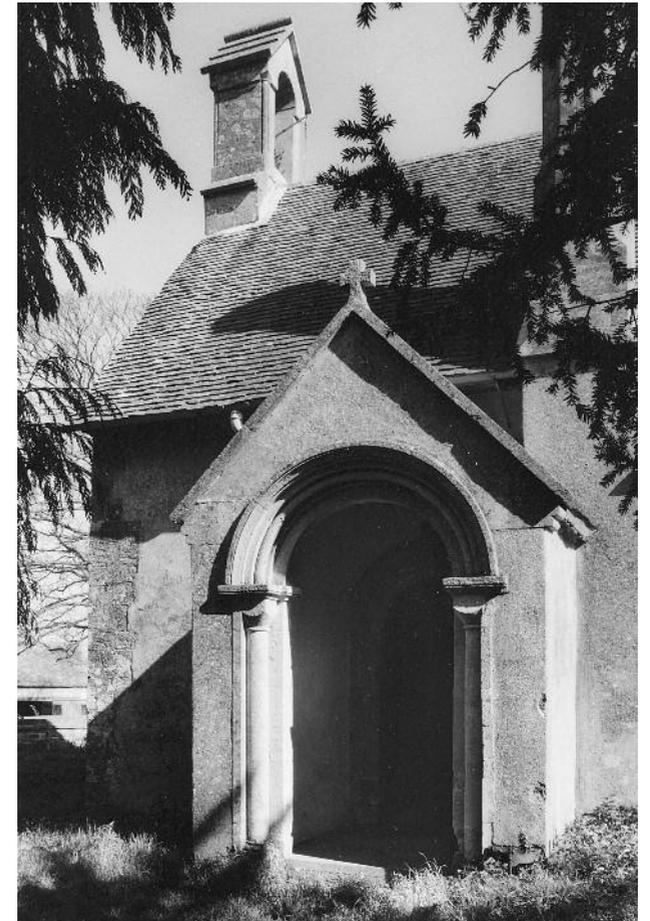




ST MARGARET'S  
CHURCH

---

CATMORE, BERKSHIRE



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

LONDON

*Registered Charity No. 258612*

PRICE: £1.00



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION  
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO  
ST MARGARET'S CHURCH  
CATMORE, BERKSHIRE

*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 325 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 until 30 September 2002. We will be moving to new offices in the autumn of 2002, so please look out for announcements in our churches or visit our website [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk) for details of our new address.*

*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:

**EAST SHEFFORD, ST THOMAS**

*5 miles NE of Hungerford off A338*

**WOODLANDS ST MARY, ST MARY**

*On B4000 between Hungerford & Lambourn*

## ST MARGARET'S CHURCH

---

CATMORE, BERKSHIRE

by ANDREW PIKE

### INTRODUCTION

The early inhabitants of Catmore must have enjoyed feline company since the name means 'a pool frequented by wild cats'. Catmore is mentioned in Saxon charters from the 10th century and came into the possession of Henry de Ferrers at the Norman Conquest. In 1266 the manor was granted to the Earl of Lancaster and so passed to the Crown on the accession of Henry IV. The Eystons are first recorded as lords of the manor of Catmore in 1433; they were also lords of the manor of Arches in nearby East Hendred. The Eyston family still owns both manors.

The size of the church and churchyard suggests that the village was never large. Earthworks north-east of the churchyard and the finds of mediaeval pottery in fields near the church indicate that there was once settlement around St Margaret's. Despite the small size of the village, however, the local population was able to enjoy a weekly market on Mondays and an annual fair on the feast day of St Margaret (20 July). The great privilege of holding these was granted by Edward I to Roger Gascelyn, Lord of the Manor, in 1306. The weekly market and annual fair took place at a location some 150 yards (137.2 m) north-east of the church, reached by a track running eastward from the junction of three tracks with the Catmore road. This track was surfaced with small flint cobblestones, which can be seen to this day. The market and fair continued until 1620, when they were replaced by a new sheep fair established by order of King James I at East Ilsley, about 4 miles (6.4 km) away. East Ilsley was the largest sheep fair in the south of England, selling up to 35,000 sheep in a day, and was held every other Wednesday from February to November, continuing until 1939. The population of the parish of Catmore in 1801 was only 69 and today is no more than 35. Most of the inhabitants live in the hamlet of Lilley, three-quarters of a mile (1.2 km) along the road towards Newbury which is where the rectory, built in the 1820s, was situated.

