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St Wilfrid's Church, North Muskham Investigation of Evidence for External Render and Statement of Significance

Aimee Henderson

Discovery, Innovation and Science in the Historic Environment



**ST WILFRID'S CHURCH
NORTH MUSKHAM
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**

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of Significance**

Aimee Henderson

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SUMMARY

The church of St Wilfrid's North Muskham is a Grade I listed parish church in Nottinghamshire (NHLE: 1178997). St Wilfrid's is constructed, in part, of Lias Limestone, which outcrops across Nottinghamshire but is more prevalent in the southwest of England. Lias Limestone weathers poorly and, while it is suggested that such buildings were quite commonly rendered historically, it is difficult to prove this conclusively. The church was added to the Heritage at Risk (HAR) Register in 2014 due to the deteriorating condition of its masonry, particularly on the lower stages of the tower.

Research to establish whether there is a historic precedent for rendering this church will inform conservation methods for this building view a view to remove it from the HAR Register.

CONTRIBUTORS

Fieldwork and research were undertaken by Aimee Henderson. The report was written by Aimee Henderson. Unless otherwise indicated, photography is by Stella Fitzgerald. Unless otherwise stated in the report, all images are copyright of the Historic England Archive.

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The author is grateful for the assistance of Jane Holt, Architect at St Wilfrid's and also Mr Andrew Willey, Churchwarden for their time and assistance when visiting the church and in providing access to photographic material. Thanks, are also given to our Historic England colleague Amanda White, HAR Architect.

ARCHIVE LOCATION

Historic England Archive, The Engine House, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon, SN2 2EH

DATE OF RESEARCH AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Fieldwork was undertaken in October 2021. Archival research was also undertaken at Nottinghamshire Archives in October 2021. Stella Fitzgerald, photographer for Historic England visited the site in December 2021.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Methodology	1
Location and context	2
DESCRIPTION	4
Exterior	4
Interior	6
PREVIOUS RESEARCH – EXTERNAL RENDER ON CHURCHES	11
DOCUMENTARY HISTORY	14
Early history	14
14th - 16th centuries	15
17th - 19th centuries	17
20th century - present	20
EVIDENCE OF EXTERNAL RENDER AT ST WILDFRID'S CHURCH	24
SIGNIFICANCE	30
Setting and context	30
Evidential value	30
Historical value	31
Aesthetic value	32
Communal value	32
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	33
BIBLIOGRAPHY	34
ENDNOTES	37

INTRODUCTION

The church of St Wilfrid's North Muskham is a Grade I listed parish church in Nottinghamshire (NHLE 1178997). The earliest surviving part of the church is the north arcade and lower part of the tower, which date from the late-12th and late 13th century respectively. The church was extended and altered in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. It was restored in 1906-7 by Messrs A Woods and Sons under the direction of the architect Charles Hodgson Fowler of Durham. Hodgson Fowler was a student and later assistant of Sir George Gilbert Scott, and Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

St Wilfrid's is constructed in part of Lias limestone, which outcrops across Nottinghamshire but is more prevalent in the south west of England. Blue lias weathers poorly. It is suggested that such buildings were quite commonly rendered historically, although it is difficult to prove this conclusively. Documentary records are often vague as to the use, location, and application of surface coatings, and weathering and/or intentional scraping of external renders can mean that little physical evidence remains on the built fabric. The church was added to the Heritage at Risk (HAR) Register in 2014 due to the deteriorating condition of its masonry, particularly on the lower stages of the tower.

Amanda White, HAR Architect at Historic England has requested that research be undertaken to establish whether there is a historic precedent for rendering the church.

Research to inform methods for addressing the HAR issues at this church will assist in removing it from the HAR Register and in addressing similar issues elsewhere.

Methodology

The following principal aims were identified to guide the investigation:

- To clarify whether any evidence exists of historic external rendering at St Wilfrid's North Muskham and how this relates to wider discussions regarding surface treatments for Lias stone churches.
- To establish the significance of the site, in terms of Historic England's *Conservation Principles*.¹

Documentary research was undertaken to understand the history and development of the building. Information was collated from primary sources held by the Nottinghamshire Record Office, which also holds the record of the Southwell and Nottingham Diocesan Office. Given that the focus of this report is on finding evidence for historic external render at St Wilfrid's, and that the churchwardens have recently found an undated photograph which appears to show render on the tower, the decision was made to concentrate primary documentary research on the 19th- and 20th-century history of the church. Information regarding the earlier history of the building has been drawn from secondary sources, notably the work of the Southwell and Nottingham Church History Project, and the Thoroton Society.

Furthermore, as the principal focus of this report was centred on the west tower, discussion of the church building as a whole has been limited to only high-level descriptions rather than an in-depth building assessment.

Although there are various forms of external surface coverings, including limewash, roughcast, render, plaster and stucco, for the purposes of this report the term render is used, unless a more specific term can definitely be applied.

Location and context

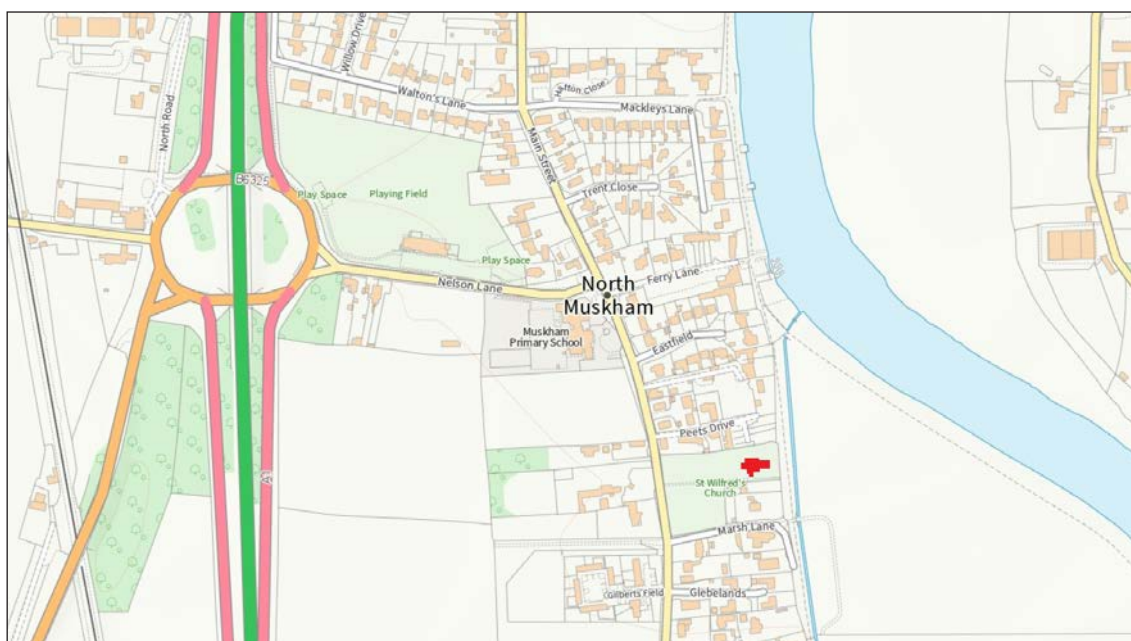


Figure 1: Location of St Wilfrid's Church (indicated in red). [Crown Copyright and database right 2022. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900]

North Muskham is a village and civil parish located north of Newark-on-Trent in the county of Nottinghamshire. The church is located on Main Street opposite the Old Hall which is listed Grade II and dates from around 1679.² The church is sited just south of the main settlement and is surrounded by a number of small cottages and houses which mostly date from the 18th and 19th centuries, interspersed with 20th century infill.

