

St John's Church, Waterbeach: Proposed Churchroom heating system

Statement of Significance, A brief history and description of the church buildings, contents, churchyard and setting.

The church building dates back to about 1160 and was named after St John the Evangelist by 1299. The eastern two bays of the arcade are believed to be the oldest existing part of the building with the southern bays probably being slightly older than the northern ones. There is a carved late 12th century capital on one of the pillars which is of particular significance. It is possible that the arches were cut through the thick walls of an earlier church.

The third, western bay of the nave is separated from the two eastern bays by a short section of wall and is probably late 13th century when the church was extended westwards and the tower was added. A north aisle was probably also built at this time.

In the 15th century the north aisle had new windows and a new entrance and a chapel was built to the north of the chancel. This chapel fell into disrepair and was demolished in about 1790. The south aisle and probably the clerestory are also late 15th century. A piscina in the south aisle wall remains from the time when there was a chantry chapel at the east end. The battlements to the north of this aisle were renewed in 1615.

The tower originally had a spire which was blown down in 1719 and rebuilt a year later but then collapsed again in 1821 and was not replaced.

The church seems to have suffered from disrepair over quite a long period from the mid 16th to the 18th century when the spire blew down for the first time, according to Clay's History of Waterbeach (1856). The chapel at the east end of the north aisle was demolished in 1783 because of its condition. However, Robert Masters' history of Waterbeach published in 1795 reports that '*great sums of money have been expended by parishioners in supporting the fabric.*' The church also got some new seating including some high pews and a gallery. A copy of a drawing in Denis Cheason's Guide to St John's Waterbeach shows the interior of St John's in 1835 which indicates what these pews were like but its source is not referenced. It does not show the gallery.

During the 19th century there were three phases of restoration work. The chancel which was still in a state of poor repair was rebuilt in 1848 by Edward Mason who was the rectory lessee. There is a memorial slab commemorating him at the foot of the sanctuary steps. The triple lancet windows with Purbeck marble shafting in the east end were installed then but north and south windows in the chancel were not added until 1878. By 1856 Clay was able to report that '*the fabric of the church is in a good and satisfactory condition: on the contrary, its interior is sadly in want of readjustment from the nature and arrangement of its pews and gallery (which gallery occupies one third of the nave as well as conceals the lower arch)*'.

In 1870-71 the nave and south aisle walls were renewed and a brick south porch was removed. The architect for this work was W M Fawcett. In 1871 a Kempe window was installed in the west wall of the tower.

The Kempe window (1871) is an early, important example, created only three years after the establishment of the Kempe Studio. The subject of the window is The Risen Christ, an unusual subject to be chosen for a window at the west end of a church, near to the font where themes related to the childhood of Christ are more common. In the main part of the window is the full-length figure of Christ. Behind his head a golden nimbus is quartered by a black cross with equal arms. Christ's right hand is raised in blessing, and the mark of the nail is visible in his exposed palm. The Kempe window has been the subject of a conservation project (completed 2019) and apart from wide-ranging conservation work on the window

itself, provided an opportunity to improve the management of damp in the tower area of the Church.

In 1878 the north aisle was rebuilt by William Ladds of London. The new windows imitated the clerestory and the central brick porch was replaced by a new porch at the west end of the church which reused the 13th century two centred-arched doorway. There is a wooden partition and door leading from the inner porch into the north aisle. The leaded glazed panels in the door are of the similar design to those in the north aisle windows. The north and south windows of the chancel which were added at this time are also similar but contain some more ecclesiastical details. To the south of the chancel a small chapel was built to house the organ chamber and the vestry. The glazing in this window matches that of the north and south sides of the chancel. The Miller pipe organ which is still in place today was installed in 1897, replacing an earlier one dating from 1870.

Decoration in the sanctuary included alabaster panelling to the north and south and a reredos with mosaic figures of Christ, Mary and John. This reredos obscures the lowest part of the triple lancet east window which depicts Christ in glory at the top of the central window with a pelican beneath and ascending arrays of worshippers in the right and left windows. The walls were decorated with what appear to have been quite intricate details typical of the late 19th century William Morris style. An indication of what the interior must have looked like before it was painted over in the 1960's can be seen in a painting displayed in the south aisle room.

A medieval altar slab of Purbeck marble which had been broken and buried under the chancel during the Reformation was found in 1875 and restored for use by 1879. It was placed on a carved and painted oak altar table made by Rattee and Kett.

The pulpit which was installed in 1883 has similar mosaics to those on the reredos. The font placed under the Kempe window was also installed at this time and replaced an earlier one (possibly 13th century) which went to the Fen chapel¹. When this building was demolished in 1964 the old font returned to the village and now sits in the Old Burial Ground which is separated from the church by St John's Close and a private house but is still maintained by the St John's PCC. The altar table from the Fen church is now in the north aisle and is moved to the front of the nave for some services. The bell from the Fen church is located on a plinth in the south aisle.

