

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

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ALL SAINTS'
CHURCH

SPETCHLEY
WORCESTER





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ALL SAINTS' CHURCH
SPETCHLEY, WORCESTER

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 300 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and be encouraged to see our other churches. Some are in towns; some in remote country districts. Some are easy and others hard to find but all are worth the effort.

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BAPTIST**

6 miles SW of Pershore off A4104

WORCESTER ST SWITHUN

*In city centre in Church Street, off High
Street*

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

SPETCHLEY, WORCESTER

by R. SOWDEN

The parish of Spetchley lies on the A422 Worcester to Stratford road, about four miles from Worcester Cathedral. It comprises an area of 779 acres (315 hectares), surrounding and including Spetchley Park which for four centuries has been the focal point of local life. The church of All Saints adjoins the estate. The population, which has fluctuated in the past 50 years, currently stands at about 90.

HISTORY

A settlement existed here in the pre-Domesday period, being known in the 9th century as Spaecleah tun when Coenwolf, King of Mercia, 'upheld the law of Christ over the common folk'. The name 'Spetchley' means a glade where moots were held. A moot was a local assembly or parliament and Low Hill, the meeting place of Oswaldslo Hundred, is near Spetchley. A church was referred to at Spechelegh in 1291 and an early cathedral record indicates that the rector had a minor office to perform. Other references to the cathedral and monastery of Worcester state that the monks held 'manses' (lands) in Spetchley, given by Bishop Oswald in 988 AD. It may be presumed that they worshipped locally in a chapel; early 13th century references to a chapel at Spetchley suggest that the status of a parish church was not acquired until later in the 13th century. The church's name 'All Saints' is recorded in 1330, and a variant of the village name 'Spechesley' is used in the 16th century, when the first references through an Order in Council of 1561 to rights of sepulture (or burial) are made.

The first known rector was Richard de Beverborne, under the patronage of John de Everly, in 1230 when a payment of 2 shillings per annum was made to the cathedral. A later rector was granted a papal licence in 1397 to let the rectory whilst he followed university studies, or served a bishop in the Court of Rome.

The parish registers date from 1539 and are deposited in the Diocesan Record Office, St Helen's Church, Worcester. They indicate the nature of the population and the changes which followed various historical developments in the district and country. Principal amongst the family changes was the acquisition of the Spetchley estate by the Berkeley family in 1606, from its former owners the Sheldons. Earlier squires had been members of the Worcester county family, the Lyttletons. Much of the architecture, development and decoration in the church are attributable to the presence of the Berkeleys in the Hall, serving as patrons and neighbours of the church.

The occupations of those who have worshipped in All Saints throughout the seven-and-a-half centuries of its existence catalogue the changes in the English countryside: landowner, farmer, household staff, farm labourer, blacksmith, railway worker, council worker, gamekeeper, estate manager, teacher, pensioner, policeman, housewife and road patrolman. The records of births, marriages and deaths show the ebb and flow of families through the village by marriage or vocation. The memorials in the church and the headstones in the churchyard are further testimony to the diversity of those who have seen the church in so many different lights.

DESCRIPTION

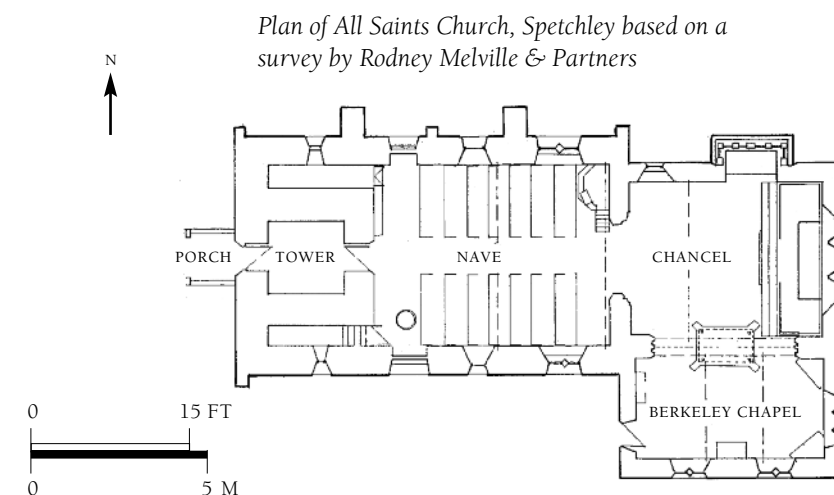
The church is built of grey lias (a limestone), with quoins, windows and other features in a local brown sandstone. It consists of a west tower, nave, chancel and south chapel. The external stonework bears signs of simple activity: the measurement of time on pin dials scratched in the stonework of the old doorway on the south wall and the south-west corner of the church wall itself, the grooves in the stonework around several doors made by the sharpening of weapons when the churchyard was the assembly point for local training of the soldiery, and the scratched initials and crosses which may be silent witness to betrothals or pilgrimages made here. Above the doorway to the south or Berkeley chapel is a fine stone-carved shield depicting the Berkeley arms and including a lion mask. Former doorways on the north and south sides of the nave have been blocked, although the wooden doors themselves remain *in situ*.