The church is set back from the road and is surrounded to the north, west and south-west by a graveyard. Immediately south of the churchyard a small cottage (Church Cottage) and its garden form the southern boundary of the graveyard. The east end of the church looks out over fields backing onto the River Trent. The course of the Trent historically was further east until a flood in around 1575 changed the course of the river to its modern path. This separated North Muskham from the village of Holme, now located on the eastern bank of the river.³ The parishes of North Muskham and Holme were formally separated in 1849 when the Parish of St Giles at Holme was created. Prior to this date they formed a single much larger parish,

although the church at Holme functioned as a chapel of ease attached to the church at North Muskham from the 12th century onwards.⁴ St Wilfrid's, North Muskham is now part of a wider 'United Benefice' of four rural parishes including North and South Muskham, and Kelham (all dedicated to St Wilfrid) and St Michael and All Angels at Averham.

The neighbouring parish churches of St Wilfrid's, South Muskham, (NHLE 1179422) and St Giles', Holme (NHLE 1302380), are both Grade I listed. Like St Wilfrid's North Muskham, both churches are constructed from a mix of local stones including Lias Limestone. A recent Quinquennial Inspection for St Wilfrid's South Muskham noted that external plaster remained visible on the lower courses of the tower as late as 1957, albeit in a poor condition.⁵

The Strategic Stone Study for Nottinghamshire identifies Lias Limestone as one of several stones used in the construction of St Wilfrid's North Muskham, along with Skerry Sandstone, Lower Magnesian Limestone and Lincolnshire Limestone. Regarding Lias Limestone, the study states the following

Evidence of Lias Limestone use dating back some 1000 years is provided by the ruins of Newark Castle, the Norman parts of which prominently feature this stone type. Churches of various ages built mainly or partly of Lias Limestone are found within an arcuate band, running roughly parallel to the Nottinghamshire–Leicestershire and then the Nottinghamshire–Lincolnshire county boundaries, between Wysall in the south and Hawton further north and east. Lias Limestone again features along the Trent Valley to the north of Newark, being seen to a greater or lesser extent in the churches at South Muskham (St. Wilfrid's), North Muskham (also St. Wilfrid's), Collingham (All Saints' and St. John the Baptist's), Sutton on Trent (All Saint's) and Girton (St. Cecilia's) amongst others.⁶

In addition to the churches at North and South Muskham, the Church of St Giles at Holme, the Church of St Bartholomew at Langford, and the Church of St Wilfrid's at Kelham all contain Lias Limestone in some quantity. The Strategic Stone Study identifies around 25 Lias Limestone quarries within 50 miles of North Muskham, the nearest being that of Beacon Hill Quarry in Newark.

DESCRIPTION

Exterior

The church of St Wilfrid's, North Muskham comprises a western tower, nave with north and south aisles, chancel and south porch. The majority of the church is constructed from dressed stone blocks, with the exception of the lowest stage of the tower which is built of coursed rubble stone. More specifically, the nave, chancel, south aisle and porch are constructed from Skerry Sandstone, as is the upper stages of the tower. The north aisle, as well as dressings and decorative work is executed in Lincolnshire Limestone and Magnesian Limestone. Only the lowest stage of the tower is constructed from Lias rubble stone.⁷ The windows of the chancel and north aisle have chamfered stone mullions, some of which contain fragments of medieval stained glass. The buttresses of the 16th century north aisle bear the coat of arms of the Barton family (three stags heads contained within a shield).⁸

The church has crenelated parapets throughout which conceal shallow-pitched roofs behind. The tower features carved gargoyles on its uppermost stage, and stone grotesques also feature on the corners of the nave and chancel (Figure 4). As mentioned above, the lowest stage of the tower (13th century) is constructed from rubble stone with dressed stone quoins, the upper stages (14th century) above are constructed from dressed stone and are in noticeably better condition than the lower stage. A small lean-to structure attached to the western side of the north aisle is an early 20th-century boiler house, which is semi-subterranean.



Figure 2: St Wilfrid's Church, North Muskham [DP311805]



Figure 3: Nave and chancel from North [DP311806]



Figure 4: Grottesque, southeast corner of the nave. Note also the stone gargoyle above the rainwater downpipe [DP311810]

Interior

The church has a traditional plan with the altar located at the eastern end. Entering through the south porch, the inner south doorway has a chamfered and rebated head and hood mould and retains a 15th-century plank door.

The nave is three bays long with a clerestory. The north arcade contains the earliest fabric in the church, dating from around 1190.⁹ Two of the piers in the north arcade are octagonal and feature water-leaf capitals, these are thought to be the earliest octagonal piers in Nottinghamshire.¹⁰ The 15th century south arcade has two unequal-sided octagonal piers running directly into arches, engaged flanking shafts with round bases and octagonal capitals. The south aisle also contains an octagonal stone font inscribed with a date of 1662 on the stem.

The shallow-pitched nave ceiling is 15th century in date and has moulded arched tie beams on moulded curved brackets. It also has moulded purlins and foliate bosses. Alternate brackets have figures holding shields.¹¹

The chancel, which is two bays in length, is separated from the nave by a heavily moulded 15th century rood screen with a canopy forming the rood loft. The carved rood itself was added in the 20th century. The chancel contains a restored 15th-century piscina with an elliptical head and also an aumbry set within a 19th century surround, in the Decorated style, with crocketed pinnacles and ogee finial.¹²

There are a number of stained-glass windows including the west and north windows of the north aisle which contain fragments of 16th century glass panels with the Barton rebus.¹³ The east window of the north aisle dates from 1938 and replaced an earlier medieval window which contained the Barton arms.¹⁴ The south aisle has to the east, a window with further fragments of 16th century stained glass also depicting the Barton rebus. The east window of the chancel dates from 1905 and was installed in memory of Rev. Francis Oswald Colley who instigated a major restoration of the building in 1904, but sadly died before it was completed in 1907.¹⁵ The west window of the tower has stained glass dating from 1907 and dedicated to St Paulinus.¹⁶

The church also contains a number of monuments, including a pyramidal memorial to John Smithe (d.1581) which is located in the chancel, and two funerary hatchments to William Dickenson (d.1822) and his wife Harriet (d.1805).¹⁷ William Dickinson, born William Dickinson Rastall, was the son of the vicar-general of the church of Southwell. He became a successful lawyer but would also distinguish himself as a historian, writing histories of both the town of Southwell in 1787 and Newark in 1806. William and his wife were residents of Muskham Grange (demolished 1964).¹⁸

An early 20th century organ and organ case has been inserted into the top of the tower arch, with a further 20th century timber screen filling the arch below.



