



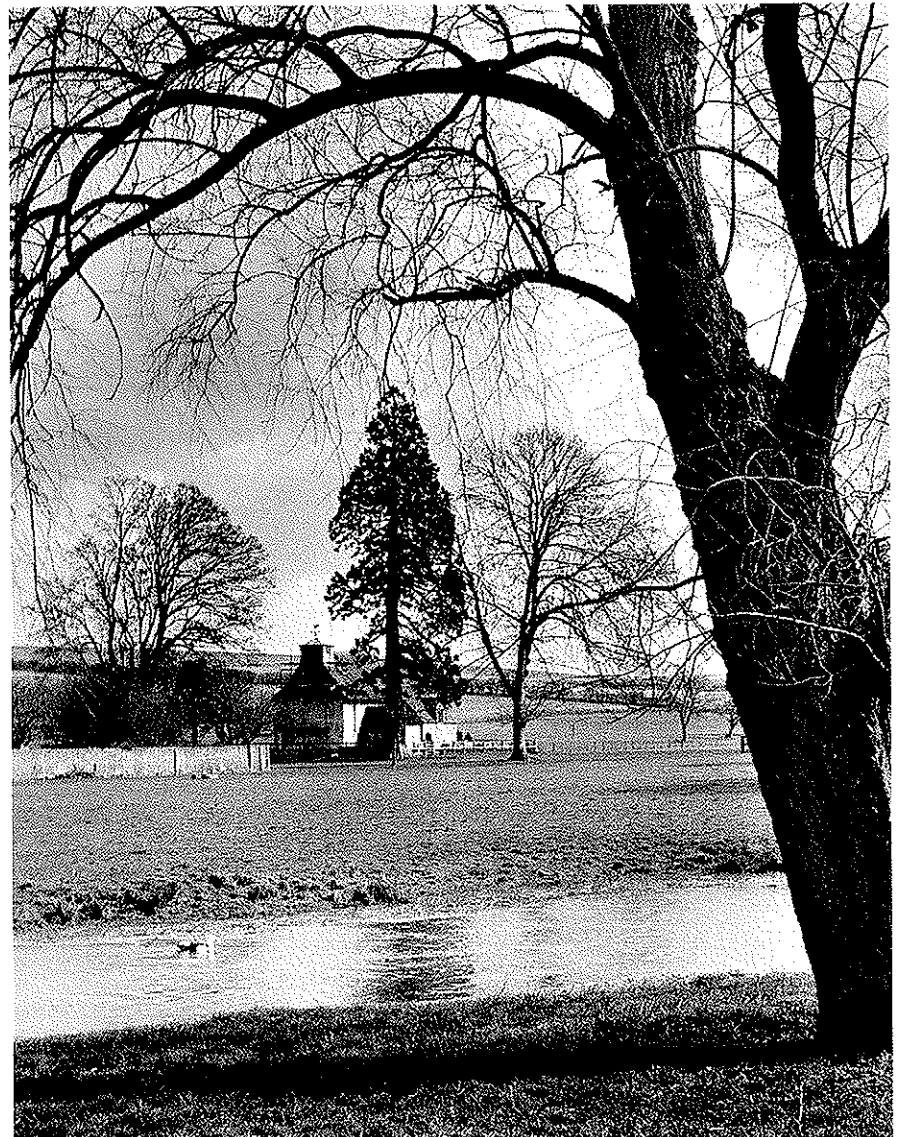
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ST. THOMAS'S CHURCH, EAST SHEFFORD, BERKSHIRE





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST
WELCOMES YOU TO
ST. THOMAS'S CHURCH,
EAST SHEFFORD, 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 291 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).

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:

WOODLANDS, St. Mary. 4 miles south-east of Lambourn, on B4000;

LOWER BASILDON, St. Bartholomew. Between Pangbourne and Goring, just north of A329;

MONGEWELL, St. John the Baptist, and NEWNHAM MURREN, St. Mary. Both just south of Wallingford, off A4074.

WALLINGFORD, St. Peter.

ST. THOMAS'S CHURCH, EAST SHEFFORD, BERKSHIRE

by Henry Stapleton

History of the Parish

Shefford gets its name from being the place where the sheep forded the river Lambourn as it runs down the valley to join the Kennet. There is much evidence hereabouts of Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlements. The Roman trunk road to the west forked at Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester) and the north-western road ran through Spinae (Speen) to Glevum (Gloucester). This road, still known from Speen as Ermine Street, ran within two miles of East Shefford. When the branch railway line from Newbury to Lambourn was constructed in 1889 an Anglo-Saxon cemetery was discovered a few hundred yards from the church.