The eastern-most window of the south aisle contains fragments of medieval glass which were collected and put into the window in a project funded by the Friends of St John's in 1999.

At the back of the south aisle is a wooden screen which forms a partition with the South Aisle Room. This houses the cupboard with the heating controls and acts as a passageway through to the church room. It has been equipped with some toys and soft chairs so parents can take small children out for services.

There is no reference as to when the pews which are presently in the church were installed, but from Clay's comments it would seem likely to have been during the 1870's periods of restoration. There is a faded wooden plaque on the wall in the outer porch which may be of relevance. It says, '*The Incorporated Society for the Building of Churches granted £80 AD1878 towards enlarging and restoring the church. All seats are for the free use of parishioners according to law.*' The church wardens' pews to either side of the tower arch were removed during the work on the heating system in 2015. They were likely installed

1 A chapel was dedicated to St Andrew in 1883 in Joist Fen (in the north east area of the Parish). Sadly the floor collapsed in 1964 and repairs were considered "unmerited".

during work on the Nave planned in 1904 which would also have included the installation of a screen in the south aisle, the first step to creating the current South Aisle Room.

The heating system which was commissioned in 2015, uses a system of wet radiators. The boiler and control system are located in the vestry.

In 2002 the first two rows of pews in the nave and the north and south aisles were removed to provide a more flexible space at the front of the church. The Fen Church altar table is moved from the north aisle to the front of the nave for some communion services and there is an electronic organ which is used for many services now. This means that the organist can be in much closer contact with the congregation. The choir now sit usually sit in chairs in this area rather than in the choir stalls for the same reason. There are an increasing number of occasions when this space is not large enough for the activities taking place in it.

The north aisle now serves as a small chapel for weekday and early Sunday communion services.

The east end of the south aisle is carpeted and has been furnished and equipped for children with a selection of appropriate and relevant books and toys, including themed play bags. This provides a valuable space if there are young children present during a service.

In 1976 a Churchroom was built on the south side of the church. This provided an entrance vestibule, toilets, a meeting room and a small kitchen. The vestibule is accessed from the south porch of the church and from a path leading from the churchyard gate on Station Road. An extension was added in 1984. This provided a second meeting room which was also the choir vestry. In 2000 a further extension was built to house a new kitchen and an office. The wall separating the original two meeting rooms was removed and replaced by a moveable partition to allow for a greater variety of uses. While the foundations of this extension were being dug a charnel pit was uncovered which contained a large number of human remains which were reburied following an archaeological survey which also found evidence of an Anglo Saxon ditch. The church room is of conventional construction and heated by means of wet radiators supplied by a 35kW gas boiler located in the kitchen. The boiler was installed at the time of the last phase of construction work completed in 2000.

The Churchroom hosts a wide range of Church and community events including (from 2020) a Food Hub.

In 1982 the church was able to buy the redundant farmyard at the back of the church and convert it into a car park which has been of enormous benefit to the congregation and other visitors.

In the field beyond the car park are the remains of Waterbeach Abbey, home of Poor Claire nuns until they moved to Denny Abbey in the 14th century. An interpretation board is attached to the fence facing the field telling something of the history of the site.

The churchyard was closed for burials in 1855 and a new burial ground established two hundred metres to the east on Station Road. After 1875 all burials were carried out in the Parish Cemetery at the north end of the village, although the Station Road burial ground was not closed until 1968. It is now an open space maintained by the PCC for the benefit of the village. A few headstones remain resting along the boundary walls and there are a couple of monuments and a beautiful beech tree.

The significance of the church (including its contents and churchyard) in terms of:

- i) Its special architectural and historical interest**

- a. The view of the church and the Hall barn as seen from the north east has changed little since the late 19th century and represent a quintessential picture of a once rural village.
- b. Pevsner comments on the significance of the arcades.
- c. The 19th century decorated reredos, altar table, pulpit and font are examples of the artistic style of the time.
- d. There are old headstones in the churchyard dating back to the 17th century.
- e. A piscina in the wall of the south aisle remains from the time when there was a chantry chapel here.
- f. Memorial panels for those who died in WW1 are mounted in the old east window which is now adjacent to the organ chamber. There is a memorial plaque for 514 squadron which was stationed at Waterbeach airfield during WW2 and there is a book of remembrance listing all those who were killed in service whilst stationed at Waterbeach during WWII.
- g. The church has grade II* listed status.

ii) Any significant features of artistic or archaeological interest

- a. Kempe window
- b. Medieval marble altar slab
- c. Variety of the pillars: none are alike
- d. North and south arcades
- e. Decorative style after school of William Morris of the pulpit and reredos mosaics, altar table and font.

Sources of information:

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A history of the parish of Waterbeach, *William Keating Clay (1859)*

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Bradley, S and Pevsner, N, Cambridgeshire (in the *Buildings of England* series), Yale University Press, 2014