

upon a fine array of carved **corbel heads**. There was an altar at the east end of the south aisle in mediaeval times, which is why the south-east windowsill has been lowered to form two **sedilia**, where the clergy sat during parts of the mediaeval Mass. Beside it is a beautiful 14th-century **angle-piscina**, into the drain of which the water from the washing of the priest's hands at the Mass was poured.

The circular **font** appears to have been recut in the 19th century. The **chest** nearby dates from the 1600s.

Excellent 20th-century woodcarving may be seen in the **western screen** and **organ loft**, which are adorned with tracery and vine-trail patterns. This loft dates from 1925 and was built to house the **organ**, given in memory of William Priestley (1912) and his wife Elizabeth. The instrument was built by Blackett & Howden of Newcastle. It has two manuals, pedals and 13 speaking stops.

The tower contains three **bells**. The treble is by Christopher Gray (1676), the second by Tobias Norris of Stamford (1618) and the tenor by William Haulsey of St Ives (1620). The tenor bell has a diameter of 38 inches (96.5 cm) and bears a Latin inscription which is translated 'When I call for a funeral, learn how to die; when for a service, learn how to live'.

At the east end of the north aisle has been placed the 17th-century **communion table**, which stood in the sanctuary until it was replaced in 1890. The **lectern** is a brass eagle.

Set in the east wall of the chancel are two carved mediaeval **heads**, which once supported statues. Beneath a large trefoil-headed recess in the sanctuary

south wall is a **double piscina**, dating from the reign of King Edward I (1272–1307) – the period when it was fashionable to have two drains; one for the washing of the priest's hands and another for cleansing the Communion vessels. The smaller **recess** above may have been where the vessels were kept, or where the wine and water were placed in preparation for the service. The wide splays of the Early English lancet windows were designed to let in as much light as possible.



Alabaster monument to Richard Nailour  
d.1616 (© CROWN COPYRIGHT, NMR.)

## MEMORIALS

The church contains several memorials.

Now fixed to the north aisle wall is a large slab, with the incised figures of a man and a woman, of c.1370. Their arms are crossed and their feet rest upon strange creatures. On the wall of the south aisle is a fine alabaster **wall monument**, with the kneeling figures of Richard Nailour (d.1616) and his two wives, Elizabeth Lovel and Katherine Herne, and also his two sons and six daughters.

In the nave floor, near the chancel arch, are the **brasses** of:

- The Revd Dr William Taylard (rector here, d. 1532), who is dressed in his academic robes.
- Sir Laurence Pabenham (d.1400), who is dressed in armour, also his two wives, Elizabeth and Johanna. This brass was part of a palimpsest and replicas of its reverse side are fixed to the wall nearby.

A much more recent brass beneath the central south aisle window is a **War Memorial** to the 14 Offord Darcy men who gave their lives in the First World War and the two who perished in the Second World War. The **stained glass** in the window above, by William Glasby of London, shows the Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

Three **ledger slabs** in the chancel floor commemorate:

- Jane Jackson (1844) and her daughter Mary (1835).
- The Revd William Deane, rector (1722).
- Marie Deane, his wife (1749).

Plaques on the walls of the church commemorate:

- The Revd Jeremiah Jackson, rector (1828).
- The Revd Henry L'Estrange Ewen, rector (1889). His grandfather was rector here from 1777–99.
- The Revd W Thornhill, rector (1872).

These are in the chancel.

- Mrs Sarah Priestley, daughter of William Nailour (1727).

On the south aisle wall.

Nearby is the Trust church of:

**ABBOTSLEY, ST MARGARET**  
4 miles SE of St Neots on B1046

*Front cover: Exterior from the south-east*  
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

The Churches Conservation Trust cares for churches of historic, architectural and archaeological importance which are no longer needed for regular worship. The Trust warmly welcomes visitors to over 300 churches, scattered throughout England. As a charity, the Trust appreciates all contributions towards the maintenance of this rich and varied heritage.



