



VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

## Sarsden

Religious History



*Sarsden parish church by J.C. Buckler in 1825: Bodleian, MS Top. Oxon. a 68, no. 454. The church, lying next to Sarsden House, was built in 1760 and remodelled in 1823.*

Sarsden had its own church by the 12th century, though the living (a rectory) was a poor one, and burials were reserved to Churchill church over a mile away. No burial ground was ever established at Sarsden, and the connection with Churchill persisted, the benefices uniting in 1851 and the parishes in 1992, when Sarsden church was declared redundant. Nothing survives of the medieval church building, which was replaced by the wealthy John Rolle Walter (as lord and patron) in 1760, and thereafter its parochial functions were combined with those of a memorial chapel for the occupants of the adjoining Sarsden House. Turnover of rectors in the Middle Ages was relatively high, but from the Reformation several served long periods, two in the 19th century being related by marriage to the resident Langston lords, who built a new rectory house in 1818. By then services at Sarsden had been reduced, with many inhabitants worshipping at Churchill. The parish (long in single ownership) was little troubled by Dissent.

## Church Origins and Parochial Organization

Sarsden's Anglo-Saxon place name possibly means 'valley of the church', although the etymology is dubious.<sup>1</sup> A church certainly existed by the 12th century, but was presumably preceded by an earlier one at neighbouring Churchill, which retained burial rights throughout and received the mortuary fees, commuted in 1375 to an annual cash payment.<sup>2</sup> Other indications of Sarsden's former dependency are the benefice's tiny endowment and its description in the 12th century as a chapel,<sup>3</sup> although in other ways it was by then fully independent. The living was a rectory, albeit a poor one, and like the manor the parish extended into Pudlicote, where Sarsden's 12th-century incumbents claimed tithes, and presumably served the chapel there until its closure by Eynsham abbey.<sup>4</sup> Baptisms were held at Sarsden from the Middle Ages,<sup>5</sup> and baptism, burial, and marriage registers survive from 1575.<sup>6</sup> The medieval dedication is unknown, with the modern dedication to St James apparently not mentioned until the 19th century.<sup>7</sup> The parish belonged to Chipping Norton rural deanery from the Middle Ages.<sup>8</sup>

Sarsden and Churchill were intermittently held in plurality in the 18th century, and from 1817 (under Charles Barter) joint provision became permanent. The two benefices were formally united in 1851,<sup>9</sup> and in 1923 the rector moved permanently to Churchill.<sup>10</sup> In 1953 Sarsden-cum-Churchill's ecclesiastical boundaries were extended southwards to include the area around Merriscourt and Fairgreen farms in Lyneham,<sup>11</sup> while in 1979 the benefice was united with that of Kingham and Daylesford, with the rector living at Kingham.<sup>12</sup> In 1992 the ecclesiastical parishes of Sarsden and Churchill were united, and Sarsden parish church was declared redundant. The following year the building was leased to the owners of Sarsden House for use as a private Christian chapel, and was sold to them in 1997.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *PN Oxon.* II, 375; A.D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place Names* (revised edn, 2011), 406; above, landscape etc. (settlement).

<sup>2</sup> *VCH Oxon.* II, 59; below (advowson; glebe; relig. life).

<sup>3</sup> *Eynsham Cart.* I, pp. 2, 122–4; below (glebe).

<sup>4</sup> *Eynsham Cart.* I, p. 2; II, pp. lxii–lxiii; below (glebe; relig. life).

<sup>5</sup> For the ancient font, Bodl. MS Top. Eccles. b 14, illustrn of 1843 (when it ornamented a garden in Enstone).

<sup>6</sup> OHC, par. reg. transcript. Sarsden's separate burial register stopped in 1869, when its burials were included in Churchill's register.

<sup>7</sup> *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1869); OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XX.6 (1881 edn).

<sup>8</sup> Lunt (ed.), *Val. Norw.* 311; Youngs, *Admin. Units*, I, 404.

<sup>9</sup> OHC, Cal. Presentation Deeds, 2nd ser., nos. 218, 613; *ibid.* PAR230/10/C/2; Youngs, *Admin. Units*, I, 404; below (relig. life).

<sup>10</sup> Below (glebe; relig. life); above, Churchill, relig. hist.

<sup>11</sup> OHC, PAR173/10/M/1–3; *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 182, 209.

<sup>12</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1879, Order in Council.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Orders in Council 1992, 1993 and 1997; above, Churchill, relig. hist. (paroch. organizn).

### Advowson

In the late 12th century Hugh Golafre and his wife Sibyl granted the advowson to Eynsham abbey, a gift confirmed by their son Roger in 1201.<sup>14</sup> The abbey presented every subsequent rector until the Dissolution, except (as in 1388) when it was held by the Crown during a vacancy.<sup>15</sup> The Crown also presented in 1539 following the previous rector's attainder.<sup>16</sup> In 1542 Edmund Horne (d. 1553) purchased the advowson, which thereafter descended with the manor,<sup>17</sup> passing in the 1550s–60s to Sir James Marvyn, a courtier married to Edmund's widow Amy,<sup>18</sup> and afterwards to the Bournes, Walters, Rolles, and Langstons.<sup>19</sup> In 1922 the earl of Ducie's daughter Constance Moreton, Baroness Eversley, acted as patron, and the advowson remained attached to Sarsden House after the estate's sale, with presentations made by Dorothy Hermon-Hodge (later Lady Wyfold).<sup>20</sup> Lord Wyfold remained joint patron of the united benefice in 1979,<sup>21</sup> until Sarsden's advowson lapsed in 1992.<sup>22</sup>

