



## VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

### Swerford and Showell

#### Religious History

Swerford had its own church by the 12th century, founded presumably by one of the d'Oilly family as lord of the manor. Henry d'Oilly granted it c.1210 to John Grey, bishop of Norwich, who in 1217 left it to Osney abbey, by which time there was also a chapel (now lost) at Showell.<sup>1</sup> The abbey did not appropriate the living, which remained a rectory in its patronage until the abbey's dissolution.<sup>2</sup> Both before and after the Reformation the cure was served mainly by resident rectors, and until c.1800 Nonconformity remained limited, save for a brief period in the later 17th century. Dissenters established a small meeting in the early 19th century, however, and a Primitive Methodist chapel was opened in 1879. The later 20th century saw the usual reduction in all types of worship, and a new Primitive Methodist chapel built in the 1930s closed in the 1990s.

#### CHURCH ORIGINS AND PAROCHIAL ORGANIZATION

Swerford church presumably existed by c.1127, when Robert d'Oilly granted two-thirds of the demesne tithes to the chapel of St George in Oxford castle.<sup>3</sup> Probably it had baptismal and burial rights from the start, although the surviving octagonal font is of 14th-century date.<sup>4</sup> Its dedication to St Mary was established probably by the end of the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> The separate chapel at Showell, apparently with parochial functions, was established before c.1210,<sup>6</sup> the 12th-century byname 'de cimiterio' suggesting that it had its own burial ground.<sup>7</sup> Presumably it was sited in or close to the deserted settlement at Showell Farm, but by the Reformation it had apparently fallen out of use,<sup>8</sup> and in 1820 the rector reported that 'not a stone tells where it stood'.<sup>9</sup> In 1963 Swerford benefice was combined with Hook Norton, and shortly afterwards the rectory house was sold. Wigginton was added to the combined

<sup>1</sup> *Oseney Cart.* IV, pp. 295–6.

<sup>2</sup> Below (advowson; relig. life).

<sup>3</sup> *Oseney Cart.* IV, p. 7; *VCH Oxon.* II, 160.

<sup>4</sup> For the font, Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 510.

<sup>5</sup> *Lewis's Topog. Dict. England* (1848 edn), s.v. Swerford.

<sup>6</sup> *Oseney Cart.* IV, p. 295; below (relig. life).

<sup>7</sup> *Reading Cart.*, I, p. 395.

<sup>8</sup> Above, landscape etc. (settlement); below (relig. life).

<sup>9</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 579, f. 89.

benefice in 1974, and Great Rollright in 1980, when Hook Norton, Rollright and Swerford parishes were combined and a team ministry established.<sup>10</sup>



Swerford church  
from the south-west.

### ***Advowson, Glebe, and Tithes***

Though in 1279 (and later) the lord of Swerford was said to hold the advowson, presentations were usually made by Osney abbey and, on occasion, by the Crown, as during the abbey's voidance in 1317.<sup>11</sup> After the Reformation Swerford's lords or their representatives presented,<sup>12</sup> until the rector John Brideoake (d. 1727) bought the advowson from the creditors of his indebted brother Richard Brideoake, then lord of the manor.<sup>13</sup> It

<sup>10</sup> Misc. papers in OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 1863/2–4; *ibid.* PAR137/10/N/1; below (rectory ho.).

<sup>11</sup> *Rot. Hund.* II, 727; TNA, C 43/2/42; *Oseney Cart.* III, pp. 60–2; *VCH Oxon.* VI, 258; *Cal. Pat.* 1313–17, 616; *Reg. Burghersh*, II, p. 90.

<sup>12</sup> e.g. S. Spencer Pearce, 'Clergy of the Deaneries of Chipping Norton and Deddington', *OAS Rep.* (1916), 23; <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed 2020).

