

## St PETER Marefair, Northampton

Restored in 1850 by famous Victorian architect Sir George Gilbert Scott, St Peters is close to the railway station and Castle site. Next door is The Old Black Lion, a historic coaching inn currently being restored by CCT. The two historic buildings will become one heritage campus.

The present church is thought to be the third building on the site of a former Saxon Minster. St Peter's was located to the west of the buried remains of a massive Saxon Hall. This magnificent building belongs to the Romanesque style of architecture. The complete Norman rebuild is dated around 1150 AD. This was more than a simple parish church. It has an all through plan – an open rectangle, a basilica. There is no chancel arch. This plan and the '3/2' rhythm of the arched bays is associated with the plan of great churches and monastic buildings.

The quality of the 12<sup>th</sup> century stone carvings is of particular interest to Art Historians. The style of architecture and lavish decorative sculpture echoes great buildings of the Cluny monastic order, such as Reading abbey and Old Sarum. St Peter's is thought to be associated with Simon of Senlis II, Earl of Northampton. Its building style is likely to have been influenced locally by the Priory of St Andrews, Northampton's Cluniac monastery, [demolished at the Dissolution].

The rebuilt East End by George Gilbert Scott is modelled on the 12<sup>th</sup> century chapel of St. Cross Winchester. The sanctuary wall stencilling was designed by John Oldrid Scott, son of Sir Gilbert Scott. This was recently restored by the Churches Conservation Trust.

The church is a glory of Northamptonshire stone. Outside, polychrome effects of alternating brown and cream stone are fashioned in blind arcades which decorate the upper story. Strange half-human faces, glare out from under the eaves on the corbel table. Local ironstone gives the ginger red hue. Contrasting creamy yellow limestones create a colour pattern.

In the interior great Norman arches of plain and banded stone are decorated with zigzag chevron waves. Elaborate carved capitals overflow with foliage, scrollwork, birds, and beasts. Look for the man emerging from a Great Fish and holding on to vines – this could be Jonah from the Bible story. An intricately carved 12<sup>th</sup> century grave slab shows a head disgorging creation.

Major rebuilding of the north and south aisles took place in 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The tower had collapsed and was rebuilt in early 17<sup>th</sup> century. This shortened the nave by about 4 metres. The superb interior tower arch, with three orders, was rebuilt too.