Figure 5: Nave looking east [DP311821]



Figure 6: Nave looking west [DP311821]



Figure 7: Chancel [DP311827]

PREVIOUS RESEARCH – EXTERNAL RENDER ON CHURCHES

Most people are familiar with the image of medieval churches and their towers as being constructed with walls of exposed stone masonry. However, this perception has been inherited from the Victorian Gothic Revivalists, whose vision of what a medieval church should look like meant that historic surface coverings were often lost or deliberately stripped from churches during restoration.¹⁹ It is becoming increasingly acknowledged that many medieval churches – and particularly their towers – would have had some form of external surface covering; either limewash or render.²⁰

Church towers were high status medieval structures, they were expensive to build and it therefore seems reasonable to assume that measures to maintain, protect or otherwise improve the appearance of the tower would be undertaken. In some cases this certainly included the rendering of the exterior of the tower. However, pre-Reformation evidence of this is rare.²¹

A single example of a pre-Reformation agreement between a builder and a parish which specifies the application of an external render (in this case referred to as ‘roughcast’) is recorded by Salzman in his book *Building in England*.

1508/9, Wycombe Church (Bucks)

Agreement by which a mason is to take down the central tower and two of the arches on which it stands, and to make six responds for the chancel arch and side arch... ..to finish of the walls, roughcast them and plaster them on the inside.²²

Salzman dedicates a chapter of his book to the subject of plasters, whitewash and paints, but this is largely concerned with internal decoration rather than external protection.²³

It would appear that, early on at least, the removal of either internal plaster or external render from churches was little commented upon in the theoretical writings of 19th century church restorers and architects.²⁴

The various materials used in church building were examined by J Charles Cox and Alban Caroe writing in 1914 and 1949 respectively; both of whom dedicate brief sections to the discussion of plaster.²⁵ From examination of both standing built fabric and documentary evidence, both Cox and Caroe came to the conclusion that that early rubble walling in most parts of the country was ‘for the most part, plastered on the outside’.²⁶

The enthusiasm for removing surface coatings from churches arose principally from the writings of Pugin and his followers the Ecclesiologists who preached of the need for ‘truthfulness’ in architecture; that stone, timber and metal should be visible and not concealed behind renders or other surface coverings.²⁷ As discussed by G K Brandwood, pre-Victorian churches were, without exception, plastered internally.²⁸ He also notes that

...the Ecclesiologists were unanimous in their condemnation of external stucco. The fact that it had been commonplace on medieval churches in no way mitigated their dislike of it.²⁹

In addition, external render, it seems, was viewed by Victorian church restorers as often being the result of Georgian intervention to bring historic churches in line with contemporary fashion. Concealing rough brick or stonework behind render was thus sternly condemned by the Ecclesiologists and, as noted by Brandwood, render added to buildings in the early 1800s was then knocked off again by the 1860s as the fervour for church restorations reached its peak.³⁰

By the 1870s however, this enthusiasm for scraping away old render was being challenged, most notably by William Morris, whose protestations against the 'scraping and scouring of Tewkesbury Abbey' was published in *The Athenaeum* on 5 March 1877.³¹ In it, Morris railed against the 'acts of barbarism which the modern architect, parson and squire call "restoration"'. Much of Morris's letter would later be repeated within the manifesto of the organisation he would go on to found that same year; namely the Society for the Preservation of Buildings (SPAB). SPAB was often referred to as the 'anti-scrape' movement.³²

Morris was not alone in the condemnation of the scraping of church renders. Charles Hodgson Fowler, a pupil of Sir George Gilbert Scott, wrote in 1882 that when dealing with plaster, 'they [churches] should not bare and point their rubble walls and leave them like a barn'.³³

Charles Hodgson Fowler (1840-1910) was born in Nottinghamshire and later trained under Sir George Gilbert Scott. Like Gilbert Scott, Hodgson Fowler specialised in ecclesiastical architecture, later holding the position of Clerk of Works to Durham Cathedral. After 1890 he became architect to Lincoln Cathedral and also to Rochester Cathedral after 1898, in addition to acting as diocesan architect for Lincoln, York and Durham.³⁴

Hodgson Fowler's 1882 article in *Building News* followed a lecture he gave to the Leeds Architectural Society on 'Church Restorations: What to Do and What to Avoid'. Hodgson Fowler espoused the importance of church restorers understanding not only the material and artistic qualities of a church, but also its ritual and ecclesiastic history. He stated that lack of knowledge about medieval ritual and how it related to church buildings may result in what he described as the 'blotting out of whole pages in the history of a building'.³⁵

In many ways, Hodgson Fowler's article was prescient of many of our modern conservation practices. It was his view that an architect was duty bound, when restoring old churches, to examine the fabric and undertake research to understand the history of the building. He also stressed that the restorers should take pains to visit neighbouring churches, so that they could understand local character and prevent the destruction of historic features through ignorance. He asked that 'all traces of the past should be preserved as far as possible, because this often gave a key to what was lost'.³⁶

The views of Hodgson Fowler upon the restoration of churches are particularly significant for St Wilfrid's, North Muskham because between 1904 and 1907 he was the architect of a substantial restoration of the church. This will be discussed in greater detail later in the report.

It should be noted that conclusive proof of historic renders or other surface finishes can be difficult to find. Churchwardens' accounts, where these survive, are typically the best source of information regarding changes to a building. However, these can be vague in detail and even if plaster, render, or other surface coverings are mentioned it can be difficult to conclude with certainty which parts of a church they may have been applied to.

In the case of St Wilfrid's, North Muskham, copies of the churchwardens' accounts from 1899-1947 are preserved in the Nottinghamshire Archives. Research undertaken by the University of Warwick as part of a project to digitise England's churchwardens' accounts suggests that no earlier accounts for North Muskham survive, and no further accounts have been found in local or national archives.³⁷

The application of stone treatments and surface coverings has been the subject of a technical conservation report carried out by Keystone Conservation and the Historic England Technical Conservation team, though this is yet to be published.³⁸ This report has been focussed on churches in Devon.

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

St Wilfrid's Church is part of the Southwell and Nottingham Diocese, the historic records of which are now held within the Nottinghamshire Archives. The archives hold records for the church dating back to the late 1590s. However, the majority of the pre-19th century records relate to the prebend of North Muskham Manor rather than to the church building itself.

There has been very little research on St Wilfrid's Church, and the history of the parish of North Muskham has been subject only to limited attention. 'North Muscham [*sic*], Holme and Battheley' was described by Robert Thoroton in his History of Nottinghamshire in 1796. In it the church of St Wilfrid's is described very briefly as

...large, but not apparently older than the reign of Edward III. It has a square tower with three bells, a nave and side aisles. In the chancel are two monuments.³⁹

More attention is given by Thoroton to describing the monuments contained within the church than the building itself, although he does provide a historical account of the church as a prebendary of Southwell Minster.