<sup>13</sup> TNA, PROB 11/625/188.

passed through various hands before being sold by the rector Nicholas Earle to Magdalen College, Oxford, for £3,500 in 1807.<sup>14</sup> Magdalen conveyed it to the diocesan board of patronage in 1948, which from 1963 shared presentations with the patrons of the various combined benefices.<sup>15</sup>

The glebe (all in Swerford township) comprised c.65 a. in 1614 and presumably in the Middle Ages, and at enclosure in 1803 was increased to 260 a. including the later Rectory and Heath farms.<sup>16</sup> Though later sold piecemeal, it still covered over 180 a. in the 1940s.<sup>17</sup> The demesne tithes granted to St George's chapel passed in 1149 to Osney abbey, which in 1509 received a 20s. pension from the rector in lieu;<sup>18</sup> presumably they remained with the rector after the Reformation, until Swerford's tithes were commuted at enclosure. Showell's tithes were separately commuted (for tithe rents totalling £188 8s. 11d. a year) in 1843.<sup>19</sup> The rectory as a whole was valued at the middling sum of £6 13s. 4d. in 1291 and at £15 6s. 8d. in 1535,<sup>20</sup> and by 1675 the living was worth £120 a year, rising after enclosure to £496 net by 1848.<sup>21</sup> By 1907 the net value was only £261, reflecting falling tithe- and land rents, and in 1934 it was still only £314, which the rector claimed he could not collect in full.<sup>22</sup>

### **Rectory House**

Until its sale in 1964 the substantial stone-built rectory house occupied a large plot opposite the church, probably the site of its medieval predecessor.<sup>23</sup> In 1634 the house included a study, parlour, hall, kitchen, malthouse, cheese chamber, and dairy house, along with bedchambers and separate male and female servants' chambers. In 1662 it had five hearths, making it the joint largest house in the parish.<sup>24</sup> By 1676, however, it was apparently in poor repair,<sup>25</sup> and the present structure appears to be largely the result of rebuilding by the

<sup>14</sup> <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk>; OHC, enclo. award; W.D. Macray, *A Register of the Members of St Mary Magdalen College, Oxford* (1894–1915), V, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Papers in OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 2036; c 1863/2–4.

<sup>16</sup> OHC, MS Archd. Oxon. b 41, f. 121; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 449, f. 47; *ibid.* enclosure award and map.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* DV/X/62; TNA, MAF 32/919/100.

<sup>18</sup> *VCH Oxon.* II, 90; *Oseney Cart.* III, pp. 60–2; IV, p. 7; VI, p. 245.

<sup>19</sup> OHC, enclo. award; *ibid.* tithe award.

<sup>20</sup> *Tax. Eccl.* 32; *Valor Eccl.* II, 182.

<sup>21</sup> *Cal. SP Dom.* 1675–6, 412; *Lewis's Topog. Dict. England* (1848 edn); D. McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy 1777–1869* (1969), 109.

<sup>22</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1907 edn); OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2036, letter of 1934.

<sup>23</sup> OHC, enclo. award and map; cf. *ibid.* MS Archd. Oxon. b 41, f. 121 (1614 terrier); *ibid.* MS dd Par. Swerford b 1, f. 47 and v. (1697 enlargement of grounds); *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 449, f. 47 (1808 terrier). For descriptions: NHLE, no. 1194004 (accessed 2020); Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 510; *Country Life*, 25 Sept. 1980, 1071–3 (incl. date of sale).

<sup>24</sup> OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 132/1/10 (inventory of rector Wm Hollins); TNA, E 179/164/504, rot. 63d.

<sup>25</sup> OHC, MS Archd. Oxon. c 33, f. 308.



long-serving rector John Brideoake (1691–1727), who probably also added the ashlar gatepiers and a new barn and stables.<sup>26</sup>



Swerford's former rectory house.

Two-storeyed with attics and basement, and of double-depth plan, the house's main range has a symmetrical three-window front with a central pedimented doorway. The windows are mainly (renewed) 18-pane sashes, but stone-mullioned windows survive at basement level. To the rear is a central seven-sided conservatory with the date 1810 on its lead roof, and two set-back side wings (one of them two-storeyed and the kitchen wing single-storeyed) may be of similar date, reflecting work by the privately wealthy Nicholas Earle (rector 1782–1823).<sup>27</sup> The interior includes early 18th-century drawing-room panelling and an oak dog-leg stair with a moulded handrail, while a separate winder stair rises to the dormer-windowed attic. Surviving early features include remains of a probably 16th-century moulded stone doorway in the basement.<sup>28</sup>

## RELIGIOUS LIFE

### *The Middle Ages*

<sup>26</sup> NHLE, nos. 1194004; 1052484; 1285901; 1052483; 1194000.