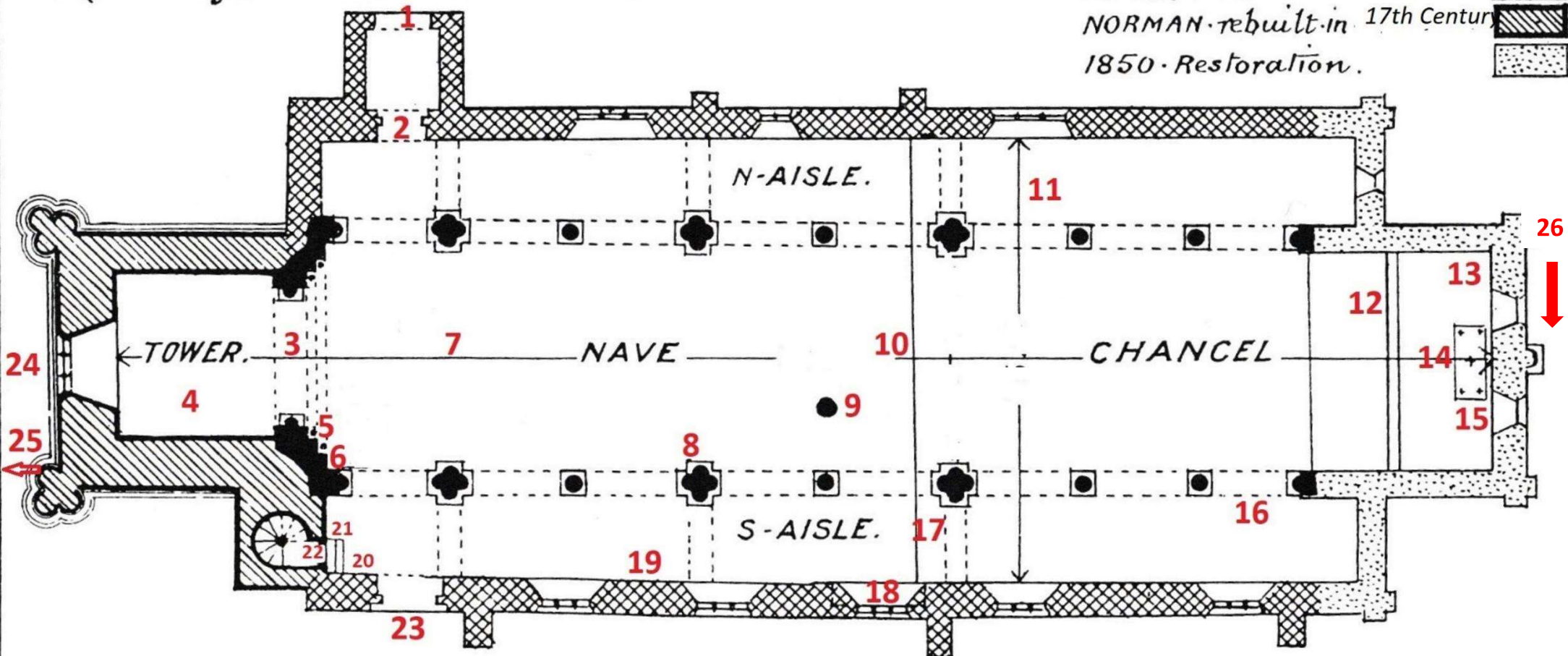
All interior carvings were plastered over in the 16th century when the Puritan reformation held sway locally. Local antiquarian Anne Elizabeth Baker carefully picked clean the Stonework with a bone knife in 1830s. This labour of love took her 11 years. She and her brother George were keen antiquarians. They lived close by at Hazlerigg House.

Important Monuments in the nave include one to the Bakers, and their friend William Smith, the "father of English Geology. "

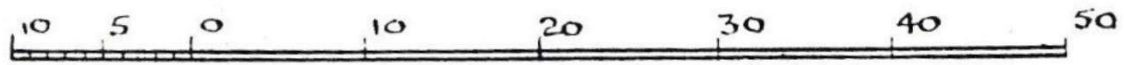
The fine marble bust of William Smith is the work of Matthew Noble. William died whilst on a visit to the Bakers at Hazlerigg House in 1839. His tomb is outside in the churchyard, facing the reconstructed west tower.

# Ch: of S. Peter Northampton:

NORMAN  
 DECORATED  
 NORMAN rebuilt in 17th Century  
 1850 Restoration.



South Gate



Scale 16 feet to an inch.

Thos Garratt. del.

**1. North Porch** - above the entrance is a modern statue of St Peter with a mitre hat. The porch was rebuilt in 1944

**2. North door stonework** is original Norman – dated about 1150 AD

**3. Font** is octagonal 14th century with crocketed gable decoration. The wooden font cover was given by George Gilbert Scott who designed the architectural restoration of the church in 1851

**4. The bell tower** rebuilt in 17<sup>th</sup> century. The 8 bells date from 1734, cast by Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester. The tenor bell was a gift of the Hazlerigg family, others by the church wardens.

**5.** The highly **decorated triple arch** separates tower from nave. It was reset in 17<sup>th</sup> century after the tower collapsed. See halfway up the south side central column: the chevron design reversed by the restorers!

