



# CHURCH OF ST PETER

EVERLEIGH, WILTSHIRE



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

*Registered Charity No. 258612*

PRICE: £1.00



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION  
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO  
CHURCH OF ST PETER  
EVERLEIGH, WILTSHIRE

*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 320 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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## CHURCH OF ST PETER

EVERLEIGH, WILTSHIRE

by GEOFF BRANDWOOD

In the ancient landscape of Salisbury Plain, sprinkled with barrows, henges, hill-forts and other prehistoric earthworks, Everleigh church is a newcomer. St Peter's dates from the beginning of the 19th century. It is nevertheless an interesting piece of architecture and forms part of one of those radical estate improvements which had been common during the previous century.

### WHY, WHERE AND WHEN THE CHURCH WAS REBUILT

'The munificent founder, builder and donor of the church' (as it declares on his prominent monument opposite the doorway) was the lord of the manor, Francis Dugdale Astley. Sir John Astley of Patshull, Staffordshire had bought part of the estate in 1735 and acquired the rest in 1764. On his death eight years later he had no direct heir and the property passed to the distant relative who was to be the builder of St Peter's. Back in 1772, the village with its church and its inn clustered round the Georgian manor house. This does not appear to have troubled Mr Astley but after he remarried in 1805 there began a period of substantial estate replanning, possibly under the influence of his new wife.

The aim was a greater degree of secluded dignity so the surrounding cottages were demolished and sited away from the house. The old inn, the *Rose and Crown*, was also taken down and its functions were moved to what was formerly the dower house and is now known as the *Crown Inn*. Similarly, the old church, displaying features from the 14th century onwards (but no doubt with an older fabric), was removed and Sir John paid for the erection of the present building. The site is somewhat to the west of the main village but was decided upon as it lay nearer to the hamlet of Lower Everleigh, about a mile away – 'a more eligable [sic] and convenient Situation' as the faculty for rebuilding put it. Such a central siting of a church between various centres of population was quite common in areas of scattered population in 19th century England and was aimed at ensuring that no-one found distance an excuse for non-attendance at worship.

*The old church**The new church*

The foundation stone was laid on 7 May 1813 and demolition of the old church began a little less than a month later. While building was in progress services took place in the private chapel of the manor house. The new church was consecrated by the Bishop of Salisbury on 26 October 1814. In all the cost was £14,000 which included a rectory (immediately south of the church and now used as private dwelling). This was a considerable sum and reflected the use of high-quality limestone ashlar and the desire to build a worthy church.

### THE ARCHITECT AND THE STYLE

The chosen architect was the little-known John Morlidge. He acted as clerk of the works for Jeffry Wyattville's remodelling of Longleat House, some 25 miles west, between 1807 and 1813. No doubt it was his work there that brought him to the attention of Francis Dugdale Astley. Nothing else is known about him apart from his appearance as a builder in Horseferry Road, Westminster in 1825-26.

The church was built in the Gothic style but a little smaller than its predecessor. The use of Gothic for church-building was standard by the early 19th century, especially in the countryside – Classical churches tended to be built only in towns. The appeal of Gothic had grown significantly during the 18th century and was linked to a fascination with a supposedly glorious mediaeval past. The style was appropriated by landowners and churchmen alike to express their continuity with this tradition, and Gothic would shortly enjoy an extraordinary flowering in Victorian Britain when it became synonymous with the whole idea of Christian church-building. Mr Morlidge, inexperienced as he may have been as a church architect, was working at a time when a great deal had been learned about mediaeval architecture. Numerous publications and, probably, studies of his own enabled him to produce a fairly convincing building in the Gothic tradition.

### THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CHURCH

The plan is a simple one with a nave, chancel, west tower, south porch and, south of the chancel, a vestry, later used as an organ chamber. The overall impression is of late mediaeval details with fairly flat roofs, embattled parapets, several Perpendicular windows, prominent pinnacles at the corners of the chancel, nave and tower, and polygonal turrets at the corners of the vestry (one of which doubles as a chimney for a fireplace inside). Y-tracery windows in the nave and in the second stage of the tower are suggestive of a slightly earlier phase of Gothic architecture. A distinctive feature is the



South side

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

use of pierced stone screens in the second and top stage windows of the tower, an idea which Morlidge borrowed from West Country tradition.

