

A short guide to the Parish of St Michael & All Angels, Thurmaston

Extracts from the 3rd Edition, May 2000

by kind permission of the author, Rev T. Robin Martin, Vicar of Thurmaston 1985-2005

THE PARISH OF THURMASTON is bounded by the River Soar to the west, above The Roundhill Academy to the north, to the east by a line across the fields, the south behind Manor Road (city boundary). The southern boundary of the civil parish is the same as the city. The church parish boundary runs south with the railway line over Troon Way, swinging east to include much of the industrial estate.

In the 1970s the area north of Troon Way was ceded to the new Parish of St Theodore's, Rushey Mead. At the same time a parcel of land surrounded by (New) Barkby and Syston off Wanlip Road, called a 'detachment' was transferred to the Syston Team. This island of land half a mile away was included in Thurmaston, because it had been owned by the feudal landowner under the Danelaw. Parish detachments are now very rare.

GOSCOTE 'Goose Shelter' the name for the wider area and Deanery has a Saxon origin. The 'moot point' or court was held at Moody Bush (Moot Bush) a mile east of Syston, between Queniborough and Barkby.

The Roman road 'The Fosse Way' possibly lay to the east of Melton Road through Thurmaston. If a line is drawn from where the Roman Mile Post was found (near Troon Way) to where large stone blocks were found on Barkby Road, it passes just to the east of St Michael's. It would be on slightly higher ground away from the river.

TURMODESTONE was the name when the Domesday record was drawn up in 1085 by order of William the Conqueror. The place probably derived from an Anglo Saxon chief called Turmod. Originally there were two small communities. The late Canon Botterill, (Vicar of Thurmaston 1930-1969) believed South Thurmaston to have been essentially a Saxon community, and the north to have been Viking in its origin. Canon Botterill did much research into the history of the parish. Some of his writings have been published. These may be found together with many older parish records (including all but the more recent registers) at the County Records Office.

After Turmod himself, William the Conqueror gave Turmodestone and other local lands to one of his followers Hugh de Grentmesnil. His successor Robert le Bossu made gifts of land for the building of Leicester Abbey of St Mary of the Meadows (St Mary de Pratis). To cut a long story short, by the sixteenth century much of what was now referred to as "Thromaston" North and South came under Leicester Abbey.

TWO CHURCHES By about the year 1220 there were two stone buildings. St John the Evangelist at North Thurmaston lay just above what is now Canal Street. All that remains is part of the west wall which you can see behind the flats called Estelle House. The Church was served by the Augustinian Canons at Barkby. St Michael & All Angels, South

Thurmaston was a chapelry of St Peter's Belgrave of which Leicester Abbey held the advowson. When the site for the local authority sheltered flats St Michael's Court was cleared, the foundations of a large stone building were discovered. A local historian is of the opinion that here was the Rector of Belgrave's Tithe Barn at Thurmaston.

It seems that St John's ceased to be used as a church towards the end of the sixteenth century. The Leicester historian Nichols describes it as cut down in height and used as a malt barn. All but the surviving west wall with its single window opening (a listed monument) was demolished to make way for the old vicarage about 1840. The historian Pevsner notes that the central section is thickened and may have supported a bell-cote. A small tympanum over the north door may have been incorporated into a house at Cossington.

North and South Thurmaston became a combined chapelry in 1796, and a separate ecclesiastical parish in 1841. When the old vicarage was demolished in 1975 to make way for the new one and the development of Estelle House by the De Montfort Housing Association, a hurried excavation was attempted. This is believed to have revealed evidence of other buildings more or less contemporary with St John's. The suggestion has been made there may have been a small religious community here. In 1993 a small parking space was made at the end of the vicarage drive. The remains of a cobbled pavement were discovered about 600mm below the present drive level extending towards the road. It was not damaged further and has been covered over again.

Although essentially a somewhat poor parish there have been several well to do farmers and land owners. One such was John Simons whose impressive memorial originally in the chancel is now in the bell tower at St Michaels. He also acquired land at Belgrave and purchased the Hall, being its second owner. In the eighteenth century Captain Sam Gamble was Deputy Lieutenant of the county. He is believed to have resided at a double fronted Queen Anne house which stood back from the main road near the new Bridge Park Road. The Dukes of Rutland at one time held lands in Thurmaston.

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCHYARD AND BURIALS The Churchyard has been full for many years and there have not been any new burials (apart from cremated remains) since the early part of the twentieth century. There are a number of interesting gravestones and others inside the church. You can see inscriptions to old local families and worthies; Wilcox, Day, Gamble, Allen, Winterton, Herrick, Simons, Foister, Checkland, Dudley, Simpson, and many others.

