



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

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PRICE: £1.00



ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

CONINGTON
NEAR PETERBOROUGH
CAMBRIDGESHIRE





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ALL SAINTS' CHURCH
CONINGTON, NEAR PETERBOROUGH
CAMBRIDGESHIRE

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 300 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 is the Trust church of:

STEEPLE GIDDING, ST ANDREW
10 miles NW of Huntingdon off A1

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

CONINGTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

by SIMON COTTON AND OTHERS

Conington church with its fine tower stands sentinel over the landscape – seen both by the traveller in the train from King's Cross to Edinburgh and by the driver on the nearby Great North Road (A1). It stands away from the village and adjacent to the 'big house', now sadly diminished to a surviving stable block. A royal connection is immortalised in the place-name: Conington means the king's manor, the 'ton' of the King. For many centuries the property was held by members of the Royal House of Scotland who were also Earls of Huntingdon. The later holders, the Cotton family, one of whom was the eminent antiquary Sir Robert Cotton, sought to capitalize on this connection and at the same time affirm their loyalty to Queen Elizabeth's Scots successor James I, by erecting elaborate cenotaphs to previous royal personages. In 1752 the manor passed to the Heathcotes.

By the mid-1970s the parishioners of Conington found the cost of maintaining this large church beyond their means. Accordingly, in June 1976, Conington was united with Holme and the church at Holme became the church of the new parish. Conington church was declared redundant and in October 1977 it passed into the care of the Redundant Churches Fund, now The Churches Conservation Trust.

A substantial programme of repairs was put in hand involving consolidating the upper stages of the tower and pinnacles and extensive work to the roof timbers and coverings. The work was carried out by Rattee and Kett Ltd under the supervision of the late Cecil J Bourne, FRIBA.

Domesday Book records the presence of a church close to here in 1086, but the present building dates almost certainly from the late 15th century. Arguments for a later date have been suggested, perhaps in the reign of Queen Mary Tudor, but no conclusion has been reached. Whatever the date, the quality of design and execution of detail in the main fabric strongly suggest the hand of a single architect.

The older church was dedicated originally to Our Lady, the new one to All Saints. The building consists of a western tower with an elaborate porch entrance, nave with north and south aisles, porches also in the northern and southern walls, and a chancel with chapels on either side.

EXTERIOR

The tower is built of oolitic limestone from the quarries at Ketton, Rutland, the rest of the church being of stone rubble and cobble with dressings of Ketton and Barnack stone. The tower has four stages with a base-course that has a quatrefoil motif; below the battlements is a frieze of trefoil-headed panels. The corners have panelled polygonal buttresses, both those on the east side containing staircases, whilst above the parapet level the buttresses become octagonal turrets, finished with lofty pinnacles and pierced crockets. The pinnacles are known to date from 1638 and it is possible that the whole tower was rebuilt from the ground about that date. The tower has a typical Perpendicular west doorway, with a large five-light window above, the tracery renewed in the 19th century. At a higher level are large circular windows, probably innovations of Sir Thomas Cotton in 1638. The tower was strengthened and fitted with iron girders in 1862.

The north and south porches contain original doors and doorways. Their modest size reflects the fact that the west doorway had become the principal entrance, and these were probably for ceremonial use in processions.

The clock is by Vulliamy of London (No. 385 of 1801) – three bells were sold in order to buy it. There were four bells in 1709; so the present second bell is probably the old bell retained in 1802 and recast in 1827 as part of the ring of six bells of that date by Thomas Mears II of London, hanging in a fine early 17th century oak frame.

The nave and chancel have embattled parapets, both the aisles having grotesque gargoyles, originally to throw rainwater clear of the walls. There is a mediaeval gable-cross at the east end of the chancel. The five-light east window below it was much renewed in 1982. There are three-light windows in the north and south walls of the chancel, and five-light east windows to the chapels. The chapels and aisles have four-light north and south windows, the south window of the south chapel being blocked to accommodate Heathcote monuments inside. The clerestory above the nave has four windows in each side, three being three-light and the westernmost five-light.



View of nave looking east

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

An unusual exterior feature is the presence of octagonal stair turrets between the chapels and the aisles. These enabled the sexton to reach the rood-loft across the chancel arch inside and that on the north side gave access to the aisle roof. The north turret has access inside the church; the one on the south side has had the interior door blocked and replaced by an external doorway.

In the churchyard the 'Stone American' memorial on the north side of the church is of interest, commemorating the air crew of the 457th Bomb Group of the United States Army Air Force who were stationed at Glatton Airfield nearby during the Second World War.

INTERIOR

The church is usually entered through the tower doorway. Originally the tower opened to the nave by a high arch; at the Victorian restoration an east wall was erected and a low stone vault inserted on the ground floor. The original high stone vault was replaced by a plaster vault on the first



Memorial in the south aisle to three Thomas Cottons (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

floor. This forms the ringing gallery. The arch in the tower wall has faces flanking it on the east side, one human, one animal. When the old lead was removed from the tower roof in the course of repairs, some 17th century graffiti were cut out and these have been fixed in the gallery.

