

The Church of St Peter and St Paul

It is very probable that there was a church in Langham before the Norman Conquest, but no Saxon or Norman work survives in the present church, which is a very fine specimen of various styles of Gothic Architecture.

The earliest parts of the existing building are the chancel, lower part of the aisles and the tower, which are 13th century. The south transept was added at the end of the 13th century; in the 14th century the present nave arcades, chancel arch and porch were built, the aisles probably rebuilt and the transept remodelled. The font is also 14th century but with a later oak cover. Simon de Langham is generally thought to have been responsible for the 14th century work.

In the 15th century the roofs of the chancel, nave and aisles were replaced and the clerestory of the nave was added, new windows were inserted in the chancel and the aisles at the end of the transept, and the parapet outside, with its battlements was also added. The two windows above the chancel arch are an unusual feature and outside, on the south side, the carved frieze of ballflower decoration is much admired. The church formerly had a north transept but this was taken down in 1802.

The south porch formerly had an upper chamber or parvise, the door to which can be seen in the south transept. The stone bowl in the porch is a mediaeval mortar. Near the organ is a narrow door which, in pre-Reformation times opened to a stairway to the rood loft.

The church plate includes a cup and cover paten dated 1679 and inscribed N Moysey, Curate; Thos Hubbard, Will White, Churchwardens; and a flagon dated 1724 given by Hannah Wiles, daughter of Dr Cotton, a curate of Langham Church at the end of the 17th century.

The parish registers commence in 1559. The earliest are in the keeping of the Leicestershire Records Office. The clergy from 1912 are listed. Until this time Langham had been served by a curate from Oakham.

The Feast

Before 1914 the Feast was kept with enthusiasm and lasted a whole week culminating in Feast Sunday (the Sunday nearest St. Peter's Day.) On Feast Sunday the church was (and still is) strewn with hay. The Feast was celebrated with a fair, dancing and cricket. Traditional Feast Sunday fare was roast duckling, new potatoes and garden peas, followed by a curd tart.

The field on which Fairfield Close was built was the scene of the fair, with roundabouts and side-shows provided by the White family from South Witham. There was a midweek dance. A fiddler came from Oakham and began to play as he passed through Barleythorpe. Everything stopped for the cricket match against Whissendine. A return match being played the following week.

Feast Week - Margaret Catchpole

On Sunday evening the Oakham Salvation Army would arrive in the Square. As the band played we sang the rousing hymns. Some folk would then wander into the Noel Arms' yard, where seats had been provided. It was unthinkable in those days for a woman to go for a drink in the "Local", but on Feast Day it was possible to have a glass of stout in the pub yard.

The village Cricket Club looked forward to their three days of cricket against local villages, especially Whissendine. We children had been waiting days for the arrival of Jimmy White's Fair, the swinging boats; roundabouts; horses; coconut shies and sweet stalls, with music blaring out over most of the village. We were let loose to do as we pleased for a couple of hours each evening. Whether we had money for a ride or not - we were there!

Those who remember the Feast recall it as a highlight of village life but according to the Stamford Mercury fewer people than usual attended in 1868 and Langham Feast like many others was said to be going out of fashion.

The Bells

Langham has six bells, the two smaller ones were recast by Taylor of Loughborough in 1900 when the bells were re-hung on a new iron frame. (The old wooden frame, wedged between the walls, was damaging the tower.) The cost of £239 was met by Sir Henry Clarke Jervoise in memory of his sister. The second bell had been previously recast in 1874, when the bells were rehung. At the same time that the clock was installed. The third bell is by Thomas Norris of Stamford and dated 1636. The fourth is a late mediaeval bell and bears the inscription "Sit Nomen Domini Benedictum". The fifth bell by Thomas Hedderley of Nottingham is dated 1771 and inscribed "The Churchis prais I sound allways". The tenor bell is by Thomas Norris in 1660. There are two records in the church of remarkable peals rung on Langham's bells.

Part of an oak beam from the belfry is dated 1662 and bears the initials **EC: HH: CW**.