The development of the church reflects the fortunes of the community and in particular the Fettiplace family at the Manor House. Their monuments reflect their presence in the village, their good fortune and the respective prosperity of the village. The Fettiplaces are first recorded in 1223 in the person of Adam Fettiplace who was Mayor of Oxford in 1245 and nine times later; the first who came to East Shefford was Thomas Fettiplace, appointed steward of the manor and hundred of Bampton in 1413. He married a member of the royal house of Portugal, Beatrice, who died in 1447 and their tomb is in the south chapel. Their grandson, Richard, who married Elizabeth Besils, had a son John who married Dorothy Danvers and they lie buried beneath the tomb on the north side of the chancel. When Dorothy died, the connection of the Fettiplace family with East Shefford ended. The Manor House passed through a succession of owners and was demolished in 1871.

The previous year marked the end of regular worship in the church when the congregation transferred to the newly-built church of Holy

Innocents (designed by Charles Forster Hayward). In 1958 plans were made for the demolition of St. Thomas's but the Friends of Friendless Churches stepped in and began a vigorous programme of conservation. In 1972 the church was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund, now re-named The Churches Conservation Trust.

History of the Building

It would appear that the earliest building on this site had the plan of two rectangles, a larger one for the nave, and a smaller one for the sanctuary at the east end dated about **1100**. The interior was decorated with wall paintings and the foundation of the church commemorated with no less than five consecration crosses. On the chancel arch was painted a nativity scene, of which parts of the kings are still decipherable. The unusual 'double axe' decoration extended along the north wall, and in part along the south. The way the Norman windows break into this indicate that these came later. The font probably dates from this period.

In the **13th century** the east wall of the sanctuary was rebuilt and a new window inserted. John Fettiplace's will of 1463 provides the dates of the likely enlargement of the chancel arch and the removal of Sir Thomas and Lady Beatrice Fettiplace's alabaster tomb from the nave to the south chapel built to house it. At the same time a staircase was made in the north wall for access to the rood loft, above which were displayed the figures of the Crucified Christ, His mother and St. John and the belfry was erected. The single small bell appears to date from the 16th century.

There is no record of the furnishings prior to **the Reformation** but when this took place the walls were limewashed and, presumably, a plain holy table, reading desk and lectern, and simple benches were introduced. Texts were then painted on the walls and the royal arms and the Ten Commandments were hung over the chancel arch. In the 18th century the south porch was added.

Considerable repair work was carried out in **1885** bringing to light an early coffin lid, again after a report by Professor E. S. Prior in **1910**, again in **1958** when the Friends of Friendless Churches undertook repairs and finally from 1972 by the Redundant Churches Fund. For five years there was an intensive programme of repairs during which the walls in particular received very careful treatment revealing the paintings that are to be seen today.

Wall Paintings

The subjects above the chancel arch are on the north (left-hand) side a king, next only a crown remains; on the south side it is to be assumed that the angel is associated with the nativity scene, the curtains forming a backcloth for the Blessed Virgin Mary and a third king over the apex of the arch. When the arch was enlarged and the roof raised these scenes were destroyed, the sacred monogram IHS being painted above along with the outline of the cross acting as background for the rood figures. This and the double axe decoration are dated to about 1100.

After the limewashing of the church at the Reformation, the walls were adorned with texts. Appropriately, to the west of the door the congregation was encouraged to remember the poor, a poor box being nearby. On the north wall are the Ten Commandments; and in the sanctuary and above the altar texts appropriate to the holy communion. These are of different styles and shapes indicating that they were painted at different dates.

Memorials

Of particular importance are:-

1. In the south chapel the alabaster tomb of Sir Thomas and Lady Beatrice Fettiplace made circa 1450 by Thomas Prentys and Robert Sutton of Chellaston. Thomas's armour is typical of the reign of King Henry VI; his wife wears an under-dress or kirtle with a full skirt to her ankle. Over her shoulders is a mantle of

state. Around the base of the tomb are angels holding shields, their heraldry no longer surviving.

2. In the north wall of the chancel, a Purbeck marble canopied tomb to John and Dorothy Fettiplace, 1524. Their effigies are in brass plates on the wall. Behind John are three indents for him and behind Dorothy four for her four daughters. The base of the tomb has three shields bearing Fettiplace arms.
3. A stone coffin discovered in 1873 and near the south door a coffin lid, under which were discovered the remains of a priest and his chalice and paten.
4. In the south chapel a slab commemorating Stephen Brown (d.1873) and Sarah his wife (d.1890); nearby that of their eldest son Richard Stephen (d.1852).
5. In the sanctuary a helmet of 1480 known as a *salade*. This was formerly fastened above one of the Fettiplace tombs and probably used at a funeral to denote the military calling of a member of the family.

The stained glass fragments in the east window have been returned to the church after a temporary incorporation into windows in the Victorian church of Holy Innocents, now demolished. On the left is the figure of a mitred bishop with a pastoral staff in his left hand, vested in alb, maniple, tunicle and cope, the last fastened by a huge brooch. On the right is the scene of the Annunciation with the Holy Spirit descending as a dove. These figures date from the first half of the 16th century and may be contemporary with the tomb of John and Dorothy Fettiplace, which also has the same portrayal of the coat of arms.

With grateful acknowledgement to the full history of East Shefford Church by Ivor Bulmer-Thomas, published in 1978.

All photographs by Christopher Dalton.

