



A short history of St Peter and St Paul - Scaldwell

In 1961, when Pevsner's 'Northamptonshire' was published, the compilers said of this church: "ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL. Unbuttressed Norman W Tower. C13. N aisle windows, S arcade of later C13. Two bays, very primitive octagonal piers, double-chamfered arches. The S doorway, if correctly rebuilt, could be contemporary in spite of its round arch, and the W lancet window certainly is. The N arcade is taller and later. The N chapel was built at the same time. Divers Perp window. Extensive restoration in 1863 by William Slater and Gillet."

This bare-boned outline of the history of this church gives no idea of the legends and details lovingly preserved within the village. It is likely that it began as a monk's cell on Church Hill, built to house itinerant priests, sent out from Bury St Edmunds when the Abbot of that foundation was given a brief by Alfred the Great to spread Christianity throughout Mercia after he had pushed the Danes towards the sea and into political agreements.

The lower part of the tower has been identified as Saxon, but the first floor is Norman, perhaps because the cruder design and mortar of the earlier builders could not sustain the upper floors. When the Domesday records were compiled in 1087, they stated that "King William (the Conqueror) gave it (Scaldwell) to St Edmund for the soul of Queen Matilda". This was his wife, who had died in 1083 and it suggests that the village was of some consequence. In honour of this gift, the North Chapel was dedicated to St. Edmund. The early Norman font must have been installed at this time.

The main part of the building was developed within the following two centuries, constructing a curious church which was broader than it was long, and which must have appeared completely disproportionate in the middle ages when the section, which now houses the organ, was another side chapel.

In the sixteenth century the local people gave generously to the church, mainly for lighting; and in 1557 the then priest, Thomas Fletcher, left money to buy plate and vestments, initially to be used for his own funeral service.

After the Reformation, Scaldwell parishioners, like many in England, must have found it difficult to conform to the new Protestantism, and many secretly worshipped in the old Catholic manner. In 1581 'monuments of Popery' were discovered in the Town House, including several alabaster figures, candlesticks, censers and bells. Legends maintain that the priest was still officiating the mass in a private house, either Townwell Cottage, which stands just across the church path and which may have been a priest's house before a more imposing rectory (now demolished) was built next to it; or else in another building called The Town House, which may have stood where the remains of the Town Wells are now, on the village green. In 1621, four bells were made for the church. Another one was added in 1682. They are still rung for services and for pleasure by a flourishing group of village bellringers.

During the Civil war, Scaldwell church did not escape the desecration made by the Parliamentary forces. We know something by hearsay; in the 1840s, J. Mason Neale, a writer of popular hymns, produced a novel based on his knowledge of Scaldwell in 1645, which he undoubtedly gathered from local people or from records which have been lost. Fairfax's horse was supposedly stabled in the church, and there are hacked marks on the pillars of the nave, which suggest deliberate vandalism of about that time. In the novel, the stained glass windows were removed by the villagers in order to keep them safe:

....."they began to take out the glass, keeping it as far as possible to the leads. The Churchwarden handed it to Will Sharp, who deposited it safely in a large basket or hamper brought for that purpose..... There was a representation of the Crucifixion in the central lights with S. Mary and the beloved Apostle. The side lights were filled with various saints and the founder's arms....." "By dawn all the glass had been removed and the pillars covered with lime and their beauty so much disfigured that it was reasonable to hope that they might escape". 'Herbert Tresham' by Dr. J. Mason Neal, 1842 pub. Rivingtons, then the S.P.C.K. The paint and gilt of the rood screen was also limewashed, the font cover was hidden in a barn and the baskets of glass were placed in a dry ditch to the south east of the neighbouring field and covered with earth and rubbish. The windows never re-appeared, although many attempts have been made to find them. In 1911 there were still traces of limewash which had once covered the church ornaments.