<sup>27</sup> For his landed interests, McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy 1777–1869*, 114; *VCH Oxon.* XI, 255. *Gardner's Dir. Oxon.* (1852) says that the house was much improved by 'the late rector'.

<sup>28</sup> NHLE, no. 1194004.

Norman 'parson' of the church of Swerford witnessed a local deed in the mid 12th century.<sup>29</sup> Osney abbey's earliest recorded presentation (in the 1220s) was of Ralph Dimmock, presumably a relative of the Hook Norton Dimmocks. On his death in 1228 the abbey presented Alexander of Swerford, archdeacon of Shropshire: he was already serving as Dimmock's vicar, for which he apparently received the whole income save for a 40s. pension, but from his institution the vicarage and rectory were recombined.<sup>30</sup> Alexander (d. 1246) was a prominent royal official, pluralist, and author of *The Red Book of the Exchequer*, and though probably born in Swerford is unlikely to have resided as rector. Conceivably he is to be identified with an earlier Alexander 'dean' of Swerford, who witnessed local charters in the late 12th and early 13th century, although more likely the two were separate and unrelated.<sup>31</sup>

The later Alexander's less exalted successor, Hugh the chaplain,<sup>32</sup> may have served the cure in person, and the same was probably true of many medieval rectors, some of whom are mentioned in a local context.<sup>33</sup> These men were a mix of graduates and non-graduates, most of them serving for ten years or more. The late 14th and 15th centuries saw increased turnover, though by then most (if not all) rectors were graduates in full orders. In the 1520s and 1530s the rector (Bartholomew Tatton) was a non-resident pluralist and the chancel and rectory house were said to be dilapidated. His parish duties were performed by a curate paid £5 6s. 8d. a year.<sup>34</sup>

Responsibility for serving Showell chapel lay apparently with the rector in the 1220s,<sup>35</sup> although in 1279 Cold Norton priory was required to supply a chaplain to celebrate annual masses for the ancestors of its mesne lord at Showell, William Walse, perhaps also in Showell chapel.<sup>36</sup> The building presumably fell out of use with Showell's depopulation during the later Middle Ages.<sup>37</sup> Lay investment in the parish church is indicated by construction of a tower c.1300 and by late 14th-century work on the nave,<sup>38</sup> while a rood loft, an image of St Anthony, and an image of the Virgin Mary (in the chancel) were mentioned in

<sup>29</sup> Brasenose Archive, Rollright 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Oseney Cart.* III, pp. 60--1; IV, pp. 333, 375; *Rot. Welles*, II, 29–30; *VCH Oxon.* II, 10–11 (noting other parishes with rectors and vicars).

<sup>31</sup> *Oseney Cart.* IV, pp. 333, 375; N. Vincent, 'New Light on Master Alexander of Swerford (d. 1246): The Career and Connections of an Oxfordshire Civil Servant', *Oxoniensia* 61 (1996), 297–304; ODNB, s.v. Alex. of Swerford. Though in clerical orders, the later Alex. also had children.

<sup>32</sup> *Oseney Cart.* III, pp. 61–2.

<sup>33</sup> e.g. *ibid.* IV, pp. 333, 375; *Cal. Pat.* 1350–4, 17; TNA, C 241/164/26.

<sup>34</sup> *Visit. Dioc. Linc.* I, 135; II, 45; *Subsidy 1526*, 264; *Valor. Eccl.* II, 182.

<sup>35</sup> *Oseney Cart.* III, p. 60; cf. below (Reformn to 1840).

<sup>36</sup> *Rot. Hund.* II, 875.

<sup>37</sup> Above, landscape etc. (settlement); below (Reformn to 1840).

<sup>38</sup> Below (church archit.).

the early 16th century.<sup>39</sup> A church house held by the churchwardens was let to a tenant by 1540,<sup>40</sup> but was probably used earlier for church ales.

