the wife of a substantial farmer), and the Radford copyholder Edward Busby and his family.⁸² Nonconformity remained small-scale throughout the 18th century, but a dissenting meeting was licensed at Lidstone mill in 1805, and in 1811 the miller Richard Wheeler led the building of a tall brick Wesleyan Methodist chapel in Neat Enstone, where a Sunday school was held and a young labourer supplied evening services.⁸³ The vicar

⁷¹ Skelton, *Antiq. Oxon.* 6; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 176, 392; above (church est.). The gallery was erected in 1700: below (church archit.).

⁷² OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 566, f. 122v.; d 568, f. 129v.; d 570, f. 121v.; d 572, f. 124v.; d 574, f. 112v.; d 576, f. 99v.; d 578, f. 97v.; d 580, f. 95v.

⁷³ Ibid. PAR97/4/F1/2, e.g. 10 June 1817.

⁷⁴ Ibid. MS Oxf. Dioc. b 38, f. 84v.

⁷⁵ Ibid. MS Oxf. Dioc. b 121, f. 19; above (vic. house); social hist. (educ.).

⁷⁶ B. Stapleton, *History of the Post-Reformation Catholic Missions in Oxfordshire* (1906), 123–9, 142–4; VCH Oxon. XI, 142; below, Kiddington, relig. hist.

⁷⁷ H.E. Salter, 'Recusants in Oxfordshire 1603–33', *OAS Rep.* (1924), 29.

⁷⁸ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 430, f. 49.

⁷⁹ *Secker's Visit.* 59; *Retn Papists 1767*, 115.

⁸⁰ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 431, f. 49; c 327, p. 102; d 570, f. 121; d 572, f. 124; d 574, f. 112; d 580, f. 95; TNA, PROB 11/1914/98 (Samuel Rock, 1839).

⁸¹ Stapleton, *Cath. Missions*, 153.

⁸² OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 430, f. 19; *Bp Fell and Nonconf.* pp. xxxvi–xxxvii, xxxix, 16–17.

⁸³ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 644, f. 84; d 578, f. 97; P. Ashbridge, *Village Chapels: Some Aspects of Rural Methodism in the East Cotswolds and South Midlands 1800–2000* (2004), 53–4.

claimed that the Methodists had been the most regular attenders at church and that some still went there, but that because ‘the county magistrates supported them’ he had been unable to prevent them building their own chapel.⁸⁴ Baptists met in Cleveley by 1807, subsequently using two adjoining houses as a place of worship,⁸⁵ and by 1831 the incoming vicar believed that the ‘conventicles’ were more popular than the parish church.⁸⁶

Since 1840

The Anglican Church John Jordan (vicar 1840–74) was the first in a series of resident incumbents who dedicated themselves to the parish. Jordan himself, an evangelical censured by the bishop of Oxford for his public promotion of Methodism, resisted an increase in services as part of a ‘Romanizing’ influence, maintaining double duty and eight sacraments a year.⁸⁷ Despite some local resistance (probably on grounds of cost) he restored the church in 1856, increasing its accommodation,⁸⁸ and enjoyed the loyalty of ‘the farmers and upper classes’.⁸⁹ Attendance amongst ‘the labouring classes’ was undermined by the parish’s scattered settlement, however, and by the presence of rival places of worship, including a Catholic chapel recently established in Radford.⁹⁰ Combined attendance there and at the Baptist and Wesleyan chapels in 1851 exceeded that at the parish church,⁹¹ where an average morning congregation of 290 in 1866 represented around a quarter of the overall population. There were then fewer than 20 regular communicants.⁹²

Following Jordan’s death, the late 19th century saw the usual increase in Anglican services, Francis Dillon (1878–90) providing holy communion twice a month and his successor John Philipps (1890–1904) delivering three Sunday services, weekday morning prayers, and a Wednesday evening sermon. Numbers of communicants also grew, perhaps partly thanks to the establishment of a communicants’ guild,⁹³ and a strong emerging choral tradition was supported by a choirmaster and regular practice.⁹⁴ Even so vicars found it difficult to serve outlying areas,⁹⁵ and in the 20th century the church (like the non-Anglican

⁸⁴ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 572, f. 124v.; d 574, f. 112v.

⁸⁵ Ibid. c 644, ff. 88, 181; *Ch. and Chapel, 1851*, pp. 26–7.

⁸⁶ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 38, f. 84v.

⁸⁷ McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy*, 87–8; *Wilb. Dioc. Bks*, 171; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, pp. v–vii; *Banbury Guardian*, 21 Aug., 25 Sept. 1845; *Oxf. Jnl*, 23 May 1874; *Wilb. Visit.* 54 (1854); OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 332, f. 175v. (1866).