NAVE

The arcades are of four bays, the three easternmost with two-centred arches and the wider westernmost one with a four-centred arch. The east and west sides of the piers have a rather complex Perpendicular section; the north and south faces have attached shafts which support the roof principals. The nave roof, which has moulded tie-beams, is original, the aisle roofs being much restored. The pews with their tall poppyheads date from 1841.

At the east end of the nave is the oak pulpit, given in memory of the Revd George Heathcote in 1890. Three corbels over the chancel arch probably supported the Rood sculptures. The blocked openings afforded access to the rood-loft above the screen, which was removed in 1838.

NORTH AISLE

Near the west end of the north aisle is a monument to Elizabeth, second wife of Sir John Cotton, 1702, with a bust probably carved by Grinling Gibbons. There are a number of ledger slabs in the floor, many almost illegible.

Near the east end of the aisle are two memorials in Ketton stone, erected after 1603. One is to David, King of Scotland and Earl of Huntingdon, having a panel flanked by two Corinthian columns and topped by a shield with the arms of Scotland and the Anglo-Saxon Kings Waltheof and Aeldred. On the base are several shields including those of Henry the Fowler, Emperor of Germany, France, the Anglo-Saxon kings, William the Conqueror, and Scotland. The monument seems to have been designed to publicise the descent of Earl David. It is inscribed 'Imperator Rex Franciae Anglo-Saxonum Angliae Scotiae'. The other is to Prince Henry of Scotland which is in a similar style, and has a shield of the arms of Scotland impaling Warenne.

Between the north aisle and the chapel is an early 16th century screen, with moulded posts and rail with carved and twisted foliage and carved spandrels.

SOUTH AISLE

On the north side at the entrance to the chapel is a table to John Cotton, 1731, with graffiti on the base (FS17 1785) and traces of mediaeval wall paintings underneath.

On the south wall are two large memorials in Ketton stone, probably erected c.1600. One commemorates Thomas Cotton, 1547 and Lucy Harvey his wife; and Thomas Cotton 1592 and his first wife Elizabeth Shirley; the other Thomas Cotton 1519 and his wife Joan Paris – their arms are in the cornice above.

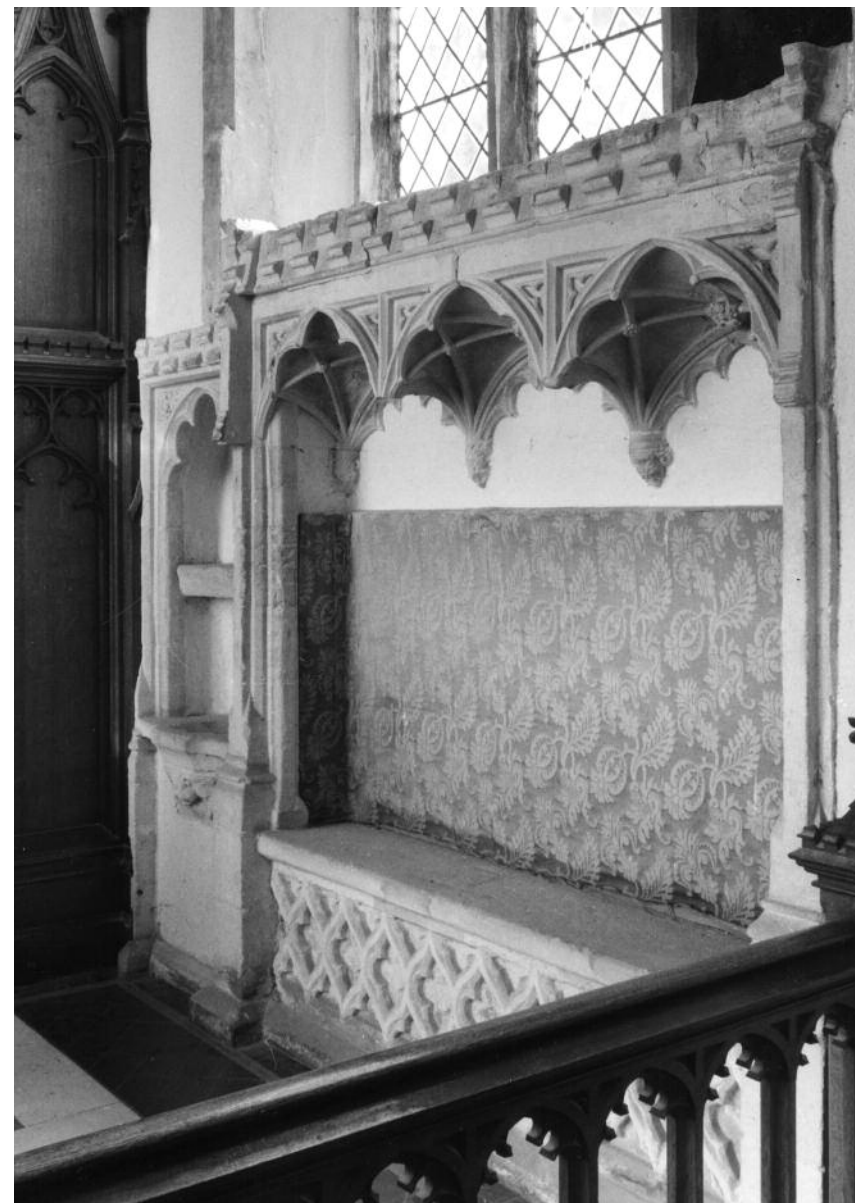
In front is the Heathcote family pew. Further west, towards the end of the aisle, is a tablet in memory of Frances Catherine Rooper, 1892. Near the south door are the fragmentary remains of a mediaeval wall painting of St George and the Dragon conserved in 1990.