### Glebe and Tithes

The medieval rectory was poor, valued at only 5 marks (£3 6s. 8d.) a year in 1254 and at £4 13s. 4d. in 1291.<sup>23</sup> From that the rector paid Eynsham abbey an annual pension of 1 mark (13s. 4d.) until the Dissolution, when it was granted to the lord and patron Edmund Horne.<sup>24</sup> By 1526 the rectory was worth £10 a year, and a century later it was augmented by Sir John Walter (d. 1630), who endowed it with a £50 annuity. A lectureship at Churchill (worth a further £50 a year) was also established by Walter, and was often held by Sarsden's rectors.<sup>25</sup> In the early 18th century the living was valued at £100, but by 1783 the glebe and tithes alone were worth £138, and after enclosure in 1788 the rector's gross income rose to £307, derived from a substantially enlarged glebe and from Walter's £100 annuity (charged on Merriscourt farm in Lyneham).<sup>26</sup> The benefice remained moderately well-off c.1830,<sup>27</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Eynsham Cart.* I, pp. 122–3, 134; *Oxon. Fines*, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1385–9, 499.

<sup>16</sup> *L&P Hen.* VIII, XIV (1), p. 534; below (relig. life).

<sup>17</sup> *L&P Hen.* VIII, XVII, p. 165; above, landownership.

<sup>18</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 105, pp. 181, 213; *Hist. Parl.* s.v. Jas Marvyn.

<sup>19</sup> *Reg. Parker*, III, 1011; OHC, Cal. Presentation Deeds, 1st ser., nos. 81–3; 2nd ser., nos. 610–14.

<sup>20</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1995, presentations; above, landownership.

<sup>21</sup> *Crockford's Clerical Dir.* (1980–2), 1242. The other was the Church Society Trust.

<sup>22</sup> Above (paroch. organizn).

<sup>23</sup> Lunt (ed.), *Val. Norw.* 311; [www.dhi.ac.uk/taxatio](http://www.dhi.ac.uk/taxatio) (accessed Apr. 2022).

<sup>24</sup> *Tax. Eccl.* 32; *Feudal Aids*, VI, 381; *Valor Eccl.* II, 211; *L&P Hen.* VIII, XVII, p. 165.

<sup>25</sup> *Subsidy* 1526, 265; *Valor Eccl.* II, 182; OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 560, f. 31v.; c 327, p. 111.

<sup>26</sup> *Par. Colln.*, III, 251; OHC, Lo. VI/1, p. 240; Lo. VI/4, f. 9; below.

<sup>27</sup> *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 132–3.

though in 1893 the rector claimed that income from glebe had halved, presumably through agricultural depression, and by 1920 total net income had fallen to £295.<sup>28</sup> Thereafter it rose to £415 in 1930 and to £468 in 1951–2, following sale of the glebe and rectory house and the rector's move to Churchill.<sup>29</sup>

The size of the medieval glebe is uncertain, the rector's ½ yardland in Churchill in 1279 being probably held in a personal capacity.<sup>30</sup> In 1341 the glebe and tithes were worth 4 marks (£2 13s. 4d.) a year, however, and in 1492 the rectory estate and house were let for £3 6s. 8d.<sup>31</sup> By the 1630s the glebe (then worth £8) covered c.17 a. of partly enclosed and partly open-field arable and meadow,<sup>32</sup> and was probably unchanged in 1783 when it was reckoned at ¾ yardland and was valued at £32, including common rights; in addition, the rector held 2½ a. in lieu of tithes from two meadows.<sup>33</sup> At enclosure (when tithes were commuted) the rector received 191 a., of which 29 a. were exchanged with the lord James Langston in 1817.<sup>34</sup> Further exchanges in 1834 and 1856 left the rector with 135 a. in Sarsden and 56 a. in Kingham, which with additional land in Churchill (following the benefices' union) contributed to an overall annual income of £510.<sup>35</sup> The glebe, run from 1834 from the newly acquired Parsonage (or Rectory or Glebe) Farm, was leased to tenants or run by bailiffs, and still covered 114 a. in 1910.<sup>36</sup> In 1923, however, the entire Sarsden rectory estate (including the rectory house and 21 a. of grounds) was sold to George Thomas Hutchinson (1880–1948), treasurer of Christ Church, Oxford.<sup>37</sup>

Tithes in Pudlicote were claimed by Sarsden's rectors in the 12th century, but by 1181 belonged (with Pudlicote chapel) to Eynsham abbey.<sup>38</sup> Around the same time Sarsden's lord Hugh Golafre gave the abbey the mill and hay tithes from his demesne, the origin, perhaps, of the 1-mark annual pension confirmed in 1203–6.<sup>39</sup> In 1375 the rector agreed to pay the vicar of Churchill 6s. 8d. a year as mortuary dues, in lieu of a traditional obligation of a third of the parish's egg tithes at Easter and fixed amounts of wheat, barley, and oats, although Sarsden's parishioners continued to owe some lesser tithes (including

<sup>28</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 359, f. 368; c 368, f. 346; *Crockford's Clerical Dir.* (1920), 804.

