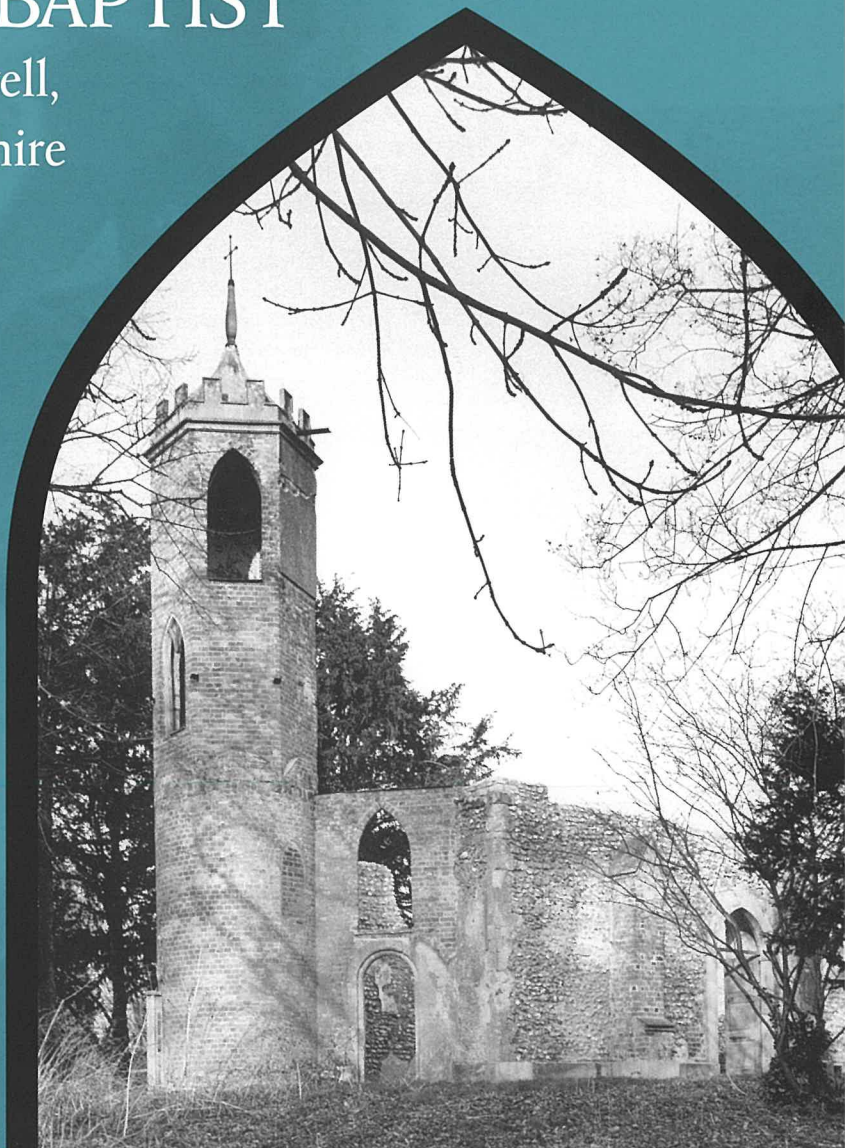




THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

Mongewell,
Oxfordshire



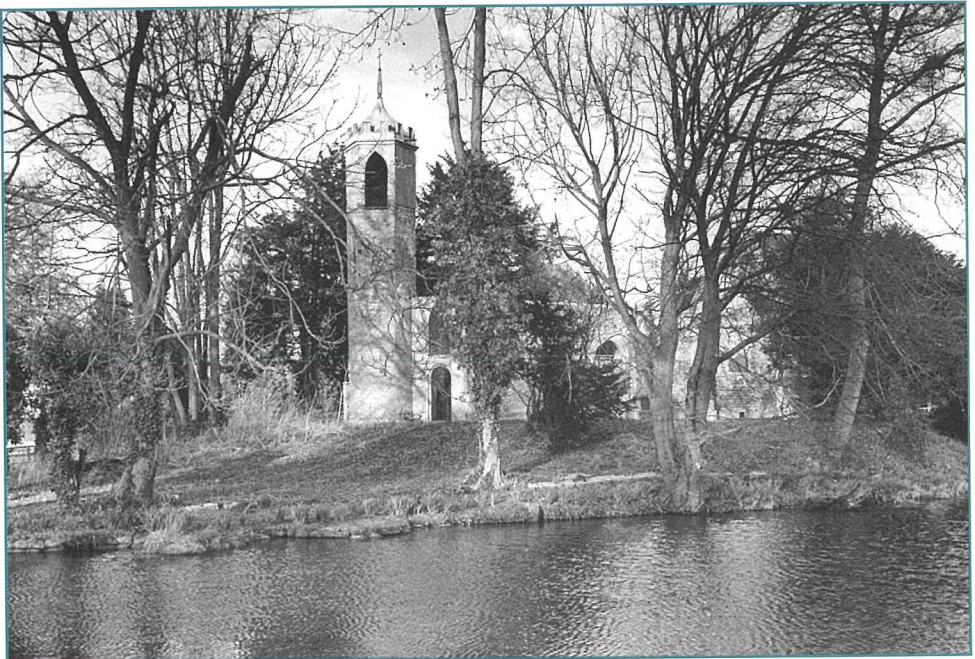
CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