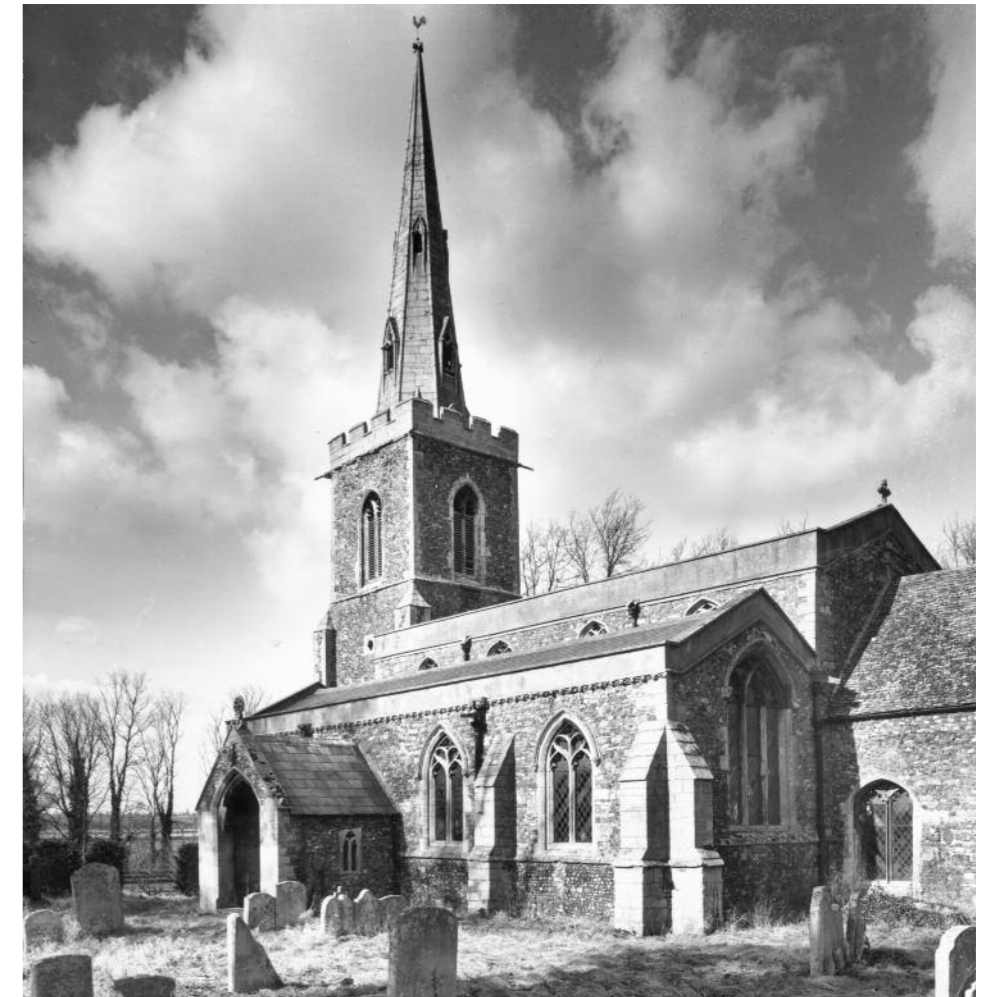
THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST  
1 West Smithfield, London EC1A 9EE  
Tel: 020 7213 0660  
www.visitchurches.org.uk  
Registered Charity No. 258612



# ST PETER'S CHURCH

OFFORD DARCY, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

by ROY TRICKER



St Peter's church, Offord Darcy, is beautifully set at the end of a cul-de-sac drive, near the Manor House – which was built by Richard Nailour in 1613 – and in a quiet tree-shaded churchyard. (Quiet, that is, until a high-speed train comes by, which happens frequently, because the main line from Kings Cross to the north-east runs very near the western end of the churchyard.) Also nearby is the River Ouse, and the name 'Offord' indicates a ford over the river here, possibly the 'Upper Ford' or even 'Oppa's Ford', whilst 'Darcy' indicates the family who owned the manor, as distinct from the Cluniac monks who owned the manor of nearby Offord Cluny.

Offord Darcy and Offord Cluny adjoin each other on the B1043 road, south of Huntingdon. In 1978, All Saints' Offord Cluny became the parish church for both villages. St Peter's Offord Darcy was considered precious enough to be vested in what is now The Churches Conservation Trust, to be preserved as a sacred and beautiful building for people to visit, to be inspired by, to learn from, to pray in, and to use for occasional services and events.

