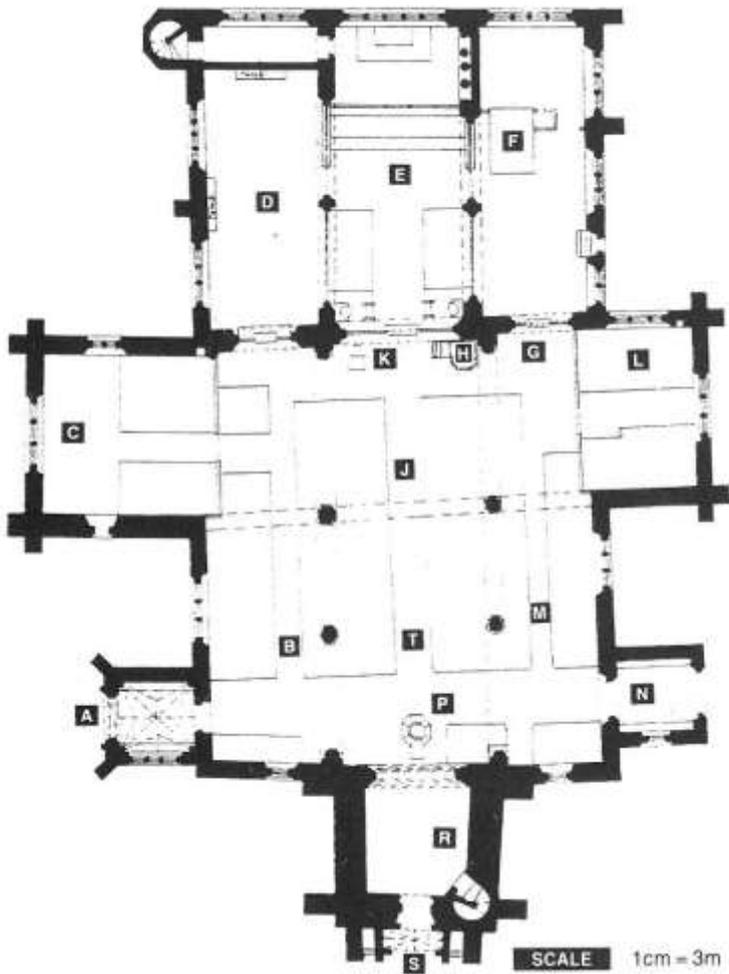


# St Mary's • Rushden



# Plan of St Mary's Church, Rushden, Northamptonshire



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## Key to the Church Plan (*left*)

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*This guide was revised and updated in 2016. Much of the information is unchanged from the guide produced by B W Paine in 1974 which, in turn took material from the guides of Rev Travers Stoney (1934) and Rev I D Douglas-Jones (1955).*

# Introduction to Rushden St Mary's Church Guide

“We are the body of Christ and each one of us is part of it.”

*1 Corinthians 12.27*

This verse, which has been the chosen text for Rushden St Mary's for some years, reminds us that the *church* is fundamentally *people* — people bound together in relationship with God and with one another through Jesus Christ. Over the centuries, God's people at Rushden St Mary's have had the privilege of using a rather splendid building for their worship, ministry and mission. The building has been modified and additions made over the years in order to meet the needs of succeeding generations. These changes continue as the “body of Christ” at St Mary's continues to proclaim the good news of Jesus to the people of Rushden.

I warmly invite you into our church ‘home’ and hope that its beauty and peace may speak to you of the love of God in Jesus, who alone “remains the same, yesterday, today and forever.” *Hebrews 13.8*

Rev Stephen K Prior  
*Rector*

## A Walk Around the Outside

Approaching the church from Rushden High Street, you have a clear view of the tower and spire, 172 feet high, erected at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The *crockets* which decorate the spire may have originally been built to enable steeple-jacks to carry out repairs in the days before scaffolding. Freeman (*Churches of the Arch-deaconry of Northampton*) described the tapering spire as “most beautiful in its airy grace”. Part of the tower dates from a century earlier, but was enlarged and strengthened to carry the spire while John of Gaunt held Higham castle.

Climbing the churchyard steps near the Church Hall and following the path to the right, you come to the North Porch. Of 15<sup>th</sup> century construction with an empty niche over the arched doorway, it is notable in having a room (*parvise*) built over it. This room, with its original fireplace and window, was accessed by a wooden staircase, now long gone. Over the centuries of its history it has been a priest's lodging, a hermit's cell, a school and, in 1850, a home for an elderly woman; it now serves as a store room.

Behind you, as you face the North Porch, a large railed tomb stands in honour of a flourishing 19<sup>th</sup> century farming family of Dearloves from Higham Park. Turning left, you see the memorial to Canon J T Barker, perhaps the most notable figure in Rushden's history. Beyond this memorial in the wall of the North Transept is a 13<sup>th</sup> century doorway, now blocked up, which led to the Chapel of St John. As you walk towards the East end of the building, look up to see stone faces and gargoyles. Many types of face and expressions are represented here, revealing the broad humour of the medieval craftsmen.



Near the East wall of the church is a large *altar tomb* dating from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century— of a type rarely seen in the open air. The inscription in dog-Latin is difficult to read but can be translated: “Pray for the souls of Willi Peeke and Margarete his wife & for the soul of Johis Peeke lately married to Priscilla whose souls God have mercy upon”.

Another ancient tomb is situated on the South side of the church opposite the old priest's door. Again the Latin inscription is almost illegible: “Here lie the bodies of Willm. Ives and Anne his wife: she died 25<sup>th</sup> May 1662 and he died 24<sup>th</sup> February 1669. Their sons, Willm. and Francis, and one only daughter Susan being left, the sons have erected this tomb in grateful remembrance of their dearest parents and of the benefits derived from them.”