The font, at the west end of the aisle, has a mid-13th century octagonal bowl with intersecting pointed arches forming an arcade round it. The arches stand on shafts with moulded capitals and bases. The stem and base are modern. Beside is a ledger slab to William, 1734 and Rebecca Sibley, 1737, infant children of Joseph and Anne Sibley. Nearby is a chest, probably 17th century, with iron-bound sides and ends for security; it has been fitted with a collecting box at one end.

CHANCEL

The choir stalls, tiled sanctuary floor, altar rails and panelling with the Creed, Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments painted on canvas are 19th century. The communion table with baluster legs and plain stretchers dates from c.1650. In the south wall is the piscina, with a cinquefoiled head surrounded by cresting, and an eight-sided drain which is supported by a grotesque creature. Next to it are the contemporary sedilia. The cresting is similar; the canopied head is divided into three sections with miniature interstellar vaulting supported by human heads. At the bottom is a frieze with a quatrefoil motif. The sill of the north window opposite is also lowered for seats.

In the front of the altar rails are two ledger slabs, one to John Cotton, 1635, and the other with a Latin inscription to the Revd Henry Harris, 1698, 30 years 'Fidelis Pastor' of the parish. The small brass tablet to Henry



Sedilia in the chancel

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

Williamson, 1614, an earlier rector, has had a more chequered history, having been ploughed up on Conington Fen in 1900 and restored to the church in 1919; it is now on the south wall. The only stained glass is some of Victorian date around the east window.

An embroidered altar frontal, incorporating parts of four stoles or maniples (c.1650) made from vestments bought at a fair in Rome, was presented to the church by Evelyn Heathcote at Easter 1907. It is now in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

NORTH CHAPEL

Much of the chapel is taken up by the two-manual organ by Miller and Sons of Cambridge. The doorway to the stair turret is in the north-west corner. The principal memorial is that to Sir John Cotton, 1702, in the south-east corner, which has a lengthy Latin text, topped by a shelf of pink marble and his portrait in relief flanked by cherubs and palm fronds. It, too, is probably the work of Grinling Gibbons who signed the very similar Cotton monument of 1697 at the other Conington, near St Ives. A black ledger slab set in the floor partly under the organ, marks the burial place of John Cotton.

A mediaeval corbel in the north-east corner was for a statue of a saint in whose honour the chapel was dedicated. In the south-east corner is a piscina with a flower above the drain and a credence shelf for the wine and water vessels above.

SOUTH CHAPEL

This is separated from the aisle by a screen, doubtless contemporary with that in the north aisle. There is a 16th century piscina with shelf in the south wall.

The earliest memorial is an effigy of Purbeck marble of a member of the Third Order of St Francis, carved c.1330. The figure is vested in a long cowed habit with knotted cord at the waist, worn over a tunic of mail, the head being supported by two cushions. It is probably that of Bernard de Brus, the lord of the manor and patron of the church, who died 1332–33 in his early twenties.

The south window has been filled to take a group of seven 19th century

memorials to the Heathcotes of Conington Castle, whilst in the north-east and north-west corners are two more to the Hon. Emily Frances Heathcote, 1846 and to John Myer Heathcote, 1892.

Two fine memorials with magnificent portrait busts in the south-east and south-west corners commemorate Sit Thomas Cotton, 1662, and Sir Robert Cotton, 1631. The latter was the celebrated antiquary whose assembled manuscripts formed the basis of the British Library. Knighted in 1603, he is said to have suggested the creation of baronets as a way for James I to raise money. He was MP for Huntingdon in 1604–11 but eventually fell into disgrace, being accused of writing seditious pamphlets. Both these monuments were erected c.1675 by Sir John Cotton who died in 1702. His great-granddaughter Catherine, who died on 30 April 1714 aged 9 weeks and 2 days, is commemorated by a white marble slab at the foot of the supposed effigy of Bernard de Brus.

The research of Dr Simon Cotton (not a member of the family associated with the church), is acknowledged with thanks.

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

Back cover: The supposed de Brus effigy (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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