### ***The Reformation to 1840***

Sixteenth- and earlier 17th-century rectors were mainly resident, and from 1609 all were graduates.<sup>41</sup> The wording of institutions suggests that rectors were supposed to serve Showell chapel,<sup>42</sup> but there is no evidence that it remained in use. Religious conservatism before and during Mary's reign is suggested by continued use of Catholic invocations in wills, while parishioners made bequests towards repair of the 'church ornaments', high altar and bells, and for a new cope.<sup>43</sup> Edward Goodman (rector 1559–76), who also served Hook Norton as curate, subscribed to the Elizabethan settlement, however, and thereafter there were no signs of recusancy.<sup>44</sup> The long-serving Morgan Williams (rector 1576–1609) was judged sufficient in learning and supplied some preaching,<sup>45</sup> while his successor William Hollins, also a preacher, remained for 25 years, established a small charity, and was buried in the chancel.<sup>46</sup> Richard Washington (rector 1634–41) resigned two years after becoming precentor of Christ Church, Dublin, however.<sup>47</sup> Parishioners continued to make small bequests to the church.<sup>48</sup>

The religious tensions of the Interregnum had a destabilising effect on religious life. In 1658 Henry Beesley (rector 1641–75), sometime tutor of Thomas Pope, earl of Downe, and also vicar of Enstone, was ejected 'by the rotten commissioners of Oliver Cromwell' and replaced by William Smith.<sup>49</sup> He recovered the living at the Restoration and became a Doctor of Divinity, but 19 parishioners were reported as absenters in 1666 and 20 in the 1680s, presumably including the 10 Nonconformists noted in 1676, and three Quakers in 1682.<sup>50</sup> The church's difficulties were probably exacerbated by Beesley's successor Jabez

<sup>39</sup> *Oxon. Wills*, 96; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 178.18.

<sup>40</sup> OHC, M110/E/1.

<sup>41</sup> For incumbents: S. Spencer Pearce, 'Clergy of the Deaneries of Chipping Norton and Deddington', OAS Rep. (1916), 22–3; Oldfield, 'Clerus'; OHC, par. reg. transcripts; *Alumni Oxon. 1500–1714 and 1715–1886*.

<sup>42</sup> Until the 19th century: e.g. OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 21, f. 7 (Francis Payn 1739); TNA, PROB 11/625/188.

<sup>43</sup> OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 180.105; 180.190; 181.23; 182.40; 182.119; 182.120; 182.176; 181.207.

<sup>44</sup> Pearce, 'Clergy', 22–3. Catholic invocations disappeared in the 1560s.

<sup>45</sup> Pearce, 'Clergy', 23; Peel, *Register*, II, 135.

<sup>46</sup> TNA, PROB 11/157/239 (Edw. Hollins of Swerford, gent., 1630); OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 132/1/10 (Wm. Hollins, 1634); *Par. Colln*, III, 293; below, social hist. (welfare).

<sup>47</sup> *Alumni Oxon. 1500–1714*, IV, 1578.

<sup>48</sup> e.g. OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 5/3/14; 44/2/11; 136/3/36; 70/4/22; 148/3/23; 5/4/36.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* MS dd Par. Swerford c 2, f. 9; *Cal. SP Dom.* 1658–9, 28, 54, 157; *Walker Revised*, ed. Matthews, 295; *Calamy Revised*, ed. Matthews, 450; *Alumni Oxon. 1500–1714*, I, 101.

<sup>50</sup> *Bp Fell and Nonconf.* 39, 67 n., 68 n.