On the South buttress nearest to the South porch are traces of a *Mass-dial* or *Scratch dial*. The object of this sun dial was to tell the priest the time for services. In the centre was fixed a metal *gnomon* and when its shadow touched the appropriate line, the bell was rung. One can visualise the workers in the surrounding fields, upon hearing the bell, stopping their labours to pray for a moment.

The South Porch is a 14<sup>th</sup> century addition at the time of the major rebuilding in the reign of Richard II. As you stand in front of it, look up and back at a blocked up window in the South Transept. This dates from the same period when the transept roof was raised, but why the window was blocked up remains an enigma. Still looking up, notice the flying buttresses and decorative stonework of the tower, particularly on the West Front. The West doorway and porch are especially fine examples of the *Decorated period*. Through this more formal, ceremonial entrance to the building many processions of Rushden people have passed: weddings, funerals and civic ceremonies marking times of both thanksgiving and mourning.

As we return to the North Porch, a large dressed stone stands by our left hand. Legend calls it the “stone of sanctuary” but more likely it was the base of a holy water stoup. It was moved here from inside the church in 18<sup>th</sup> century. Entering through a modern outer door in the North Porch, we see the 14<sup>th</sup> century roof vaulting and the ancient inner door with its old lock, the door marked and marred with the posting of parish notices.

## Tour of the Inside of the Church

Turning left from the North door and proceeding up the North Aisle, the first window holds four small figures which are all that remain of a medieval window of the Apostles Creed, dated to about 1450 (*Appendix 1*).

Passing through the curtained screen on the left, into the North Transept, you enter the *Chapel of St John* added in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and now the Choir Vestry. When the plaster was removed during restoration work in the last century, it could be seen that the walls of this chapel had been raised in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and evidence of an altar and *piscina* (a shallow basin used for washing the communion vessels) was found, as well as some medieval plaster and red and black colouring.

Returning to the North Aisle and continuing east, you enter another chapel. Originally *Our Lady of Pity*, it is now known as the Pemberton Chapel. The first objects to catch the eye are two large monuments made of local alabaster to members of the Pemberton family - squires at Rushden Hall for two centuries. Coming from Somerhall in Lancashire, they had other estates, and some members of the family attained considerable rank at the Tudor and early Stuart courts. The monument to Robert Pemberton and his second wife Mary stands at the site of the original chapel altar. Robert was one of the gentlemen ushers to Queen Elizabeth. Both this and the monument to Sir Goddard are fine examples of early 17<sup>th</sup> century sculpture and can now be seen in their original glory thanks to 20<sup>th</sup> century patient reconstruction work by Inger Norholt, a recognised international expert in this field. Memorials of several successors to the Pemberton family can be found on the walls and floor of this chapel; namely Ekins, Fletcher and Sartoris. The upper tracery of this East window contains some more fine examples of medieval glass, dated between 1450 and 1470 (*Appendix 1*).

An old chest contains some church documents, however all early (pre 1900) registers and other records have been removed to the County Archives Office for safe keeping. Marriage and burial registers date back to 1559 (Queen Elizabeth's reign) and baptisms are recorded from 1598.

Moving towards the centre of the church into the *Chancel*, look first at the great *perpendicular* window in five panels. Some of the upper part contains glass of 1430 (*Appendix 1*), but the main panels form a Victorian memorial. On the left, note the empty niche, probably for a statue of the patron saint, and the low *Early English* doorway which predates the Pemberton Chapel, and now leads to a utility area.

On the right, you can see an *Early English piscina*. Next to it are *sedilia* (seats for the priest and his assistants) which are said to be some of the most beautiful workmanship of their kind in the district and form part of the earliest construction of the present



*The South East corner of the chancel, showing 13th century piscina (furthest left), sedilia and window.*

church, dating from about 1250. The *internal window* on the wall above, would have originally been an external window, probably housing the *sacring bell* which was rung at communion, reminding villagers of the worship going on in the church as they went about their daily affairs. E A Freeman, quoted earlier, describes this as a “very curious and elegant window”.

The choir stalls date from the 1870 restoration; you can see only one 14<sup>th</sup> century “miserere” chair left from what would originally have been a full set of chairs in the chancel.

Crossing the chancel, we come to the organ. This was installed in 1935 but some of the pipes from an earlier instrument were incorporated. The organ and organ pipes divide the former large chapel of *St Anne* at the eastern end of the South Aisle, into two parts, the larger and public part of which is now the *clergy*

*vestry*. On the South wall, behind the organ, is another well preserved *piscina*. There are also some interesting wall plaques and pictures there.

Also in the South wall, with steps leading up to it from the clergy vestry, is the *priests’ doorway*, part of the early decorated stonework put in when they added the aisles on to the main chancel. It is possible that this was originally situated in the chancel wall.

Dividing this vestry from the South aisle in the nave is an oak screen and the *Bochar Arch* of *Perpendicular* style. On the *soffit* (the underside of the arch) the inscription reads “This arch made hue (Hugh) b Bochar & Julian his wyf, of whos sowlys God have mercy upon”. On the scrolls held by the figures beside the arch is written, “In God is all” and “In God help”.

Returning to the chancel, look at the *Pulpit* which is constructed of oak and dates from the time of John Wycliffe (c 1320-1384). It is one of only 35 of these 14<sup>th</sup> century pulpits left in England.

From here is perhaps the best view of the *Strainer Arch*. This internal arch and similar structures at Finedon parish church and Canterbury and Wells cathedrals are the only examples of this form of architecture in England. It is believed that the same architect was responsible for the earlier Finedon arch. This is an architectural device to combat the tendency for the nave walls to fall inwards. This tendency results from the additional loads imposed on the relatively slender pillars of the nave when, in the same period, the roof level of the nave was raised. The beautiful tracery of the arch was obscured by layers of whitewash for several centuries until a 19<sup>th</sup> century curate Rev F M MacCarthy, patiently picked and scraped it away by hand to expose the original stone.



