



THE CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS OF MYRA

OZLEWORTH
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

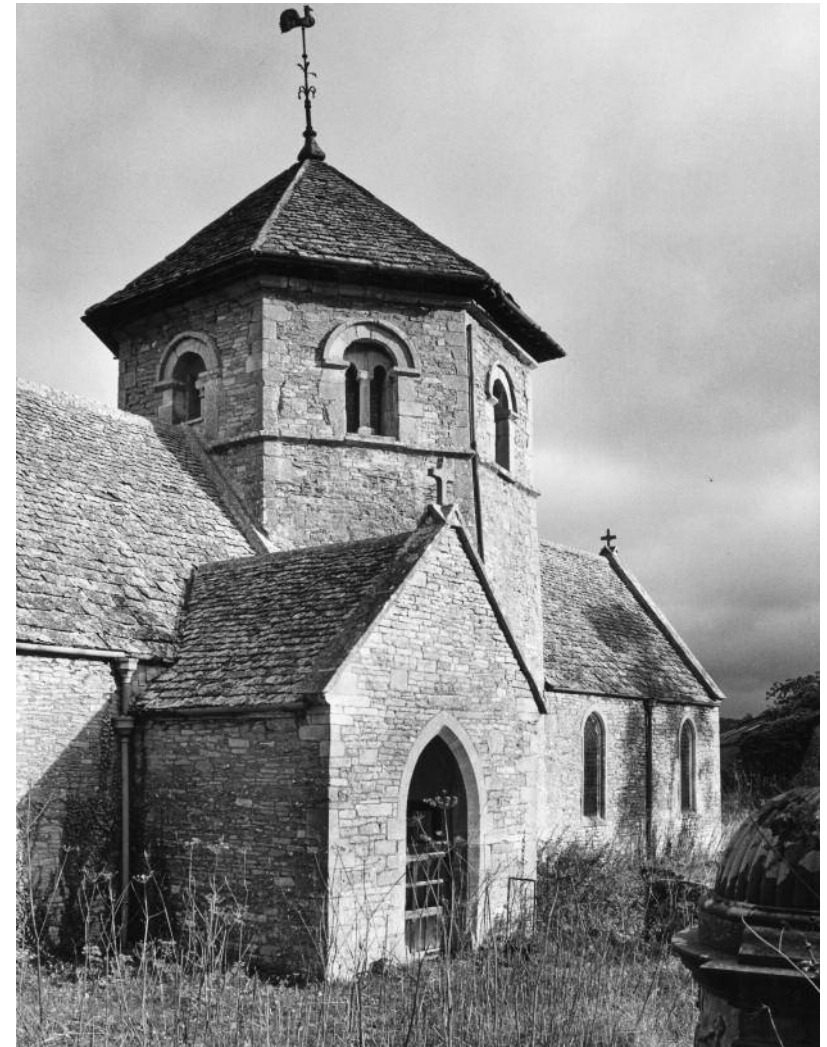


THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

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THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
THE CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS
OF MYRA
OZLEWORTH, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

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).

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THE CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS OF MYRA

