

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH,  
NORTHOVER,  
SOMERSET



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**THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST  
WELCOMES YOU TO  
ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH,  
NORTHOVER, SOMERSET.**

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 292 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:

SEAVINGTON, St. Mary. 3 miles east of Ilminster, off A303;  
STOCKLINCH OTTERSEY, St. Mary the Virgin. 2 miles north-east of Ilminster, off A303.

**ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, NORTHOVER, SOMERSET.**  
*by Mark McDermott*

**Introduction**

St. Andrew's church stands on a pronounced knoll alongside the Fosse Way in a former suburb of the Roman town of Ilchester. The Fosse Way, linking Exeter with Lincoln, was joined by another Roman road, from Dorchester, just before crossing the river Yeo. The crossing was initially defended by a fort which was superseded by a fortified town known then as Lindinis or Lendinae in reference to the Lendinienses, the British inhabitants of the low-lying Yeo valley. North of the river (the later name 'Northover' means 'northern river bank') the Fosse Way ran through an extra-mural suburb which included a large Romano-British cemetery in which the pattern of aligned burials may indicate a Christianised population. The siting of St. Andrew's church seems likely to reflect either a distant recollection of this or, alternatively, the deliberate occupation of a site with pagan associations (perhaps the location of a pagan shrine).

**The Saxon Minster**

After the Roman withdrawal Lendinae declined and may have lost its urban character altogether by the time the area became part of the Saxon kingdom of Wessex in the 7th century. The date of the foundation of St. Andrew's church is unknown but it had certainly occurred by 1066. The dedication to St. Andrew who was the patron saint of many Saxon minsters and the fact that it was well endowed with land (although the church and its estate were controlled by the Saxon landowner Brictric, who held the property from Glastonbury abbey) suggest that it was a 'minster' church. A minster would have a community of priests serving the population of an extensive area, and a reference in Domesday Book (1086) to St. Andrew's as the church of Givelcestre (as the revived former Roman town was now known) indicates that it served not only the population north of the river but also that of Ilchester itself. This strengthens the impression that there must have been a special reason for the particular location of the church.

**The Medieval Church**

Control of St. Andrew's church and its land had passed by 1086 to the bishop of London, who held directly from the king. The land has been identified with the medieval manor of Northover, part of which, including the church, was acquired by the hospital of John the Baptist at Bridgwater by 1219. St. Andrew's church seems to have lost its status as a minster by this time, for several churches had already been established within Ilchester, and it was now merely the parish church of Northover. The hospital, as appropriator of the living, benefited from the rectorial tithes as well as the land and appointed a succession of poorly-paid vicars to serve the church, at least two of whom were brethren of the hospital itself.

**County Town**

As the county town of Somerset, Ilchester housed the county gaol which was moved in the 16th century to a new site on the north bank of the river to the west of the Fosse

Way, but the parish boundary was redrawn to transfer the site from Northover to Ilchester. Public executions, some of which took place above the gable entrance, were popular spectacles, but this notorious building was eventually closed in 1843.

### Effects of the Reformation

Thomas Master, vicar from 1509 to 1556, survived the religious changes of the period, but St. John's hospital was dissolved in 1539 and the manor of Northover and the right to appoint the vicar of St. Andrew's passed to a succession of owners, including members of the related Hody and Chichester families – whose memorials can be seen in the Chichester aisle (north transept) of the church.

### The Vicarage

The thatched building on the opposite side of the Fosse Way is a former vicarage which was probably built in the 18th century but may occupy the site of an earlier vicarage. Several vicars chose to live elsewhere until in c.1871 a new vicarage was built on the site of Northover manor house, to the north of the church: this remained the vicarage until 1936 and is now the farmhouse of Vicarage Farm.

### The Church

No identifiable remains of the Saxon minster have survived. Some 14th century window tracery in the Decorated style has been reused in the north wall and stair-turret of the tower, but the overall impression is of a church in the Perpendicular style of the later medieval period, although considerably restored in the 19th and 20th centuries. It consists of a chancel with shallow transepts on either side, an aisleless nave and a west tower, all built of Has limestone with dressed work in golden Hamstone from Ham Hill.