*The Strainer Arch*

The *Rood Screen* between the nave of the building and the choir is an example of 15<sup>th</sup> century carving. The curiously shaped holes in the lower parts of the screen have been the subject of much speculation. It is possible that they are present because the screen was made or repaired from earlier confessional boxes. The other chapel screens are of later date and bear marks of restoration.

As you move into the South Transept or *Memorial Chapel*, originally dedicated to *St Catherine*, you see the East window which was inserted as a memorial to the 402 Rushden men and one girl who lost their lives in the 1914-1918 war; their names are inscribed on the panelling. Another stained glass symbolic window on the South aspect commemorates the death in action of Randall Mason, the last in the male line of an old Rushden family with close associations with the church. The names of those who died in the 1939-45 war were added to the panels. In and near this chapel are fascinating carvings on corbels and bosses of heads. In addition to the clerical figures there are others, including a woman with down-cast eyes and a muzzled bear. There is no known explanation for their presence. Hidden behind the panelling to the right of altar is another *piscina*.

Returning along the South aisle to the back of the church, you will see the list of Rectors dating from 1230 (*Appendix 2*) and an unfortunately incomplete list of churchwardens from 1546. Above these is one of a pair of windows re-glazed in 1930 to commemorate, 700 years earlier, the appointment of the first recorded Rector – Thomas of Northampton. The windows illustrate William Peverel, Lord of the Manor of Higham Ferrers presenting Rushden church to the Cluniac Priory at Lenton in 1105 and King Henry I confirming that grant at Nottingham. These window openings are difficult to date, but their rounded heads are almost certainly original *Transitional* (i.e. between Norman and Early English). This could be seen when the plaster was off, however restoration work in 1718 and again in 1930 has disturbed their appearance.

*The Font* is 14<sup>th</sup> century and the details of its carving a mixture of *Early English* and *Decorated* styles.

The glass screen and doors separating the bell tower from the nave were erected in 1963, largely through the efforts of the bell ringers. The present bells form a full peal of eight, completed and re-hung in 1953 after strengthening the tower (*Appendix 3*).

You may wish to note the wooden bench, slightly beneath the bookcase near the North door, which is possibly a *houcelling bench* or coffin-stool: this may be *Jacobean* and is certainly ancient.

The last architectural feature of the church to be mentioned is the *Angel Roof*. The best way to inspect this is to lie on your back in the centre aisle of the nave with a good pair of binoculars. However, you may prefer to view the sample of angels on the back cover of this guide. The roof was erected at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The angels are holding various items in their hands: books and musical instruments are the most recognisable. One angel over the chancel arch has folded wings. All the roof has been carefully preserved and protected against the enemies of old timber rot, woodworm and death-watch beetle.



## Chronological History

The name Rushden is undoubtedly Saxon and means a small rushy valley. Of the 16 various spellings recorded in "Place Names of Northamptonshire", Risdene is most used in early documents. In pre-conquest days it was held by Gitda (Gytha), widow of the Earl of Hereford, a powerful Saxon thane. Her lands passed to William Peverel, the reputed illegitimate son of William I, who also held Hecham (Higham Ferrers).

In 1086, the Bedfordshire Domesday Survey speaks of a virgate of land in Risdene "formerly held with power of sale by Samar the Priest". It was not unusual at this time for a parish priest to hold a small parcel of land (in this case probably 40 acres) like those of the villein shareholders of the township, but freehold. If there was a priest in Risdene, it seems difficult to believe that there was not a church. We may have to picture a small Saxon chapel of wood and wattle, not worthy of a mention in the Domesday survey.

William the Conqueror rewarded his knights with English lordships and Peverel became a very great lord, believed to have held 162 manors, mainly in the Midlands. Possibly he had built the Norman church, whose foundations still lie beneath the present church. Two sets of footings lie along and beneath, supporting the nave arcades. These walls have rubble foundations ten inches deep and three and a half feet thick. A short length with botch faces intact was found in good preservation under the plinth of the SW pier of the nave. The positions of the East and West walls of the building could not be clearly established, but the East wall of the tower represents the westernmost extent of the building. It seems to have been a simple rectangular construction, 35 by 16.5 feet, corresponding approximately to the present nave and clearly Norman style architecture of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1105 William Peverel founded the Priory of Lenton, one of the noblest and richest religious houses in Nottinghamshire. It was endowed with six churches, including Rushden. This priory belonged to the Cluniac missionary order from France and was "built" for the souls of King William the Conqueror and his wife, King William Rufus, King Henry I and his wife and also for the souls of William Peverel and his son and his other children. King Henry I confirmed these grants to the priory at his Court in Nottinghamshire.

### Thirteenth Century

We have no records of this Norman church or even the names of its priests till 1230. It is said that the monasteries did not look after their parish churches very well, for they were supposed to provide a priest to care for the parish on their behalf (i.e. vicariously, hence the title Vicar). Later, Bishops insisted on the appointment of vicars.

The monasteries were allowed to take the tithes of corn (greater tithes), whilst the vicars who lived in the parish were paid with the lesser tithes of fruit etc. However in the case of some few parishes, like Rushden, the Bishop allowed a resident Rector to be appointed who was paid by some of the corn tithes (in the case of Rushden by one fifth share) the remainder going to the monastery.

This is why the benefice of Rushden has remained a Rectory. The first rector to be appointed was Thomas of Northampton in 1230. In 1254, under Henry III, the profits of Rushden Rectory rated at 10 marks, glebe land amounted to 3 acres and arable land to 26 acres.

During this and the two succeeding centuries the rector was not the only priest residing in the parish, for there was a Hospital of St James for lepers under the charge of a resident chaplain, situated near the Higham boundary. St James's Close today perpetuates that memory.

The late 13<sup>th</sup> century was a time of great religious enthusiasm and Henry III a great church builder, the great Abbey at Westminster being one of his foundations. Between 1250 and 1270 the church was considerably extended; a tower chancel and North and South aisles were added in the prevailing Early English style. With the addition of the aisles the previous North and South walls were replaced by arcades, which would also have been of Early English style.