Catmore House, adjacent to the churchyard, is a brick and timber-framed building dating in part from the 14th century. Most of it is Elizabethan and



*Exterior of the church from the south-east*

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

it was almost certainly the manor house. Two Victorian extensions were demolished in 1980.

A church at Catmore is mentioned in Richard I's reign (about 1195) when the Knights Hospitallers claimed the advowson or right to appoint incumbents to the parish. The list of rectors (a copy of which can be seen on the south side of the nave) records the incumbents from about 1300.

## DESCRIPTION

The church consists of a chancel 14ft by 11ft (4.2 x 3.3m) with a small vestry on the north, a nave 41ft by 14ft (12.5 x 4.2m) the west wall of which is continued upwards to form a small bell-cote, and a gabled south porch. The building is essentially of the late-12th century. The exterior walls are covered with roughcast and render, with stone quoins and dressings at the corners and around the windows and doors. Various works, including repairs to the walls in brick, appear to have been carried out in the 17th century. The roofs are tiled.

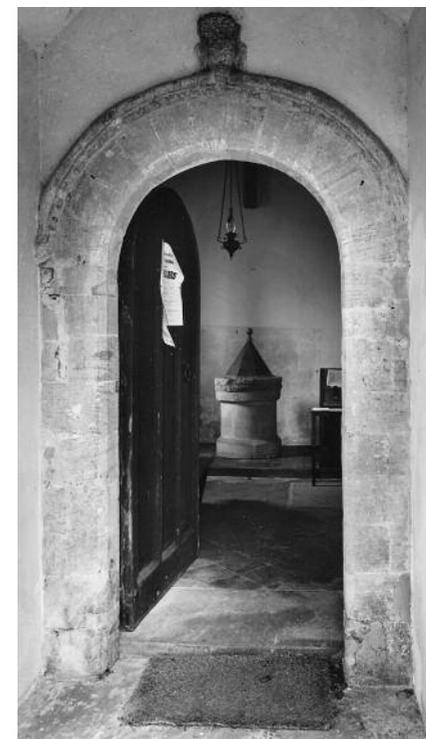
The church was considerably restored about 1845 when new windows in the Norman style were inserted: the previous windows were probably similar in shape. However the small window on the south side of the chancel

appears to be of 16th century date. In the north wall of the nave is a blocked 12th-century doorway. Also about 1845 a vestry and a south porch were added. A new roof to the chancel was provided in 1891 by H Devey Browne and the doorway to the vestry was inserted. Browne also re-roofed the nave, raised the level of the chancel floor and retiled the other floors, installed drainage around the walls and built a chimney against the east wall of the south porch for a stove formerly situated inside the church near the south door.

## INTERIOR

The church is entered through a 12th-century round-arched south doorway on quarter columns with cushion capitals. At its apex is a beaked figure or bird. On the right-hand side of the doorway can be seen the outline of a mass dial. The very fine nave roof was added in 1607: the date is visible on two of the wall posts at the west end, together with the initials 'WE' – probably William Eyston – and 'IA'. It is divided into five bays, with many of the timbers being elaborately carved. The round chancel arch is a 19th-century restoration. The 12th-century font is contemporary with the church, but has been cut down to about half its original height. There are traces, now much worn, of carved decoration. The base is modern. The simple wooden cover was given in memory of Leah Pounds in 1950.