By the eighteenth century, the village church was so well attended that a gallery had been built on the west side of the church in which a small orchestra played accompaniments to the services (similar to those described in Thomas Hardy's 'Under the Greenwood Tree'). One of the instrumentalists was George Clarke, who was the village schoolmaster, but who was more famous as a topographical artist whose drawings of Northamptonshire buildings included views of this church. In 1863, when the church suffered many alterations, the gallery was taken down and the orchestra was disbanded to be replaced by a small organ, which in turn was superseded by the present organ in the 1870s.

During earlier times the church was lit by candles and the brass candlesticks on the lectern were taken from an older three-decker pulpit, which was also removed when the church was renovated by zealous Victorians.

Apart from removing the gallery, builders Slater and Gillett moved the font to its present position. On its rim can still be seen the marks of staples which closed the lid during the reign of King John. The original cover, which was removed during the civil war, is now missing and



the present cover was made by Charles Brown, a 19th century churchwarden who was also the village wheelwright. Some of the renovations caused some dissension in the village, especially the removal of the old family pews in 1863, which caused emigration to the chapel by parishioners. Alternative services were held in an upper floor barn at Home Farm for a while, then the farmer gave land for a chapel to be built in East End, which was finished in 1868. Another innovation in 1863 was the replacement of the earlier altar by the present holy table. Isabel Vera Isham was the young daughter of Sir Charles and Lady Isham. He was the squire of Scaldwell when the village largely belonged to the Lamport estate. When Isabel died, aged seven, in 1868, the Ishams added greatly to the church in her memory. The carved ivy leaves which decorate the lights (left) are a memento of her initials. The family also donated the oil lights to the church. When the burners of those originals burnt out, Captain Soames of Scaldwell House replaced the lamps with larger and brighter

lights. However, these oil lamps needed constant care, and when electricity came to the village in 1936, the original oil lamps given in memory of Isabel Vera Isham were put into use again, as they were more easily adaptable.

The present stained glass was installed in the 1870s. In 1878 the Communion Plate was replaced in silver and the plated version was given to a charity to be redistributed overseas, supposedly to Barbados. However, in 1924, the vicar received a letter from Taranaki, New Zealand, where the Scaldwell plate is probably still doing honourable service. Queen Victoria's fiftieth jubilee in 1887 was commemorated in Scaldwell by planting the lime trees on the Green; and also by installing a clock on the church tower. The churchyard proved insufficiently large by 1909 and part of the Townwell gardens were annexed to extend the burial ground. It was felt this new area would last until the 1950s or '60s, but by 1990 it had not been used; suggesting that villagers were either moving from Scaldwell, or not being buried in the local churchyard, or that the elderly population was leaving rural villages.

During the First World War, when recruiting was at its height, the Bishop of Peterborough made a pilgrimage through the Diocese and preached on the village green, emphasising the need for fellowship, both patriotic and political, and drawing attention to the poster saying 'Your King and Country need you'. In fact, 10 men from Scaldwell were killed between 1914 and 1918, and they are remembered on the brass plate in the North aisle, with those who fell in the Second World War.

In 1940, during the worst period of the war, a layreader conducted daily services on the village green between 9.20 and 9.30 a.m. They were attended by the women of the village, who stood round the old well memorial, which was used as an altar. Presumably this was because it was a central position which could be seen from almost every part of the village.



✧ Church of S. S Peter & Paul ✧
✧ Scaldwell ✧



INTERIOR VIEW OF SCALDWELL CHURCH

Scaldwell Church as it
was a hundred years ago
Photographed from a pen-
ink sketch by Geo. Clark of
Scaldwell. R. Kerchauer

The villagers raised nearly £4,000 in 1960 for crucial repairs to the church, replacing rotten beams and decayed stonework, and renewing the heating system. The stars on the ceiling were restored and the corbel heads beneath were also repaired. Since then, some work has been done on the church almost every year.