OZLEWORTH, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

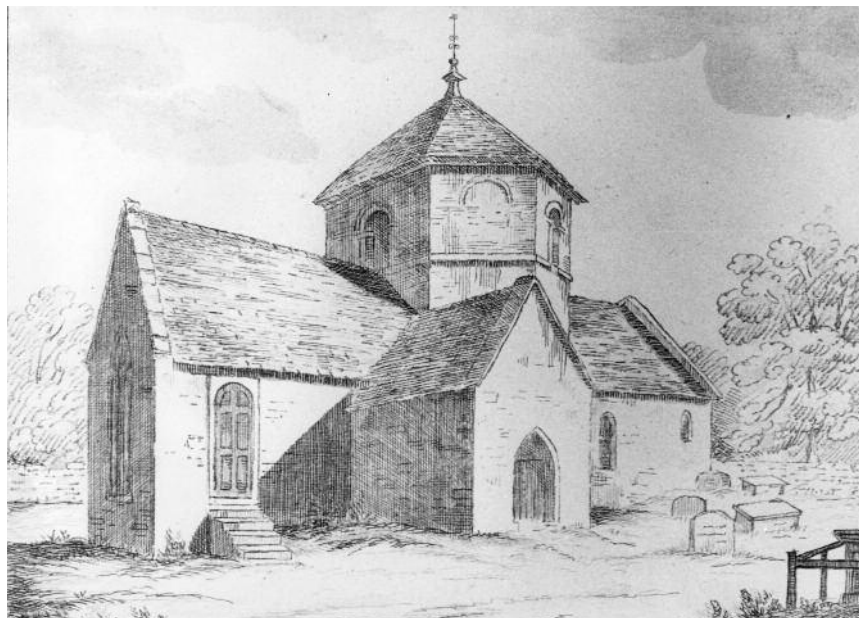
by J H BETTEY

INTRODUCTION

The Norman church of St Nicholas at Ozleworth is one of the most interesting and unusual in the country, and its architectural development has been the subject of much detailed study and speculation. Its remote situation, circular churchyard, remarkable plan, irregular hexagonal tower and its long history, as well as the way in which it has been altered over the centuries to meet changing requirements for accommodation, lighting, ritual and liturgy, combine to make Ozleworth a memorable and attractive church to visit.

Although little more than two miles (3.2 km) from Wotton-under-Edge, Ozleworth church is set on the side of a deep valley, with no village or hamlet, but only isolated farms in the large but sparsely populated parish. Even at its peak in the mid 19th century there were only some 150 inhabitants in the parish, and the number declined rapidly thereafter. The origin of the name is obscure. *Worth* is Old English for an enclosure or homestead. *Ozle* might be a personal name – perhaps a corruption of *Osla*, *Oswald* or *Osald* – but it could also be *Osle*, the Old English word for a blackbird. In the 13th century it was sometimes called *Woselworth*.

Before the Norman Conquest the whole area was part of the royal manor of Berkeley. A charter of 940 mentions church land at Ozleworth and there may have been a Saxon church on the site of the present one, although no trace of this remains. After the Conquest William the Conqueror granted the lands to the Berkeley family, and it was probably Roger de Berkeley (d.1131) who built the earliest surviving parts of the church; he granted the patronage to the Augustinian priory which he founded at Leonard Stanley, some eight miles (12.9 km) north of Ozleworth. In 1146 Leonard Stanley Priory became a cell of the wealthy abbey of St Peter, Gloucester: Ozleworth thus remained part of the abbey's possessions until the Reformation. After the dissolution of St Peter's Abbey in 1539, the patron-



Ozleworth church in 1803

(S LYSON: COLLECTION OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE ANTIQUITIES)

age of Ozleworth was granted to the Poyntz family who were important landowners in the district; from them it descended in the 18th century to the Clutterbuck family of Newark Park who remained as landowners and patrons of Ozleworth until 1920.

There are two large houses in the parish. Newark Park (the 'new work') was built during the mid 16th century as a hunting lodge by the Poyntz family, using stone from the former Cistercian abbey at Kingswood; it was enlarged and remodelled by James Wyatt in 1790. It stands on high ground to the west of the church with superb views to the south and west. Ozleworth Park beside the church was built by George Miller who died in 1787 and is commemorated by a large memorial inside the church on the north wall of the nave, opposite the south door. The house with its extensive stables and outbuildings, as well as its formal gardens and shrubberies, effectively removed most traces of the former settlement around the church. In 1849 Ozleworth Park was purchased by Sir John Rolt, a promi-

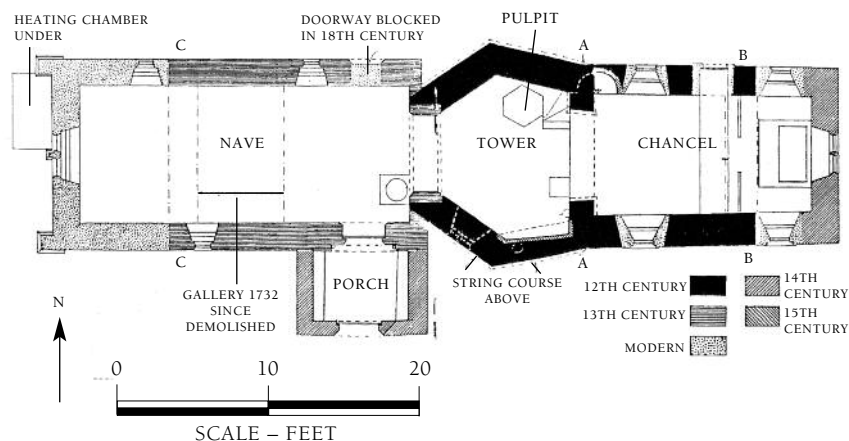
nent lawyer who was later Attorney-General and MP for South Gloucestershire. After a change in ownership in the early 1990s the house underwent extensive repair and refurbishment. In 1975 the parish of Ozleworth was united with Wotton-under-Edge and in 1981 the church was declared redundant and vested in The Churches Conservation Trust. Repairs have been carried out under the supervision initially of Mrs Penelope Adamson and latterly of Mr Andrew Townsend.

