

A short tour of the Parish Church

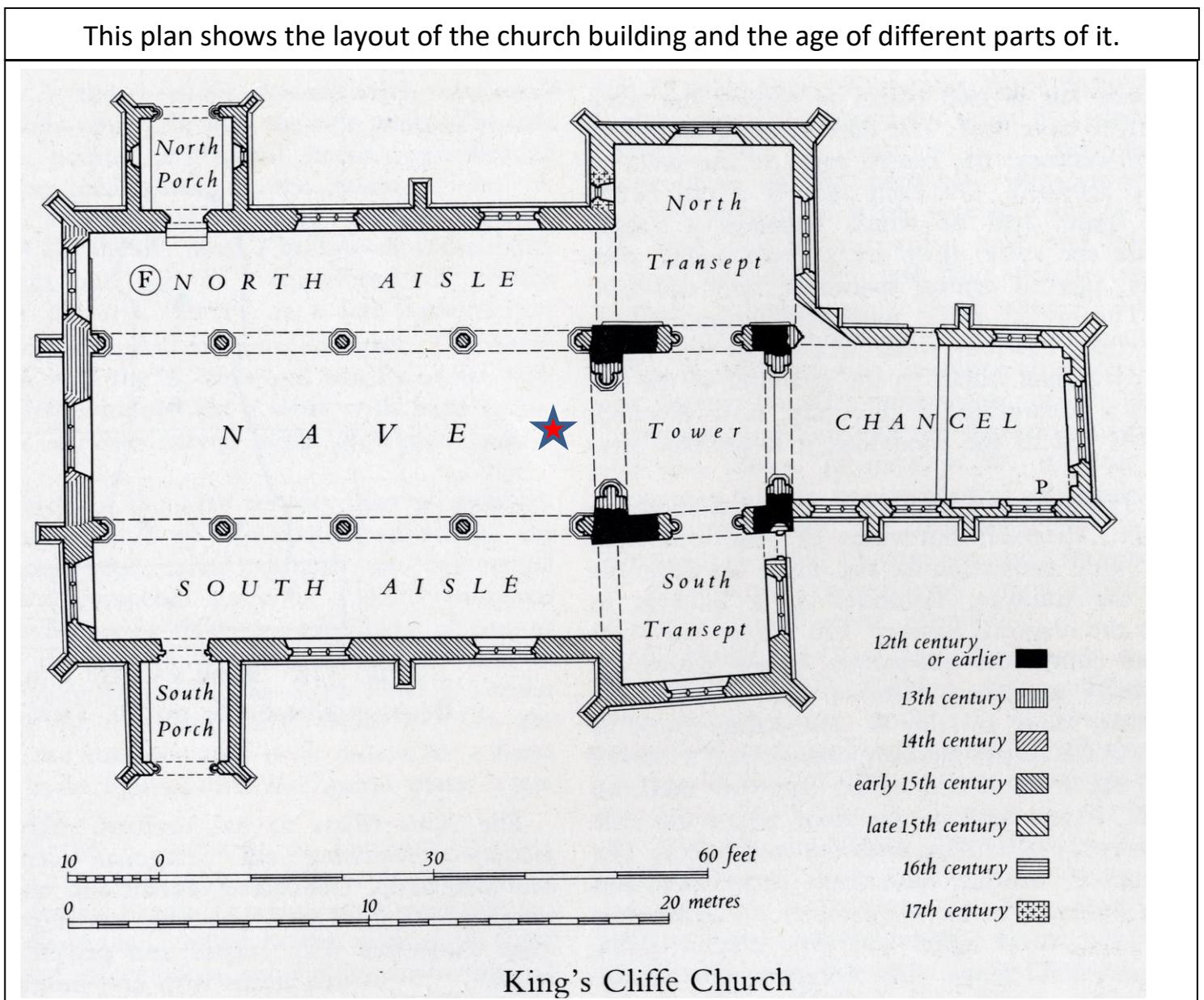
You can find more detail about the architecture and individual features inside in the Parish Church by going to our searchable archive: [Places>Parish Church>Features](#).

This short tour takes you round some of the features inside and outside the church.

(Note: century dates have been abbreviated throughout, eg 13thC. Abbreviations of N, S, E and W have been used in place of North, South, East and West.)