<sup>29</sup> *Crockford's Clerical Dir.* (1930), 1214; (1951–2), 615; above, Churchill, relig. hist. (glebe).

<sup>30</sup> *Rot. Hund.* II, 746.

<sup>31</sup> *Nonarum Inquisitiones*, 139; OHC, P6/16D/1; below (relig. life).

<sup>32</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 41, f. 92.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* Lo. VI/1, p. 240; *A Particular of the Manors of Sarsden, Lyneham, etc.* (1786) (copy in BL, available online at <https://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>).

<sup>34</sup> OHC, Lo. VI/4, f. 9; *ibid.* PAR230/10/M/1.

<sup>35</sup> Incl. Parsonage (formerly Sarsgrove) fm, acquired from the Langstons in exchange: *ibid.* Lo. I/ii/12; Lo. VI/11, p. 62; *ibid.* PAR230/10/M/6; *ibid.* 99/M; *Crockford's Clerical Dir.* (1860), 32; above, Churchill, relig. hist. (glebe). Cf. *Ch. and Chapel, 1851*, nos. 110, 377 (reckoning £479).

<sup>36</sup> OHC, QSD/L/236; *ibid.* DV/X/41, no. 162; TNA, HO 107/1732; *ibid.* RG 9/910; RG 14/8250, no. 153.

<sup>37</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1996; *ibid.* RDC9/3/F6/1; *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1924).

<sup>38</sup> *Eynsham Cart.* I, pp. 123–4; above, Chilson, relig. hist.

<sup>39</sup> *Eynsham Cart.* I, pp. 2, 123.

fruit and hemp) to Churchill.<sup>40</sup> In 1783 Sarsden's remaining great and small tithes were valued at £96, excluding an annual £10 modus for redemption of tithes from the manorial demesne and Sarsgrove farm and wood.<sup>41</sup>

### *Rectory House*



*Sarsden rectory house was built by George Repton in 1818 and enlarged in 1834, and replaced an earlier predecessor.*

The medieval rectory house may have stood close to the church and manor house, and when let in 1492 may have been thatched.<sup>42</sup> In 1662 that or a successor was assessed on four hearths,<sup>43</sup> but by 1721 it was 'decayed' and was exchanged for a 'more commodious' house belonging to Sir John Walter. That lay in 2½ a. of grounds on the opposite side of the Bruern road from the church and Sarsden House, and included stables, a coach house, and other outbuildings along with a garden, orchard, and fishpond.<sup>44</sup> The building was two-storeyed with attics and included a hall, dining room, drawing room, and four bedrooms above a kitchen, larder, pantry, dairy, and beer and wine cellars, while a detached brewhouse lay off the kitchen.<sup>45</sup> A new tithe barn towards the Churchill road (then Beggar Lane) was provided around the same time, built by the rector Nathaniel Sturges (1720–62) at his own expense, and measuring 38 by 20 feet.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *St Frideswide's Cart.* II, pp. 293–6; above, Churchill, relig. hist. (glebe).

<sup>41</sup> OHC, Lo. VI/1, pp. 230, 240, 317–18.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* P6/16D/1 (mentioning thatch, though possibly only for outbuildings).

<sup>43</sup> TNA, E 179/255/4.

<sup>44</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 26, f. 265; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2198, no. 3; *ibid.* Lo. VI/4, ff. 8v.–9 (incl. map); *ibid.* PAR230/10/M/3.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2202, no. 45 (dated 1802).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 26, f. 265; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2198, no. 3; *ibid.* Lo. VI/4, ff. 8v.–9; *ibid.* PAR230/10/M/3.

Humphry Repton called the rectory a ‘staring house’, screening it from view of Sarsden House as part of his landscaping in the 1790s,<sup>47</sup> and in 1817 James Langston (whose brother-in-law Charles Barter became rector that year) arranged for a replacement to be built on a virgin site ½ mile north of the church, engaging George Repton as architect.<sup>48</sup> The old house was repossessed and later demolished.<sup>49</sup> The new house, built of limestone ashlar with low-pitched, hipped slate roofs and wide eaves, was completed in 1818,<sup>50</sup> and forms a U-plan, with stabling and other outbuildings extending further north.<sup>51</sup> Its third storey was added in 1834, with a plat band running between the second and top floors. The three-bayed west front and four-bayed south front (whose fourth bay breaks slightly forward) incorporate a ground-floor loggia supported on wooden posts, which on the south encompasses a canted bay window, and supports a two-bay first-floor balcony with iron railings. The east (entrance) front includes a flat-roofed porch and large external stack, while all three sides feature sashes of varying size. Inside, a vaulted passage and stone-flagged hall lead to an open-well staircase lit by a rectangular lantern, and to rooms with plaster cornices and marble fireplaces. At the rear, adjoining service ranges and outbuildings create an open courtyard leading to a walled kitchen garden,<sup>52</sup> the former stable block retaining early 19th-century loose boxes. A contemporary lodge by the roadside was probably also designed by Repton, based on one of his father’s drawings.<sup>53</sup> By the 1980s (following its sale in 1923) the house was divided into flats, but was restored to single ownership by Rupert and Amanda Ponsonby, the owners in 2023. The Ponsonbys also restored the walled garden and the grounds, adding some new trees and establishing a wild meadow.<sup>54</sup>

## Religious Life

### *The Middle Ages*

<sup>47</sup> N. Temple, ‘Sarsden, Oxfordshire’, *Jnl of Garden Hist.* 6 (1986), 91–3.