Certain features mark the church as a building of its time. Most significantly the chancel is much shorter than a normal mediaeval (or, indeed, Victorian) one since the emphasis of Georgian worship was upon

preaching, not the sacraments. Some of the detailing, notably in the porch and the parapets, has an unconvincing mediaeval air to it and the use of single, as opposed to multiple, lights for the belfry windows would be unlikely to have occurred to mediaeval or Victorian builders.

### THE INTERIOR

The inside of the church is the product of two phases. When the church was built it had box pews and a western gallery. These items became deeply unfashionable during Victorian times yet they survived intact until the turn of the century. In 1903 the pews were converted into conventional open seats but fortunately the gallery was left untouched. Like the tiling round the font and in the chancel, the choir stalls are of the same period, being a memorial to Adelaide Blundell (d. 1900). The roof is of low-pitched hammer-beam construction; the wall-posts spring from carved stone heads, many of them with expressions of considerable discomfort.



Belfry window showing the screen-like infill borrowed from mediaeval West Country churches (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

### MONUMENTS

The founder's monument with its white marble frame and lengthy inscription (of almost illegible metal letters on a black ground) dominates the nave. Francis Dugdale Astley survived the building of the church by only four years, dying in 1818 at the age of 76. Like his church, the monument is emphatically Gothic. It suggests the idea of 'the munificent founder' being part of a long tradition which includes those who built the great ecclesiastical edifices of mediaeval England. A later inscription at the base records



Monument to Francis Dugdale Astley (d. 1818)

(GEOFF BRANDWOOD)

how the nave was restored in 1903 in memory of Sir John Dugdale Astley, great grandson of the founder. Just to the right of the Astley monument is a tablet to William Pinkney (d. 1843) who occupied Lower House Farm for 40 years and who laid the foundation stone of the present church. 'W. P. 1843' in the nave records his resting place.

The sense of continuity with the past is reflected in the way the old monuments from the previous church were brought to the new one. The earliest is a brass plate to a former rector, Johannes Berkley, who died in 1429 (chancel north wall). On the same wall there is John Wallis (d. 1737), 'Batchelour of Divinity, Rector of the Parish, and Public Professour of Arabic in the University of Oxford'. There are four Astley memorials, one of which, unusually, is a small casket set into the wall. In the former vestry is a large marble tablet to the Revd Thomas Penruddock (d. 1876) bearing a fulsome text (signed 'Baker, Marlboro').

In the vestry is a wall tablet to the Revd WT Bowles (d. 1786), a very chaste monument with an oval inscription panel, and a further one to the Revd C Earle (d. 1817).

## OTHER FEATURES

*Fonts.* Tapered Norman font, brought from the old church, with broad scallops round the base (west end). Octagonal column with moulded top and base, and central ring, provided for the new church in 1814, and looking rather like a chimney pot (near chancel arch).

*Stained glass.* Good east window in memory of Francis Dugdale Astley (d. 1873) and Doreen, his wife (d. 1872). Made by WT Cleobury of London. The orange borders in the other windows are no doubt of 1814.

*Ten Commandments, Creed and Lord's Prayer.* On the east wall of the chancel and south of the chancel arch.

*Royal Arms* of George III over the doorway, evidently placed in the church in 1814.

*Corona lucis.* A good Victorian corona in the chancel.

*Cannonball* (near chancel arch). Brought back from the Crimean War battle of Alma in 1854.

*Hatchments.* Three hatchments (beside chancel arch and over doorway).

*Organ.* 19th century (in the gallery).

*Bells.* Six bells, one of which records their presentation by the founder of the church and adds 'My cheerful note I'll therefore raise to sound my benefactor's praise.' All were cast by James Wells, Aldbourne, Wiltshire in 1814.



*Interior looking east* (ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND)

Following a period of decline and neglect over a number of years the church closed in 1974. The church and churchyard were vested in the Redundant Churches Fund (now the Churches Conservation Trust) in October 1975. Repairs carried out on vesting included masonry repairs, the re-covering of the nave and tower roofs and the re-leading of the windows. This work was carried out by F Randall & Sons of Devizes under the supervision of Kenneth Wiltshire of Salisbury.

## SOURCES

Faculty for building the new church dated 28 May 1813. Wiltshire Record Office, Trowbridge, reference 651/25.

W.A. EDWARDS, Everleigh, some notes on its story (1967).

D.F. FINDLAY, notes for the Council for Places of Worship (1972).



*Royal Arms*

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

*Back cover: Interior looking west* (RCHME).

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