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ST MARY'S  
CHURCH

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POTTESGROVE  
BEDFORDSHIRE





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION  
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO  
ST MARY'S CHURCH  
POTTESGROVE, BEDFORDSHIRE

*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.*

Nearby are the Trust churches of:

**EDLESBOROUGH, ST MARY THE  
VIRGIN**

*11 miles ENE of Aylesbury on A4146*

**LOWER GRAVENHURST, ST MARY**

*10 miles SE of Bedford off A6*

**PITSTONE, ST MARY**

*9 miles E of Aylesbury off B488*

## ST MARY'S CHURCH

POTTESGROVE, BEDFORDSHIRE

by CHRISTOPHER DALTON

The hamlet of Pottesgrove (or Potsgrove as it is now usually spelt) lies in a remote and sparsely populated part of Bedfordshire, near Woburn and the Buckinghamshire border. The name is probably derived from 'Pottes Graf' meaning 'grove by a pool' or otherwise signifies 'the potter's grove' or 'Pottes grave'.

In the 15th century the principal manor of Potsgrove belonged to the Abbey at Woburn. King Edward VI conveyed it to Lord Clinton and Saye but soon afterwards it passed to the Saunders family. It later belonged to the Page Turner family but since 1884 it has been part of the Duke of Bedford's Woburn Abbey estate. The church was granted by King Henry II to the Monastery of St Albans. After the Dissolution it belonged for some time to the Duncombe family.

Although consisting only of nave and chancel in one, south porch and north-western bell turret, St Mary's church is of generous proportions and forms a remarkably unified design. It dates chiefly from the earlier part of the 14th century and all the windows (of two lights with various tracery) apart from the east window are of this period, though largely renewed in the 19th century. The fine oak rood-screen is of similar date.

In 1880 the church was extensively but most effectively renovated by John Dando Sedding (1838–91), an architect closely involved with the Arts and Crafts Movement and responsible for Holy Trinity church in Sloane Street, London; St Clement's, Boscombe, Bournemouth; and All Saints, Falmouth, and many other churches in Cornwall. His are the niche with a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary (patron saint) and the Holy Child on the west gable outside, the octagonal belfry with its 'pepperpot' spirelet, the glazing in the windows and much else. The main contractors for the work were Messrs Edwards and Gibbons of Leighton Buzzard. The glazing, and the painting on the rood-screen and font cover, were executed by Messrs Purser of the same town. The church was reopened on 24 October 1880 by the Bishop of Ely.

Pottesgrove was united with nearby Battlesden as early as 1732. By 1966 the condition of Pottesgrove church was thought to be dangerous and it



Interior looking east in 1947

(F A FOWLER)

was closed. In 1968 the Diocesan Advisory Committee agreed that it should be demolished; but it was later visited by a delegation (including Sir John Betjeman and Canon BFL Clarke) from the Council for the Care of Churches which concluded that the church was much too good to lose. Sir John considered that it had been 'most attractively restored' with a 'really delightful interior' and that the bellcote was 'of great distinction'.

In October 1972 the church, having been officially declared redundant under the provisions of the Pastoral Measure of 1968, was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund (now The Churches Conservation Trust) for preservation 'in the interests of the nation and the Church of England'. Repairs carried out under the direction of the architect Mrs Penelope Adamson by Mr Peter Mackinnon consisted chiefly of correcting the outward lean of the north wall, and re-covering the 1880 nave roof, the thrust from which had contributed to it; and subsequently to the chancel roof by Peter's son Colin.

The walls are built of random rubble, most of it local ironstone and cobble but with some soft Totternhoe limestone also. The last material was originally used for the windows and dressings but where it had weathered it was replaced in 1880 by more durable limestone from further afield. At the same time the walls were stripped of old rendering, repointed and partly rebuilt. The roofs are tiled.

The **south porch** was rebuilt in 1880 reusing some old materials. The carved heads (now badly eroded) on the outer doorway represent the then Bishop of Ely and the rector, the Revd EN Coles. The inner doorway is 14th century and has the remains of two ancient carved heads. The **north doorway** is likewise 14th century but the heads here, carved with a good deal of expression by Mr Seale, are Victorian and depict Christ and St Mary. Both north and south **doors**, with splendid iron hinges, are by Sedding. Built into the north wall outside, below the bell turret, are a few **carved fragments**, some of them of late Norman date and showing that the church was previously of this period.

In the west window is a colourful jumble of **stained glass**, 14th century and later, attractively worked into four roundels by Sedding. The south-west window contains mediocre stained glass of the mid-Victorian period, brought here from the former St John's mission chapel, Potsgrove. All the other windows contain plain glass, prettily patterned to suit the tracery, by Sedding. The simple octagonal **font** of Cornish Serpentine, with a wooden cover, is again by Sedding. Fixed now over the north doorway is the former **reredos** (introduced since 1880) consisting of three painted panels: the Nativity, the Crucifixion and the Last Supper.

The oak **roof**, or rather ceiling as it now is, over the nave dates from the 15th or early 16th century but a high-pitched roof was added above it in 1880. One economy made in 1880 was to use softwood rather than oak for the nave **pews** but the open **pulpit** is of oak. The **rood-screen** is a good 14th century piece; the cresting on top, the large cross and the pretty stencilled patterns on the lower part were added by Sedding. In mediaeval times there were two altars on the western side of this screen.

In the turret are three **bells**:

Treble by Edward Hall of Drayton Parslow, 1743.

Second uninscribed and founder unknown, 17th century.

Tenor (weighing about 5¼ cwt) by Thomas Mears of Whitechapel, 1813.

Before the present turret was built the bells were hung for ringing in a wooden cote above the west end of the church; but they are now hung 'dead'.



*Interior looking west in 1967*

(ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND)

The large, five-light, 'Perpendicular' east window dates from 1880 but is a copy of what was there before. The lofty barrel-shaped roof over the chancel is of similar date. The rather squat poppyheads on the oak chancel stalls (also of 1880) are very characteristic of Sedding, as is the design of the arches over the *sedilia* in the south wall. Opposite is a tomb recess of mediaeval origin but now mostly Victorian. Also of 1880 are the plain altar rails and the altar itself. This has five painted panels, one depicting the *Agnus Dei*; and the others illustrating the continuity of the priesthood: from left to right, Melchisedec, Abraham, St John and a contemporary (1880) priest. On the sill of the east window is a fine cross by Sedding.

On the floor are brasses to the Saunders family: Richard and Joan Saunders, 1535; and (damaged and incomplete) William and Isabel Saunders, 1563. These last are palimpsest brasses, that is to say they have been reused by engraving the reverse side. The registers date from 1663; they are now kept in the Bedford County Record Office.

In the churchyard on the south side is a magnificent series of carved gravestones, of Portland stone and dating from the 18th and early 19th centuries. The small lych-gate was erected in 1880.

## SOURCES

Printed and manuscript material and illustrations in the Bedford County Record Office (including a newspaper cutting describing the reopening of the church on 24 October 1880).

Manuscript material, correspondence, etc. at the Council for the Care of Churches, Westminster.

Bedfordshire volumes of the Victoria County History.

*Victorian Architecture* by Dixon and Muthesius (Thames and Hudson, 1978).

*Front cover: St Mary's from the south* (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

*Back cover: West wall and bell turret* (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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