by Andrew Pike (Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Field Officer with The Churches Conservation Trust since 1994; currently Regional Development Manager. Previously an archaeologist with Buckinghamshire County Museum Service)

HISTORY

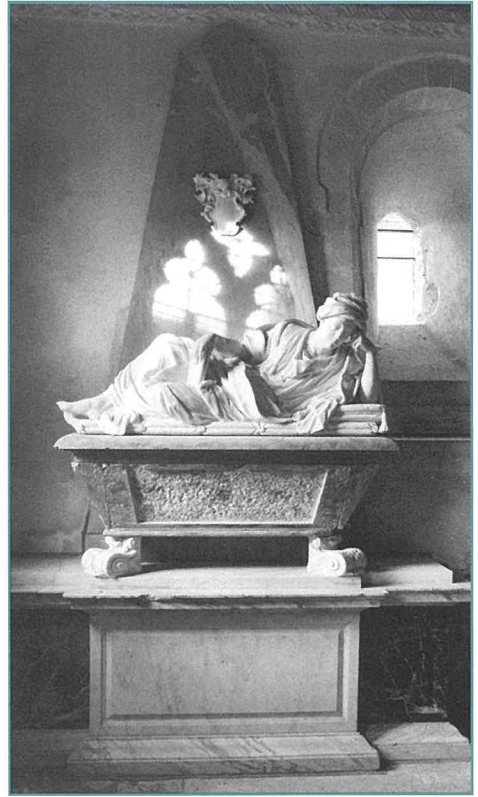
In Domesday Book of 1086 Mongewell ('Munda's stream or well') was held by Roger de Lacy. In the 15th century the Rede family had considerable possessions here and in the 19th century the village was owned by The Hon. Shute Barrington, Bishop successively of Llandaff, Salisbury and Durham, who lived at Mongewell House. Barrington is said to have greatly improved the lot of the poor of the parish and 'raised them to a state of comparative independence'. It is claimed that he started the co-operative movement here and opened a shop in the parish. The bishop was buried under the font, then located at the west end of the nave by the south door. A later owner was Uvedale Price, notable apostle of the 'Picturesque'. His other seat was at Foxley, near Hereford, where he built the remarkable church of St Mary the Virgin at Yazor in 1843, also now in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust.

*View from the south-west
(Christopher Dalton)*





*View of the derelict nave in 1943 looking west
(© Crown copyright. NMR.)*



Monument to John Sanders (d.1731) (Christopher Dalton)

The landscaped garden, in which the church became a feature, still partly survives. Barrington's house was rebuilt in 1890–91 and in 1953 Carmel College, founded by Rabbi Dr Kopul Rosen in 1948, moved here. Carmel College closed in 1997 and the estate was subsequently sold. Mongewell House, together with the former school buildings, is likely to revert to residential use.

Having become derelict and disused with no congregation to support it, Mongewell church was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust in 1985. A short walk northwards along the River Thames leads to Newnham Murren church, whilst across the river lies St Peter's Church, Wallingford, both also in the care of the Trust.

DESCRIPTION

The church is of 12th century date. When first built it consisted of a nave and chancel constructed in flint and stone: Norman features survive in the chancel walls, the reset corbels on either side of the chancel arch and the windows on the north and south sides. The reconstructed wooden roof dates from the 14th century.