⁸⁸ *Wilb. Dioc. Bks*, 171; Ch. Ch. Arch., MS Estates 72, ff. 225–7; below (church archit.).

⁸⁹ *Wilb. Visit.* 54.

⁹⁰ *Wilb. Dioc. Bks*, 171; *Wilb. Visit.* 54; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 332, f. 175v.; below (Rom. Cath.).

⁹¹ *Ch. and Chapel, 1851*, pp. 26–7, 34–5, 83–4.

⁹² OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 332, f. 175v.; cf. *Census*, 1861–71.

⁹³ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 347, ff. 161–2; c 359, ff. 157–8; c 365, ff. 148–9.

⁹⁴ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 8 Dec. 1880, 23 Feb. 1881, 5 July 1893; *Lifting the Latch*, 39–40, 145.

⁹⁵ Ch. Ch. Arch. MS Estates 72, ff. 327–39.

places of worship) faced the usual problem of falling attendance. The First World War supplied a temporary boost, reflecting anxieties about the 'men and lads' serving in the army and navy.⁹⁶ Even so reduced congregations led to the removal of pews in 1930 and in the 1960s–70s.⁹⁷

A survey in 1994 found that 47 per cent of respondents never attended a local place of worship, and that only 15 per cent did so often.⁹⁸ The church's average Sunday morning congregation was then just 45, although a larger number gave financial support for restoration work, perhaps partly reflecting the church's strong local engagement with the primary school and Sunday school and with community events and organizations, as well as its production of a popular newsletter (the Enstone Ensign).⁹⁹ From 2001 the parish was served by a team ministry covering Chadlington, Ascott-under-Wychwood, and Spelsbury as well as Enstone, and though the regular congregation remained small in 2004, local supporters wished the church to survive, calling for its use for concerts and other activities.¹⁰⁰ In 2023 there were usually two Sunday services a month, with worship described as 'liberal' and 'broadly central church style'.¹⁰¹

Roman Catholicism The Kiddington Catholic mission was transferred to Radford in 1840–1, when a plain chapel dedicated to the Holy Trinity (and designed by A.W.N. Pugin) was erected next to the existing presbytery, along with a school. In 1851 there was a morning congregation of 53 plus 15 Sunday school children, drawn from several surrounding parishes.¹⁰² A small convent and orphanage were added in 1854 thanks to a bequest by Mary Bowden of Radford. Two or three nuns looked after between half a dozen and c.30 orphans, one elderly sister remembering her time in the mid 1870s as a daily round of looking after cow, pigs and garden with only the children to help.¹⁰³

By the early 1950s a Catholic priest still based in Radford served c.130 parishioners in Enstone, Charlbury, and Heythrop. The congregation at Radford itself was small, however (later only c.20), and the mission, latterly run from Heythrop, moved to Charlbury in 1970.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ Gore's Visit. p. 414.

⁹⁷ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 1806; c 1807/1–2.

⁹⁸ Enstone Village Appraisal: The Report (1995): copy in OHC.

⁹⁹ A Profile of the United Benefice of Enstone and Heythrop [c.1992]: copy in OHC.

¹⁰⁰ Enstone Parish Plan (2004): copy in OHC.

¹⁰¹ <https://thechasebenefice.org.uk/about-us/> (accessed Aug. 2023)

¹⁰² Stapleton, *Cath. Missions*, 130–1; notes and letters on Radford mission in possession of VCH; Archdiocese of Birmingham Archives, Radford letters; *Ch. and Chapel, 1851*, pp. 83–4; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 310.

¹⁰³ TNA, RG 10/1458; RG 11/1521; letters on Radford mission in possession of VCH. For schooling at Radford: above, social hist.

¹⁰⁴ S.P.B. Mais, *Our Village Today* (1956), 86; notes on Radford mission in possession of VCH.

Enstone House in Neat Enstone hosted a small Catholic meeting c.1918–63, and mass was later held in the Neat Enstone youth hall.¹⁰⁵ Masses in Enstone were discontinued c.2020.¹⁰⁶



The small Roman Catholic church at Radford, designed by A.W.N. Pugin.

Protestant Nonconformity During the 19th century Baptists and Wesleyan Methodists continued to attract support chiefly amongst craftsmen and labourers.¹⁰⁷ In 1851 the Baptist minister Thomas Eden (based in Chadlington) reported a Sunday congregation of 91, despite services still being held in a house in Cleveley rather than in a dedicated chapel. The Wesleyan chapel in Neat Enstone, served from Chipping Norton, reported a congregation of 100 (plus 35 Sunday school children) in the afternoon and 120 in the evening.¹⁰⁸ A Primitive Methodist group was meeting at Lidstone by 1860 and erected a small stone chapel there in 1874, its congregation made up mainly of labourers,¹⁰⁹ while a brick Baptist chapel with a connecting school room was opened in Upper Cleveley in 1864. That was paid for by Robert Ryman of Great Tew, the congregation remaining closely connected with their fellows in Little Tew.¹¹⁰ Tensions later arose between the church patron Arthur Dillon (d. 1892), 16th Viscount Dillon, and Wesleyan Methodists such as the draper and dealer James Adams.¹¹¹ Numbers attending the Wesleyan chapel had fallen by 1896, but even so there was a regular congregation of 50.¹¹²