Start your tour at the front of the nave (at the star on the plan below) and continue by following the guidance in red.

How old is the church building?



The earliest part of the church today is the **base of the tower**, which is Norman, **early 12thC possibly even late 11thC**. At the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 King's Cliffe had a priest and there was almost certainly a Saxon chapel here.

The **early Norman church** was compact: a tower, with narrow round-headed arches leading E into a chancel and W into a nave with a much lower roof than today. There may have been two short transepts either side of the tower.

From the nave, high on the tower wall above the arch you can see a double round-headed 'Romanesque' window arch. There are four of these, one on each side of the tower. You can see the other three from outside. Originally this one was also outside, above the lower roofline of the 12thC nave, made taller in the 15thC.

How has the church building changed over the centuries?

In the **13thC** the church was made bigger and a spire was added to the tower. The original narrow arches at the base of the tower had to be made wider to support the weight of the spire.

Move up into chancel

As you look around the chancel you will see some **13thC** features: the **two niches** in the wall either side of the E window; the **piscina** (stone bowl for the priest to rinse the chalice and paten) and **sidilia** (stone seat) in the S wall of the chancel.

The **E window has 15thC stonework** in a style called 'Perpendicular'. It was re-glazed in 1864 to a design by William Wailes as a **memorial to the Revd Archdeacon Henry Kaye Bonney**, Rector of King's Cliffe from 1810 until his death in December 1862. Mediaeval stained glass removed to make way for this window was re-used in 1897 in the windows in the N and S aisles.

You may wonder about the **diagonal passage** near the organ. It was created in the 15thC as a way through from the chancel to the N transept after it had been made longer, probably to accommodate a stone chamber built in the N transept but removed in 1822.

In the base of the tower

The **organ** was built and installed in 1865 by Messrs Walker and Son of London and was first used at special morning and evening services on 1st August 1865 when the Organist and Choir of Lincoln Cathedral provided the music.

The **cast-iron spiral staircase** was installed in 1884, made in Peterborough by Hayward Reffel & Co: their name is cast on every step. The stairs lead to the bell-ringing chamber, which also houses the church clock mechanism, and above that, the bell chamber with the ring of six bells.

The Bells are of varying ages:

- Treble – cast by John Taylor, Loughborough in 1929;
- Second – cast by Henry Penn, Peterborough in 1714;
- Third – cast by Tobias Norris, Stamford in 1619;
- Fourth – a 14th or 15thC bell, re-cast in 1832 by Mears of London.
- Fifth – cast by either Francis Watts or Edward Newcombe, Leicester in 1592
- Tenor – cast by Thomas Eayre II, Kettering in 1738 and re-cast in 1917 by Mears of London.

The Mothers' Union banner has been here since 1957, made to a design chosen by members of the Mothers' Union in King's Cliffe and dedicated by the Bishop of Peterborough.

Now return to the nave

The columns either side of the base of the tower are **13thC**, the arch between them is **15thC**. Before the arch was built, there would have been a wooden rood screen spanning the width of the tower above the columns, with a large crucifix above. The **doorway high on the wall**, now blocked-in, gave access to the rood screen. Rood screens disappeared from most churches during the Reformation.

What about the small figure on the ledge to the right of the arch? It is of St James the Apostle, brought back many years ago from a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Our Parish Church is dedicated to All Saints and St James.

Look up in the nave!

The **nave was made taller in the 15thC**. The 'clerestory' with windows was added under a new roof. The columns with their battlements, the stone heads and beasts around the walls, and the angels carved onto the ends of the roof beams all date from the 15thC. At the same time, the aisles, both transepts and the chancel were also rebuilt but the overall length and layout of the church didn't change.

Move to the SW corner of the church, near to the font

The internal windowsills at the W end of the nave and N aisle give a clue to the age of this end of the church. They are roll-moulded and chamfered in **typical 13thC style**. The 13thC windows would have been much narrower than they are today, so-called 'lancet' windows. The current windows are **14thC** in what is called the English Decorated Style – the nice curvy tracery in the top! In the window behind the font you can see some old stained glass. These fragments came from the remains of the former collegiate church at nearby Fotheringhay, brought here around 1820 by the Rector, Revd H K Bonney.