INTERIOR

The visitor to the church approaches through a simple timbered porch and enters the round-headed west door, below the 17th century two-stage tower built within the west end of the nave (and from which the four square pinnacles have been removed in relatively recent times). The nave and chancel, which can accommodate about 80 worshippers, have features from the early 14th century. The chancel arch, also probably dating to the 14th century, is of red sandstone and quite plain. The damaged piscina in the south-east corner of the nave testifies to the former existence of an altar there.

On the south side of the chancel is the Berkeley Chapel, dedicated to the Holy Trinity and constructed in 1614, although some earlier material was reused, such as the 14th century windows in the south wall. Subsequently this chapel has been ornamented with many family memorials. In the west wall is the former private family entrance to the chapel.

Amongst the oldest furniture in the church are the two chests, one a dugout in the nave, possibly dating to the 13th century, the other a somewhat later hinged, metal-bound, locked chest in the chancel and once used to house the church plate, cruets and linen. The stone font may date from the 12th century and stands in the south-west corner of the nave. Its top and wooden cover with metal cross are later. The altar is a late 17th century



communion table in oak, contemporary with the oak panelled reredos in the sanctuary. In the early 19th century the wooden pulpit, painted blue and mounted by oak steps, was installed and the lectern with Jacobean cherub detail was acquired. The simple altar rail with wrought iron configuration is of the same period.

The floor throughout the church is of simple quarry tiles, a few mediaeval examples being set in the chancel floor, with 19th century decorated styles in the side chapel. During 1992, when the tiled floor in the nave was being repaired, two arched brick vaults were revealed which had previously been unknown to local people: one bore the name Palmer, the other was unnamed; subsequent repair work has revealed a ledger stone below the tiles, adjacent to one of these vaults. Wrought iron rails close off both the Berkeley chapel and the 16th century bay window on the north side of the chancel. This latter is most unusual in a church and was built to accommodate a tomb-chest. It is interesting to observe that this tomb, which is decorated with stone shields, is apparently unused but is believed to have been intended for John Slade, who died in 1597. Slade himself was buried in Hindlip church, about six miles away.

Of the windows, some are 14th century and in the nave are a few samples of mediaeval glass. The nave windows are of Decorated style and are symmetrical; the chancel east window of three lights is Victorian, but 15th century Perpendicular in style. The stained glass in the church is all by John Hardman. In the north wall of the chancel a window of 1860 depicts The Annunciation; the east window of the Berkeley chapel (1874) shows The Resurrection; and in a window on the south side was installed in 1876 a scene of Jesus's appearances after the Resurrection to Mary Magdalene, to the disciples at Emmaus, to Thomas and to Peter in Galilee; the second window on the south side of the chapel depicts a bishop: St Robert, with St Catherine, and portraits of the late Squire Berkeley and his widow below. To the north of the tower is a blocked lancet window.

MONUMENTS AND MEMORIALS

The monuments and memorials throughout are executed in a variety of styles: in stone, marble, alabaster, brass and wood. A profusion of heraldic symbols are found on several of the Berkeley shields which bear variously a small crescent or star placed centrally, or a silver label (grid) across the

top. These marks of 'cadence' indicate the order of birth of sons and grandsons. The principal monument in alabaster lies between the chancel and the side chapel; it is dedicated to Sir Rowland Berkeley (d.1611) and his wife Katharine, née Haywood, whose effigies lie on the chest – the detail of their apparel is an important depiction of 17th century dress: Katharine's feet lie on a large dog. The whole is covered by a semicircular panelled stone vault with obelisks capped with balls at each corner. Rowland Berkeley served as MP for the City of Worcester and was the first of the Berkeleys to live at Spetchley. On the pillar near the monument are the iron brackets for a helmet of c.1570 with the Berkeley crest and coat of arms, and for a tabard. The helmet is to be replaced in 1998; unfortunately the tabard disappeared many years ago.