<sup>48</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 15, f. 91v.; c 2198, no. 4; *ibid.* PAR230/10/M/1; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 453–4; below (relig. life).

<sup>49</sup> The ho. formerly listed as the ‘Old Rectory’ (NHLE, no. 1367796, now The Agent’s Ho.) was an unrelated fmho.: above, landscape etc. (built character).

<sup>50</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 15, f. 91v.

<sup>51</sup> For following: NHLE, no. 1300861 (accessed June 2022); Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 453–4; N. Temple, ‘Reptoniana’, *Jnl of Garden Hist.* 3 (1983), 56; Temple, ‘Sarsden’, 105 (illustn); [www.ribapix.com](http://www.ribapix.com), RIBA29485 (plan and elevation as first built); OHC, POX0196064–5.

<sup>52</sup> For walled garden, R. Bisgrove, *The Gardens of Britain: Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire* (1978), 160–1.

<sup>53</sup> NHLE, no. 1053276 (accessed June 2022); Temple, ‘Reptoniana’, 55–7; Temple, ‘Sarsden’, 100–1.

<sup>54</sup> *Country Life*, 6 Mar. 2013, 56–60; *Oxon. Gardens Trust Newsletter* 26 (Autumn 2017), p. 6; Brunner and Lunt, *Sheriffs*, 218–19.



The medieval living was a poor one, and apparently attracted incumbents early in their careers. Several were granted leave to study, and many moved on to other benefices, Eynsham abbey occasionally presenting several candidates in quick succession.<sup>55</sup> None rose to great prominence, but for that very reason may have served their parishes conscientiously. The earliest known rector was Roger of Batsford (Glos.), a manor held by Sarsden's lord and patron Hugh Golafre. It was Roger who in 1181 acknowledged Eynsham abbey's right to the tithes from Pudlicote, receiving in return an annual payment of ½ mark (6s. 8d.) for life.<sup>56</sup> More than 30 further rectors are known before the Reformation, all except Thomas Cone (in 1388) presented by Eynsham abbey.<sup>57</sup> Those styled *magister* (and so presumably university-educated) included the 13th-century rectors Henry of Wycombe and John de Culne, while Alan of Horncastle (rector 1311–16), granted robes by the abbey 'for his service', probably continued to study at Oxford, presumably appointing a chaplain to serve the parish.<sup>58</sup> Others intermittently absent at university included John de Middleton (instituted c.1224) and William of Horncastle (rector c.1320–31).<sup>59</sup>

Sarsden's lords probably influenced the presentation of their family members John Golafre (rector ?1280–1304) and Elias Golafre (1304–11), whilst Eynsham abbey's acquisition of lands in Cambridgeshire may have prompted their presentation of Nicholas of Impington in 1316.<sup>60</sup> In 1331 a rector promoted from a benefice in Grimsby (Lincs.) was heavily in debt,<sup>61</sup> and several rectors resigned the living in favour of wealthier benefices, among them Peter of Ardington in 1371 and the university graduate Philip Montgomery in 1380.<sup>62</sup> Long incumbencies were generally rare, exceptions including William Frypat (rector 1397–1418) and John Banham (1434–65), who in retirement received an annual pension of 20s.<sup>63</sup> A stipendiary chaplain mentioned in 1472 probably substituted for an absentee rector, while Edmund Lockey (rector 1475–81) was permitted to hold Sarsden and another benefice in plurality with Wolvey (Warws.).<sup>64</sup> The long-serving John Thomas (rector 1481–1504) was presumably also non-resident in 1492, when he leased the house and rectory estate to a local man for three years.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>55</sup> e.g. in 1418: Lincs. Arch. REG/14, ff. 417v.–418v. Of 31 known rectors c.1224–1508, 6 vacated by death, 15 by resignation or exchange, and 10 by cause unknown.

<sup>56</sup> *Eynsham Cart.* I, pp. 123–4 (Rog. de Bechesora); Farrer, *Honors*, I, 121; above (glebe and tithes).

<sup>57</sup> Above (advowson).

<sup>58</sup> *Rot. Welles*, I, 127; *Rot. Grosseteste*, 501; *Eynsham Cart.* I, p. 371; Emden, *OU Reg. to 1500*, II, 965.

<sup>59</sup> *Rot. Welles*, II, 18; *Reg. Burghersh*, III, p. 12.

<sup>60</sup> Lincs. Arch. REG/2, ff. 147, 167; *Eynsham Cart.* I, pp. 222, 226.

<sup>61</sup> *Reg. Burghersh*, II, p. 80; *Cal. Close 1330–3*, 296 (Geoff. de Steyning).

<sup>62</sup> Lincs. Arch. REG/10, ff. 354v., 371; Emden, *OU Reg. to 1500*, II, 1298.

<sup>63</sup> Lincs. Arch. REG/14, f. 417v. (Frypat's death); REG/20, f. 242 (Banham's pension).

<sup>64</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1467–77, 323; *Cal. Papal Regs 1471–84*, 416.

<sup>65</sup> OHC, P6/16D/1 (to Nic. Boteler).