Brideoake (1676–91), one of a series of incumbents related to the lords of the manor, who in 1682–3 was suspended for a year for neglect of duty and espousing Papist views in a public house in Great Tew.<sup>51</sup> His successor John Brideoake (d. 1727), apparently more orthodox, refused a demand for a ‘processioning barrel’ (presumably of ale) on Holy Thursday in 1698.<sup>52</sup>

From 1714 Brideoake was also vicar of Whaddon (Bucks.),<sup>53</sup> and his successors included several other pluralists, some of whom appointed curates to serve in their place.<sup>54</sup> Even so in 1738, under the absentee Richard Lydiatt (rector 1732–9), there were two Sunday services and c.20 communicants, while Nonconformity was apparently limited to three families of Anabaptists and one of Quakers.<sup>55</sup> In 1759, when the rector’s father-in-law (the dean of Jersey) served the cure, the number of communicants had risen to 30 or 40, but by 1768 it stood at only 12–16.<sup>56</sup> Similar patterns continued in the late 18th century, and in 1802 the resident rector Nicholas Earle (d. 1823) reported that some ‘reprobates’ failed to attend church regularly.<sup>57</sup>

The number of Dissenters remained low at that date, generally comprising between two and four families of the ‘lower class’ (chiefly Baptists) who attended meetings in neighbouring Hook Norton.<sup>58</sup> One or two Catholics occasionally attended mass at Heythrop, or were attended at home by the earl of Shrewsbury’s priest.<sup>59</sup> Protestant Dissent increased from c.1817, by which time a meeting house had been established, leading in turn to a fall in the Anglican congregation.<sup>60</sup> Against this background the ‘amiable’ and ‘gentlemanlike’ James Chambers (rector 1836–46), fellow and vice-president of Magdalen College, organized a restoration of the parish church.<sup>61</sup>

## **Since 1849**

The church’s restoration and enlargement (and the later insertion of an organ)<sup>62</sup> apparently had little long-term impact in strengthening church life, probably partly due to the approach of Chambers’ long-serving successor Thomas Harris (rector 1849–95), another former fellow

<sup>51</sup> OHC, MS Archd. Oxon. c 30, f. 208; c 131, ff. 73–4; *ibid.* MS dd Par. Swerford c 2, ff. 4, 14.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* MS dd Par. Swerford c 2, f. 35.

<sup>53</sup> *Alumni Oxon. 1500–1714*, I, 179.

<sup>54</sup> *Secker’s Visit*, 156; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 557, f. 95v.

<sup>55</sup> *Secker’s Visit*, 156.

<sup>56</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 557, f. 96; d 560, f. 115.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* d 565, f. 179; c 327, p. 114 (claiming 20–30 communicants in 1787); d 567, f. 135v. (for 1802).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* d 563, f. 121v.; b 17, f. 22v.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* b 17, f. 22v.; d 573, f. 113; d 577, f. 118.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* c 644, ff. 46–7, 183, 235, 261; c 647, f. 60; d 581, f. 113v.

<sup>61</sup> *Alumni Oxon. 1715–1886*, I, 235; *Wilb. Dioc. Bks*, 11; below (church archit.).

<sup>62</sup> In 1867: below (church archit.).

and vice-president of Magdalen College.<sup>63</sup> Judged ‘better known as a longstanding chairman of the Chipping Norton board of poor law guardians ... than for his ministry’,<sup>64</sup> Harris continued the limited pattern of Sunday services, and in 1854 reported c.25 communicants and an average congregation of c.150 (representing about a third of the population).<sup>65</sup> His social conservatism and antipathy to Nonconformists was highlighted by his role as a JP in the notorious ‘Ascott Martyrs’ case of 1873, after which he and a fellow clerical justice were widely condemned for partiality.<sup>66</sup> The growth of Nonconformity within Swerford itself was reflected in the establishment of a Primitive Methodist chapel in a wooden hut in East End in 1879, which accommodated c.40 worshippers.<sup>67</sup>

Harris’s successors responded by establishing weekly prayer meetings and supplying an increased number of services.<sup>68</sup> Charles Shebbeare (rector 1898–1921), author of *Religion in An Age of Doubt* (1914), recalled the period from 1900 as being characterised by ‘religious earnestness in the village which touched Church and Chapel alike’. By 1918, however, only a ‘little flock’ kept up ‘steady religious ways’, and although there was no general hostility to religion there was ‘a disconcerting deadness’, several women saying that their faith had been destroyed by the war.<sup>69</sup> Most of Shebbeare’s successors served for just a few years,<sup>70</sup> and it was the non-Anglicans who showed greater vigour. In 1938 local Methodists replaced the old Primitive Methodist hut with a new ‘barn-like’ stone chapel on a nearby site, given by J.H. Turner of Milton-under-Wychwood. The building, designed by the Banbury architects Cripps and Stewart, included a vestry, and catered for c.60 worshippers.<sup>71</sup>