**6. Look above** this arch. The **truncated windows on both sides** show where the original wall extended further west.

**7.** Standing with your back to the **font** view the uninterrupted **layout of the church** as a simple rectangle – **it is an all through plan. There is no Chancel arch. This is very unusual in a parish church.** Walk along the main aisle toward the altar - pause to turn back and view the main processional entrance to the church: – the **west window** is the remains of a **blocked-up doorway**

**8. Arcade arches** on either side are decorated with alternating bands of coloured stone.

The headings or **capitals** of each column have different designs. Creative carvings by the 12th century sculptors use foliage, animals, and interlaced patterns popular at that time.

**9.** The **brass eagle lectern** is a copy of the rare medieval one now in Southwell Minster.

**10.** The **oak pulpit** on the left, replaced a Victorian stone one. Note the carved, claw-like feet of the column here. Choir stalls were installed during the restoration work in 1851. The chancel step was created by lowering the nave floor. All this to the design of Sir George Gilbert Scott.

**11.** The **chamber organ** c.1980, replaced the previous two-person instrument, designed by John Oldrid Scott, son of Sir George Gilbert Scott. It had been installed as restoration work in 1884.

**12.** The **east end** wall is part of the Victorian restoration by Sir George Gilbert Scott completed in 1851. It is a copy from Holy Cross Hospital Winchester. The wall stencils were part of a later restoration by his son John Oldrid Scott.

**13. Two 17<sup>th</sup> century Hall Chairs** on either side of the altar came from Hazlerigg House in Marefair.

**14.** On the altar the painted **redos** was installed 1878 by J Oldrid Scott. He designed the stencilled pattern on the sanctuary walls here.

**15. Stained glass** windows were inserted 1863. Bottom right see St Peter receiving the keys of heaven.

**16.** Now walk across to your right - enter the **south vestry**. Along the length of the south walls are **memorials** to townspeople of C18th and C19th. The vestry screens were installed in 1851.

**17. 12<sup>th</sup> century Carved stone grave slab** found in 1843 as door lintel at a cottage close by on Black Lion Hill. The Green Man motif of Renewed Life is surrounded by interlaced foliage, beasts and cosmic circles, themes familiar in 12<sup>th</sup> century philosophy. Thought to be carved by the same workshop of sculptors as the capitals in the church. It was the gift 1933 from Thomas Manning Churchwarden and brewer of The Old Black Lion.

**18. 14<sup>th</sup> century Tomb recess in South wall** - possibly used as an Easter Sepulchre. The two fragments of **Barnack limestone from Saxon Cross shafts** were found in 1850 during the restoration of the east end wall. Carved with basket weave decoration, they were part of the earlier Saxon church here.

**19. Victorian stained-glass windows** commemorate the wife of a headmaster of Northampton Grammar School. The school was in Free School Lane and then Hazlerigg House in C19th. It later became Northampton School for Boys.

**20. Memorial tablet to George and Anne Baker** by Matthew Noble of London. Anne-Elizabeth Baker spent 11 years unpicking the plaster applied to cover up the capitals during the Reformation. She and her brother George were keen antiquarians. He wrote a history of the County of Northamptonshire. They lived at Hazlerigg House, Marefair.

**21 Monument to William Smith**, the carved effigy also by Matthew Noble. Known as the Father of English Geology Smith, died whilst visiting the Bakers at Hazlerigg House.

**22. Entrance to Bell Tower turret** - part of the 17th century rebuild. It contains carved stone fragments which probably came from St James Abbey or St Andrews priory at the Dissolution

**23. Exit by the south doorway** this is the original Norman stonework

**24. Walk to your right, pass the turret and go to the WEST WINDOW.** This was originally a fine recessed doorway of 3 orders with shafts and capital, before the tower collapsed.

**25. Grave of William Smith 1769 – 1839.** The inscribed name is worn away. It is of national importance and ready for more significant landscaping.