Lay involvement is poorly recorded, and was probably partly focused on Churchill, where parishioners were buried and paid mortuary fees (in kind until 1375),<sup>66</sup> and perhaps also left offerings for lights or anniversary masses. Under Henry Moxson (rector 1508–39) Sarsden's chancel and rectory house were neglected, the sedilia apparently ruinous c.1520, and the rector having nowhere to live. Ten years later the church was still not fully repaired, though the churchwardens reported that work was under way, while the lord John Horne (d. 1526) left 40s. towards the church's maintenance and a further 10s. to the rector himself.<sup>67</sup> Moxson actively opposed Henry VIII's Protestant Reformation, and in 1539 was attainted for involvement in an alleged Catholic conspiracy, prompting the Crown to present his successor.<sup>68</sup>

### *The Reformation to 1817*

Only nine rectors were instituted between 1539 and 1816, each serving between 13 and 57 years. Seven are known to have attended Oxford University, and most were at least intermittently resident. In the 1540s Edmund Garsett (rector 1539–62) employed a curate (Arthur Dyxe), but like him witnessed parishioners' wills, whilst the vicar of Churchill Robert Ruthin (d. 1551) remembered Garsett in his will.<sup>69</sup> Some traditional sensibilities initially persisted: Elizabeth Horne presented the church with an early 15th-century book of hours in 1541, and seven years later a husbandman's widow called Dyxe her 'ghostly father'.<sup>70</sup> No evidence of Roman Catholic recusancy has been found, however, and Garsett himself (as a Crown presentee) presumably imposed Protestant worship, although he was flexible enough to survive the brief restoration of Catholicism.

Garsett's successors Francis Duckett (rector 1562–75) and William Beard (1575–1628) were similarly orthodox and probably mostly resident: the long-serving Beard died in the rectory house,<sup>71</sup> although in the 1580s the vicar of Churchill sometimes substituted for him.<sup>72</sup> By the 1590s a rate of 12*d.* per yardland was levied for the church's maintenance, and church goods included a surplice, a silver chalice and cover, and cloths for the communion table and font. During Beard's incumbency the living was augmented and the church renovated by Sarsden's new lord Sir John Walter (d. 1630), who probably also contributed to

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<sup>66</sup> Above (glebe and tithes).

<sup>67</sup> *Visit. Dioc. Linc.* I, 135; II, 46; TNA, PROB 11/22/188.

<sup>68</sup> *L&P Hen. VIII*, XIV (1), pp. 402–3, 534.

<sup>69</sup> OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 179.68; 179.304; 179.305; 180.47; TNA, PROB 11/37/136; Pearce, 'Clergy', 42–3; Emden, *OU Reg. 1501–40*, 227–8.

<sup>70</sup> Bodl. GA Oxon. c 317 (12); OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 179.305.

<sup>71</sup> Pearce, 'Clergy', 43; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 115/1/16.

<sup>72</sup> E.R. Brinkworth (ed.), *The Archdeacon's Court: Liber Actorum, 1584*, II (ORS 24, 1946), 222; cf. Peel, *Register*, II, 135 ('lying at Oxford').



new church furnishings including a pewter stoup, painted calicos, a 'great English bible', and two common prayer books. By 1631 his son Sir William had added embroidered cushions, a linen pulpit cloth, and a green silk-fringed carpet for the communion table.<sup>73</sup>

Beard's successor John Morris (rector 1628–48) was Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford and (from 1635) also vicar of Pyrton, and at Sarsden employed a curate (Lewis Jones), who in 1636 was left 10s. to preach a funeral sermon.<sup>74</sup> Walter Dayrell (rector 1648–63) was Morris's brother-in-law, but in 1649 was ejected from Christ Church, Oxford, by Parliament; possibly he maintained a low profile at Sarsden during the Commonwealth, but kept in touch with other sequestered clergy, and in 1666 became archdeacon of Winchester.<sup>75</sup> George Vernon (rector 1663–1720) held the rich living of Bourton on the Water (Glos.) in plurality, employing curates, and was vigorous in his opposition to Protestant Nonconformity, appealing for fines to be levied on those absenting themselves from Anglican worship. Dissent at Bourton was rife, and at Sarsden in 1682 Vernon reported two women Dissenters and a man who rarely attended church.<sup>76</sup> Sarsden nevertheless remained largely unaffected by Dissent until the 19th century, probably partly reflecting its status as an estate village, and Catholic recusancy, too, remained rare, exceptions including James Burnett in 1635–6,<sup>77</sup> the servant John Beale in 1706, and in the 1760s the carpenter's wife Ann Sessions, while a baby girl was reportedly baptized in the nearby Catholic chapel at Heythrop.<sup>78</sup>

A church bell inscribed to the churchwarden John Mansell was installed in 1682,<sup>79</sup> and in the early 18th century new church furnishings presented by the Walter family included a silver basin for the offertory, a bible and leather-bound common prayer book with silver clasps, and cloth-of-gold coverings for the altar and pulpit, while a new surplice was given by parishioners.<sup>80</sup> Vernon's former curate Nathaniel Sturges succeeded him as rector in 1720 (remaining until his death in 1762),<sup>81</sup> and though he and his successors generally served Sarsden in plurality with Churchill (as lecturer or vicar), they nevertheless lived at the

<sup>73</sup> OHC, PAR230/1/R1/1, ff. 1, 3v–4v. (transcribed in *ibid.* par. reg. transcript, misc. pp. 1 (giving 1671 in error) and 3); TNA, PROB 11/158/448; above (glebe); below (church archit.). For later Walter family gifts, below.