The first headstone on the left as you come up the church path has an interesting story behind it. William Lane described as a 'Drummer Boy' in the local militia was shot by an irate local, Squire Allen. The inquest was held in the White Hart Public House across the road. The inscription on the headstone is well worth reading. The grave is still classified as a military memorial, and from time to time a wreath is laid by a local society.

CHURCHES AND CHAPELS In addition to the Primitive and Wesleyan Methodist Chapels of 1884 and 1886, there was a small Methodist Chapel in Garden Street. It was converted into houses many years ago.

THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS The first thing to notice is that the church is situated on slightly higher ground above the river. The Domesday Book does not record a church building at Thurmaston, but that is not conclusive. We know that there was a Saxon community. The name Thurmaston or 'Turmod's-ton' is indicative. A large number of Saxon funerary arms were discovered in the area just over the railway bridge. Leicester itself had several pre conquest churches including St Nicholas and St Martin's (the Cathedral Church of the revised See of Leicester – Leicester Cathedral).

The sixth century 'Martinian' Church missionary movement was an undoubted factor. In addition, the dedication of St Michael & All Angels suggests a connection with these times. The claiming of a pre Christian site of worship for Christ, under the patronage of St Michael and the Holy Angels would have been significant. There is therefore good circumstantial evidence to suggest a church building of some sort here 1,000 years ago. Only a detailed archaeological excavation could confirm this.

Any Saxon church building at Thurmaston is likely to have been of wood. There is a unique survival of one such at Greensted in Essex. It is possible that the first stone St Michael's was a simple rectangular shape like that at North Thurmaston and later rebuilt with aisles. What we can say is that some pillars and arches in the Nave have been dated around 1220. The tower was added in the fifteenth century.

At the end of the eighteenth century the old church was in a poor state of repair. It was smaller in those days, the Nave shorter and the Chancel longer. Contemporary records note that there were clerestory windows in the Nave (windows above the pillars and centre walls). A wooden west gallery is also spoken of. In 1848-9 under the architect Henry Stevens of Derby, all but the tower was rebuilt to a new design. The pillars and arches were reused but the Nave lengthened by an entire bay. At the same time the aisles were widened by about six feet for the length of the Nave. The north aisle at St Matthew's Morley near Derby is a section from the cloister at Dale Abbey. The aisles at St Michael's bear a resemblance.

Excavations behind the font to provide a heating duct in 1988 proved conclusively that the floor level was raised by several feet in 1848. Since the early Victorian reconstruction there have been relatively few alterations. Apart from new windows and decorations, the organ chamber was built, and the Chancel floor was raised in 1890. The church is now listed as Grade 2 with Star.

UNIQUE ROOF At the rebuild, Stevens designed the unusual roof covering the centre Nave and Aisles in a single span. It is a heavily timbered hammer-beam design and believed to be unique.

THE TOWER The tower is probably late fourteenth or early fifteenth century and more or less original, with the addition of the perpendicular tower possibly relating to renewed economic activity after the Black Death. At the top outside at each corner, you will see the gargoyles. These are water spouts with a grotesque figure to take water from the roof. (No longer used for this function). On the top of the roof is a 'trig point', last used by surveyors to check levels for the Hamilton development. At the base of the tower there is a 'bench mark' to indicate the trigonometric reference. When the tower was re-roofed in the 1970s, silhouettes of the workmen's hands and shoes were discovered on the lead. The pieces have been framed and can be seen at the bottom of the tower.

THE CLOCK was made about 1844 by Paine of London. It is wound by hand; the weights descend the shaft in the corner of the tower just inside the door. It is recorded that the impetus to provide a church clock was to save taking the children to Syston to teach them to read the time from the church clock there!

THE BELLS The tower originally had only one bell. In 1625-7 three more were added, with a fifth in 1848-9. In 1908 these were all recast and a tenor bell added by Barwell's of Birmingham and weighs over half a tonne. When the bells are rung (as opposed to chiming when the bell is swung just enough for the clapper to hit the side), they swing over 360 degrees making a note on each side of the swing. They are rung in 'changes' according to complicated patterns. This method is unique to England, except where it has been copied in other parts of the world. A full 'peal' consists of 5,040 changes. There are details of the bells in the tower.

MONUMENTS IN THE TOWER In the base of the tower there are two fine monuments to members of the Simons family. They were originally on the north wall of the Chancel and were presumably taken out in the 1848 rebuilding or when the organ chamber was built.