Like most mediaeval churches, St Peter's has a mixture of craftsmanship from several periods, as people over the centuries have altered, enlarged and beautified this church, the earliest parts of which were built by the Normans,



Interior looking east

(© CROWN COPYRIGHT. NMR.)

nearly 900 years ago. Some of the landmarks in its long history are as follows:

**c.1100–1150.** The north arcade of the nave dates from this period, indicating that this must have been a Norman church of some size, with a side aisle. There was probably an earlier Saxon church here.

**c.1250–70.** The present chancel, with its Early English lancet windows, was built at this time.

**c.1320–30.** The south aisle was added, with its beautiful Decorated windows, arcade and stonecarving.

**c.1370–80.** The western tower and spire were erected.

**c.1450–1500.** The north aisle was rebuilt and the nave walls were heightened to form a clerestory. A new east window was placed in the chancel.

**1850.** New roofs were provided for the south aisle and chancel. (The ancient timber from the old south aisle roof was bought by the rector for one guinea, because no-one else would take it.)

**1860.** The nave and north aisle received new roofs and the spire was rebuilt.

**1890.** The seating was altered, choir stalls were provided in the chancel and a new prayer desk was supplied.

**1900.** The vicar of St Neots presented a new altar table to the church, so that he could have back the table which had been in use at his church until 1863, but which had been brought out of disuse and taken for use at Offord Darcy in 1890.

**1925.** A new organ, and a screen and gallery for it, were erected at the west end of the church. Fragments of medi-

aeval screenwork, which were originally in the north aisle, but had been erected under the tower arch in 1908, were repositioned beneath the chancel arch.

## EXTERIOR

This church is set apart from its village and from the main road, in a beautiful churchyard. A mediaeval stone coffin may be seen near the east end of the south aisle. The walls of the building itself are faced with brown cobblestones, as are many churches in the area, with renewed stone parapets to the nave and aisles.

The late-14th-century western tower is strengthened at its corners by clasping buttresses and has a three-light early Perpendicular west window. Small quatrefoil openings light the chamber above and the tall two-light belfry windows have simple cusped 'Y' tracery. Beneath the embattled stone parapet, worn gargoyles at the four corners throw the rainwater clear of the tower walls. The spire is tall and graceful, with ribs at the angles of its eight sides and two tiers of spire-lights – the lower ones double and the upper ones single. The former county of Huntingdonshire is rich in splendid stone spires and this one, when compared to many of the others, is quite modest.

The north aisle is lit mostly by 15th-century Perpendicular windows and there is a large north doorway. By contrast, the much wider south aisle is almost entirely work of c.1320–30, with beautiful Decorated architecture in its windows, most of which have hood-moulds resting on original carved corbel heads, and in the lovely string-course beneath the parapet, which is carved with a trail of ball-flowers. There

is also a fine gargoyle to the east of the porch. Above the aisle is the clerestory, with its 15th-century two-light windows.

Fifteenth-century craftsmen made the north-west and south-west chancel windows, and also its three-light east window, but the single lancet windows date this part of the church back to the 1200s, although these received new tops when they were uncovered in 1851.

The much restored 14th-century south porch has small but elegant two-light windows and shelters the 14th-century south doorway, which was restored in the 19th century, when it was given its present corbel heads.

## INTERIOR

In this bright interior, 19th- and 20th-century work takes its place alongside the craftsmanship of earlier ages.

Of great interest are the arcades which separate the aisles from the nave. The northern arcade has three plain and bold 12th-century Norman arches, upon sturdy square piers. East of these is a smaller 19th-century arch, which has been cut through a further, but smaller, Norman arch. The graceful south arcade has four Decorated arches of c.1320 resting upon quatrefoil piers.

The tall chancel arch is probably 15th-century. Beneath it is the woodwork which incorporates fragments of a

15th-century screen which was once in the north aisle.

The roofs were all renewed in the 19th century – the south aisle and chancel in 1850, the north aisle and nave in 1860–61. The date is on one of the corbels in the north aisle. However, some of the stone corbels which support the arch-braced roof of the nave are mediaeval and those supporting the south aisle roof are all 14th-century originals. The windows of this aisle all have internal hood-moulds, which rest



Chancel interior

(© CROWN COPYRIGHT. NMR.)