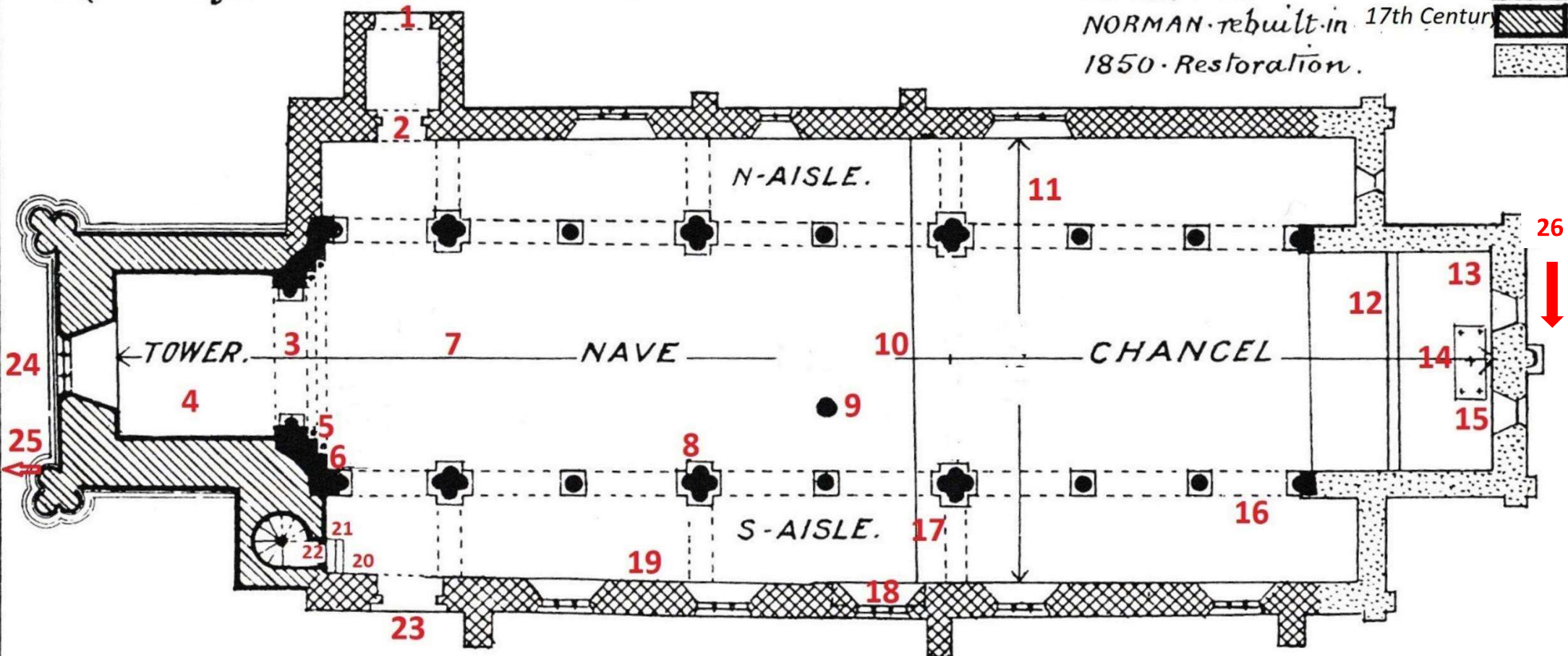
**26. Before you leave, walk out into Marefair and then along St Peter's Gardens. View the outside of the East End of the church. The weathered stone capital on the central column is an original from the 12th century building. It had been buried at some stage – then rediscovered.**

**CONTACTS:** [Visit churches .com](http://Visit churches .com) [CCT] [stpetermarefair@gmail.com](mailto:stpetermarefair@gmail.com) [www.fostp.org.uk](http://www.fostp.org.uk)

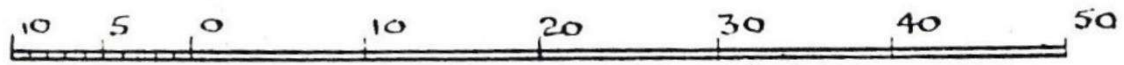
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