

## **The Church of St. Mary, Everdon.**

Everdon is first mentioned in a charter dated 944, now at the British museum. From this it appears that a man named Bern managed land here on behalf of the bishop of Hereford. After the Norman Conquest land in 'Everdone' was held by William Peverell under the Bishop of Bayeux, as recorded in Domesday book. By the reign of Henry II (1154-89) much of Everdon belonged to the Benedictine Abbey of Bernay in Normandy.

Bernay Abbey seems to have had a cell in Everdon, probably consisting of a small colony of monks sent from the parent abbey to look after its estate here. The cell is said to have stood on the site of the present Manor House but nothing now remains of it. As an alien monastery, it was suppressed during the reign of Henry V (1413-22); and Henry gave Everdon estate to Eton College, which he founded in 1440.

Eton College retained the right to appoint rectors until 1923; the present patron is the Bishop of Peterborough. The first rector, 'Elias Capellanus (chaplin) de Everdon', was instituted in 1218. Revd. William Antobus, appointed in 1726, was uncle of the poet Thomas Gray and there is a tradition that Gray's Elegy was written in Everdon churchyard. The parish had its own rector until the retirement of Revd. Ralph Dye in 1974. In 1975 it was linked with Weedon Bec and Revd. Peter Woodward appointed, whom Revd. David Witchell succeeded in 1982. Revd. David Jacks was appointed in 1990 and the present rector is Revd. Helen Rayment. ....

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Everdon church stands out among neighbouring churches in Northamptonshire both for its great width and height and because it dates almost entirely from one period in the middle ages, namely the reign of Edward III. Certainly there was a church here by the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, for a rector was appointed in 1218 and the existing font dates from that period, but nothing remains of this building. For some undocumented reason, perhaps a fire or just the desire to create a more glorious building on a grander scale, the whole church was rebuilt in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The work took possibly as little as a decade to complete. The fact that Everdon could afford to built such a church suggests considerable wealth and prosperity, probably associated with the wool trade and with the Bernay monks who may have shared the use of the church with the parishioners.

The church was designed and built in the style known as 'Decorated', presumably by a band of masons and other craftsmen local to the district. It has been claimed that the builders were a family of masons by the name of De Courville (anglicised to 'Carvell') brought over from France by the Bernay monks. This is an intriguing theory but does not seem to be supported by any definite evidence. The tower, nave, aisles and porches form a remarkably unified and dignified design, nobly proportioned but refined, of high quality but exuberant only in two details; the south doorway and the east window of the south aisle. (Other churches in the district with work of similar date and quality, and on something approaching the same scale, are Kissingbury, Greens Norton, Byfield and Crick.)

The beautiful south *DOORWAY* is richly moulded and adorned with a profusion of stylised flowers, leaves and foliage and on the inside faces also.

The two large corbel heads have been defaced, probably by puritans, but seem to portray a king and a bishop. The north doorway is equally fine but simpler; here the corbel heads represent a king and a queen.

The east *WINDOW* of the south aisle is of four lights with elaborate flowing tracery (similar to that in a window at Kilsbury). The other windows in the aisles are of three lights. Some have simpler flowing tracery; others have the attractive form of tracery known as 'reticulated' and one had its tracery renewed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The nave has four small clerestory windows in each side. Many of the aisle windows have corbels carved into male and female heads and busts, some of them being spirited examples of mediaeval carving.

Although they are surely similar in date, the north and south aisles vary slightly in detail; the north aisle has pinnacles on the corners, while the south aisle has the more elaborate buttresses and, of course, the principle doorway and the finest window. Undoubtedly a part, at least, of the village once stood on this side of the church where now only open fields lie. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, if not before, part of the south aisle was appropriated to the inhabitants of Snorscomb.