More recently, the Southwell and Nottingham Church History Project (SNCHP) was started in 2000 to provide a database of historical information about all of the churches of Southwell and Nottingham Diocese (then still known as Southwell Diocese).⁴⁰ It comprises an extensive team of volunteer researchers under the direction of Professor John Beckett and Dr Christopher Brooke of the University of Nottingham as well as drawing on the expertise of national experts in church fabric and fittings.⁴¹ The project currently provides historical information for some 315 churches in the Diocese. One of these is St Wilfrid's, North Muskham and this provides a summary of the history of the church based on documentary records.⁴²

St Wilfrid's Church is briefly described in the most recent edition of Pevsner's Buildings of England series for Nottinghamshire.⁴³

Early history

North Muskham is recorded in the Domesday Book as a large holding in the possession of several owners, including the Archbishop of York and the Abbey at Peterborough.⁴⁴ The original parish covered the whole of what is now North Muskham and Holme parishes. It is noteworthy that no church is mentioned at North Muskham at this date.⁴⁵

St Wilfrid's Church is thought to have been founded in the 12th century. No evidence has been found of an earlier church on this site, although one may have existed. The earliest parts of the present building are the north arcade which dates from around 1190, and the lower stage of the tower which was constructed around the middle of the 13th century.⁴⁶ Note that the SNCHP give two dates for the construction of the

north arcade; around 1190 and also around 1280-1300. This is presumably is an editing error; the late 12th century date is repeated elsewhere within the SNCHP's report and also by Hartwell, Pevsner and Williamson.⁴⁷ The north arcade contains perhaps the earliest example of octagonal piers in Nottinghamshire.⁴⁸

At some point after the construction of the tower's lowest stage, a small doorway was installed under the west window, providing external access into the ground floor of the tower. This has now been blocked up but is shown on early 20th century photographs of the church.⁴⁹ The photographs suggest that the door head cut into the stone sill of the window above, indicating it was a later insertion rather than part of the original construction. The upper stages of the tower date from around 1350 and are executed in the Decorated style.

The church was a prebend of the canons of Southwell Minster. A prebend is a form of benefice held by a prebendary and issued from a cathedral or collegiate church. The stipend was typically drawn from land or tithes in the cathedral's estate. Brooke and Beckett concluded that the prebend was founded probably by Thomas II Archbishop of York 1109-1114 and was endowed with a part of the great tithes of North Muskham.⁵⁰ Brooke and Beckett further note that in 1204, a letter of Pope Innocent III remarked that the prebend at North Muskham was one of two prebends made out of one larger one; as South Muskham was also founded at the same time as North it seems probable therefore that the prebend initially covered both churches and was split before 1204.⁵¹

14th - 16th centuries

The 14th and 15th centuries saw the development of the wool trade in the region, and the church benefitted from the resultant wealth this brought. The south aisle arcade and porch were added in around 1480.⁵²

Wool merchant John Barton (d. 1491) purchased significant properties in Holme, which before the late 16th century was not separated from North Muskham by the river. John Barton built a fine house at Holme, and in a nod to the source of his wealth, a window of this house was reputed to have borne the inscription: 'I thanke [*sic*] God and ever shall. It is the Sheepe [*sic*] has payed [*sic*] for all'.⁵³

John Barton largely rebuilt St Giles' Church at Holme, but also made significant contributions to the church at North Muskham; making provision in his will for rebuilding the north aisle.⁵⁴ The chancel and north aisle were rebuilt in the Perpendicular style in around 1530, although some earlier fabric was retained.⁵⁵ The Barton coat of arms appears on buttresses on the north aisle indicating their association with this phase of rebuilding (Figure 8). Additionally, two windows in the north aisle and the east window of the south aisle also contain fragments of early 16th century stained glass depicting a barrel or 'tun', part of the Barton rebus of a bear and barrel (bear-tun) (Figure 9). Robert Thoroton, writing in 1677 but republished in 1796, also makes reference to the coat of arms of Ralph Barton ('Azure on a Fesse between three bucks heads Cabossed Or a Mullet Sable') as being

depicted in the east window of the north aisle.⁵⁶ This window, however, no longer exists as it was replaced in 1939.⁵⁷ The Barton family appear to have continued to act as benefactors to the church until the Reformation.⁵⁸



Figure 8: Barton coat of arms and the Barton rebus of a chained bear sat next to a barrel or tun, from the buttresses of the north aisle [DP311819]

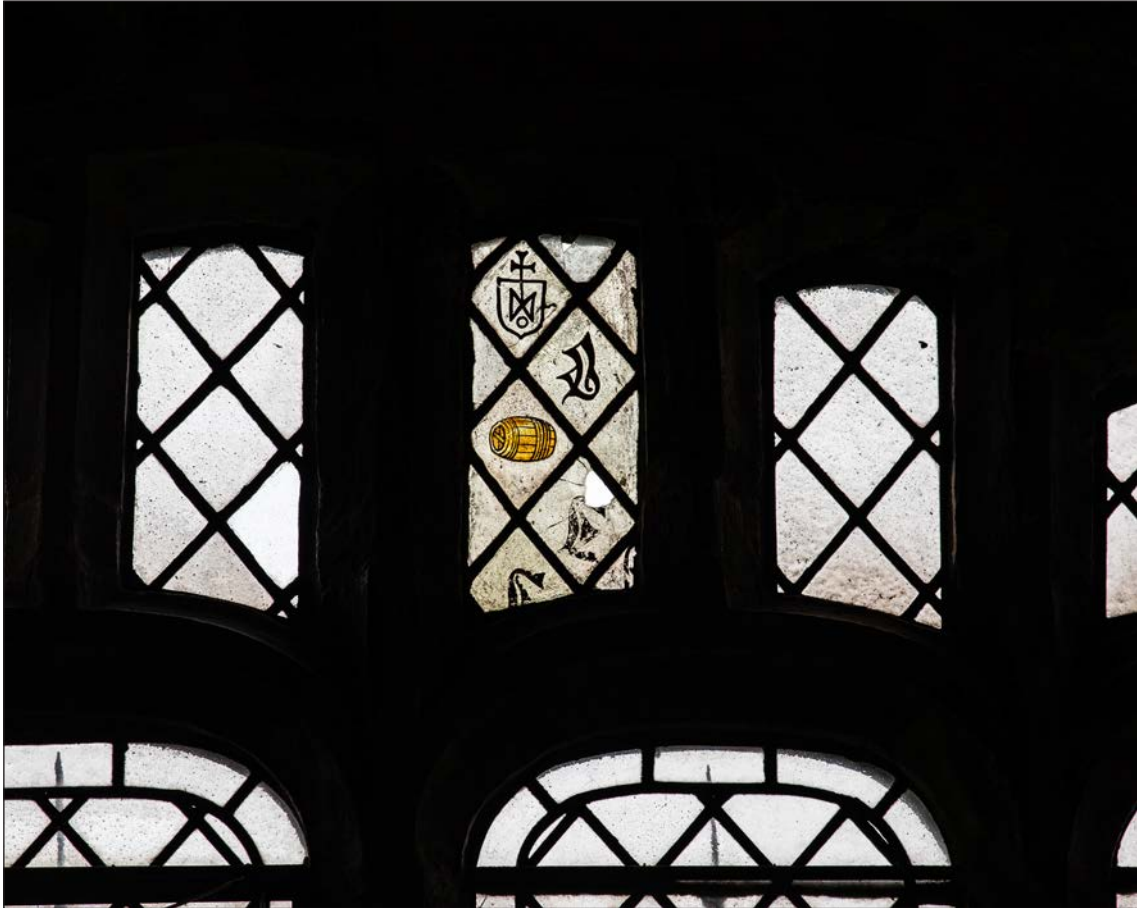


Figure 9: Part of the Barton rebus, a barrel or tun, from the east window of the north aisle [DP311833]

17th - 19th centuries

The Southwell and Nottingham Church History Project has noted that very little is known about the church during the remainder of the 16th century and 17th century. One item in the church which does bear a date from the 17th century is the octagonal font, which bears the inscription ‘H B FEb. [sic] 20 1662 C M RSAC’.