During the 20th century numbers at all three chapels continued to fall, despite open-air preaching and hymn singing meetings which attracted large crowds at Chalford Green

¹⁰⁵ *Gore's Visit*. p. 414; notes on Radford mission in possession of VCH; *A Profile of the United Benefice of Enstone and Heythrop*.

¹⁰⁶ *Enstone Ensign*, various edns; info. from Father Clive Dytor.

¹⁰⁷ OHC, E228/3D/1; Ashbridge, *Village Chapels*, 54.

¹⁰⁸ *Ch. and Chapel, 1851*, pp. 26–7, 34–5.

¹⁰⁹ *Wilb. Visit.* 54; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 332, f. 176; *Oxford Chron. and Reading Gaz.* 26 Sept. 1874; Ashbridge, *Village Chapels*, 65–7; HER, PRN 250.

¹¹⁰ *Oxford Chron. and Reading Gaz.* 10 and 24 Sept. 1864, 22 July 1865; *Oxf. Jnl*, 2 Dec. 1871, 6 Oct. 1877; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 24 Nov. 1883, 24 May 1922; *Banbury Guardian*, 16 May 1946; HER, PRN 287 (incl. survey in detailed record file); VCH Oxon. XI, 258.

¹¹¹ Enstone Local History Circle, 'A History of Enstone and Heythrop': copy of handwritten notes in OHC (1955 with later additions); OHC, E36/3/10/L/1.

¹¹² Ashbridge, *Village Chapels*, 54.

and elsewhere in the 1920s–30s.¹¹³ The Lidstone Primitive Methodist chapel and the Neat Enstone Wesleyan chapel became part of the United Methodist Church in 1932, but by 1960 the combined membership stood at just 15 excluding trainee members and Sunday scholars. The Lidstone chapel was sold in 1963, and the Neat Enstone one in 1983, the former becoming a car garage and the latter still standing empty in 2023. The Cleveley Baptist chapel absorbed the Little Tew congregation in 1966, but was closed c.1984 and converted to a house.¹¹⁴



The former Methodist chapel in Neat Enstone.

Church Architecture

Enstone church is a largely medieval structure restored in the 1850s, incorporating chancel, aisled and clerestoreyed nave, south porch, and a squat 16th-century west tower which may have replaced an original central tower.¹¹⁵ The walling is limestone ashlar and rubble, and the roofs copper and lead. Amongst the earliest surviving features are the late 12th-century north and south doorways, the former plain (and probably reset), and the latter elaborately decorated in three orders. That appears to be in situ, accompanying a contemporary south aisle whose arcade retains four bays of pointed arches with circular columns and square bases and capitals, stylistically dateable to c.1180–90. The north aisle appears to have been

¹¹³ *Lifting the Latch*, 158–9.

¹¹⁴ OHC, NM1/8/A3/1–2; Ashbridge, *Village Chapels*, 54, 67; VCH Oxon. X, 153; XI, 258; F. Price, 'A History of Little Tew' (n.d.), at <https://www.littletew.org.uk/download2/A%20History%20of%20Little%20Tew.pdf> (accessed Aug. 2023); *Oxford Mail*, 10 Jan. 1986.

¹¹⁵ For other accounts: Parker, *Eccl. Topog.* no. 73; Bodl. Dep. c 558; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 307–8; NHLE, no. 1052805 (Church of St Kenelm); and for the possible central tower, below.

added in the late 13th century, given the alternating circular and fluted octagonal columns of its arcade. Probably at the same time the chancel was extended eastwards and a new higher chancel arch inserted. A small reset 12th-century scalloped capital to the south is perhaps from an earlier arch.¹¹⁶



View towards the chancel and reredos.

Late-medieval additions include a two-storey porch perhaps of late 14th-century date, featuring a small two-light window and octopartite vault; and a doorway with continuous mouldings in the north wall of the chancel, which possibly gave access to a now-lost vestry. A rood loft, evidence of which survives in a walled-up staircase,¹¹⁷ was most likely added in this period, and so too the surviving octagonal font. In the mid to later 15th century the south aisle was widened and both aisles extended eastwards to create chapels, work which involved the insertion of Perpendicular windows and plain roof parapets to nave and chancel.