In 1791 Shute Barrington partly rebuilt the church in the Gothick style, adding a western apse, an unusual polygonal turret in brick (which was originally rendered) and a gallery for the use of his family: the architect may have been James Wyatt. The tower was formerly surmounted by a lead-covered cupola and its door, protected by a porch. In 1880 Joseph Morris and Spencer Slingsby Stallwood restored the chancel in

neo-Norman style, adding the zigzag decoration. Most of the fittings, including the font and the fine wrought iron chandelier, belong to this restoration. In 1888 the now roofless vestry was added to the north side of the nave.

In the early years of the 20th century the church gradually became derelict and assumed the appearance of a romantic ruin. Some repairs were undertaken in 1915 and 1954. In the late 1940s the nave roof collapsed, so in 1954 the architect Hugh Vaux had the chancel arch blocked, with a door inserted in it to provide access to the chancel, which continued to be used for occasional services. The font and several of the monuments, formerly in the nave, were moved into the chancel at this time.

The north wall of the chancel has monuments to Edmund Madock (1692) and his wife and to a reclining John Sanders, wearing a turban and holding a book. On the south wall is the monument to Bishop Shute Barrington and another to Jane Barrington, his mother. Other monuments are to the Durrell family – Thomas Durrell, who died in 1879, was a rector of Mongewell – and to John and Gertrude Fraser (1887). The Frasers gave the stained glass in the little east window with the figure of Christ which has, unfortunately, suffered some damage over the years.

There was formerly a clock on the tower and a single bell, 16½ inches (0.43m) in diameter and hung in an oak frame. The bell was cast at the Gloucester foundry and bore the inscription

'COME AWAY MAKE NO DELAY 1760'.

Unfortunately this bell and the clock seem to have disappeared shortly after the Second World War. An inventory of the church made in 1553 lists two bells.

The stone base of the pulpit, dating to the 1880 restoration, survives at the east end of the nave.

Repairs to the church were carried out in 1915, 1954 and since 1985 by The Churches Conservation Trust under the supervision of Penelope Adamson and, latterly, by Ian Stewart.

The church registers were begun in 1660 and are deposited in the County Record Office in Oxford.

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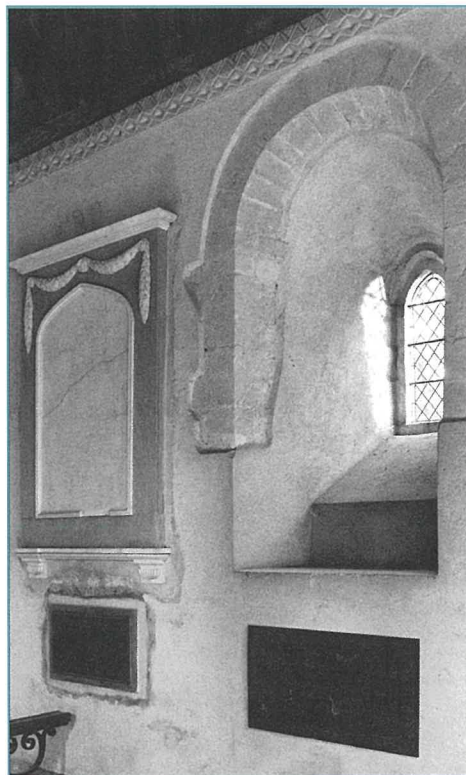
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Norman window in the chancel south wall (Christopher Dalton)

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

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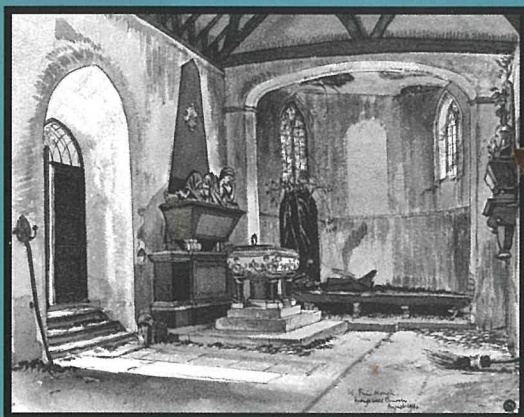
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Front cover: View from the south-west (Christopher Dalton)

Back cover: Pen and ink drawing by W Fairclough, 1940, showing the font and the Sanders monument in their original positions in the nave (© Crown copyright. NMR.)



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