The **font bowl**, made of local limestone, also dates from the **13thC** but it was moved twice by the Victorians and now stands on a **Victorian stone base**. The carved wooden **font cover** was carved in the **1820s** by the Rector, Revd H K Bonney using mediaeval timbers he had brought from Fotheringhay. Bonney used other timbers from Fotheringhay to make pew ends in the choir stalls and to build a three-tier pulpit-cum-reading desk (*see sketch by Bonney, right*).

In the **19thC** several changes and restoration projects were undertaken:

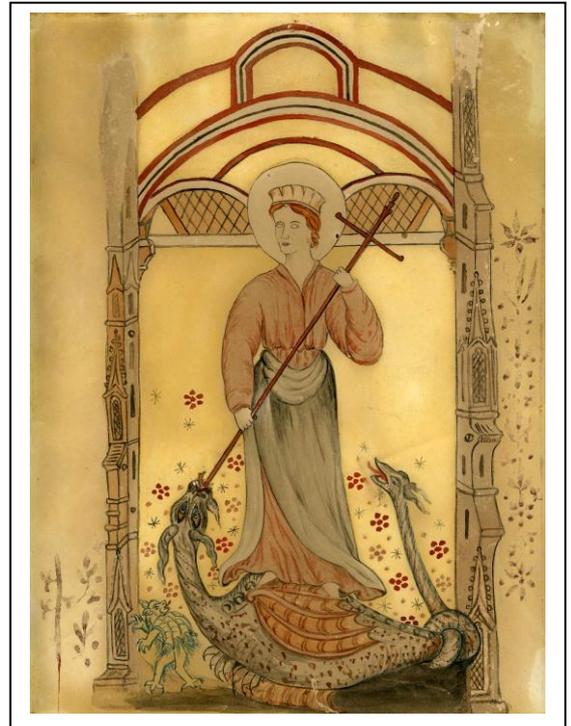
In **1822: The N transept was reorganised** a stone chamber was removed and new box pews erected. A gallery, used by the pupils of the Law & Hutcheson Charity schools, was moved from the E to the N side of the transept.

In **1862-3 all box pews were removed and open, free seating provided for the congregation**; the gallery in the



N transept and another at the W end of the church were removed; and the font, reading desk and pulpit were repositioned. The walls of the chancel, nave and aisles were also restored and the nave re-roofed. During the work, the **walls of the N and S aisles** were found to be **'covered with frescoes'** but sadly they were not preserved and disappeared again under the new plaster. The image of **St Margaret of Antioch** was recorded in a small watercolour by an unknown artist (*see right*).

In **1897**: The font was repositioned (again!) to where it stands today, and windows in the N and S aisles were re-glazed with 25 pieces of 'ancient glass' removed from the original E window when it was re-glazed in 1864, and the rest with glass mostly brought 60 or more years earlier from Fotheringhay's former collegiate church by Rector H K Bonney.



In **1898**: two small but important improvements made as permanent memorials to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897:

- a new church clock with external clock faces was installed, replacing one from 1692 which had no external clock faces. The 'new' clock is still in use today.
- creation of a new churchyard entrance from Hall Yard, made possible by the gift and demolition of two old cottages which stood on 96 sq yards of ground. (*A commemorative stone plaque for this is on the wall beside the Village Map.*)

In the **S aisle**, look at the **two stained glass windows: they are fine examples of the work done in the nationally renowned workshops of Charles Eamer Kempe**. One dates to 1904, the other to 1911. Near the bottom left-hand corner of each window you can see the Kempe workshop emblem: a sheaf of wheat at the time of the 1904 window; changing to a sheaf of wheat and tower by the time the 1911 window was made.

On the wall of the N aisle, the stone war memorial tablets commemorate those from King's Cliffe who lost their lives serving their country in both World Wars and later.

Leave the church by the North porch and turn left to walk around the church.

Here are some things to notice as you go:

Crenellations ('battlements') were added all around the walls when the nave was made taller in the 15thC.

Enjoy the splendid 15thC **gargoyles** around the walls. They were waterspouts: there were no drainpipes until much more recent times.