There was a new tower, smaller than the present Decorated tower, as indicated by a vertical joint between different types of stonework visible on the North and South sides. Stonework evidence too, can be found for the steeply pointed, probably thatched roof of this period.

The next addition was the North Transept, whose early type of Decorated windows suggest a date of about 1300. Rushden was then situated within the large Diocese of Lincoln, and we were fortunate in having a most learned, devoted and energetic Bishop, Robert Grosseteste, who had good records kept and removed any cleric found to be slack or unworthy. Our rector, William of Towcester, remained in office so we assume he was a good man. It is significant of the Continental associations of the Cluniac monks that after this Bishop's death in 1253, we find Italians figuring as rectors; Hammond de Alta Ripa and Lothair de Florentia.

## **Fourteenth Century**

In 1348 the "Black Death" swept through Britain; it is said that half the population died. Two thirds of English parishes lost their incumbents, however our rector, John de Clifton, survived till 1359. This was the century of Chaucer, who tells us so much about village life at that time. He had an honest respect for the poor village parson:-

*Wide was his parish and the houses far asunder,  
But he did not fail for rain or thunder,  
In sickness or in trouble, to visit  
The farthest in his parish, much and late.....  
But Christ's teaching and His apostles twelve  
He taught: and first he followed it himself.*

Although the manor of Higham (including Rushden) was conveyed to the famous John of Gaunt in 1362, the church remained in the spiritual and material care of Lenton Priory. It isn't known who paid for or authorised the new building work, but extensive rebuilding took place during this period, though not all at the same time.

A possible sequence of building events is this: the building of South Transept with the enlargement and strengthening of the tower; the building of the spire; the addition of the North and South porches. All these have the same distinguishing features, namely the use of ironstone, probably quarried locally, a thin string course outside and Decorated stonework to doors and windows of increasing complexity.

Later in the same century, the transept roofs were raised, as can be seen from interruptions in the horizontal bands of ironstone and more even masonry. Internally, the font was also a 14<sup>th</sup> century addition with mixed styles of stone carving.

### **Fifteenth Century**

This was the time of the slow movement of the Church in England away from Rome. Beginning with the translation of the Bible into English by John Wycliffe in 1380, the activities of the Lollards introduced sermons into our services. The fact that Rushden has a Wycliffe Pulpit which dates back to around that time, makes it possible that the rectors were Lollards or followers of Wycliffe. The rest of the clergy scarcely preached at all.

It is known that the Bishop of Lincoln allowed Wycliffe preachers to preach in his diocese. In a space of 35 years (1385 -1420) there were eight rectors which makes it appear that violent changes were going on.



*The "Wycliffe" Pulpit*

Elsewhere the reformers were regarded as heretics and were cruelly persecuted. Archbishop Chichele, born in the adjoining borough and a prelate of considerable importance, issued a mandate in 1416 for the detention and possible burning of persons who frequented private conventicles or who read suspect books such as Wycliffe's Bible.

In spite of persecution, new lines in religious thinking spread slowly through the Church, though it was 100 years before Henry VIII, for different reasons, finally broke away from Rome.

As well as changes in the doctrines of the Church, this century was an epoch of changes in the intellectual and social life of the English people, widening out into the Renaissance revival of learning with new movements of thought and achievement. It was the time of Caxton's printing press, Erasmus, Luther, Columbus and other pioneers. The Wars of the Roses had ended on Bosworth Field in 1485 but this was largely an affair of the great lords and their retainers. The bulk of the people was not involved, traders and merchants grew rich and a new middle class was developing into a *squirearchy* in place of the Plantagenet barons.

Thus we find the earliest mentions of the Pemberton family at Rushden Hall in 1461. Also in the Rushden Court Rolls dated 30<sup>th</sup> April 1404 "Hugh Bocher sued William Duke for 16shgs., the price of a horse sold to him. Duke says that he does not owe anything because he took the horse for the service of the King in the war against the Welch when he was constable of Rushden and he asked for the verdict of a jury". On 8<sup>th</sup> June 1404, a jury was summoned and decided that "Hugh Bocher should recover the 16shgs against William Duke". A jury list is attached to this Court Roll and on the back is as follows:

"William Duke is removed from the office of Constable  
and in his place William Bocher is appointed."

It is believed that this Hugh Bocher was the donor of the Bochar Arch and that the family lived in the Crabb Street area.

In 1418 Robert Eyverhale, Rector of Rushden, planted a hedge too near the Kings Highway at Monkesyard. He was ordered by the court to remove it within 15 days under penalty of 40 pence. He left Rushden the following year!



*Bocher Arch*

And in 1492 a later rector, William Rayrde, was fined 4 pence for tethering his horse in the common meadow to the serious injury of his neighbours. During his incumbency, he also held the parish of Newton Bromswold from 1483 to 1489, so the current combination of parishes within this benefice is not completely new.

From 1470 to 1490 came the last substantial rebuilding of the church, leaving it basically as we see it today. The chancel aisle walls were raised and their original lean-to roofs replaced by arched roofs and Perpendicular windows inserted. The main East window of the chancel itself is of somewhat earlier 15<sup>th</sup> century date. The nave piers and chancel arcade were rebuilt in Perpendicular style, replacing the Early English, and possibly the clerestory also dates from this period.

After this, the lovely timber roofs were erected, some of the stone arch labels being cut away to accommodate the graceful woodwork and carved angels. At this time the architect took the wise precaution of inserting the strainer arch. The main North and South aisle windows, East window of South transept, tower windows and part of the North porch were also included in these Perpendicular style modifications. The church at this period must have been much more ornate than we see it today with all the niches filled with images of saints, walls decorated with colourful biblical pictures and a great crucifix or holy picture dominating the entrance to the chancel. Local worthies of the period left varying sums of money in their wills to provide “torches” for the high altar or one of the subsidiary chapels. These were not torches as we understand them today, but massive brown candles of several pounds weight, often made from a mixture of wax and resin. They were burnt by the bier of the deceased parishioner and afterwards by the altar when Mass was said. Less wealthy persons left money for wax for the torches.