<sup>74</sup> *Alumni Oxon.* 1500–1714, III, 1035; Oldfield, 'Clerus'; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 71/1/22.

<sup>75</sup> LJ, X, 627; *Alumni Oxon.* 1500–1714, I, 389; TNA, PROB 11/204/192; B.D. Greenslade, 'The Compleat Angler and the Sequestered Clergy', *Review of English Studies* V no. 20 (1954), 363.

<sup>76</sup> *Bp Fell and Nonconf.* pp. xxxix–xl, 29; ODNB, s.v. Geo. Vernon; *Alumni Oxon.* 1500–1714, IV, 1542. For curates, *HMC, 10th Rep. IV, Stonyhurst*, p. 177 (John Griffin); below.

<sup>77</sup> Davidson, 'Cath. Oxon.' 344; cf. OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 11/4/25 (Edm. Cooke, invoking the 'company of heavenly angels and blessed saints' in 1611).

<sup>78</sup> *HMC, 10th Rep. IV, Stonyhurst*, p. 177; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 560, f. 29v.; *Retn Papists 1767*, 117.

<sup>79</sup> *Ch. Bells Oxon.* IV, 368.

<sup>80</sup> OHC, PAR230/1/R1/1, f. 1v.; PAR230/1/R1/2, f. 1 (transcribed in *ibid.* par. reg. transcript, misc. pp. 2, 5).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* par. reg. transcript, misc. p. 2; Oldfield, 'Clerus'; *Alumni Oxon.* 1500–1714, IV, 1440.

Sarsden rectory house newly provided by Sir John Walter. By 1738 there were two Sunday services, one with a sermon, and holy communion (attended by c.20 parishioners) was celebrated four times a year,<sup>82</sup> while the church itself, though apparently in good condition, was entirely rebuilt in 1760 by the wealthy lord and patron John Rolle Walter.<sup>83</sup> Tilleman Hodgkinson (rector 1762–86), presented by Rolle Walter and his brother Denys Rolle, maintained the two Sunday services and read prayers on feast days when there was ‘sufficient congregation’,<sup>84</sup> though under Arthur Saunder (rector 1786–1816) regular Sunday services were eventually reduced to one, except when the Langstons were resident at Sarsden House.<sup>85</sup> A bassoon was presented by John Langston in 1796, presumably for a west-gallery band.<sup>86</sup>

### *Since 1817*

During the 19th century Sarsden’s religious life became increasingly focused on Churchill. Charles Barter (rector 1817–68) served both churches throughout his incumbency, from 1829 in plurality with Cornwell, and from the outset held only a single Sunday service (with sermon) at Sarsden, reckoning that most of those attending lived at Churchill, which had morning and afternoon services.<sup>87</sup> By the 1830s parishioners generally attended Sarsden in the morning and Churchill in the afternoon, with holy communion celebrated four times a year by c.50 communicants.<sup>88</sup> Even so a new organ was installed at Sarsden in 1824 (replacing one of 1819), while a new silver chalice, paten, and flagon were given by James Langston in 1826.<sup>89</sup> Average attendance in the 1850s was 70–90 depending on whether the Langstons were in residence, but fell to 50–60 by the following decade.<sup>90</sup> William Dickson Carter (rector 1868–1903) introduced monthly communion (attended by 30 parishioners) and held occasional weekday services, but Churchill continued to be served more regularly, and by 1890 Sarsden’s inhabitants were so used to worshipping there that Carter reported there was ‘really no cause for any service at Sarsden’, except that ‘I could not bear to give it up’.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>82</sup> *Secker’s Visit.* 130; *Secker’s Corresp.* 62–3; above (rectory ho.); Churchill, relig. hist. (relig. life).

<sup>83</sup> Below (church archit.); cf. chwdns’ accts in OHC, PAR230/4/F1/1 (with extracts in *ibid.* par. reg. transcript, misc. pp. 8–10); *ibid.* MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. c 98, ff. 1 sqq.

<sup>84</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 560, f. 31; c 327, p. 111; *Alumni Oxon.* 1715–1886, II, 672.

<sup>85</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 31, ff. 7v., 9v.; d 575, f. 73v.; *Alumni Oxon.* 1715–1886, IV, 1255.

<sup>86</sup> OHC, par. reg. transcript, misc. p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 15, f. 91v.; b 36, f. 72; above, Churchill, relig. hist. (relig. life).

<sup>88</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 38, f. 168v.; b 41, ff. 193v.–194.

<sup>89</sup> L. Elvin, *Bishop and Son, Organ Builders* (1984), 112–13; Evans, *Ch. Plate*, 150–1.

<sup>90</sup> *Wilb. Visit.* 126; *Ch. and Chapel, 1851*, no. 377 (estimating 100); OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 180, f. 982v.; c 335, f. 341v.

<sup>91</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 338, f. 359v.; c 356, f. 359.