THE FONT It is the same basic word as fountain, and is a container used to hold the water used for Baptism. 'Christening' is the popular name for Baptism. Fonts are commonly made of stone. The symbol is not just one of washing, but of dying and hence also rising with Christ. The Sacrament of Baptism is the ceremony by which new members of the Church are made. Christian Initiation is completed by Confirmation and Holy Communion. The Font at St Michael's is probably several hundred years old. The lead lining is missing and the soak away is blocked. (This is why we use a removable bowl. The water once it has been blessed should soak to earth rather than down ordinary drains). The cover is old, and the two pieces of stone let into the top shown that there used to be iron hasps so that the cover could be locked. (The water was blessed primarily at The Easter Ceremonies and often only changed each year. Salt was added as a symbol of cleansing and preserving and has featured in some Baptismal Rites).

THE ALTAR A table sometimes made of stone or with a stone top. It is used for the special symbolic meal whereby the faithful are spiritually nourished, renewed in the life of Christ,

and joined in fellowship. It is also seen as a commemorative offering before God of what Jesus Christ has done for us. The names used by Christians for this Service emphasises various truths about it: The Lord's Supper; The Liturgy; Holy Communion; The Eucharist; The Mass. All may be found within the Anglican tradition. Apart from the main Altar, sometimes referred to as the 'high' Altar, there may be others in a side chapel. The Main Altar Table at St Michael's is probably seventeenth century in origin. It had been somewhat crudely repaired in the past. In the year 2000 Mr Colin Watson restored it using some very old oak planks. A photographic record may be seen. An all-seasons Altar cover has been provided in memory of former Churchwardens Tom Eccles and John Sikes and of Barbara Sikes. At the principal services, the Altar is brought forward so that the maximum number of worshippers can see and feel part of the Eucharistic action.

THE LECTERN is the stand from which the Bible is read. We now use a small portable Lectern. At the main Sunday Service, the book of Gospels is carried in procession and read in the centre of the Nave. This symbolises the life giving Word proclaimed in the whole Church and to the World. In the days when Bibles were very large, rare and expensive it was much more necessary to have a large stand and they were often chained down. In some churches the lectern is made of brass and the top shaped like an eagle (a symbol of far sightedness and spirituality and the sign for St John). The old St Michael's lectern dates from 1903. The top is used as a stand for the Memorial Book, and the base is now the splendid Easter candle stand.

THE PULPIT is an elevated platform from which Sermons (sometimes referred to as the Address or Homily) are given. St Michael's Pulpit dates from 1903. Even in a relatively modest sized church building like St Michael's, without sound reinforcement of some kind it is difficult for people to hear. The pulpit is an aid to being heard. (Some churches like our Cathedral have a sounding board as well).

Things like overhead projectors are modern equivalents to help communications. 'Gift of Mrs G B Checkland in memory of her husband 27 September 1903'

REREDOS A decorative screen behind the Altar on the east wall. The main one at St Michael's is made of stone and contains panels with the Creed, Ten Commandments, and The Lord's Prayer. It is probably Victorian, though the tablets may be older. In the centre is the sacred monogram 'IHS' for the Latin form of JESus; and also, a delicately carved head possibly intended as 'An Angel of the Presence'. 'A freewill offering from Mr and Miss Simpson of Thurmaston 1848'

ROOD SCREEN A screen of wood or stone between Nave and Chancel. It was not intended as a barrier but rather to symbolise a veil between this world and the next. Surmounted by the Cross, one symbolically passed under the judgement of The Cross to Resurrection. It is probable that any remains of a screen at St Michael's were

destroyed at the 1848 rebuild. Stones let into the west facing arches of the last pillars of the Nave may have been the sockets of a rood Screen.

CHANCEL ARCH The arch at the junction of Nave and Chancel. St Michael's is Victorian and a whole bay further east than the original. Note the two animal heads probably intended to be lions.

STAINED OR PAINTED GLASS Relatively little stained glass has survived in ordinary Parish Churches that date from before the Reformation. There is no ancient glass at St Michael's but there are several pleasant nineteenth century windows. The pictures are often highly symbolic including the background and detailing. Three new windows are noted below.

Main East Window dates from about 1880. It depicts the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and each holding a man, lion, bull and eagle, representative of the character of the Gospel that bears their name. In the top tracery is the figure of Christ in glory. 'In memoriam Elizabeth, daughter of Isaac Dudley of Humberstone and wife of Jonathan Hodgson, who died 7 January 1879, aged 73'

Chancel South Window This new window 'with gratitude for the life of Jean Marie Welborn 1929-1986' was installed 25 July 1989. It shows St Raphael the healer and alludes to an incident in the Book of Tobit. The river is also a powerful symbol, suggestive of Baptism, cleansing, and healing. As with the two west windows, the artist is the acclaimed Thomas Denny.

