
St. Peter's Church, Upwood

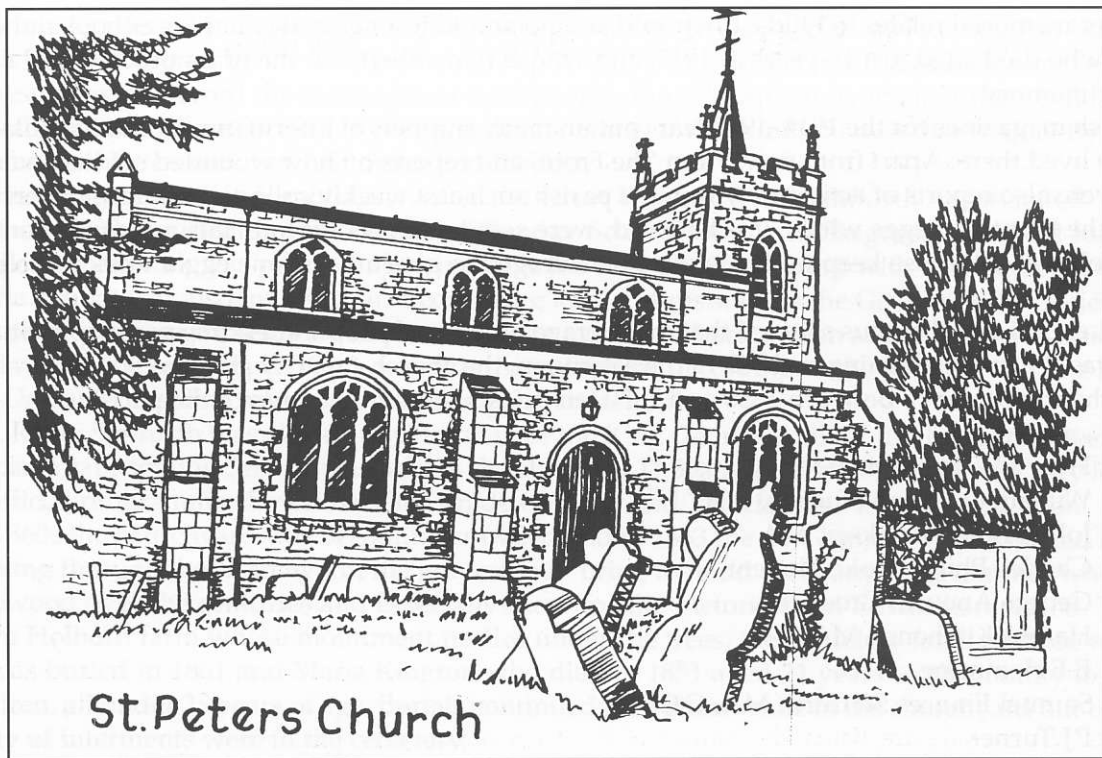
The church of Upwood St. Peter played an important part in the daily lives of people in years past. The two villages of Upwood and Gt. Raveley were joined together for worship in medieval times and whilst the basic fabric of the church has not altered much over the centuries, the passage of time has necessitated some repairs and alterations.

In 1884/85 the north aisle and vestry were rebuilt at a cost of £340. Unfortunately additional repairs were necessary in 1912 at a further cost of £214. The original church tower was built in the late 13th century but, due to subsidence in the 19th century, had to be almost entirely rebuilt in 1890. A plaque inserted into the outside wall in the tower records the various years of these repairs.

The parish magazines also record frequent appeals for repair funds — October 1932 saw a leaking roof leading to replacement beams and lead roofing. Fund raising in the form of whist drives and jumble sales was organised. Revd. Turner in July 1938 was again asking for funds to repair the east wall and roof and when talking about the forthcoming Fête exhorted the parishioners to *'do our best first to fill the stalls and then to empty them and to have a good try to win the competitions, then we are sure to achieve much...'*

Not all the repair work, however, was funded by public subscription. The restoration of the northeast window in the Chancel was dedicated to Sir Ernest Shepperson of Upwood House 1874–1945.