The church bells would broadcast news to the village. The tenor bell ringing three strokes, three times, with a pause between each three meant the death of a man. For a woman there would be two strokes, three times and for a child a single stroke. On the day of a funeral the sexton would ring the treble bell one hour before the funeral and the tenor bell for the arrival of the cortege.

After the harvest, the Gleaning bell rang at 8a.m. and 5p.m.

The Rent Bell was rung to announce the arrival of Lord Gainsborough's steward at the Noel Arms to collect the rents due to the Exton estate.

Campanology

Early preachers summoned their scattered flock to worship by means of the ringing of a small handbell but in later times clergy wanted large church bells which could be heard over great distances. Early church bells were something of a status symbol and were very large, very heavy and very difficult to ring.

After the Reformation new, lighter bells were made and many old bells recast. The introduction of the "whole wheel" method of hanging bells made it possible to control the movement of each bell and this led to the ringing of "rounds" - ringing in order from the lightest to the heaviest bell. Further alterations to the order in which the bells could be rung provided the basis for change ringing. 17th century ringers, in particular Fabian Stedman, were fascinated by the possible permutations and this saw the beginning of "methods". In the mid 19th century, bell ringers, especially those in country parishes, had a reputation for a fondness for the ale house.

Restoration

It seems that Langham church was neglected after the Reformation and the Archdeacon's Visitation Report for 1605 records an unpaved nave; the communion table in decay, broken seats and no cover for the font. In 1619 the chancel was "foul and filthy"; there was no paten and a basin was sometimes used for christenings. Work was undertaken on the belfry in 1636 and 1660. There were more criticisms in 1681 when the Archdeacon ordered the chancel to be paved, seats, floor and rood-loft repaired, windows glazed and the Ten Commandments, Creed and Lord's Prayer to be painted and the Sanctus bell repaired and hung.

A beam inscribed: **17 C&W HUBBARD 83, CHURCHWARDEN** commemorates the repair of the nave roof.

There was a period of restoration between 1876-1880 when work was undertaken on the chancel and nave, the west gallery was removed and the present pews installed. Names of donors are on the south wall. Sadly during this restoration four armorial windows were removed as was the rood screen. Thanks to Sir Henry Clarke Jervoise, the flooring was renewed in 1890 and followed by the installation of heating apparatus and a new reredos. The organ was donated by him in 1895 and in 1899 the roof of the north aisle was renewed. In 1901 the spire was repointed and the lightning conductor erected.

The outer doors to the south porch were made in 1976 by inmates of HM Prison, Ashwell. The ironwork, dated 1734, and the original lock were retained.

The care of parishioners has meant that church restoration has continued as needed.

Outside the Church

The clock was given to the church by Revd. John Mould, Vicar of Oakham in 1874. There is a "scratch dial", a primitive sun dial scratched into the stone, on the south side of the church.

The churchyard was levelled and re-walled in 1897, thanks to Sir Henry Clark Jervoise, and enlarged on the southwest side by the work of parishioners in 1921 when the war memorial was erected.

Memorials

Memorials in the church include an alabaster slab recording the death of John Clarke in 1532 and his two wives.

The stained glass windows in the south transept honour the memory of a former churchwarden, Henry John Rudkin who died in 1866 and church benefactor, Sir Henry Clarke Jervoise who died in 1908. This second window is by J.N. Comper as is the east window which is dedicated to Frederick Hamlyn and given in 1907.

There are memorial tablets commemorating Lord Ranksborough; George Ruddle; Sir Kenneth Ruddle; John Thompson; the First Airborne Division who trained in the parish prior to the Battle of Arnhem; Owen Hugh Smith; Private William Mann; the re-hanging of the bells in memory of Janet Small; the repair of the clock in memory of John Hassan; the restoration of the heating system in memory of James Robinson; former organists Miss Lee and Percy Pointer.

The vestry was constructed in 1962 in memory of Owen Hugh Smith. The decoration of elephants' heads represents his family crest.

Further details of church history and architecture may be obtained from David Tew's "Short Guide"; from the Victoria History of the Counties of England and from The Rutland Magazine and Historical Record 1903/4.