The late 20th century saw the usual decline in religious observance, despite ecumenical efforts such as joint Anglican-Methodist services.<sup>72</sup> The Methodist chapel closed in 1992 and was converted to a private residence.<sup>73</sup> By that time Anglican services were shared with the other churches of the united benefice, latterly by a team ministry based in

<sup>63</sup> *Alumni Oxon. 1715–1886*, II, 614.

<sup>64</sup> M. Curthoys, ‘Oxfordshire’s Tolpuddle? The Case of the Ascott Martyrs’, *Oxoniensia* (forthcoming); his memorial in the chancel was installed by the guardians and ‘other friends’.

<sup>65</sup> *Wilb. Visit.* 144–5.

<sup>66</sup> McClatchey, *Oxon. Clergy*, 198; *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 110; Curthoys, ‘Oxfordshire’s Tolpuddle?’.

<sup>67</sup> OHC, NM1/22/P/1 (photo); NM1/22/A2/1 (claiming that it was an old railway plate-layers’ hut); OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XV.1 (1881 edn); *Kelly’s Dir. Oxon.* (1907).

<sup>68</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 362, f. 406 and v.; c 368, f. 395v.; *Gore’s Visit.* 300.

<sup>69</sup> *Gore’s Visit.* 550–1.

<sup>70</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2036, presentation papers.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* NM1/22/A1/1; NM1/22/A2/1; OS Map 1:10000, SP 33 SE (1955 edn); *Kelly’s Dir. Oxon.* (1939); HER, PRN 519.

<sup>72</sup> OHC, NM1/22/F1/1 (united services in 1980s).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* NM1/22/F1/1; NM1/22/D/1.



Hook Norton. Early 21st-century congregations were usually very small, although 61 per cent of inhabitants identified as Christians in 2011.<sup>74</sup>

## CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

Swerford church is a middling-sized medieval building of unusual plan, much altered in the 19th century.<sup>75</sup> Built from Marlstone ashlar and rubble, and roofed in Welsh slate and lead, it comprises a three-bay nave, 19th-century north aisle, heavily buttressed chancel, south-west tower with Y-traceried bell openings and small broach spire, south porch, and north-east vestry.



The chancel's rubble walls and lower buttresses may be 13th-century, but the building's layout was apparently much altered c.1300, when the three-stage tower was constructed and nave widened. It has been suggested that the tower was built with the western end of a planned north aisle but that, because no arcade was ever built, the whole space was taken into the nave.<sup>76</sup> That might account for the western archway constructed immediately north of the tower arch: the two are similar in style, although the northern one is double- rather than triple chamfered and slightly lower. The Decorated (possibly late 14th-

<sup>74</sup> *Oxf. Dioc. Year Book* (2006/7), 65--6; *Census* 2011; local information.

<sup>75</sup> Except where indicated, account based: on Parker, *Eccl. Topog.* no. 86; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 510; NHLE, no. 1193995 (accessed May 2020); VCH fieldwork with Paul Barnwell, May 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 510; NHLE, no. 1193995 (accessed May 2020).

century) chancel arch stands opposite the buttress between the two arches rather than opposite the tower arch. More likely, the tower lean-to and double-arch arrangement provided structural support for a building located on the edge of the adjacent motte and bailey castle's deep ditch. Possibly (as later) the space beyond the northern arch was used as a vestry.<sup>77</sup>



The tower arch (left) and its lower northern companion.



The chancel arch and (left) the 1840s north aisle.