The small communion table, with its shaped baluster legs and carving on the top rail, is 17th century. The pews are plain and probably date from the restoration of 1845; some appear to be reused doors or panelling. The panelled ceiling of the chancel was inserted as part of the restoration of 1891; at



*The 12th-century south doorway*

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)



Nave roof wall post of 1607  
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

the same time the altar rail, pulpit and rotating double-sided wooden lectern were bought for the church from Jones & Willis, London. The Catmore testaments, one Old Testament, one New Testament, in separate volumes, are kept at the Old Rectory at Lilley and still used for services in the church. They were published in 1846 and each carries a bookmark inscribed *RICHARD & HANNAH REEVES 1848*. The Reeves family lived at Catmore House at that time. The lectern was provided to carry these testaments, one on each side. Both would be opened in advance of the service at the appropriate lessons for the day, with the Old Testament facing towards the altar. After the first lesson had been read from the Old

Testament, the lectern head was turned around so that the New Testament was in position for the reading of the second lesson. Also kept at the Old Rectory are the Catmore Book of Common Prayer, dated on the flyleaf June 1894, and a book of the Holy Communion and other rites and ceremonies of the church, inscribed *Bought with the pennies of their Sunday Collections, This Book was presented to their church by the children of the Catmore Sunday School, Christmas 1935. Glory to God in the Highest*.

There has never been electricity in the church; the rustic nature of the building is emphasised by the use of three iron cartwheel tyres as 'chandeliers', suspended from the nave roof. This rusticity was brought home to the Revd Canon Naunton Bates, rector of Brightwalton-with-Catmore from 1934 to 1970. He was once unable to preach his sermon from the pulpit because a hen turkey was nesting in it. In recent years music for the services has been provided by a harmonium.

There are two monuments, both in the chancel. On the north wall is one to George Bartholomew and his wife Mary (d.1800) by Sims of Swindon; a ledger stone under the altar marks their actual place of burial and the correct date of George's death (1809, not 1806 as stated on the monument). On the south wall is a monument to Robert Stephens (d.1801) and his wife Mary (d.1823, aged 90). They lived at Catmore Farm and their children and children's spouses are also recorded in detail. A ledger stone at the east end of the nave marks the burial place of various members of the Dewe family (d.1833–46).

During repairs to the church in 1999 part of a wall painting was discovered on the north nave wall. This comprised a simple decorative border surrounding a religious text and is probably of 17th-century date. Some time later, perhaps in the 18th century, the text was repainted within the original border. A simple painted dado, probably of Victorian date, was revealed on the west wall of the nave.

A gallery is mentioned in the accounts of the 1891 restoration.

There is one small bell in the bell-cote cast by Henry Bagley III and inscribed 'H. BAGLEY MADE MEE 1700'.

The registers date from 1724 and are deposited in the Berkshire Record Office, Reading, together with other documents including details of the 1891 restoration.

Since 1895 the rector of Catmore was also incumbent of Brightwalton; the parishes were officially united in 1933. In more recent years the living has been expanded to include Leckhampstead, Chaddleworth and Fawley. St Margaret's was made redundant in 1973 and, after a period of disuse, a cycle of three services a year (an evensong at Whitsun, a Harvest Festival and a Carol Service on Christmas Eve) was started by the Revd Bob Greaves, incumbent from 1974 to 1987. In 1999 it was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust which embarked on a programme of repairs in the same year under the supervision of Andrew Townsend Architects of Faringdon. Under the Trust's aegis the same three services continue to be held in the church each year, plus an occasional baptism or funeral.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Mr David Gardiner of Lilley, who has provided much information on the church and village.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

SHARPE F: *The Church Bells of Berkshire*, 2nd edition, 1971  
*Victoria History of Berkshire* 1924, vol. 4, pp. 9–11

Front cover: *The south porch* (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

Back cover: *Interior of the church looking east* (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

© The Churches Conservation Trust 2001  
Series 4 no. 158  
March 2001