

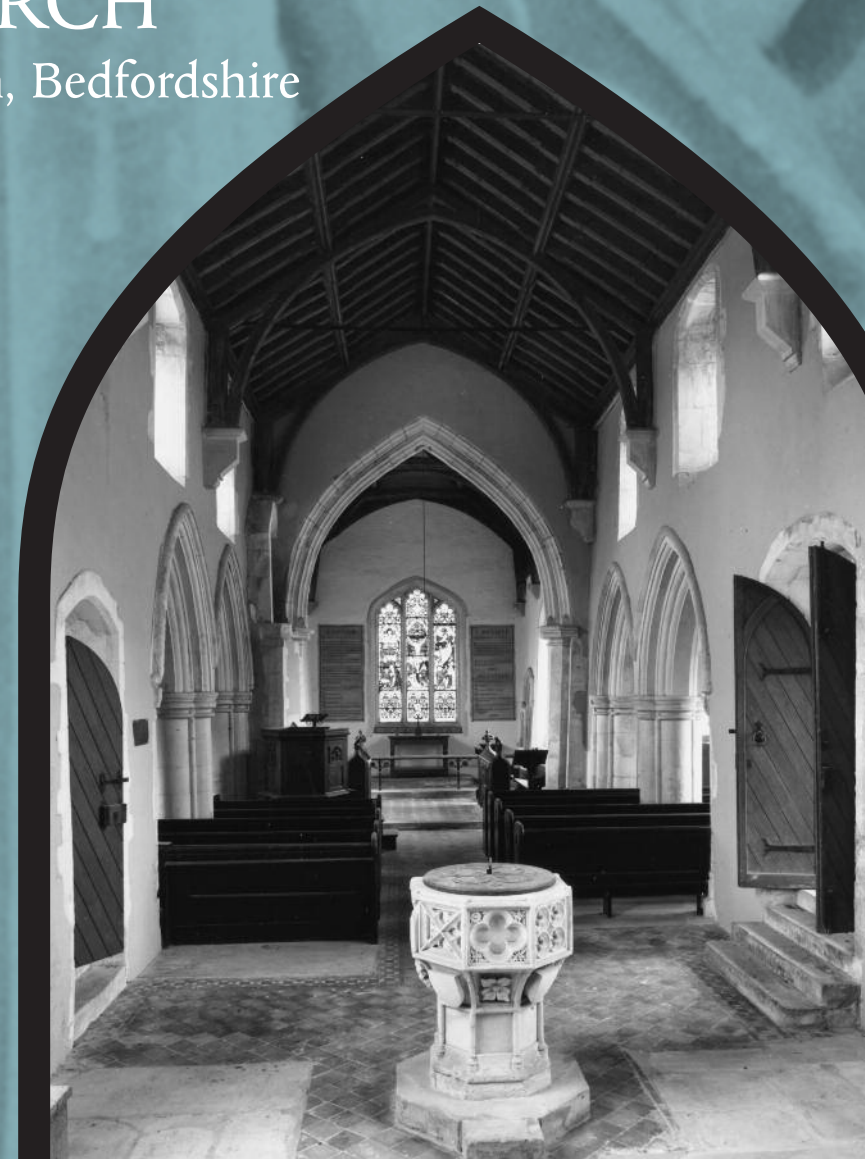


THE CHURCHES
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ST GEORGE'S CHURCH

Edworth, Bedfordshire



THE CHURCHES
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Edworth, Bedfordshire

ST GEORGE'S CHURCH

by Anthony Barnes (Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and Director of the Redundant Churches Fund (1984–92))

HISTORY

Edworth lies close to the Great North Road (A1) where it follows the course of a former Roman Road. The village is tiny, only amounting to a hundred people for a few years in the 19th century, but its origins are old. A Roman pavement was found at the old rectory and the suffix 'worth' means an enclosed settlement, in this case Edda's, a name dating from well before the Norman Conquest. To the east of the church there are traces of a moated site, suggesting that the church may not always have been as far as it now is from its village.

*Front cover: Interior looking east
(Christopher Dalton)*

*Left: Interior looking west, with the
chancel stalls in the foreground
(Christopher Dalton)*

Exterior from the south-east (Bedfordshire and Luton Archives Service)

EXTERIOR

St George's is reached by taking the track to Church farm, off the Hinxworth road, and crossing the farmyard to where the church stands on a meticulously tended slope beyond. One of its charms is the unusual variety of materials used in its construction: cobbles, clunch, rubble, brick, with rendering on the south side and part of the tower. The quality of much of the carving around the windows and in the

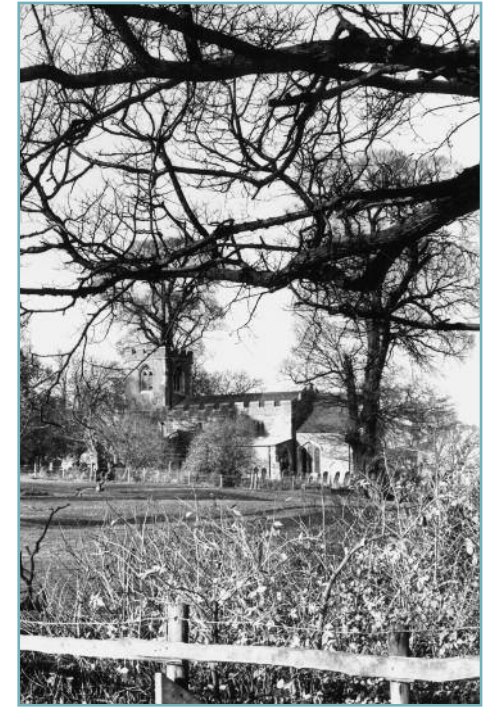
porch is unexpectedly high for so isolated a building. This can probably be explained by the fact that the church belonged to St Neot's Priory for much of the Middle Ages.