As mentioned above, a great flood in around 1575 changed the course of the River Trent.⁵⁹ This is reported to have physically separated North Muskham from the hamlet of Holme.⁶⁰ The Church of St Giles at Holme has a long association with North Muskham. St Giles, when built, was a chapel under the jurisdiction of the peculiar court of Southwell attached to the prebend of North Muskham.⁶¹ Thoroton and Thorosby records in 1796 that, despite the physical separation of the old parish, the chapel at Holme continued to be considered as an appendage to the North Muskham vicarage.⁶² This association continued until 1849 when the two parishes were separated, and Holme became a parish in its own right.⁶³

The new course of the river between Holme and North Muskham is depicted on several early maps of Nottinghamshire, including John Speed’s map of the County of Nottingham, which was surveyed in around 1610 and republished in 1662 (Figure 10).⁶⁴ Speed’s map combines North and South Muskham together as ‘Muscombs’

rather than depicting two separate settlements. However, the map does show the separation of the hamlet of Holme by the River Trent and indicates the presence of a church at 'Muscombs'. Although this could also refer to the church at South Muskham as both existed at this date, the proximity of the church as depicted next to the River Trent suggests that it represents the church at North Muskham



Figure 10: Detail from John Speed, 1662 'Nottinghamshire', *A Prospect of the most famous parts of the World* [British Library BLL01004958934]. Note the position of North and South Muskham is given as 'Muscombs' west of the River Trent.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the church, like others in the district, suffered during the siege of Newark, when lead was stripped from church roofs to be melted into bullets.⁶⁵ Some sources report that for some time until the end of the Commonwealth in 1660 that there was no roof covering on St Wilfrid's.⁶⁶ However, this seems unlikely given the survival of the 15th century timber roof structure of the nave, which would have been unlikely to survive if left uncovered for any length of time.

At some point after 1660, the church was restored. At this time, it would appear that box pews were installed into the nave and chancel along with a large gallery at the west end of the nave.⁶⁷ It seems likely that as part of this work the arch between the tower and nave was partially infilled. In 1764 the Rev. William Harding reported

that there were 65 families in the parish of North Muskham and that a further 25 families occupied the parish of Holme. Rev. Harding himself lived in Newark, stating that the condition of the vicarage in North Muskham was poor and that no vicar had resided in it for some time.⁶⁸

Both North and South Muskham are illustrated on Emanuel Bowen's map of Nottinghamshire (1755). This map also indicates the presence of a church in each village, though the church at North Muskham is slightly obscured by the coloured ink used to illustrate the river on the map (Figure 11).

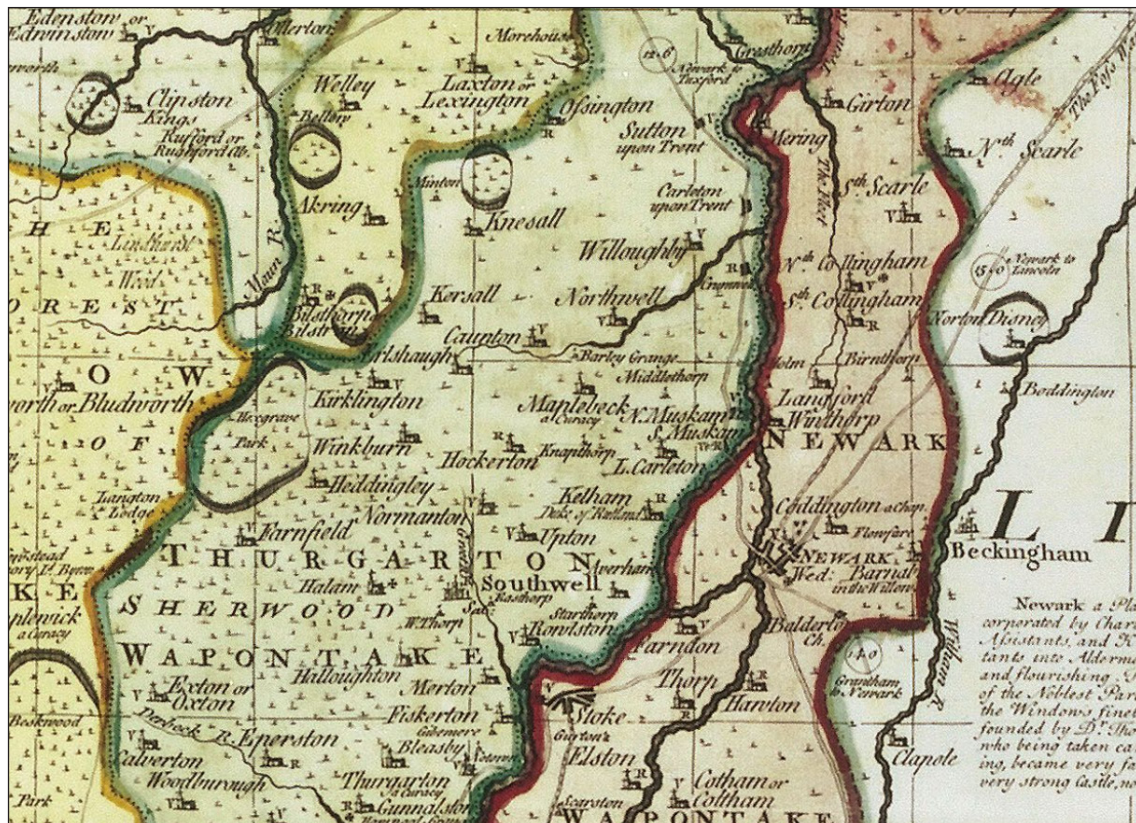


Figure 11: Detail from E. Bowen 1755 *An accurate Map of Nottinghamshire* [British Library BLL01004902770]

North Muskham is shown in greater detail on John Chapman's survey of Nottinghamshire in 1774. Although this doesn't provide any further detail regarding the church building itself, the map helps illustrate that the street pattern of North Muskham has remained largely unaltered since at least the late 18th century. It also suggests that, as today, the majority of the settlement of North Muskham was located north of the church rather than surrounding it. It is not possible from available evidence to know whether this represented the historic arrangement of the settlement north of the church, or a more recent shift northwards following the diversion of the river in around 1575.