The *TOWER* is both fine and individual. The walls are 80 inches thick; they have massive buttresses that are carried up as corner shafts to simple pinnacles. Sadly the carvings round the parapet and on the buttresses are now too badly weathered to interpret. The initials 'RY' on the four weather-vanes are a mystery unless they are intended to be 'RK', for Sir Rainald Knightly of Fawsley, who was a major landowner here in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The nave, which is splendidly wide and lofty, has four-bay *ARCADES* of similar proportions, with the same simple but unusual mouldings on the tall pillars as on the arches. For some reason, perhaps because it was the first to be built, just one pillar (north-west) has an elegantly moulded base. Grooves and other marks in the two eastern pillars must relate to previous, mediaeval and later, arrangements of parclose screens and seating and to the former position of the pulpit. Three of the corbels on the north arcade are carved into faces. The chancel arch is in the same style as the arcades and is very large, contrasting with the massive and beautifully shaped tower arch.

The *CHANCEL* seems to be of a different, and slightly later, build from the rest of the church. Although just as generous in proportions it is simpler in detail. The side windows were supposedly altered to their two-light form at some time, perhaps in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The east window was given its present 'Perpendicular' style tracery in 1892.

On the south side of the sanctuary is a 14<sup>th</sup> century *SEDILIA* (triple seat), with a piscine incorporated, and on the north is a fine arched *RECESS*, probably intended to house a tomb but perhaps for an Easter Sepulchre. The *VESTRY* is an unsympathetic addition of about 1860; but since it has a mediaeval doorway and piscine it is thought to be on the site of a previous building.

The *STONE* used in the building of the church was the local Middle Lias ironstone, or 'marlstone', which stretches in a line from about Edge Hill to beyond Melton Mowbray. With its variety of shades from pale yellow and gold to dark brown, this stone is a delight to the eye but a great anxiety in that some of the paler varieties weather very badly. The nave parapets, the tower and many other aspects of masonry are severely eroded and now require urgent and expensive repair<sup>1</sup>. Happily the windows and some other details are made chiefly of more durable Oolitic limestone.

Some undocumented restoration work, mainly to the chancel, was carried out about 1860 perhaps by the Northampton architect E. F. Law. Other work, mainly to the furnishings and the chancel roof, was done by the famous firm of architects Bodley and Garner in 1891-92. Fortunately, neither scheme was too expensive or did much to spoil the beauty and texture of the medieval fabric; but in consequence the present generation is faced with the difficult problem of trying to repair an enormous amount of decayed and worn-out stonework, woodwork, lead-work and glazing.

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All the *ROOFS* of the church are now low-pitched and covered with lead. However, the line of the original high-pitched roof over the nave can be seen on the tower (complete with a beautiful leaf finial). The present attractive nave roof was made in 1755 by two local carpenters, Edward and William Carvell. The date and the initials of the churchwardens at that time are carved on two of the beams. On another beam is the date 1811, referring to extensive repairs carried out by Mr. Stockley and Mr. Bailey. Although the roof is basically sound, past leaks have given rise to severe outbreaks of death-watch beetle, dry rot and wet rot in certain parts of it, causing much anxiety at present<sup>2</sup>. Unusually, the corbels under the roof trusses are of wood, not stone; a few of them are mediaeval and carved into heads.

The north aisle roof was renewed in 1823 and badly needs attention now. The south aisle roof was renewed in 1820 at a cost of £132 17s; being the most urgently in need of attention it was repaired and the lead recast in 1968 at the cost of £3,500. The chancel roof was carefully renewed in 1892 but incorporates some earlier timbers, including one with the date 1788.

The most ancient item in the church is the *FONT*, dating from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and made of Purbeck marble brought all the way from Dorset. It has an octagonal bowl and base; the stem and columns were renewed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when a sympathetic wooden cover was added.

A treasure of Everdon church is its carved oak *ROOD SCREEN*. This is one of the best screens in Northamptonshire and was made in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, probably soon after the church was built. The more elaborate side of the screen, facing the nave, was unfortunately stained in 1892 (originally it would have been coloured); but on the chancel side the natural colour of the wood can still be appreciated. A wood-carver has made some of the terminals into grinning faces: an appealing touch of humour.