The tower, which seems to have been least affected by later restoration, is relatively plain in comparison with Somerset's finest examples. It has diagonal buttresses which reach to the middle of the second stage, and the top stage (which on the south face has an unusual secondary opening alongside the main belfry window) is surmounted by a plain parapet. The west doorway, with its late-medieval mouldings and four-centred arch, is the only entrance to the church apart from a narrow doorway in the north wall of the chancel, and above it is an empty statue niche (for St. Andrew<sup>2</sup>).

The unrestored church was described by Edmund Rack in the 1780s as 'a pretty, decent edifice' which evidently had a wagon roof, with plastered panels, over the nave and a flat ceiling in the chancel, although the east window had been blocked and no transepts are mentioned. The communion table was 'old and dislocated' and the pulpit was of 'carved wainscot' but 'very indifferent', with a faded fringed cloth and cushion but no sounding-board. Rack recorded four doors and a porch, which may indicate that there was direct entry into the nave at that time, and 'an old stone font on a pedestal', which presumably refers to the present font with its plain octagonal bowl on a carved stem.

Rack also recorded some 'old strong backed benches with carved ends' (probably medieval or 16th century) and seven pews which must have included those built in 1752 when floor-space was sold to various individuals to build pews at their own expense. Above the font (probably then, as now, at the west end of the church) was

a 'singers' gallery'. This had been built in 1758 and a pitch pipe bought for the singers in 1761.

### The Early 19th Century

In 1821 the 'body' of the church was rebuilt in accordance with a plan by a Mr. Beard. No details are known, but the work may have included the rebuilding of the south wall of the nave, which has no plinth, whereas the north wall has a weathered plinth and has been reinforced with buttresses.

Sir Stephen Glynne, on a visit in 1825, found the church plain and uninteresting but he noted 'Rectilinear [Perpendicular] tracery of good work', a small chapel belonging to the Chichester family on the north side of the chancel (presumably added after Rack's visit), a plain octagonal font (as today), some carved bench-ends, and an east window the description of which tallies with the design of the present window, although this may have been renovated in the 1870s (and may also be compared with the west window).

In 1836-37 'tablets' inscribed with the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Creed were set up and one 'Higgins' was paid for the painting and lettering. A window shutter in the tower includes pieces of wooden board with remains of lettering which may be fragments of this work.

### Victorian and Early 20th Century Changes

The phasing out of 'west gallery' music in churches is reflected at Northover by a decision in 1859 to remove the gallery, and subsequent references to an organ and church choir indicate the new liturgical arrangements. Alterations to the pews also occurred in 1859, perhaps creating the present arrangement.

Despite the 1821 rebuilding, another major restoration took place in the 1870s, partly funded by a grant recorded on a notice in the church, although much of the finance was provided by the incumbent, the Rev. L. H. P. Maurice. The work, to plans by the Yeovil architect Charles Benson, included rebuilding the chancel 'from the foundations', adding an organ chamber (the gift of Mrs. Maurice) and re-roofing in pitch pine both nave and chancel, the corbels under the chancel roof being decorated with heraldic shields relating to families and places connected with the history of the church. The present clay roof tiles with scalloped bands are presumably the Bridgwater tiles which were used in 1878. It is also recorded in 1878 that a Miss Price had donated the brass desk on the pulpit (and another for the altar) and that the pulpit and lectern had been made from 'Elizabethan carved oak found in the church', which may refer to the Jacobean-style panels in the pulpit and the fragment of medieval carving on the underside of the lectern desk.

On the completion of the restoration (during which a Roman coin had been found in the chancel) the church was formally reopened by the bishop in November 1878, bad weather being blamed for the rather disappointing attendance.

In 1908 Capt. F. E. Chichester paid for the rebuilding of the Chichester aisle which was being undermined by the gradual collapse of the vault beneath. The vault was sealed and a passage leading to it from the east side of the churchyard filled in.

## The Bells

There were formerly four bells in the tower (although an account of repairs in 1763 refers to equipment for five bells) but only three together with a 5-pit 18th century frame remain. The broken treble bell, which has been scrapped apart from its inscription band, was cast by Richard Purdew I in 1636; the second bell was cast by Thomas Bayley of Bridgwater in 1763; the third by William Ebery of Clossworth in 1751; and the tenor, which has a pre-Reformation inscription including a ship, by the Bristol foundry.