A wide arch in the chancel's south wall was created perhaps in the early 16th century, to give access to an elaborate vaulted chantry (about which nothing is known) in the north-east corner of the south aisle. That featured a surviving stone altar with panelled reredos, and a three-light window with image niches. The nave's plain clerestory and Tudor

¹¹⁶ J. Sherwood, *A Guide to the Churches of Oxfordshire* (1989), 76. and Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 308 both suggest that a new chancel was added E of the earlier one, though if that were the case the 12th-cent. S aisle would have overlapped the original chancel.

¹¹⁷ *Gardner's Oxon. Dir.* (1852); Bodl. Dep. c 558.

windows in the chancel are probably of similar date, while the three-stage west tower with corner pinnacles was built c.1531–46,¹¹⁸ apparently involving alterations to the nave and removal of a bay.¹¹⁹ At the nave's easternmost end, wide four-centred moulded arches cut through the side walls may indicate the contemporary removal of an earlier central tower.¹²⁰ If so the 12th-century church must have been of high status, and of a form which may indicate pre-Conquest origins and a small secular college.¹²¹

Post-Reformation work included the insertion in the chancel's east window of stained glass by Andrew Hall of London (dated 1637), moved later to the south chapel's east window; and the erection in 1700 of a western gallery.¹²² A wooden pulpit (since replaced) was inserted in 1709, and in the late 18th and early 19th century there was heavy expenditure on repairs to the roof and tower and on Dutch oak pews. The chancel was redecorated more cheaply, painted 'blue like a pot house'.¹²³ The bells were recast at the Oxford foundry in 1831,¹²⁴ the north aisle repaired in 1833, and work carried out on the chancel in 1846.¹²⁵ By then the north aisle's east end was used as a clergy vestry, and the font was in the chancel.¹²⁶

G.E. Street's restoration of 1856 involved repewing and removal of the wooden gallery; the laying of a new floor (covering many memorials), and installation of a stone pulpit and reading desk; replacement of the south-aisle roof and insertion of a tower door; and erection of a lychgate.¹²⁷ A clock was given the following year.¹²⁸ Later stained glass includes the former chantry's east window of 1898 (by Lavers and Westlake, in memory of Ellen, Viscountess Dillon), and a window by Morris and Co. (commemorating the parish's war dead) was inserted in the north aisle's north-west window in 1920–1.¹²⁹ Major repairs were carried out in 1930 (when the organ was moved within the north aisle), and again in the

¹¹⁸ OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 178.61; 178.76; 178.22; 179.152.

¹¹⁹ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 308; 'St Kenelm's Church, Church Enstone, Oxfordshire' (unpubl. Thames Valley Archaeological Services Watching Brief, July 2010), <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/browse/issue.xhtml?recordId=1105499&recordType=GreyLitSeries> (accessed July 2023).

¹²⁰ As suggested by NHLE, no. 1052805 (Church of St Kenelm).

¹²¹ J. Blair, 'Clerical Communities and Parochial Space: the Planning of Urban Mother Churches in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', in T.R. Slater and G. Rosser (eds.), *The Church in the Medieval Town* (1998), 272–94, esp. Fig. 12.4; cf. also Hook Norton (*VCH Oxon.* XXI (forthcoming)).

¹²² *Rep. Com. Char.* 250; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 176, 181, 300; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 308.

¹²³ OHC, PAR97/4/F1/2 (1709 ref.); *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 660, ff. 173–176v.; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 388–91.

¹²⁴ *Ch. Bells Oxon.* II, 128.

¹²⁵ Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 391 (for 1833); *Ch. Ch. Arch.*, MS Estates 72, f. 231.

¹²⁶ *Ch. Ch. Arch.*, MS Estates 72, ff. 274–6 (1848).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* (incl. replacement of heavy rectorial pews in chancel), ff. 298–302; *Oxf. Jnl*, 19 July 1856; Jordan, *History of Enstone*, 176–8; E. Marshall, *An Account of the Township of Church Enstone...* (1868), 53–4; 'St Kenelm's Church, Church Enstone...' (unpubl. Oxford Archaeology reports, 1996 and 2013), copies in church.

¹²⁸ Jordan, *History of Enstone*, p. iv.

¹²⁹ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 308–9; Bodl. Dep. c 558.

1980s and 1990s.¹³⁰ In 2016 Nigel Hammett of Johnston Cave Associates oversaw the insertion in the chancel of a large and colourful mosaic reredos depicting the life of St Kenelm, along with creation of a vestry space at the north aisle's east end (enclosed by half-height wooden partitions-cum-storage), and of a kitchen and toilet in the tower.¹³¹

¹³⁰ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1807/1–2; *A Profile of the United Benefice of Enstone and Heythrop*; G. Binns (ed.), *The Story of Enstone* (1999), 32.

¹³¹ Poster display in church (2023).