THE SITE OF THE CHURCH

The church is set on an escarpment overlooking the deep, narrow valley of Ozleworth Bottom and is surrounded by the formal gardens, stables and outbuildings of Ozleworth Park. A feature of the site is the circular churchyard, enclosed by a dry-stone wall of local Cotswold stone; the church itself is set in a shallow depression within the circle. This circular enclosure is clearly quite deliberate and it is possible that here, as elsewhere, the first church on the site may have been purposely built within a circular pre-Christian ritual site; but without detailed archaeological investigation this cannot be proved. The round churchyard is almost exactly 150 feet (46m) in diameter and is clearly far larger than was ever required for burials by the parish's tiny population. It contains some good 18th century table-tombs and memorials on the south side of the church, including those to the Harris and Webbe families who were clothiers, and to the Worlocks and Witts who were yeoman farmers in the parish. The 18th century Worlock tombs are excellent examples of local craftsmanship with their finely-cut lettering and bold decoration of cherubs, fruit, flowers and other symbols. In the south-west part of the churchyard is the family vault of the Rolt family, dating from the 1870s and topped with a large slab of red granite. On the north side of the church is a large churchyard cross erected as a memorial to John William Rolt who died in 1913.

DESCRIPTION

The church consists of a nave with south porch, chancel and a central tower in the form of an irregular hexagon with the longest side to the east. It is constructed of local Cotswold limestone with roofs of stone slates. There has been much conjecture about the unusual plan of the church and

Plan of Ozleworth, St Nicholas of Myra

the sequence of its development. The most likely explanation seems to be that the lower part of the hexagonal tower, of which the only other similar example is at Swindon Village near Cheltenham, was built by Roger de Berkeley about 1110–20 as the nave of a tiny oratory or chapel. Originally it was two stages high and probably had a small apse or semicircular chancel to the east and an entrance at the west. A few examples of such small Norman chapelries survive – for example at Holy Sepulchre, Northampton, Holy Sepulchre, Cambridge and Ludlow Castle. Remains of blocked round-headed slit windows which would have provided the dim lighting for this first church can still be seen at Ozleworth in the north-east and south-east walls of the tower, and the round Norman chancel arch is probably also a part of this early church. An original plan of this sort, with an eastern apse, would explain why that side of the tower is considerably wider than any of the other five sides.

About 1150–60 the hexagonal tower was altered: the two slit windows were blocked and an upper storey was added with a two-light window in each of the six sides, thus no doubt greatly improving the lighting in the church. These windows survive and are typical of that period, each having a central shaft with a band of cable-mould decoration. The next development came about 1220 when a short nave of about 22ft (7m) in length



Interior of the church looking west

(ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND)

with north and south doorways was added to the west side of the tower. The elaborately carved arch was inserted in the west tower wall, decorated with a unique and intricate pattern of deeply undercut chevrons; the only comparable example locally is the contemporary vaulting ribs of St Mary's Gateway in Gloucester. The remarkably fine workmanship of this western tower arch at Ozleworth and the intricacy of its design illustrate the artistic heights which stone carving had reached during the early 13th century.

The north doorway was blocked during the 18th century, but the superb south doorway remains as the entrance to the church, with a finely carved exuberant decoration of stiff-leaf sprays set in six large lobes around the arch and supported by circular shafts with stiff-leaf decoration around the capitals.

A further alteration took place in the 14th century when the small chancel was rebuilt and extended eastwards by about 8ft 6in (2.5m), perhaps to

provide more space for the increasingly elaborate ritual of the church services at that time. The straight joints where the 14th century chancel joins the tower can clearly be seen on both the north and south sides of the church. The Decorated-style east window of the chancel is typical of the period and the porch was built around the south door during the 14th century. In 1732 there was evidently a need for more accommodation in the church, partly no doubt because many of the pews in the nave would have been rented out to the wealthier parishioners; a gallery was built at the west end of the nave and a flight of stairs and a doorway was inserted in the south wall of the nave to provide access. Evidence of the stairway and door can still be seen on the outside wall west of the porch.