THE TOWER

THE FONT

THE MAIN BODY OF THE CHURCH

RENOVATIONS

LIGHTING

CLOCK

CHURCHYARD EXTENSION

STRUCTURAL REPAIRS

Saxon and Early Norman

Early Norman

Thirteenth century

1840s and 1863

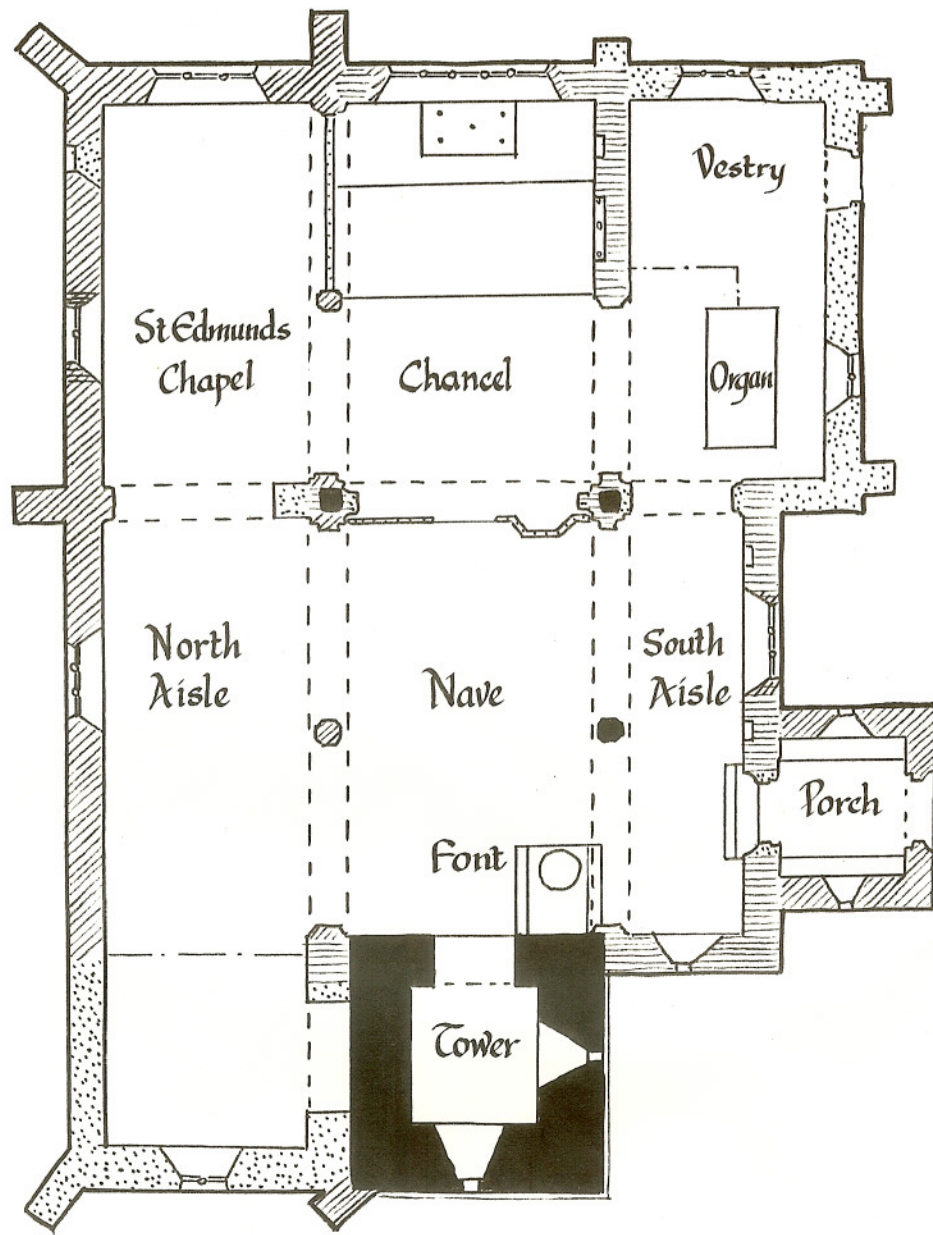
1863 and 1936

1887

1909