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<sup>1</sup> See Addenda

<sup>2</sup> See Addenda

Various initials and, curiously, several windmills have been scratched on the screen over the centuries.

The unusual *BALCONY* across the back of the nave has no connection with minstrels or musicians but was sensibly provided, at some uncertain date, to give access to all the church roofs. It now dates mostly from 1892, including the 17<sup>th</sup> century-style balustrade. However, the massive beam that supports the balcony is an adapted medieval piece with fine mouldings. It was repaired in 1980.

In the north aisle is a simple oak *CHEST*, perhaps dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the ironwork, now sadly incomplete, was probably re-used from an earlier chest. Like the screen, the lid of the chest is covered with windmills and other scribbles.

The *COMMUNION TABLE* now in the south aisle dates from the Stuart period. It is on the site of a pre-Reformation altar, probably the one known to have been dedicated to St. Catherine. Each aisle has a *PISCINA* but both were damaged after the Reformation, probably so that they could be plastered over.

The *PULPIT*, made for 10 gns, by John Bailey in 1808, was altered and given its present base in 1892. It formerly had a sounding-board and was part of a 'three-decker'.

In the churchwarden's accounts it is recorded that the royal arms were painted and the Lord's Prayer, Creed and Ten Commandments written by Mr. Maycock in 1762. Of these items only the *ROYAL ARMS* of George III, painted on Canvas, have survived. They are now in the tower with a funeral hatchment and a board recording the Knightly charity. The iron-clad door to the tower stairway is ancient.

The plaster in the walls, at least in the nave and north aisle, is partly original and now in need of further redecoration. Remains of mediaeval wall paintings are just visible above the chancel arch. Over the tower arch and the doorways are texts dating from the 1820's. A few mediaeval floor tiles have been preserved under the alters in the chancel and south aisle. In the chancel is an ancient *CARVED STONE*, badly damaged and probably rescued from the top of a gable. On one side is the Crucifixion.

The well-made, if uninspired, *STALLS* and *ORGAN CASE* in the chancel and *PEWS* in the body of the church were designed by Bodley and Garner in 1891-92. The previous seating, consisting of box-pews installed about 1820, and a gallery which blocked the tower arch were then removed; but some of the box-pews were re-used as panelling in the ground and first floors of the tower.

All other woodwork, including the reredos, lectern and north and south doors, dated from 1892 or since. Electricity was installed in the church in 1946.

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Many of the windows are filled with old clear *GLASS*, which makes the church light and through which one can enjoy the sky and trees outside. Much repair and renewal

of the glazing was done in 1812, and exercise which sorely needs repeating now<sup>3</sup>. Of the very slight remains of medieval stained glass, the most noteworthy are the Pelican in her Piety in the north-west window and a deer in the south aisle.

All the other glass is by the reputable firm of Burlison and Grylls: namely the east window of the chancel (1906), the east window of the south aisle (1921 as a war memorial), and the other windows in the south aisle (1892). Christ is depicted in three windows; the remaining lights are occupied by different saints whose names are given beneath them.

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Of the many memorials in the church, five slabs date from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The finest, although badly worn, is a Purbeck marble slab, with a floriated cross, let into the floor of the north aisle. The inscription is now quite illegible but was recorded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as being to Henricus de Everdone who died in 1330. A second slab, now in two pieces with a third missing, is carved with a cross and what appears to be a running hare; it has been suggested that it commemorates a forester. In the south aisle and porch are three slabs; one has a brass inscription but no date and another with the remains of lettering is to John de 'Snotcumbe', Rector, who died in 1335.

In the chancel are memories to several clerics and their families including two brasses, one of 1613 to Adam Robyns and the other of 1665 to Timothy Dod who is said to have been so broad that he was unable to climb the pulpit!

On the east wall of the nave is an attractive *MONUMENT*, put up in 1606 to commemorate Thomas and Dorithy Spencer and their family who were lessees of the Manor of Everdon for a period.