The most notable part of the church is the War Memorial, dedicated in January 1920. The Lady Chapel in the South aisle was restored as part of the memorial work but the most outstanding feature is the mosaic below the main window, depicting the crucifixion, designed by William Glasby (1863–1941) famous for his artistry in glass. Under this mosaic are listed the names of the men of the joint parish who gave their lives for their country in two world wars and the Korean war. One other second world war memorial in the church is a marble baptismal font dedicated to James 'Hadge' Brown which was originally sited in the Wesleyan Methodist chapel.



The Domesday Survey of 1086 mentions a church in Upwood. The church on the present site was started c.1100AD but very little of this early building now remains. The present church is of barnack stone dressing over a flint rubble filling.

One other memorial relates to Hilda Townsend, a scholar and teacher in the Sunday School and organist in the church who died aged just 16 years in 1915, and who is remembered in the brass processional cross, dedicated to her memory.

The parish magazines for the 1914–1918 war contain many snippets of information about the village and the people who lived there. Apart from news from ‘the Front’ and reports on how wounded soldiers were recovering, there were also reports of activities within the parish such as a weekly collection of newspapers to send to soldiers at the Front and eggs which, it is believed, were sent to Abbots Ripton Hall, a convalescent home for wounded soldiers. All those keeping fowls were encouraged to give at least one egg a week to help with this effort.

The 1851 ecclesiastical census showed that the average number of people attending worship at St. Peter’s on a Sunday was 113 in the morning and 167 in the afternoon, the church capacity given as 300 seats — considerably more than nowadays! Between 1850 and 1950 ten priests served the needs of the parish:

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| 1850-1864 | Henry Worsley Mawdesley |
| 1864-1885 | William O’Farrell Hughes, MA |
| 1886-1908 | John Francis Cooksey, MA |
| 1909-1910 | Charles Philip Croke Nugent |
| 1910-1914 | George Aneurin Green, BA |
| 1919-1925 | Harold Kitchener, MA |
| 1925-1931 | E.F.Hemming |
| 1932-1936 | Samuel Frances Staffurth MA, C.C. |
| 1937-1945 | P.J.Turner |
| 1946-1951 | Frank A.Cox |

The church registers for the period are held by the County Record Office at Huntingdon but a printed transcript is being prepared by the local history group so that a copy of the historic records may be kept in the church. These registers record the marriages of local people, the subsequent baptism of their children and the sad entries for burials, all too often for young children. Some of the family names that frequently appear are Shelton, Fountain, Townsend, Setchell, Scarr and Sinclair.

The parish magazine ceased publication after the Great War but Revd. Staffurth 'resuscitated' it. The first edition in June 1932 reported that the combined Sunday Schools Outing to Skegness was fixed for Thursday, 4th August and that work was proceeding to improve the look of the cemetery with new gateposts. Alongside worship, the church was also involved in encouraging local groups such as the Girls Friendly Society which in the 1930s used to meet in the schoolroom on a Tuesday evening. There was an active Mothers' Union that met on a Monday evening and a Lads' Club was flourishing where, according to the parish magazine for October 1934 'Neil Greenwood's dart board still proves a great attraction'.

In 1935, Revd. Staffurth was elected as Chairman of the King George V Silver Jubilee committee and on 6th May a special Thanksgiving Service was held in the church at 11.30a.m. It cannot have been a very long service since the official programme shows that the Parade of Decorated Vehicles was to start at 12 noon.

By the 1860s the churchyard was becoming crowded and in 1863 the new cemetery was opened in Meadow Road. Walking through the churchyard, the gravestones bring to mind the many large families who lived and died in Upwood over the centuries and especially those for the Victorian and Edwardian period. The Fairley family from Holborn farm whose monument nestles under the trees, the Pentelow family whose ten year old son John was buried in 1861 and Maria Kington who died in 1851 aged 21 years — this family lost a total of seven children, all under 25 years of age. Burials continued for a short while in the churchyard but by the 1870s the majority of interments were in the cemetery.

Tobe Stratton, as a schoolchild, can recall that when a funeral service took place at the church all the children had to line the road outside the school whilst the funeral procession went by. This gave a pleasant, if somewhat sad, break to the daily scholastic routine.