## **Sixteenth Century**

Zealous reformers of this century attacked all that they considered superstitious and idolatrous. “Smiths and carpenters were sent to remove the images from the churches: the roods and statues of saints were cruelly handled. Not a statue was left in the church. The paintings on the walls were whitewashed. Everything combustible was burnt. What could not burn was broken to pieces. Nothing was spared however precious or beautiful.”

In 1538 the priory and convent of Lenton was destroyed and the advowson (right to appoint clergy) passed to the King. The last rector to be appointed by Lenton (Thomas Thurlonde) must have been an acceptable moderate reformer for he held the living till 1561, by which time Elizabeth was on the throne and the Reformation firmly established, in spite of the swing back to Rome in Mary's reign.

In 1541, the Diocese of Lincoln was split and the Diocese of Peterborough created, the former Abbot becoming the first Bishop. Rushden, along with most of the

county, was included in the new diocese. By the time of the Act of Uniformity in 1559, the English Prayer book was generally accepted, a wooden Holy Table had replaced the stone altar and rhymed versions of the psalms were sung to the accompaniment of wind instruments and viols. It is interesting to speculate whether a 10 pipe organ like that held by one of the angels in the roof was actually used at St Mary's and what sort of harmony the Rushden congregation made of four part singing "Cantus, Altus, Tenor and Bassus." One could imagine the village blacksmith, whose forge was already established opposite the church, supplying the last named part. Weekly attendance at church was compulsory, with fines on absentees, but the fines were not regularly extracted.

As well as registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, records of the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century bear testimony to a great deal of litigation about the tenure and transfer of Rushden land and some felonious acts mostly settled in the local manorial court, but sometimes passing to the Duchy of Lancaster for decision or action. The famous Sir Christopher Hatton was for a time Steward of the Duchy and the Pembertons were Duchy tenants. Quite a number of surnames in these records are still borne by Rushden families.

### **The Seventeenth Century**

The Seventeenth Century finds the Pembertons still at Rushden Hall and being buried in Rushden church. The two splendid monuments in the Pemberton chapel, with their quaint inscriptions, are complemented by a memorial to another later Goddard Pemberton in Higham Ferrers and in other places where the family held estates.

In 1607 there was a popular rising to destroy hedges and mounds enclosing fields at Rushden and other Northamptonshire villages. There was fighting between villagers and "justices and gentlemen". Prisoners were taken. Some were charged at Northampton, hanged and quartered. After the revolting custom of the time, the quarters were set up at Northampton, Oundle, Thrapston and elsewhere.

In 1612 a survey of the church reported "Ye going up of ye pulpit badd and without steppes. Two great holes in ye glass on ye South side of ye church, one of them stoped with boards."

Again in 1631 there was an adverse report: "There is no sufficient chest with 3 lockes and no sufficient poor mans box." (The three locks had three separate keys for the rector and two churchwardens, so that it could only be opened when all three were present).

The church was sadly in need of repair again by 1682, for the rector, William Holmes, was bidden to remove and take away rubbish round the church and chancel, to mend the glass in the church windows and keep out the pigeons. The seats in the

chancel to be mended and the communion rails to be set up. To change the old silver paten for one which will hold a large penny loaf. To buy a new cushion for the pulpit and a new carpet for the communion table of green cloth at 14 pence per yard with green silk fringe 3 inches deep.

In 1731 the church was broken into by thieves who stole a surplice, about 3 yards of green broadcloth for the communion table and a pulpit cloth of green velvet with silk fringe: If these were the same items purchased in 1682, they could not have been a very great loss after fifty years use.

In 1631, William Maye of Rushden left £100 to be laid out in freehold land "to benefit the poor of the town so long as the world endures." Land at Wollaston was duly bought and the revenue from this bequest and a later Latham's Charity is still managed by the Charity Commissioners and dispensed to poor people in Rushden by a committee headed by the Rector. The religious disturbances of Puritanism and the Commonwealth had their reactions in Rushden. Frederick Schloer, appointed rector in 1637 by Charles I, was one of many who managed to rub along with the Puritans for a time, but for some reason in 1645 he was ordered to become "minister" of Old and must have moved there because a son was born to him there in 1648. However in 1647 articles brought against him were referred to the Committee of Parliament and he was dismissed in that year.

From 1648 to 1650 one Thomas Greening "Minister" was keeping registers, and although the service of Baptism was forbidden, baptised among others his own son on June 10<sup>th</sup> 1649. His incumbency was not apparently recognised by Peterborough and his name does not appear in their archives. No other minister is named until 1656, when Richard Rewse, described in the parish records variously as Minister and Clerke, officially became Rector.

Richard Rewse was therefore incumbent when the Book of Common Prayer was restored on St Bartholomew's day 1662. However he did not keep the registers very well and in 1665 he was appointed to the living of Keyston, Hunts. It is not clear why his successor, James Mawde only remained for less than a year, but we know more about Thomas Haywood. He had been Vicar of Badley and had been sequestered for misdemeanours in 1646. He was imprisoned and his wife and children reduced to begging and would have starved but for the help of Royalist funds. He was restored to Badley at the Restoration of the monarchy and was apparently rewarded for his sufferings by appointment to the Rectory of Rushden. He may not have resided here at all as he did not give up Badley and he died in 1670. His successor, William Holmes was a better record keeper.