The church's extension in 1823 and refitting in 1896 both took place under the patronage and direction of the Langstons,<sup>92</sup> for whom it was effectively a family memorial chapel adjoining the mansion house. The 'strictly private' funeral of James Langston took place there in 1863,<sup>93</sup> and a burial vault was built underneath, whilst the refitting (which commemorated Langston's daughter Julia (d. 1895), countess of Ducie) reduced church accommodation from 110 to 90.<sup>94</sup> Some rectors, too, had close Langston family connections: Charles Barter married Langston's sister Elizabeth in the year that he was presented, moving to the grand new rectory house which Langston built for them, while in 1850 the Barters' daughter Ellen married William Dickson Carter, who became vicar of Shipton-under-Wychwood (1852–68) before eventually succeeding Barter. Both weddings were performed in Sarsden church.<sup>95</sup> Barter was also appointed rural dean and served the local committee of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, earning respect for his moderate views, while Dickson Carter (who also became rural dean) was made an honorary canon of Christ Church, Oxford in 1894.<sup>96</sup> Dissent remained minimal throughout their incumbencies, two Baptists (probably of the Pratt family) worshipping at Chipping Norton in the 1810s,<sup>97</sup> while a few inhabitants may have attended Churchill's Nonconformist chapel. The prominent farmers John Pascoe (d. 1913) and John Treweeke (d. 1916) were 'staunch' and 'active' Wesleyans, although Pascoe was also remembered for his broad-mindedness, and in old age (when unable to travel to neighbouring Nonconformist chapels) attended Sarsden church.<sup>98</sup>

Eight rectors served the benefice between 1903 and the union with Kingham and Daylesford in 1979, holding a weekly Sunday service and monthly communion at Sarsden, with additional services performed at Churchill.<sup>99</sup> Edmund Johnson (rector 1903–22) was the last to live permanently at Sarsden, where he was apparently disconcerted to find the rectory house so large. He was also unfamiliar with the High Church practices of his predecessor, and instead adopted a more evangelical tone.<sup>100</sup> His successors resided at Churchill, the long incumbencies of Martin Spearing (rector 1926–45) and Arthur Holmes (1948–63)

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<sup>92</sup> Below (church archit.). Churchill church was also rebuilt by Langston in 1825–7: above, Churchill, relig. hist.

<sup>93</sup> *Reading Mercury*, 31 Oct. 1863.

<sup>94</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1891–1911 edns).

<sup>95</sup> OHC, par. reg. transcript; *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 78; above (rectory ho.).

<sup>96</sup> *Oxf. Jnl*, 4 July 1868, 3 Mar. 1894; *Wilb. Letter Bks*, 113–14; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 4 Mar. 1903. For Dickson Carter's earlier involvement (as magistrate) in the notorious 'Ascott Martyrs' trial, M. Curthoys, 'Oxfordshire's Tolpuddle? The Case of the Ascott Martyrs', *Oxoniensia* 86 (2021), 159–78.

<sup>97</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 575, f. 73v.; *ibid.* Chipping Norton Baptist reg. transcript, s.a. 1815–16, 1818. In 1820 they moved to Bruern: *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 306.

<sup>98</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 335, f. 342; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 26 Feb. 1913, 27 Sept. 1916; above, Churchill, relig. hist. (relig. life).

<sup>99</sup> OHC, PAR230/1/R7/1; above, Churchill, relig. hist. (relig. life).

<sup>100</sup> R. Mann, *The History of Churchill and Sarsden* (2013), 115–17; *Gore's Visit*. 272–3, 522–4; above (rectory ho.).

providing some stability amidst several shorter ministries. In 1955 the church was reroofed and in 1964 redecorated, largely at the expense of the Wyfolds of Sarsden House, though by then attendances were declining, and in 1990 (when a weekly communion was held) the church closed following the Wyfolds' sale of the estate.<sup>101</sup> The building was declared redundant in 1992, and has since been restored as a private chapel.<sup>102</sup>

## Church Architecture



*Detail of John Glover's watercolour painting of Sarsden House and church c.1820 before the church's remodelling:*  
[www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/images/gallery/531dd8b4.html](http://www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/images/gallery/531dd8b4.html)

The (presumably medieval) church was newly paved, seated, and whitewashed by Sir John Walter (d. 1630) in the early 17th century,<sup>103</sup> but otherwise little is known of the building replaced by John Rolle Walter in 1760. In 1695 it occupied the same site as its successor, its west end almost abutting the east wall of Sarsden House and extending at right angles to it, and in the 1790s a pedimented stone bellcote surmounted the roof,<sup>104</sup> presumably containing the single surviving bell of 1682.<sup>105</sup> A renewed Norman tympanum above a Maltese cross, set in the present-day chancel's north wall, may have come from the earlier church,<sup>106</sup> though there is no firm evidence. The church contained no tombs or memorial inscriptions since inhabitants were buried at Churchill.<sup>107</sup>

The present structure (comprising nave, chancel, short transepts, and a small vestry and south-west porch) reflects Rolle Walter's rebuilding of 1760 (by an unknown

<sup>101</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1995, faculties; *Roundabout* [Churchill and Sarsden par. newsletter] (Dec. 1990): copy in *ibid.* SZ CHURb/052; Mann, *Churchill and Sarsden*, 119–20; cf. *Sunday Telegraph*, 3 June 1990 (reporting only 20 services per year).

<sup>102</sup> Above (paroch. organizn); below (church archit.).

<sup>103</sup> OHC, par. reg. transcript, misc. p. 5. For church goods and other embellishments, above (Reformn to 1817).

<sup>104</sup> OHC, POX0078617 (1695 illust. by White Kennett, largely obscured by foliage); <https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:11987> (bellcote); OHC, Lo. VII/2 (map); OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XX.6 (1881 edn). Given its proximity to the house the church may have also suffered fire damage in 1689, but if so no details are known.