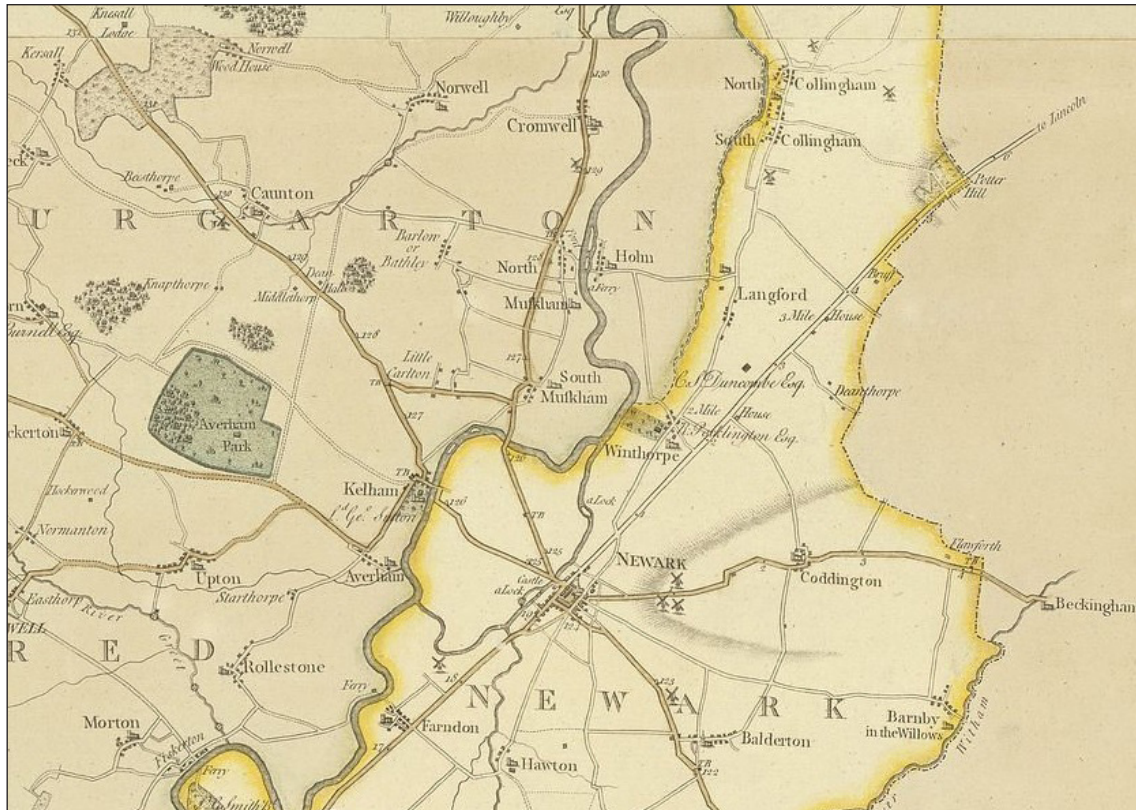


Figure 12: Detail from John Chapman 1774 *Nottinghamshire Surveyed* [British Library BLL01004902771]

By the 1850s the box pews were becoming viewed as a hinderance. The Rev. J M Parry reported in 1851 that the church seated 250, but noted that it ‘was very ill-pewed and is capable of many more sittings.’⁶⁹ Perhaps because of this report, soon after in around 1853-4, part of the church was fitted with open pews, the cost being financed by a church rate.⁷⁰

In 1877 additional land to the south of the church was purchased to extend the churchyard and make room for additional burials; the original churchyard being full.⁷¹

20th century - present

The gallery and the remaining box pews survived until the early 20th century and were recorded during a visitation by Bailey in 1902.⁷² The gallery and box pews were also recorded in early, though undated, photographs of the interior taken around the same time as Bailey’s visitation (Figure 13).⁷³ These photographs show that the tower arch was, at that time, largely infilled. Therefore, access to the tower was, until the early 20th century, via a small single doorway leading from the nave or via the external door in the west wall of the tower. This external door was blocked up during restoration works in 1907 (see below) but remains visible on early 20th century photographs of the church exterior. The same collection also includes an image of the interior which shows the somewhat unusual heating arrangement in the nave; a central stove with an angled chimney exiting through the northern wall of the church (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Church interior looking west c. 1900, note the infilled tower arch with the gallery above and surviving box pews [St Wilfrid's North Muskham PCC]⁷⁴

By the turn of the 20th century the church was in a poor condition. Proposals were brought forward to fully restore the building and correspondence began between the Rev. Francis Oswald Colley and the architect Charles Hodgson Fowler (usually referred to as C Hodgson Fowler) in 1904.

Subsequently, Hodgson Fowler produced a report on the condition of the church and concluded that the external stonework of both the chancel and nave needed considerable repair. The lead on the roofs of the nave, north aisle and chancel needed stripping, re-casting and re-laying. The roof of the south aisle was, at the time, covered with slates and Hodgson Fowler recommended that this should be replaced with lead owing to the shallow pitch of this roof. Internally, the plaster on the walls was found to be decaying throughout and in need of scraping off and new plaster applied to replace it.⁷⁵

Importantly, Hodgson Fowler's report is the first document which makes clear reference to external render on the lowest stage of the tower. Note that Hodgson Fowler uses the term 'plaster' throughout his report when referring to both internal and external surface coverings. This report also recommended that the tower arch should be reopened. The details of the 1904-1907 restoration and the exterior render of the tower will be discussed in greater detail later in this report. Hodgson Fowler

estimated that the repairs would cost approximately £2550.00, and a committee was immediately formed to raise the monies for the works.⁷⁶

In March 1905, Rev. Colley became ill, and while correspondence continued between Hodgson Fowler and the Reverend's sister Amy Colley for a brief period, he died shortly after.⁷⁷ His successor, the Rev. W H Williams continued to push for the restoration of the church and in 1906 a Faculty was submitted along with a detailed specification and plans drawn up by Hodgson Fowler.⁷⁸ A further Faculty was also granted to allow for divine services to be held in the North Muskham Institute during the period that the church was closed for restoration.⁷⁹

In addition to the repairs, the restoration of the church also included extensive reordering works; removing the remaining old box pews and replacing them with open pews throughout the church and creating a vestry in the northwest corner. The backs of some of the box pews remain at the ends of the north and south aisles.⁸⁰ The gallery was also removed, and the tower arch was reopened. The building's heating system was upgraded with the addition of the external boiler house. The specification for the repairs also included a note regarding the closing of the door in the west elevation of the tower, instructing that the 'modern west door' should be built up and the window above made good.⁸¹ It is extremely difficult to see where this door was located in the fabric of the tower today.

The successful restoration and reopening of the church were reported in the local press in May 1907.⁸²

Numerous Faculties for the upgrading and preservation of the building were submitted during the 20th century. These included:

- 1911- installation of an organ into the west end of the nave.⁸³
- 1914 – installation of a clock into the tower.⁸⁴
- 1920 – unspecified repairs to the tower, to remove and tune the bells in the tower and to install a memorial to those who fell in the First World War into the church.⁸⁵
- 1927 – for restoration of the rood screen, this also included the addition of the carved rood which was a gift of Mr Gardener, and the addition of gates to the rood screen as a gift from the Canon and Mrs Williams.⁸⁶
- 1938 – installation of a memorial window into the east end of the north aisle.⁸⁷
- 1947 –wiring for electricity, installing electric lighting and an electric blower for the organ.⁸⁸

At some point before 1950 the pews were removed and replaced with wooden chairs.⁸⁹ Some of these chairs remain in use at the church but are in the process of being replaced.