The early 14th-century south doorway is enclosed by a large later 14th-century porch featuring gargoyles and a parapet which matches that of the nave. The nave and chancel were apparently re-fenestrated and the nave heightened in the 15th century. The nave's

<sup>77</sup> Parker, *Eccl. Topog.* no. 86. The former partition between the two spaces is indicated by marks on the stonework of the arch between the tower and its lean-to.

south wall has three Perpendicular square-headed traceried windows, surmounted by single-light clerestory windows, of different style to the two northern clerestory windows. The south wall of the chancel has an unusual square-headed Perpendicular window with two main lights above a transom, and four small ogee-headed lights below (which include a renewed low-side window). A large blocked round-headed window at the east end of the chancel's south wall may be of similar or slightly later date. Fragments of 14th-century stained glass survive in the nave's south-east windows and the chancel's south window, and in the early 18th century the latter contained three now-lost figures including one of St Paul.<sup>78</sup>



The nave's south windows and porch.



The chancel's south wall.

By 1609 the chancel had been 'much ruined' thanks to a faulty roof, which was renewed that year.<sup>79</sup> Repairs were carried out in the early 18th century, and work on the chancel, paving, and seating was ordered in 1755.<sup>80</sup> In 1776 the north door was blocked to house a pew for Edward Witts of Swerford Park, his more invasive proposal to demolish part of the north wall and build a small extension in the churchyard having been successfully resisted.<sup>81</sup> Twenty years later the rector Nicholas Earle repewed the church at his own expense (though the present plain pews are later).<sup>82</sup> More significant was the church's restoration and enlargement in 1846–7, undertaken by the local mason John Powell to designs by H.J. Underwood.<sup>83</sup> The nave roof was replaced and the clerestory reformed, and

<sup>78</sup> Newton, *Oxon. Glass*, 197; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 510 (dating to 14th or 15th cent.).

<sup>79</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 264, ff. 34v. –35.

<sup>80</sup> *Par. Colln*, III, 293; OHC, MS Archd. Oxon. d 13, f. 13.

<sup>81</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 456, f. 60; *ibid.* MS dd Par. Swerford b 1, f. 29; *cf.* above, social hist. (1535–1800).

<sup>82</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 327, p. 114; MSS dd Par. Swerford b 1, f. 30 (allocation and boarding of pews, 1849). For minor repairs in 1788–9, 1801, and 1835–6: *ibid.* MS Archd Oxon. c 107, ff. 50–2, 71–2, 121, 124–5.

<sup>83</sup> OHC, SWER/283 2 (plans); *ibid.* MSS dd Par. Swerford b 10 (contract); b 1, f. 5.



the doorway and staircase to the rood loft (present in 1812)<sup>84</sup> were presumably removed. The chief addition was a new north aisle with a three-bay arcade, octagonal piers, trefoil lancets, and a two-light east window, while a lean-to vestry was added on the north side of the chancel. In 1853 the rector Thomas Harris restored the chancel and inserted Perpendicular-style tracery in the east window, the window's stained glass being added in 1862 and 1876.<sup>85</sup>



The church viewed  
from the north.

Late 19th-century changes included installation of an organ at the west end of the church in 1867, requiring removal of a wooden gallery previously used to seat children during services.<sup>86</sup> The bells were restored in 1894 and again in 1998, when a sixth bell was added to improve the peal.<sup>87</sup> In the 1930s the rector Basil Challenor moved the organ into the north aisle and refurbished the chancel, upgrading the altar and communion rails to oak and replacing the pews with two clergy stalls.<sup>88</sup> Electric light was installed in 1951.<sup>89</sup> In 2020 the nave was again reroofed, and major repairs carried out to the windows and stonework.<sup>90</sup> The churchyard was extended in 1863 and 1925–6, the land donated respectively by Samuel Davis of Swerford Park and the rector H.F. Wilson.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Bodl. MS Don. e 107, f. 50. Marks on the stonework of the chancel arch may indicate the location of former rood fixings.

<sup>85</sup> *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1877); Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 510.

<sup>86</sup> OHC, MS dd Par. Swerford b 1, ff. 23v.–24; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. b 41, f. 215v.

<sup>87</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1907 edn); OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1863/4, faculty pps; *Banbury Guardian*, 14 May 1998; 3 Dec. 1998.

<sup>88</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2036, faculty pps.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/6021/> (accessed 2020).

<sup>91</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2036.