## The Eighteenth Century

The Eighteenth Century seemed comparatively quiet in the history of St Mary's. Dissenters or Nonconformists had been increasing in numbers and fervour since John Bunyan and other itinerant preachers made their impact on the sturdy independent folk of Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. The first Baptist chapel in Rushden was opened in 1722. Both sides were busy with doctrinal arguments, tracts and books of theology. One of the most notable authors in this field was the Rev Daniel Whitby, DD who was born in the old Rushden Rectory during his father's incumbency. A new clock was installed in St Mary's tower, replacing one c. 1500 which was given to Wymington, where parts of its original works are still to be found. The "new" one went to Hargrave about a century later and the present one, with several modifications, is recognised as the town's official (and reliable) timekeeper.

In October 1771, a serious fire destroyed houses, barns and ricks in Rushden to the extent of £500 and a relief fund was set up.

In 1794, the peal of five bells was cast and set up as a scale. The great tenor bell was added in 1818. Bell ringing customs at this time included: a bell rung daily at noon; a *pancake bell* on Shrove Tuesday; a *gleaning bell* during harvest time. The *death knell* consisted of three tolls for a male, two tolls for a female. It was also a custom to ring at daybreak the morning after a wedding "in order to wake the bride to commence her household duties." Speaking of weddings, the rector in 1778 put a notice in church setting out his official fees: *Marriage by licence 10 shgs; Certificate after reading of banns 5 shgs; Funeral 4 pence; Churching (of women after childbirth) 9 pence.*

## Nineteenth Century

In 1805, the bell ringers were practising when a severe thunderstorm passed over the town. A great flash entered the ringing chamber and instantly killed a boy, Tom Sears, who was standing behind one of the ringers, but none of the ringers were harmed.

In 1810, an item of £12-16-6 appears in the church wardens' accounts for "Reparin the Bass" i.e. a bass viol used to provide musical accompaniment to services. The repair cannot have been good, as further smaller sums had to be spent on it in 1813, 1814 and 1815. The first organ was built in 1852, the gift of Mr Cooke of Bencroft Lodge.

Through the century, changes in lighting ranged from candles up to 1831, when occurs the first mention of purchases of oil and charges for lighting the lamps. Gas bills commenced in 1869; electricity was first used on Sunday, 19 October 1924.

Open hearth fires in the West walls of the aisles provided the only heating for many centuries. These were blocked up in the 1870 restoration, but an iron stove remained on the North side using the chimney which can still be seen from the roof. Since then there have been several improvements in the central heating system which now keeps worshippers in considerable comfort.

In 1836 John Baker, a shepherd, died at the age of 89. He had never slept outside Rushden and had never travelled more than 15 miles away.

A description of the church in 1844 mentions a “gallery for the singers” in the tower. It was built in 1829 but no record has been found of its removal. A doorway off the staircase leading to the bells might well have led to it.

Around this time, the church appears to have been in a dilapidated state, but in 1847, under some diocesan pressure, an effort was made to improve conditions. A carpenter was paid 15/9d to repair floors, seats, communion table and pulpit. Three men, three women and a boy were employed at a rate of 3/- per day for men and 2/6 per day for women to clean the walls, floors, etc with soft soap and hot water. Hire of scaffold planks cost 12/9 for the operation which took about three weeks. The churchwardens were distressed that they could not raise a parish rate to do more and it seems that poor conditions (including an “unusable” prayer book for the rector) persisted until the arrival of the Rev John Thomas Barker. The advowson (right of presentation to the living) passed from Lenton Priory to the King at the Reformation and most of the English sovereigns up to George II presented rectors to Rushden. Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Chancellor took over the management of the Royal advowsons which had become (but not now) saleable and inheritable rights. The Rev (later Canon) J T Barker purchased the advowson and accepted the living himself. After his death, his family offered it to the Diocese, but it passed into private hands and was later presented to the Church Pastoral Aid Society who have made all appointments since 1914 after consultation with the parishioners.

In 1849, the old workhouse adjoining the churchyard was converted into a school and, for a time the rectors also acted as schoolmasters. It was still in use in 1867, but with the aid of friends Canon Barker built a new Church School at South End. The old school was demolished and the lower part of the church hall, called the Vestry Hall, was built on the site for local government purposes. Rushden UDC sold the building to the church in 1910. He also had a large stone rectory built to replace the one in Little Street; he restored the church at a cost of £6,000; at his own expense he provided an infant school in Coffee Tavern Lane (now demolished) and a school and mission room at the foot of Rushden Hill. He was also the first to plan and support any work of utility or culture for the town, such as the opening of a large reading room, the building of a Temperance Hotel and the formation of musical and other societies. Giving much of himself as well as his personal finance, his epitaph could well

be “He made Rushden.” His incumbency coincided with intense expansion and industrialisation in the town and his death in 1890 soon after the death of Mary, his much loved and talented daughter, was deeply lamented by a wide circle of friends and admirers.

Joseph Enos Smith was appointed organist and choirmaster in 1875, in time for the ceremonial reopening of the church after its major restoration. Bishop Magee of Peterborough preached a dedicatory sermon. He was later translated to become Archbishop of York. Mr Smith, earning a living by teaching music, travelled far and wide by bicycle, train and on foot to collect an immense amount of information on Rushden history and became a friend and aid to six rectors. He died in 1924, leaving his long projected “History of Rushden” unfinished.

In 1879 a new clock was installed in the tower. In 1885, a 50lb block of masonry fell from the spire, necessitating its first repair for 166 years. In 1888 the municipal cemetery was opened and no further interments were allowed in the churchyard. In 1889 the choir wore surplices for the first time.

At the turn of the century, two devoted and generous churchwardens deserve mention among many such characters. Mr George Mason served the church well and truly in that capacity from 1891 to 1933. Mr George Skinner, born opposite the church, was first elected churchwarden in 1888. He died in office at the age of 97.

## **Twentieth Century**

Between 1900 and 1905 increasing expansion of the population of the parish in a westerly direction required new pastoral provisions. To meet the need a new church of St Peter in Midland Road was completed and opened in 1907 and a parish, distinct from St Mary was created within the enlarged town.