The Southwell and Nottingham Church History Project lists further works to the church, including:

- 1988- the church was rewired.
- 1990 – a new platform and metal ladder were installed into the tower.

- 1999 – a steeplejack was engaged to remove a tree growing from the tower.
- 2000 – additional lights installed.
- 2004 – the clock was converted to electric windings and the face re-gilded.
- 2006 – the church interior was lime-washed.
- 2015 - a new war memorial plaque was donated by local historian Trevor Frecknall in 2015.

More recently, the church at North Muskhams has installed accessible toilet facilities in order to better meet the needs of its congregation.

The church was targeted by metal thieves in 2019 and the lead was stripped from the roofs of the nave, chancel and aisles. At the same time, lead being dropped from the roof by the thieves damaged grave markers in the churchyard. In 2020 a programme of repairs recovered these roofs with terne coated stainless steel to prevent future thefts.⁹⁰

EVIDENCE OF EXTERNAL RENDER AT ST WILFRID'S CHURCH

As noted in the opening sections of this report definitive evidence of external render coatings is usually difficult to find; either surviving on built fabric or referred to in documentary records. Furthermore, even though it is widely held that Victorian restorers were often responsible for the scraping of plasters from both internal and external walls of churches, few contemporary commentators made reference to the practice; possibly because it was seen as an accepted part of returning a church to its 'correct' medieval form.⁹¹ Even where documentary references to surface coverings are found, whether this refers to internal or external coatings can be unclear, and terms such as plaster, render, and stucco are seemingly used loosely, and often inaccurately, for surface coatings both inside and outside of a church.

It is fortunate therefore, that the records for St Wilfrid's North Muskham include clear reference to the existence of external render on the tower. Hodgson Fowler's 1904 report made reference to the need to remove and replace the render on the exterior of the tower's lowest stage. Specifically, the report states that

This [the tower] is generally in fair condition, but the exterior of the lower part must be re-plastered and its stonework repaired in places, while the upper part needs repointing and some new stonework.⁹²

As noted earlier in this report, Hodgson Fowler consistently used the term 'plaster' to refer to surface coatings at St Wilfrid's, regardless of whether he was referring to internal or external coatings. Given the uncertainties noted above, then Hodgson Fowler's use of the term plaster in this context needs careful consideration. It seems likely that he was referring to the use of lime plaster, as this could be used externally as well as internally. In his specification for the church, Hodgson Fowler gave very clear instruction to the plasterers that new plaster was to be applied 'with great care', although he did not specify the type of plaster to be used. His specification for mortars used in repointing the stonework stated that they be 'composed from the best stone lime from Keveston Park or other approved place, and clean sharp Trent river sand'.⁹³ It is reasonable to conclude that the 'plasters' used on the church would have been mixed using similar components.

A copy of Hodgson Fowler's report accompanied a pamphlet issued by the church restoration committee seeking to raise funds for the works. Its cover shows a sketch of the church in 1904 when viewed from the east.⁹⁴ Although only a sketch drawing, the image of the church does also suggest that there was some kind of rendered surface covering the lower stage of the tower (Figure 14). This is depicted as irregular hashed lines, in contrast to the regular delineated marks used to indicate ashlar masonry on the rest of the church.



Figure 14: Drawing of St Wilfrid's North Muskham, 1904, note the hashed lines suggesting render on the lower stage of the tower. [Nottinghamshire Archives DR/1/1/2/1711A/15]

As a drawing, there is always a degree of interpretation and artistic licence which may put question to the accuracy of this representation. However, in the case of St Wilfrid's there is supporting evidence in the form of undated photographs which have recently been located by the churchwarden.⁹⁵ These photos show both the interior and exterior of the church as it was in around 1900, and one of which illustrates the condition of the tower prior to the restoration works in 1907 (Figures 15 and 16). It is clear from this photograph that the lowest stage of the tower was, at that time, covered with render, albeit in a degraded condition and largely flaking away. Although this photograph cannot tell us when this coating was applied, it is reasonable to conclude from its appearance that it had been on the tower for quite some time. It would also appear from this photograph that the render, though much degraded, had been applied only to the rubble masonry of the lowest stage and was cut in around the coursed masonry of the quoins, buttresses and window surrounds.



Figure 15: Undated photograph (estimated to be c. 1900) showing render on the exterior of the tower [St Wilfrid's North Muskham PCC]



Figure 16: Undated photograph (estimated to be c. 1900) showing render on the exterior of the tower (detail). Note also the now blocked door in the western elevation. [St Wilfrid's North Muskham PCC]

It is interesting to note that in his specification for the restoration works, which was submitted as part of the Faculty application in 1906, the architect stipulated that the render should be removed from the tower, but also that new plaster must be applied.

Tower (second schedule): Take off the plaster from the lower part and replaster carefully, keeping it quite thin and finishing with a steel trowel.⁹⁶

The architect's instruction to finish with a steel trowel would suggest that it was intended to have a smooth finish over the masonry; even though this would require the plaster to be applied quite thickly in places to cover the rubble walls.

It appears that despite Hodgson Fowler's instructions, this was never actually carried out and there is no evidence of the church having been externally rendered after the 1907 restoration. Though it is possible that render was applied as per the faculty application and then subsequently removed. Photographs of the church taken by F J Palmer in 1950 for the National Monuments Record, now the Historic England Archive, show that by that date there is no sign of external render on the tower (Figure 17). It is unlikely that the render would have completely fallen away between 1907 and 1950, and no records indicate that it was removed during this period, so presumably it was never reapplied in 1907.



Figure 17: St Wilfrid's, tower viewed from the west, F. J. Palmer 1950 [4680/002]

It is important to reiterate that although we cannot be certain when the render which was recorded in 1904 was originally applied to the tower. By the time of Hodgson Fowler's report, it had clearly been in place for some time; given its degraded condition at that date. We also must take into consideration that even if the render visible in 1904 was a relatively recent application, perhaps during the 19th century, it is not possible to judge from available evidence whether this was the first time the tower was rendered, or if this may have been renewing an earlier render surface.

It is notable that only the lower stage of the tower was rendered, and that this is also the only portion of the tower to be constructed from coursed rubble Lias Limestone rather than higher-quality dressed stone. Furthermore, it is clear from historic photographs that the render was cut in around the dressed stone elements, suggesting a conscious decision in applying the render only to the rubble stone areas. This considerably strengthens the likelihood that this lowest stage has rendered in order to improve the appearance of the rubble stone, as well as to protect it. As such it may have been rendered for a significant period of time; perhaps from its construction, or possibly from the date of the 15th century improvements to the church, when much of the rest of the building used ashlar masonry. Hodgson Fowler's stipulation that the 'plaster' should be reapplied is suggestive that he too felt it was necessary whether for the protection or improvement of the stone, or to continue a historic practice.