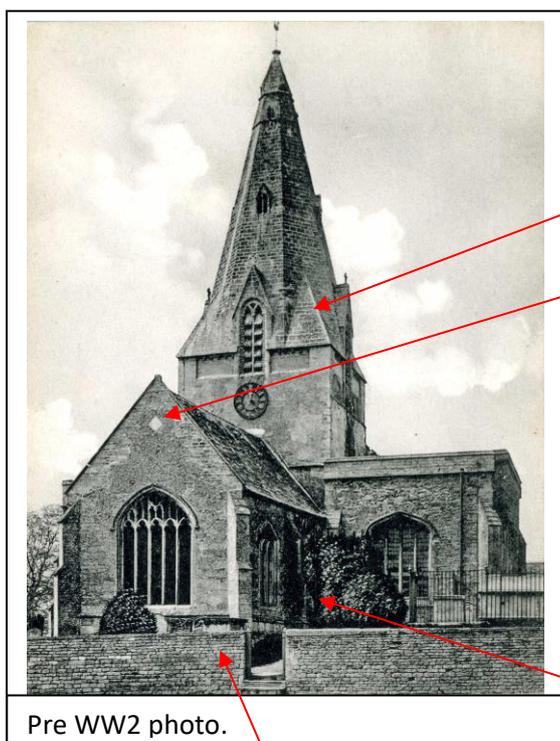
The **N porch** is 15thC, but the **1663 date stone** with churchwardens' initials above the arch tells us it was rebuilt/extended at that time.

On the **W wall** look for the **outline of the original roof gable of the nave** in the stonework above the W window.

You may notice a **short projection of stone at about 18 inches above ground** along some parts of the walls. This is a 'string course' – a 15thC feature designed to throw off the rain. The W wall of the nave which dates to the 13thC has no string course.

The **chest tomb near the W end of the church is where three Roman Catholic priests are buried**. From the 1790s until 1855, a Roman Catholic Riding Mission priest lived in an ancient house adjoining the Golden Ball Inn (now no.4 Bridge Street), riding out on horseback from there to take the Sacrament to the scattered population of Roman Catholics living in a very wide area.

On the left of the **S porch entrance** is an **indentation for a brass plaque** depicting a kneeling figure – perhaps a priest at prayer. Holes on the right of the porch entrance indicate a plaque was fixed here, too.



The original **Norman tower** ends under the louvred windows of the bell-chamber. The spire added in the 13thC is known as a 'broach spire', a style distinctive to the Midlands. The corners of the tower are in-filled with buttresses to support the weight of spire.

The datestone of 1648 above the E window tells us that work was done here at that time. This was at the end of the Civil War period, when perhaps the church had got into a bad state. *For just over a year from 1640 to 1641, Dr Michael Hudson was the Rector of King's Cliffe. He was a Royalist who became a Chaplain to King Charles I. He lost his life on 6th June 1648 while fighting for the King at Woodcroft House in Etton, Northants.*

In the N wall of the chancel the little **priest's door** dates from Tudor times.

To the **right of the small wooden hand-gate** in the churchyard wall, look at the **stone slab forming the wall top**. It is slightly tapered with carved leaf and scroll decoration on the inside (churchyard) edge. This may be part of an early cross shaft, perhaps Saxon, split vertically.

Tomb of William Law, 1686 to 1761– religious thinker, influential Christian writer and local benefactor. His writing desk-shaped tomb is near the small hand-gate (surrounded by iron railings in the picture above). Revd William Law MA died April 9th 1761. Buried with him are Miss Hester Gibbon, died June 22nd 1790 and Miss Sarah Law, died January 14th 1794. Close by is the tomb of Mrs Elizabeth Hutcheson who died January 31st 1781. *More about William Law on our leaflet 'The William Law Walk' and our searchable archive: People>William law.*

The **churchyard gravestone inscriptions** were read and recorded back in 2003 by members of King's Cliffe Heritage. Many were difficult to read even then, and the earliest legible inscription dates to 1670. A book of the inscriptions and a plan of the churchyard with the graves numbered can be found at the back of the church. *This information is also on our searchable archive: [Baptisms, Marriages, Burials>Churchyard>Inscriptions](#).*

Sue Trow-Smith, August 2020

Based on notes made during a guided tour of the church led by Bruce Bailey, architectural historian, in July 2013.