Various schemes of repair and improvement were carried out before the 1914 war, including the replacement of a roughly paved slope to the West Door by stone flanked steps and gates. In 1935 a new organ was installed. In 1952 the tower became so unsafe that the bells could not be rung. Canon Green, rector at that time, by a personal appeal raised £3,500 from the town in 100 days. The tower and spire were strengthened and repaired, the bells rehung and two new bells added to bring the peal to 8.

In 1959 widening of the A6 road meant that part of the churchyard was lost and the high stone wall on the north side of the churchyard had to be built. Unfortunately a row of trees known as the Twelve Apostles were felled during the work. 36 skulls and bones were found and re-interred. The opening between the tower and nave was closed in 1963 by an ornamental glazed screen and doors.

Between 1969 and 1972 extensive restoration work was carried out costing nearly £20,000. This work involved walls and floors inside the church, and extensive stonework restoration to the west front, tower and spire. It is interesting to note that an even more extensive restoration a century earlier cost £6,000. While the floor of the nave was lifted it was possible to explore the foundations. The basic outline of the original Norman church was identified and the present nave follows the same lines but is somewhat longer. A report of these investigations was made by David Hill in *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol 5 No 2.



*Treble bell, "rehung Coronation  
Elizabeth II, 2 June 1953"*

The Vestry Hall, located at street level next to the church, was no longer adequate as a meeting room and in 1982 a new Church Hall was built in the churchyard. In 1985 the large rectory in Rectory Road, built by Canon Barker was sold by the diocese. Part of the land was retained and used to build a new rectory more in keeping with current needs.

As the population of Rushden continued to grow (24,094 in 1994), members from St Mary's held a children's holiday club in the school on the Whitefriars Estate in 1991. This event led to the development of a church with a congregation of nearly 100, with its own curate, meeting in the school.

The need for repairs to the building remained a concern. In 1994 Philip Akroyd, the church treasurer wrote: "We are in the middle of the National Decade of Evangelism, but we have just completed a decade of major church repairs and restoration. We have finished the roof repairs and stonework renewal, cleaned and serviced the organ, restored the cracked font, re-wired the church and installed a new amplification and public address system. Some damaged timbers have been replaced, and all the roof timbers have been chemically treated to prevent woodworm, death-watch beetle and rot attack. We are custodians of a medieval church, a Grade I listed building, and have no choice but to maintain it in good condition. The bills incurred from January 1985 to December 1994 will total £259,250, that is £500 a week for 10 years, and over 90% has been given by you, the congregation."

## Twenty First Century

At the beginning of the new century the population of Rushden was close to 30,000. Pastoral reorganisation by the Diocese established a new parish of Whitefriars, based on what had been a St Mary's church-plant initiative. The new arrangements established three benefices in the town; St Mary Rushden with St Peter, Newton Bromswold, St Peter Rushden and Whitefriars Rushden.

In 1875, in a speech made to celebrate the restoration of the church made at that time, Canon Barker had said, "Restoration has endeavoured to give back to the old building some of its ancient beauty and stability and we wish it to witness more than ever to the truth that there is a Father in Heaven. We want to hand down a living Church which is capable of adapting its ritual and forms to the necessities of this century." It became increasingly clear at the start of the Millennium that in meeting the mission and ministry needs of St Mary's the words of Canon Barker were still very relevant.

Many changes that affected the work of the church were taking place in the life of the town and more generally in society. The PCC decided to carry out a review that would identify the changes and additions that were necessary to ensure that the buildings and their facilities could properly support the mission of the church. It was acknowledged that these essential developments must go ahead alongside the ongoing work of maintaining the fabric of our Grade 1 listed building.

In 2003 restoration work was carried on the spire and tower. In the same year a ringing chamber was created by installing a floor in the tower, the space below providing a room that could be used for various activities including a crèche. It also improved access to the church through the West door for weddings and funerals. Access was further improved by the subsequent installation of a new floor that covered steps that were an impediment to the use of wheelchairs. The helical staircase leading to the ringing chamber was repaired and the ventilation of the ringing chamber was also improved.

In response to new government legislation that required all buildings to have adequate provision for the needs of the disabled, a number of measures were carried out in the church and church hall. Handrails were installed at various places in the church, including on the steps to the pulpit and also on the flight of steps outside the West door. A lift was installed to facilitate access between the two floors of the church hall and a toilet suitable for use by wheelchair users was provided.

The kitchen in the Church Hall was substantially upgraded to meet modern hygiene standards and to enhance the catering facilities to a level where they could support a wide range of events.

Within the church building a number of significant developments took place. The Pemberton Chapel was brought back into regular use for worship in 2001. An oak Communion Table of modern design was donated in memory of Peter Crisp, a former member and prominent local business man. Contemporary chairs were also installed.

In 2005 a low platform, with removable rails, was installed at the eastern end of the nave and the adjacent row of pews was removed. These changes created the space needed for the effective leadership of contemporary worship. In 2012 a high-specification audio-visual system was installed. This provided good quality sound reproduction throughout the church and enhanced the effectiveness of a Music Group when they were providing music for many of the services. A large screen and a projector, capable of providing daylight viewable images, also formed part of the system. Recording facilities, cameras and an internet connection further enhanced the usefulness of the system.

Between 2007 and 2014 several maintenance projects were carried out including a new carpet and improved storage in the choir vestry, repairs to the South Parapet wall and the installation of an intruder-alarm system protecting the church roof and the halls.

In 2014 the lower part of the church hall was refurbished and a purpose-built Parish Office, with enhanced equipment was created within it. Also in that year new gates, donated in memory of Dorothy White, were installed at the west end of the churchyard. In 2015 the roof of the North Porch was re-leaded.