On the south wall of the chapel is the figure of Sir Robert Berkeley (d.1656), son of Sir Rowland, who as a Royalist had an encounter with Oliver Cromwell after the Battle of Worcester in 1651. He also served as a King's Bench judge (his effigy here depicts him in his judge's robes) and was imprisoned in the Tower of London for a short time, for an offence in support of King Charles and his Ship Tax. He endured the destruction of

the Hall in the park after the battle and was prepared to raise his family in lesser accommodation based on the stables. His family origins may be followed via the thirteen heraldic devices surrounding his tomb. It was Robert Berkeley who built the family chapel and also had his parents' tomb erected. An interesting discovery during recent repair work was the remnant of a painted text behind the overmantel to this tomb, which



Sir Rowland Berkeley (d.1611) and his wife Katharine
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)



Berkeley Chapel: monument to Sir Rowland and Lady (Katharine) Berkeley in foreground
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

suggests that more of the church was so adorned before the later vogue for whitening church walls obliterated the earlier decoration schemes.

Sir Robert's descendants are also remembered by other memorials in the chapel: Thomas his son (d.1693) who married Ann Darrell (d.1692) became a Roman Catholic and moved to Ravenhill, Tibberton. Several Worcestershire parish records of 1674 highlight such changes through churchwardens' presentations of some names as 'papists'. Robert Berkeley succeeded Thomas and is still known as the provider of the Berkeley Almshouses in Worcester. His widow, née Blake, erected his monument in



Robert Berkeley's monument erected by his wife Elizabeth (d.1708)
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

the south-east corner of the chapel, complete with weeping cherubs, a sarcophagus and garlands of flowers. The succession continued through Thomas and Mary Berkeley (d.1719) and later heirs are remembered in marble and brass wall tablets of the 19th century. On the south wall of the chancel by the entrance to the chapel is a wall monument with pillars, shields and a cherub, commemorating Anne Smyth, née Berkeley (d.1638), wife of Prebendary William Smyth whose brass is mentioned below.

The recently restored hatchments on the south and west walls of the chapel commemorate Sir Robert Berkeley (d.1804) who married Apollonia Lee in 1792 (black background with motto 'Resurgam'); Robert Berkeley (d.1874) who married Henrietta Sophia Benfield in 1822 (black background with motto 'Requiescat in Pace') and Henrietta Sophia Berkeley (d.1857) (left side of hatchment black, with motto 'Dieu avec nous').

A fine brass plate is set into the floor on the north side of the chancel, to the memory of Prebendary William Smyth (d.1658). Adjacent is a small brass shield containing the names of Rowland (d.1611) and Katharine Berkeley (d.1629) who are commemorated in the fine monument between chancel and chapel, referred to above. This small brass probably marks their burial place.

Other parishioners recalled in wall plaques are Palmers, Wheelers, Rector William Jeffreys and his wife Elizabeth (d.1792) and John Watson (d.1952), a former churchwarden.

Other woodwork in the church includes two 19th century Jacobean-style chairs, an impressive High Victorian prayer desk and an alms board in the base of the tower recording alms given in the 18th century. The nave is fitted with Victorian pine pews; simple choir benches furnish the chancel and there is old oak panelling in the sanctuary.

The parish's communion plate is now in the care of the Parochial Church Council of White Ladies Aston with Churchill and Spetchley: it consists of a chalice, cover paten and flagon made by RT c.1680 and a paten by DB c.1688.

The west tower houses four 15th century bells, probably all from the Worcester foundry: a complete pre-Reformation ring is a remarkable survival. Only one bell, the third, is inscribed, with the words 'Sancte Petre ora pro nobis' (St Peter pray for us). The wooden bell-frame is probably

early 17th century and therefore earlier than the tower. Perhaps the previous tower was timber-framed as are a number in the Worcester area.

The churchyard is in the care of the successor PCC of White Ladies Aston, whose church has been the parish church since April 1987 when Spetchley church came into the care of The Churches Conservation Trust. The initial programme of repairs was carried out under the direction of Mr John Bucknall, later repairs by Mr Andrew Brookes of Rodney Melville's practice in Leamington Spa. With the co-operation of the Trust, the PCC has helped to ensure that All Saints continues to have a role in the life of the village, by offering occasional services and other events, thus enabling the relevance of this ancient building to be maintained for many years to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Hereford & Worcester County Archives

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Miss Juliet Berkeley, Spetchley Park

D Findlay, Spetchley, All Saints (Council for the Care of Churches report) 1985

Front cover: 17th century tower (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

Back cover: North side of church showing bay window (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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