<sup>105</sup> By Ric. Keene: *Ch. Bells Oxon.* IV, 368; above (Reformn to 1817).

<sup>106</sup> As suggested in LPL, CLARKE/1/5, f. 120.

<sup>107</sup> *Par. Colln*, III, 253.

architect);<sup>108</sup> a substantial enlargement and remodelling by George Repton (for James Langston) in 1823, costing an estimated £500;<sup>109</sup> and an internal refitting by the architect W.E. Mills in 1896. Its outward-facing north and east walls are of limestone ashlar, while the more hidden south wall is of coursed and dressed rubble, and the west wall is rendered. The roofs throughout are slated, with coped verges on projecting kneelers.<sup>110</sup> The building remains well maintained, following some sympathetic restoration work by Sarsden House's owners since its decommissioning in 1992.<sup>111</sup>

As first rebuilt the church comprised a three-bayed nave and two-bayed chancel, the latter lit by two- and three-light pointed-headed windows with cusped tracery. A prominent stone steeple rose from a hexagonal wooden belfry at the junction of chancel and nave.<sup>112</sup> Repton's changes in 1823 included removing the belfry and steeple, rebuilding the chancel and the eastern part of the nave, and adding short transepts, of which the northern one supports a surviving open bellcote. His new round-headed east window (with plain tracery) is matched by one in the south transept, while the north transept, originally intended to be lit only from the east, incorporates three stepped round-headed lancets facing north (in place by 1825).<sup>113</sup> The nave's fenestration may have been left largely unchanged from the 1760 rebuilding, the north side incorporating two round-headed windows with moulded architraves and projecting keystones, flanking a central doorway with a semi-circular fanlight.<sup>114</sup> A tiny vestry lit by a single window under a hipped roof was built into the south transept's south-east angle, though an embattled porch at the church's south-west corner, traditionally associated with Repton's remodelling, was already extant in 1820, and dates probably from 1760. The porch (which adjoins Sarsden House) served a west gallery rather than the main body of the church, and was presumably used by household members.<sup>115</sup>

Repton's cruciform interior was influenced by Sir John Soane, its plastered and unembellished barrel-vaulted roofs meeting at a plain crossing whose central groin vault

<sup>108</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1907); *Sale Cat., Sarsden Est.* (1922), p. 13: copy in OHC, Fi. XIV/ii/2.

<sup>109</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2172, no. 4.

<sup>110</sup> NHLE, no. 1200325 (accessed June 2022); Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 453; illust. in HE Arch., England's Places 4970\_005 (photos of 1943); <https://churchillsarsden.com/history/sarsden-estate>.

<sup>111</sup> e.g. of the organ: below.

<sup>112</sup> Illust. in OHC, POX0078691; N. Temple, 'Sarsden, Oxfordshire', *Jnl of Garden Hist.* 6 (1986), 95; [www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/images/gallery/531dd8b4.html](http://www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/images/gallery/531dd8b4.html) (watercolour by John Glover, accessed July 2022); [www.ribapix.com](http://www.ribapix.com), RIBA65415 (plan before later alterations).

<sup>113</sup> Illust. in Bodl. MSS Top. Oxon. a 68, nos. 452, 454 (both dated 1825); c 852, f. 22v.; *ibid.* MS Top. Gen. a 11, no. 523. Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 453, and NHLE, no. 1200325 both wrongly attribute the bellcote and N transept windows to Mills in 1896.

<sup>114</sup> NHLE, no. 1200325; cf. [www.ribapix.com](http://www.ribapix.com), RIBA65415 and RIBA65416 (plans); [www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/images/gallery/531dd8b4.html](http://www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/images/gallery/531dd8b4.html) (Glover watercolour); Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 852, f. 22v. The three S windows are similar but plainer.

<sup>115</sup> [www.ribapix.com](http://www.ribapix.com), RIBA65415; RIBA65416.

springs from four unmoulded arches.<sup>116</sup> The church was also repewed,<sup>117</sup> although the communion rails retain their 18th-century twisted balusters, and most other surviving fittings date from Mills's 1896 refurbishment, amongst them the nave benches and choir stalls, the 15th-century-style octagonal font and oak pulpit, and the dado panelling. Mills also removed two galleries, improved the heating system,<sup>118</sup> and installed a chamber organ (built by J.C. Bishop in the 1830s) from Sarsden House, replacing a barrel organ of 1824 also by Bishop. Set originally in the north transept, the new organ was later moved to the west end and was renovated in the early 21st century.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> O. Bradbury, *Sir John Soane's Influence on Architecture from 1791* (2015), 72 (incl. illustn).

<sup>117</sup> [www.ribapix.com](http://www.ribapix.com), RIBA65415; RIBA65416.

<sup>118</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1995, faculty; *ibid.* PAR230/11/Y/1; NHLE, no. 1200325; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 453; HE Arch., England's Places 4970\_001 (photos of 1943).

<sup>119</sup> L. Elvin, *Bishop and Son, Organ Builders* (1984), 112–13; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1995, faculty; [www.goetzegwynn.co.uk/organ/sarsden-house-oxfordshire-restoration-of-the-ca1830-j-c-bishop-organ-in-st-james-chapel](http://www.goetzegwynn.co.uk/organ/sarsden-house-oxfordshire-restoration-of-the-ca1830-j-c-bishop-organ-in-st-james-chapel) (accessed June 2022).