In 2016, a tour around St Mary's Church and associated halls readily reveals considerable changes to the facilities within them when compared with the situation when this guide was last up-dated in 1995. The expectation is that this process of change and enhancement will continue alongside necessary maintenance activities. Plans are already being made to replace the 18<sup>th</sup> century lead on the Chancel roof in 2017.

Further repairs and modifications will continue to be made to this historic building as the years pass, in order to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the body of Christ —the family of the church — who meet and worship here together.



## Appendix 1

### Details of Designs of Ornamental Windows

#### North Aisle

The window is *perpendicular* in style with abundant tracery. Four small figures remain, but these are quite perfect, in yellow or white glass, set in borders like fire. A label containing a portion of the Apostles Creed in Latin accompanies each figure. The bottom left-hand figure, possibly St Matthew, has a wallet with strap and wears a pilgrim's hat with the label "He sitteth at the right hand of the Father Almighty." The top left-hand figure, possibly St Peter, carries two keys and a book with the label "was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." The top right-hand figure, possibly St James the Less who was clubbed to death for his faith carries a large club labelled "The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints." The bottom right figure, possibly St Matthew who is believed to have been skinned alive carries, a knife and a box or book saying "Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord."

#### Pemberton Chapel

The **North Window** contains mainly clear glass, however at the top of the framework there are some examples of medieval glass.

**East Window:** Here we have the Madonna and Child with their crowns and cherubim above swinging censers. Grouped about Mary are ten of the apostles, who have been identified by the objects that they carry as, Peter, Andrew, John, James, Thomas, James the Less, Philip, Matthew, Simon, Jude and Bartholomew.

#### Chancel, East Window

This large *perpendicular* window of 5 lights with two rows of smaller lights, 10 to a row containing incomplete or unidentifiable figures, some of which have crowns, sceptres or orbs and may be kings. The uppermost quatrefoil shows the five wounds of the Saviour. The main lower lights are of 19<sup>th</sup> century work and the figures are fairly obvious. A vine runs through the window—hence its description as a "Jesse" window.

#### Memorial Chapel, East Window

This represents the triumphant conquest of suffering. Although on the cross, Jesus is alive: on His face is the light of victory; on His brow a crown of glory, not of thorns; His wounds radiate glory; His hand, though nailed, is outstretched in blessing. Around Him are grouped, in adoration, His mother Mary (representing women), St Nicholas (sailors) the Centurion (soldiers) and St Luke (medicine). Above are emblems and coats of arms of regiments in which Rushden men served. Both windows in the Memorial Chapel were executed by Messrs C E Kempe & Co of London.

## Appendix 2

### List of Rectors

#### Diocese of Lincoln

Thomas de Northampton	1230
William de Towcester	
Hamond de Alta Ripo	1278
Lothair de Florentia	1285
Herbert Pouger	1318
Hugh de Luffenham	1329
William de Brigham	1342
John de Clifton	1344
William de Braybrooke	1359
Richard Wright	
William Kendale	1386
John Bosham	1388
William Spicer de Staunton	1397
John Sperso	1403
John Draper	1409
Robert Eyverhale	1410
Robert Norwyche	1419
William Lillingstone	1420
Henry Yekyn	1452
John Farley	1463
William Rayrde	1467
John Bere	1494
Nicholas Glynton	1519
Thomas Thurlonde	1530

#### Diocese of Peterborough

William Brayfield	1561
Andrew Broughton	1573
Richard Peake	1577
Thomas Whitby MA	1630
Frederick Schloer* MA	1637
Richard Rewse	1655
Jacob Mawde	1665
Thomas Haywood	1666
William Holmes MA	1670
David Kinlock MA	1686
Charles Livesay	1694
John Lettice	1702
Randolph Ekins MA	1720
Thomas Bright MA	1745
William Withers	1745
Richard Wynne MA	1752
Benjamin Hutchinson MA	1788
Spencer James Lewin	1804
George Edward Downe BA	1843
John Thomas Barker MA	1868
Charles James Gordon MA	1891
Wallace Ransome Morse MA	1895
Arthur Kitchin MA	1905
Percy Robson MA	1914
Travers S Stoney MA	1929
Edwin A Green MA	1937
Ian E Douglas-Jones MA	1954
Derek Elliott MA	1963
Michael Wilson MA	1969
Alan Smith	1983
Barry Morrison	1998
Stephen K Prior	2009

\* Note: Rector Schloer was dismissed by the Committee in Parliament in 1647 and Rushden was served by Puritan ministers, including Thomas Greening, until the Restoration of Charles II.

## APPENDIX 3

### Details of the Bells

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Note</i>	<i>Weight</i>			<i>Inscription</i>
		<i>Cwt</i>	<i>Qtrs</i>	<i>Lbs</i>	
Treble	E	5	0	24	<i>Bells rehung Coronation Elizabeth II, 2 June 1953. John Taylor, Loughborough.</i>
2	D flat	5	2	10	<i>Spire and rehanging £3500 subscribed in 100 days. Deus Laudatus. Rector E A Green. Wardens F E Andrews &amp; G E V Fleeman. Inspirer Charles Clifton.</i>
3	C flat	7	0	2	<i>1794 Recast 1953: John Taylor, Loughborough.</i>
4	B	7	2	8	<i>1794</i>
5	A	8	3	27	<i>1794 Recast 1952 God Save the King. John Taylor, Loughborough.</i>
6	G flat	9	1	2	<i>1794 Robert Taylor. St Neots fecit. John Achurch &amp; Thos Smith Churchwardens.</i>
7	F Flat	11	3	10	<i>Robert Taylor St Neots (1794) John Achurch, Thos Smith, Churchwarden.</i>
Tenor	E	18	0	17	<i>I Smith &amp; Edward Wood C.W. Robert Taylor and Son, founders St Neots 1818.</i>
	Total weight	73	2	16	



*Stone detail from the exterior of the church*



*A sample of the angels from the roof in St Mary's Church*