East Window South Aisle circa 1850, the scene of the Glorious Ascension of Our Lord with the Apostles. The truth of this mystery is essentially about the glory of God in Jesus. It is about 'inner realisation' rather than the special image. 'To the memory of William, Elizabeth, Sarah and Ann children of John and Joanna Simpkin this window is dedicated by their brothers and sisters'

Small Window South Aisle 'Christ – The Good Shepherd. Erected to the loving memory of The Revd J G Packer MA Vicar 1866-1894

South Aisle West Window Three light window with outer panels in 'mouth blown' clear glass. Centre light design by Thomas Denny of Chalice and Host (The Holy Bread). 'To remember before God Canon Charles W Botterill 1898-1983 Vicar of this Parish 1930-1969 also his wife Ivy F Botterill 1895-1976'

Tower Window In centre top light an angel holding a scroll 'Ministering spirits sent forth to minister'. Left hand light St Michael Archangel. Right hand light St Gabriel Archangel. 'To the memory of Henry Jefferson Packer brother of Revd Isaac George Packer MA Vicar of this Parish born 1843 died 1864 in British Columbia'

North Aisle West Window as South Aisle West, with design an Alpha and Omega (first and last letters of the Greek alphabet) with Crown. 'To remember before God Canon Charles W Botterill 1898-1983 Vicar of this Parish 1930-1969'

Centre North Aisle Window Three light windows, Christ with St Cecelia (Patron saint of musicians) and St Michael. 'To the Glory of God and in ever affectionate and treasured memory of Samuel Hubbard, who from 1902 to 1928 was a people's Warden of this Parish – In Christ shall all be made alive'

North Aisle East Window Three light window matching South Aisle East Window. It depicts the crucifixion of Our Lord. On the right Our Lady the most Holy Mother of Jesus, shown with a halo of seven stars, indicating that she is in a place of special honour in Heaven. To the left of the Cross is Mary the sister of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. 'In loving memory of John Simpkin Died May 8, 1835, aged 41 also Joanna Simpkin died June 8, 1845, aged 57'

THE LADY CHAPEL was constructed in 1951 by Mr Arthur Talbot a local craftsman. It was dedicated with other furnishings 'in memory of Charles and Sarah Foister, 1951'

THE AUMBRY is a small locker in which is kept a portion of the Holy Bread. It is reserved so that Communion can be more easily taken to the housebound and be a link with the main Parish Eucharist. The Sacramental Presence of Christ is a powerful aid to devotion. Also kept in the Aumbry are the Holy Oils used in Baptism and for the Anointing of the Sick.

THE WHITE LIGHT is a sign that the Blessed Sacrament is reserved there. It is customary and a sign of respect to be reverential here.

BOOK CUPBOARD A superb new book cupboard was made by Ray Baker in 1988. This was given in memory of Emma Beatrice Cleaver. The main oak framing of this was constructed from an old Altar piece that was in St Philip's, Evington.

SOUND AND LOOP SYSTEM A new high quality sound and loop system was installed for Easter 2000 in memory of Kenneth and Joan Mee and Neville and Kath Taylor.

A HOUSE OF PRAYER

Above all else, St Michael's is a tangible sign of the love of God in Jesus Christ in the community. Prayer and worship are offered every day of the year.

LIST OF CURATES IN CHARGE AND INCUMBENTS The list is taken from a painted shield in church. The term 'curate' is not in its modern sense, of an assistant deacon or priest, usually in the first few years of Ordained Ministry. Rather it is a more general reference to those who have been appointed to 'A cure of souls' in that place. Thomas Allen 1621-1667 covered the Puritan 'Commonwealth' period (1649-1659).

Chapelry Curates

1601	Robert Morey
1604	G Clark
1617	R Richardson
1621	Thomas Allen
1667	W Barton
1687	H Whatton
1700	W Bentley
1705	T Horton
1745	T Place
1757	S Bolton
1792	J Doubleday
1794	S Woodford

Perpetual Curates

1797	H Woodcock
1821	J Fell
1828	E M Hoare

Vicars of Thurmaston

1845	Oswald J Howell MA
1852	E N Pochin BA
1856	Edward Woodcock MA
1866	Isaac G Packer
1894	George F Holtzer BA
1897	George Chappell
1927	R O Barratt BA
1930	Charles W Botterill LTh
1969	Leonard E Burrows
1980	Anthony J Lane BA (died 2019)
1985	T. Robin Martin

Assistant Curates

E J C Loseby ('Ev') 1966-1970

John Hayes 83-85 (died 1998)

Chris Gash 1986-1989 (died 2018)

Martin Court 1989-1992

Stephen Bowring 1992-1995

David Shenton 1995-1998

Assistant Priest

Ian Hill 2000-2011

Priest in Charge

2007 – 2009 Javaid Iqbal

Team Vicar (as part of The Fosse Team)

2009 – 2013 Javaid Iqbal

2014 – 2022 Tim Day

We have been in interregnum, without a Vicar, since September 2022.

Our regular services continue, led by visiting clergy and by our own lay ministers.