The tower also contains some pieces of lead sheet marked with outlines of shoes and human hands, and names and dates in the 18th and 19th centuries, presumably connected with building work.

## Recent History

Agriculture was the traditional mainstay of the local economy in the parish, but after the arrival of the motor car traffic using the Fosse Way was catered for by garages and other services, although traffic flows have been affected by the opening of the Ilchester by-pass. New housing has included accommodation for those employed at the nearby Yeovilton air station, aircraft from which frequently fly at low level over the church, which has a warning light on the tower. The parish was united with that of St. Mary Major, the only survivor of several medieval churches in Ilchester, in 1936 and, despite the growth in population of Northover, St. Andrew's church was eventually made redundant. It was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust (formerly the Redundant Churches Fund) in 1986. Repairs were carried out under the supervision of Mr. John Schofield. It remains a consecrated building, and its future has been safeguarded by The Churches Conservation Trust, although unfortunately it has been necessary to remove for safekeeping several items including a triptych of the Nativity which was painted and presented by an unnamed lady in 1878.

## The Churchyard

This includes a Hamstone chest tomb with semi-circular arched panels and classical details which commemorates John Fowler who died in 1714.

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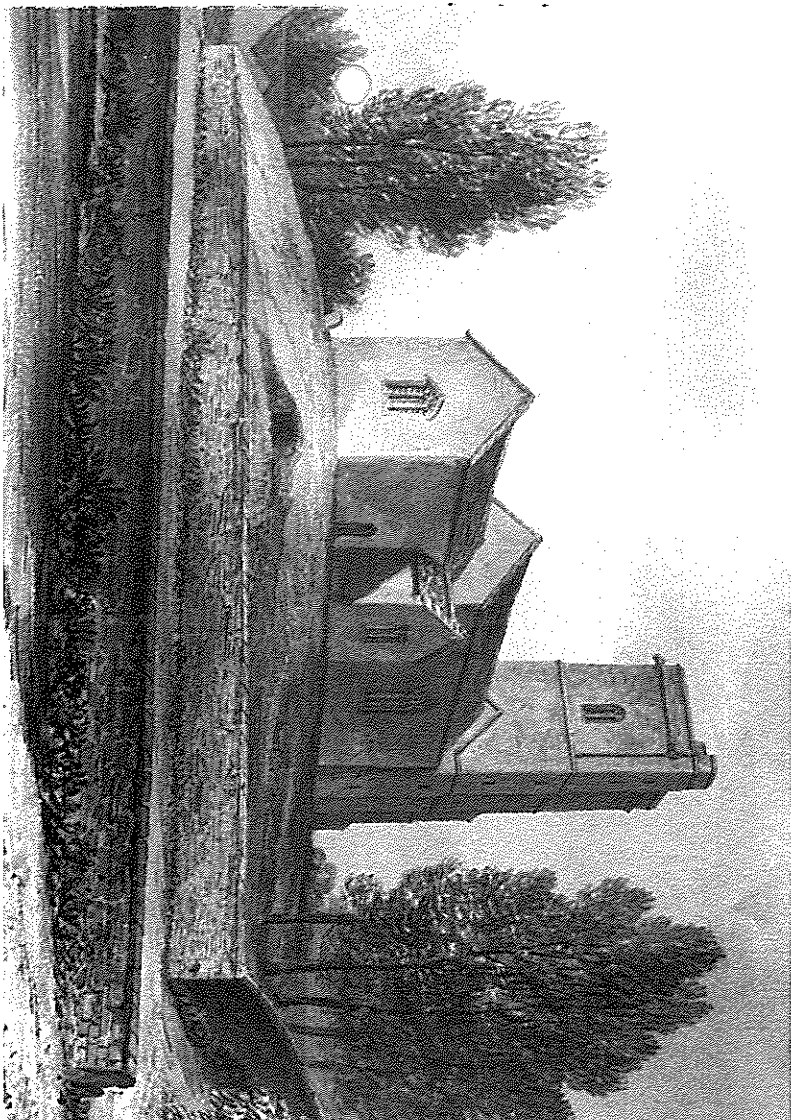
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Drawing by John Buckler, 1832. Reproduced by kind permission of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society.

Ground plan as restored 1878. (Ref. 'DP north 6/3/1'.) Reproduced by kind permission of the Somerset Record Office.