The nave dates from the early 13th century, the time of the first recorded priest. To this were added aisles on each side in the early 14th century, when the chancel was also either rebuilt or added. The tower is from later in that



Right: 'So isolated a building' (Christopher Dalton)

Below: The church before the chancel was shortened in 1836 (Bedfordshire and Luton Archives Service)



century, at a time when confidence was returning after the Black Death of 1348–49; and the porches and battlemented clerestory are 15th-century work. The north porch, through which one enters, still has its original roof. Directly opposite is the south porch within which are two scratch dials, for telling the times for mass from the sun's shadow: these must be older than the porch itself.



INTERIOR

Large 15th-century windows between the porches and the tower admit floods of light, emphasising the unusual balance of the interior. It is almost as if an early-19th-century architect, told to build in the Gothic style, had been unable quite to forget his training in classical architecture.



The south aisle is only a few inches narrower than the north, both running from the porches to the line of the chancel arch. The east window of this aisle has lovely flowing tracery. There is also a 14th-century piscina which suggests that at some time there were three altars in use.

In the chancel the stalls are largely 15th century with carved finials – poppyheads, a lion and a baboon. There is a second mediaeval piscina here and in the north aisle a pillar piscina, probably dating from the 12th century, has been introduced. Above it are traces of wall paintings from when the aisle was built. At one time more were visible but have subsequently been plastered over. Here also is the stair to the former rood loft. Part of the screen was incorporated in the pulpit during restoration work in 1908–09. More was at one time in an outhouse at the old rectory. The soft stone invites graffiti: some early ones are to be seen in this aisle.

West of the porches there are two beautifully carved capitals on the south window sill, saved from one of the restorations. The fine tower arch again reminds one of the quality of so much of the work here. The tower contains three bells: treble by William Haulsey of St Ives 1623; second by Newcombe of Leicester and Bedford 1615 and tenor by Kebyll of London 15th century. The frame and fittings, by Day of Eye in Suffolk, date from the 1908–09 restoration.





Left: Interior during repairs in the 1970s (Bedfordshire and Luton Archives Service)

Below left: The font (Christopher Dalton)

Below right: Graffiti on the soft stone (Christopher Dalton)

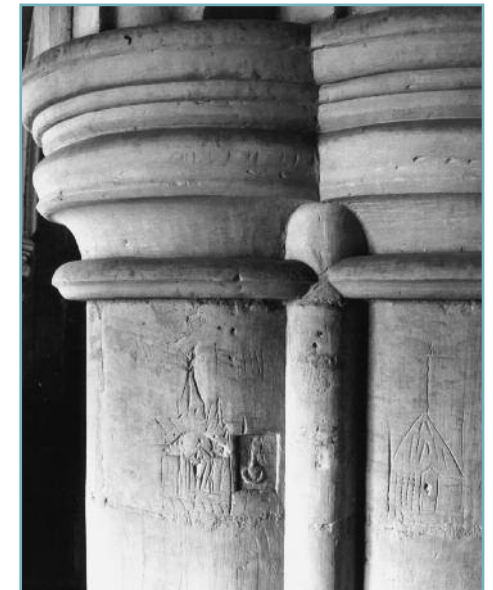
In the south side of the chancel is a 14th-century stained glass figure of St Edmund with other pieces of mediaeval and later glass around it. In the clerestory on the south side is a 15th-century figure of St James and there is other plain old glass elsewhere, but nowhere near as much as was reported by G Boissier in 1827. The east window, by Heaton, Butler and Bayne, 1873, is in memory of members of the Smyth family, who still live in the house next door. The west window in the tower is in memory of the Revd Henry Buttenshaw, rector here for 30 years, who died in 1891. He was responsible for rescuing the building, which was described as

being in a 'disgraceful state' in 1852, suffering seriously from damp (as it was again in 1972) and partly because there had been no resident clergyman for half a century. The history of neglect is confirmed by the very minimal 1801 inventory of the church's goods.

A copper roof was installed in 1787, but was subsequently said never to have been watertight. (This was the time when copper was first used for ships' bottoms, to enable them to go faster and to reduce downtime when they had to be cleaned. Was this an early extension of a technology for whose development Lord Sandwich, from not

far away, was responsible?) In 1836 the chancel was shortened, probably because of instability due to the sloping ground. The dates of the Smyth graves indicate where it stood formerly. The restoration of 1875–76 was by Raynes and Shum of London and cost £800, mostly found by Mr Buttenshaw and his family. In 1908–09 there was further work, costing £400, largely necessitated by the continuing eastward settlement of the building. It was supervised by William Weir, architect to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

By 1973 the population had dwindled to less than 50 and in June 1976 the church was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund (now The Churches Conservation Trust). Since then further repairs have been carried out, chiefly to the stonework and in the spirit of William Weir. As a result of these repairs, required mainly because of the soft nature of the clunch, the church looks all patches; but many visitors find the mixture of surfaces and textures delightful. As Pevsner observes, St George's looks 'gratifyingly not over-attended-to'.



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that the church is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

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Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

NEARBY ARE THE TRUST CHURCHES OF

St Denys, Little Barford
2 miles S of St Neots off B1043

St Mary, Lower Gravenhurst
10 miles SE of Bedford off A6

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges with thanks access to research and material provided by Canon Christopher Dalton in the preparation of this guide.

Right: 15th-century figure of St James (Christopher Dalton)
Back cover: Graffiti made respectable by age (Christopher Dalton)