Everdon church possesses a heavy ring of five *BELLS*, the tenor (largest) weighing about 18 cwt. These fine tones bells were cast in 1625-26 and 1635, all by Hugh Watts II of Leicester. Watts was one of the most able and prolific bell-founders of the Stuart period. The oak bell-frame is of similar age to the bells, which were partially refitted and re-hung in 1889. After many years of silence, in 1974 the bells and belfry were repaired sufficiently to allow occasional ringing. There was once a sanctus bell in the cote over the chancel arch: the groove made by the rope can still be seen from the roof. However, in 200? the bells were once again restored to be enjoyed by the inhabitants of Everdon.

In 1812 Mr. Hanbury of (East or West) Haddon was paid £21 10s for a new church *CLOCK*. This was unfortunately superseded by a synchronous electric clock in 1955 but the old movement remains in the tower. Earlier time-pieces can be seen on the south side of the church, where a mediaeval sun-dial is scratched on the stonework under one of the windows and a much later sun dial is fixed over the south porch doorway.

The oldest items of *PLATE* are a cup and paten, of crude design, dating from 1691. Another cup was given in 1872 and a flagon (of 1874) in 1880. Finally, in 1968 the

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<sup>3</sup> See Addenda.

cup and paten now in use were given in memory of Maurice Smith, a former church treasurer. There are also two pewter plates, one dated 1702, and a pewter flagon and basin.

Dating back to 1558, the *REGISTERS* are now mostly deposited for safe keeping in the county Record Office. Other records include the churchwardens' accounts but only between the years 1711 and 1853.

In the *CHURCHYARD* a prominent feature on the side facing the village street is a magnificent pair of lime trees. It is recorded that there was once a murder in the churchyard; for in 1292 the Bishop of Lincoln commissioned the priors of Daventry and Ashby to reconcile it. The churchyard was extended southwards in 1921 and hundreds of tombstones were moved in 1954 in an effort to make it easier to maintain. From the south porch there is a lovely view over the fields to Snorscomb and the hills beyond.

## **ADDENDA**

The brass cross and candlesticks on the chancel alter are by Bodley and Garner, 1891-92. The organ was built by Lewis & Co. of London in 1906 and consists of two manuals and pedals with nine speaking stops. The fine lectern in the nave was introduced in 1912.

## **THE MODERN RESTORATION**

While the nave was in scaffolding for repairs to the roof in 1977, the wall painting (mostly covered by limewash) over the chancel arch was examined by Mr. Clive Rouse, who confirmed that it was a 'Doom' painting. Thanks to donations, the two windows in the worst condition were re-glazed in 1976 and a further one in 1990.

In the years 1976 to 1982, the restoration work begun in 1968 with the overhaul of the south aisle roof continued, with Mr. J. M. I. Scott as architect and Messrs. T. Bodily & sons as main contractors. The repair of the nave roof and the renovation of the tower roof and parapets were completed in 1985.

From 1994 to 1998 repairs to the North porch and South porch was undertaken. The clerestory windows were re-glazed and also several windows on the north aspect of the church. These works cost over £100,000 and were very generously supported by English Heritage with a grant of £70,000. The works were also supported by Northampton Historic churches and Frances Coales Charitable foundation.

Internally, The Spencer Monument was painstakingly cleaned, this work was funded by Frances Coales Charitable foundation. The Royal Coat of Arms and the Benefice Board were also restored during this period.

In 2001 the church bells were re-hung in a modern steel frame. The original medieval oak frame on which the bells were hung was left in situ. The works cost £40,000. The church received grant support from Daventry District Council and the Peterborough Diocesan Guild of Bell ringers. Over £30,000 was raised by the village and after 2

decades of silent church bells the village now regularly hears the bells rung on a Monday evening.

2001 was also the year that the font was repaired. 2002 and 2003 saw the redecoration of the church after some 50 years and also the installation of pew heating in the chancel and aisles.