More accommodation was provided during the 19th century by enlarging the nave. This was carried out to the designs of a clergyman architect, the Revd William Henry Lowder, who had studied architecture under William Butterfield and who subsequently became curate of nearby Bisley (1862) and Miserden (1866) and in 1873 he undertook extensive work at Ozleworth. At a cost of £850 Lowder extended the nave westwards by 12ft (3.5m), thus completely altering the proportions of the church. He removed the gallery and earlier furnishings, altered most of the windows, probably inserted the south-west window in the tower, and designed the new pulpit, lectern and marble altar reredos. The priest's door in the north wall of the chancel was also inserted during the 19th century restoration. Much of the present-day appearance of Ozleworth is therefore due to Lowder, and the squared stonework of his nave extension is obviously different from the much earlier walls of the original nave or the even earlier base of the tower. From the later 19th century the church, together with the adjacent mansion and outbuildings, was lit by gas from John William Rolt's private gasworks.

INTERIOR

The thoroughness of the 1873 restoration means that few of the earlier furnishings survive: the oak altar with a central mosaic roundel depicting the Agnus Dei, the reredos of white marble with tiled panels depicting the Crucifixion and the Four Evangelists, the iron and brass communion rails with oak top, the wooden pulpit on its stone base, the iron lectern and the oak chancel stalls are all Lowder's work. Red needlework hangings of



The 13th century font (RCHME)

stylised lilies adorn the east wall; the same pattern is painted on the wall behind. These, too, are almost certainly Lowder's work. The font, with its deep circular bowl enriched with dog-tooth and nail-head decoration and pedestal with four attached shafts, is 13th century. A wooden rood-screen was inserted, probably during the 15th century, to separate the chancel from the nave and surmounted by the crucifix or 'rood'. The stairway which gave access to the rood-loft above the screen remains on the north side of the chancel arch, entirely fitted in to the thickness of the wall despite the fact that this must have seriously weakened the structure at this point. On the south side of the chancel arch beneath the tower is a broken corbel which probably supported a statue, and the wall was cut away here during the later Middle Ages to accommodate an additional altar.

Evidence that the windows were once filled with mediaeval stained glass can be seen in the east window where a fragment of glass depicting the head of a saint survives. The rest of the glass in the east window may be by A L Moore. The other stained glass is by Joseph Bell of Bristol and by Clayton and Bell and dates from the 1870s, commemorating the Clutterbuck and Rolt families, with the exception of that in the south-west window of the tower: the four panels of painted glass here depict St John the Evangelist, St James the Great, St Thomas and St Mark. This glass is probably Flemish, of the 16th or 17th century. The 1873 restoration is commemorated by a brass plaque over the south doorway and bears the names of the rector, C F Clutterbuck, and the churchwardens J Rolt and T Ind.

The importance in the parish of a few wealthy families is evident from the memorials in the church. The Clutterbuck family of Newark Park are represented by monuments, on the south wall of the chancel, to Catherine (d.1805) by Thomas King of Bath, to the Revd Lewis ('more than fifty years rector' and also lord of the manor, patron and justice of the peace, d.1820), also by Thomas King, and to Frances (d.1836), by Reeves & Son of Bath. The Miller family who built Ozleworth Park next to the church are represented by monuments to Sarah (d.1775), wife of George who built the house, on the north wall of the nave; to William (d.1846) and to Elizabeth Dyer, née Miller (d.1807), both on the south wall of the nave. There are a number of tombstones in the churchyard to the Rolts, who succeeded the Millers. The north and south walls of the nave each contain a memorial to those from the parish killed in the First and Second World Wars; they comprise circular bronze plaques framed by bronze laurel wreaths. Against the west wall of the nave is a mediaeval stone coffin, much repaired by lead plugs and rivets.

Inside the tower is a bell by John Rudhall of Gloucester, 1809. The oak bell-frame incorporates parts of the mediaeval frame.

The parish registers date from 1698 and are deposited in the Gloucestershire Record Office, Gloucester.

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Ozleworth Park and church, showing the circular churchyard
(CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY COLLECTION OF AIR PHOTOGRAPHS)

Front cover: Exterior from the south-west (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

Back cover: The Norman south doorway (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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