SIGNIFICANCE

St Wilfrid's Church has been assessed in line with the criteria outlined in *Conservation Principles*.⁹⁷ This document sets out a process for assessing the heritage significance of a place and allows for the considered management of change within the historic environment.

Setting and context

As a Grade I listed building, St Wilfrid's, North Muskham is considered to be of 'exceptional interest'.⁹⁸ Places of worship can be extremely complex buildings, with multiple layers of history and meaning. There has been a church on this site since the late 12th century – the date of the earliest surviving fabric in the north arcade – and as such, it has been considered sacred for many centuries. As the setting for baptisms, marriages and burials for successive generations, churches occupy a unique position in a community's understanding of its past, even in an age of declining church attendance.⁹⁹

In addition to its religious role in the lives of the community, the church is a significant building within the village. The church is the oldest surviving building in North Muskham and along with the Old Hall, it forms the historic core of the settlement. When the church was founded the course of the river Trent ran some distance further to the east, and so the church's current position above the fields next to the river Trent and separate from the nearby hamlet of Holme is not representative of its original location at the heart of a much larger parish. Nevertheless, the proximity of the church to the Great North Road and the river means that the tower would have been a visually prominent feature in the landscape to travellers for many centuries. In addition, the position of the church located close to these major transport routes has influenced its development by virtue of the wealth and patronage these connections have brought.

Today, trees and other plants screen the church from view when approached from the main road, but historically the building would have been the major landmark building in the village. Currently, the main view of the church, from outside of the churchyard, is as approached from the east across the fields and public footpath, and from Marsh Lane.

Evidential value

With phases of development dating from the 12th through to the 20th century, St Wilfrid's is the result of successive changes resulting from changes in liturgy, evolving patterns of worship and donations by parishioners. Evidence of these phases are recorded in the building's fabric, its monuments, fixtures, and fittings. The built fabric of the church stands as a physical record in changing styles of church construction and also of phases of extension, restoration and maintenance of the building. The memorials, stained glass and fittings inside act as a record both of stylistic changes, but also of the desire by successive congregations to adapt the

church to their needs, and to be remembered for their role in relation to it and the wider community.

Some of these phases are substantial, such as the rebuilding of the north aisle and chancel in the early 16th century by the Barton family, or more subtle, such as the addition of new windows or memorials. Other phases are harder to detect, often preserved only in documentary records or in fragments within the building's fabric and fittings; such as the removal of the box pews and gallery in 1907, of which only elements of panelling remain.¹⁰⁰

The documentary record associated with the church has revealed that the lower stages of the tower were externally rendered. It is unusual to find clear documentary evidence of this practice, and as such the photographs held by the churchwardens make a valuable contribution to our understanding of historic renders on church towers.

Historical value

Historical value derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.¹⁰¹ By virtue of their age and the central role in the social and religious life of the community, churches are typically highly valued for the historical associations they hold. St Wilfrid's has been a site of Christian worship for over 800 years and as such holds historical value for the use and evolution of this sacred site.

In addition, St Wilfrid's church holds important associations with the locally prominent Barton family. The will of John Barton made provision for the rebuilding of the norther aisle and chancel, and the families coat of arms is represented on the buttresses of the north aisle. The connection to the Barton family is further illustrated in fragments of stained glass in the windows of the north and south aisles. John Barton was also responsible for extensive rebuilding at the Church of St Giles at Holme. This link continues the longstanding connection between Holme and North Muskham which were formerly one parish.

Further important associations are represented by the hatchments and brass memorial to William Dickinson and his wife Harriet.

Parish churches have often been at the heart of important historic events, such as the Black Death, the Reformation, the English Civil War, and the First and Second World Wars. In the case of St Wilfrid's, the church is understood anecdotally to have suffered damage during the siege of Newark, although there is no physical evidence of this in the church. More recently, the impacts of the First and Second World Wars are illustrated by war memorials to those whose lives were lost in the conflicts. These provide a focus for mourning and commemoration for the community.

Aesthetic value

St Wilfrid's is recognised for its aesthetic and architectural quality. The church sits prominently above the fields to the east. It comprises built fabric of the 12th to the 16th centuries, with interior fixtures and fittings representing practices of worship and remembrance right up to the present day.

The church provides a visual record of different phases of alteration, visible in changes in the stonework of the building, and also in stylistic changes from 12th and 13th centuries in the north arcade and tower, through to 16th century in the aisles and chancel. The rebus and coat of arms of the Barton family are also recurring motifs throughout the church and highlight the connection of the church to this prominent family.

The ornate early 16th-century rood screen is a fine example of the type as is the nave ceiling, which, coupled with the many memorials, enhance the otherwise simple interior.

Communal value

The art and architecture of a church can be an intrinsic part of the religious experience. While a church building does not need to be ancient in order to be sacred, nor to be a place for worship, the age and familiarity of English parish churches, hold a particular role in our sense of place – this is tied strongly to communal and spiritual value.

Ultimately, a parish church is an expression of the Christian faith. Their function is as places of worship and as such their spiritual value is intrinsic. An individual parish church embodies the history of Christianity in a particular location.

The church continues to serve its local community as a place for regular worship - formal and informal - including weddings, baptisms and funerary services. Therefore, the church of St Wilfrid's holds communal value as a focus of worship but also for its role as a venue for life events such as baptisms, marriages and funerals. Beyond the church, the churchyard holds significance as a place of burial and remembrance.

Parish churches are important repositories of the spiritual, social and architectural history of the nation. Beyond its purely religious use, a parish church is something that most people having grown up in England will recognise. The idea of a rural church with its tower and churchyard sited at the heart of a village, is almost quintessentially English. As such, St Wilfrid's Church holds communal value as part of the collective sense of place for North Muskham, even for those who do not use it for religious purposes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report was instigated to establish whether the tower of St Wilfrid's Church, North Muskham had been externally rendered during its history and to place this within the context of wider discussions regarding historic church renders and plasters.

It is certain from early 20th-century documentary evidence that the tower was rendered externally on its lowest stage until 1907, although it has not been possible to confirm how long this render was in place before this date. It is noteworthy that the render coating was only applied to the stage of the tower which is constructed from the comparatively lower quality Lias Limestone; a stone which is known to weather poorly. It seems reasonable to conclude therefore, that the friable nature of this stone and the resultant degradation of the towers lowest stage in terms of its physical and aesthetic condition, has been a long-term issue for this church. Furthermore, given this issue, in all likelihood the application of a protective coating was probably undertaken for a considerable period of the history of the building.

Further study and liaison with Historic England's Technical Conservation Team and with the churchwardens at St Wilfrid's may help to better understand how the removal of the external render of the tower in 1907 has altered or increased the decay of the tower stonework and in turn lead to improved conservation management of this and similar buildings.

In addition, a wider contextual study of Lias Limestone churches in Nottinghamshire may better demonstrate the prevalence of historic external surface coatings on these churches. In turn this could be used to underpin and inform conservation decisions and to address issues arising from stone weathering and decay. Ultimately it is hoped that the growing body of evidence for historic render on churches and other buildings will lead to wider public recognition of the practice, and better appreciation for the practical and aesthetic value that such surface coatings can provide.

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