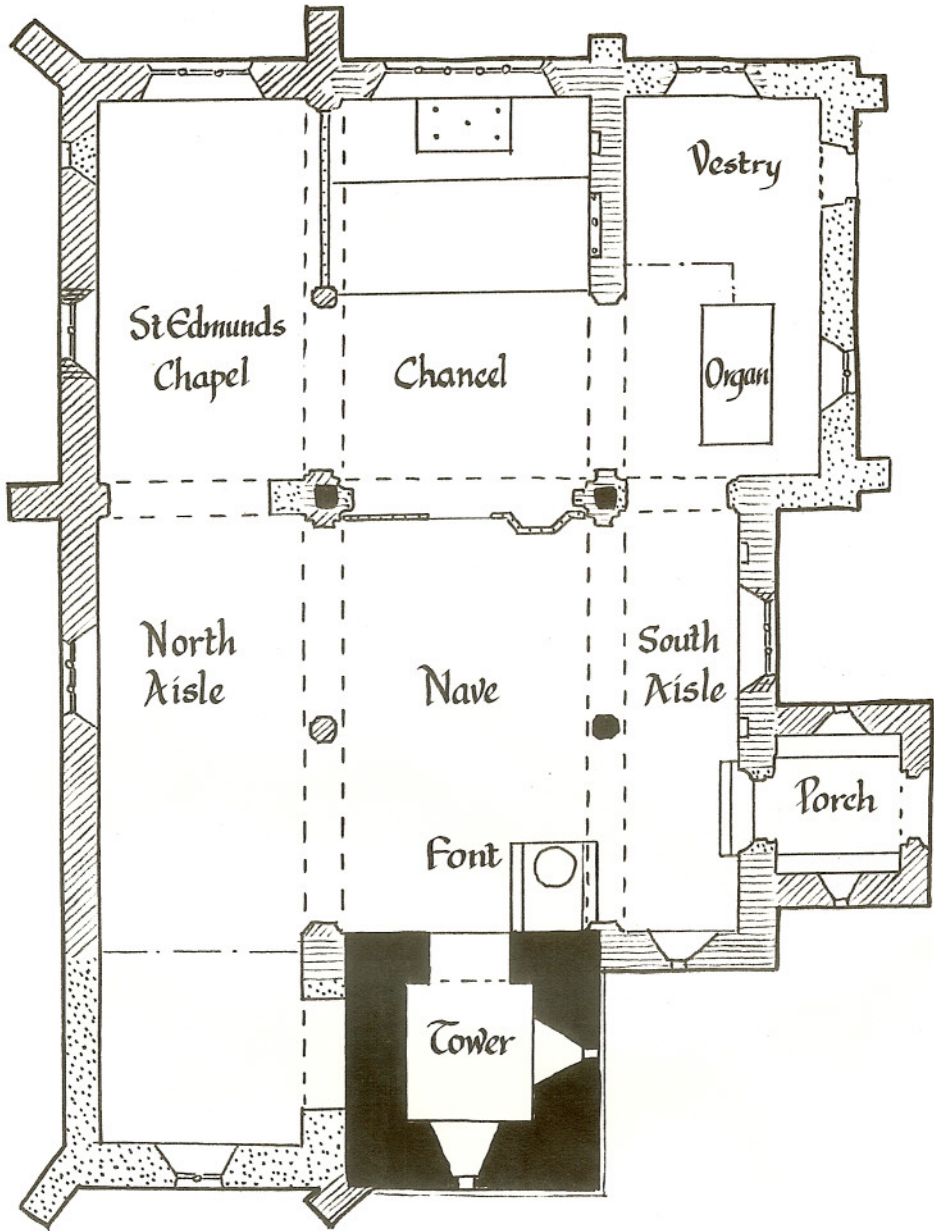
1960 onwards





Church Plan Key

- 12th Century ~ Norman
- ▨ 13th Century
- ▧ 15th Century
- ▩ 19th Century ~ Victorian



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- 13th Century
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