



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST



OLD CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS

Nuneham Courtenay,
Oxfordshire



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

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OLD CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS

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INTRODUCTION

At the time of Domesday Book (1086) *Neuham* or ‘the new village’ was amongst the possessions of Richard de Courcy. The Courtenays first appeared on the scene in 1310 when the manor was given to Hugh de Courtenay, Earl of Devon (d.1340) by King Edward II. By the end of the 14th century Sir Peter de Courtenay had sold the family’s interest in Nuneham to Sir Hugh Segrave.

The Pollards acquired the manor in 1544 for £818 and kept it until about 1608 when Lewis Pollard sold it to Hugh Audley to pay off his father’s creditors. Dame Mary Pollard (d.1606) lived to be over 100.

In 1710 the manor again changed hands when it was bought by Sir Simon Harcourt of Stanton Harcourt ‘for the cheapest pennyworth that was ever bought in Oxfordshire’ (as Dr William Stratford of Oxford wrote to his friend Edward Harley, Earl of Oxford). Sir Simon was created Baron Harcourt of Stanton Harcourt in 1711 and Viscount Harcourt of Stanton Harcourt in 1721; he died in 1727 and was succeeded by his grandson Simon, who became Viscount Nuneham of Nuneham Courtenay and Earl Harcourt of Stanton Harcourt in 1749, the year he decided to live at Nuneham. The original earldom died out in 1809; another Harcourt – Lewis – was created Viscount Harcourt in 1917. The Harcourts continued to live at Nuneham until 1948 when the house and estate were sold to the University of Oxford, which has let them out to various organisations. Currently the estate is occupied by Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University. The Harcourts themselves went back to live at Stanton Harcourt.

*Front cover: Exterior from the north-east
(Rob Judges)*

Left: Interior looking west (Rob Judges)

Below: Wall plaque recording the erection of the church in 1764 (Rob Judges)

Below right: The portico and main entrance at the west end (Rob Judges)

The VILLAGE

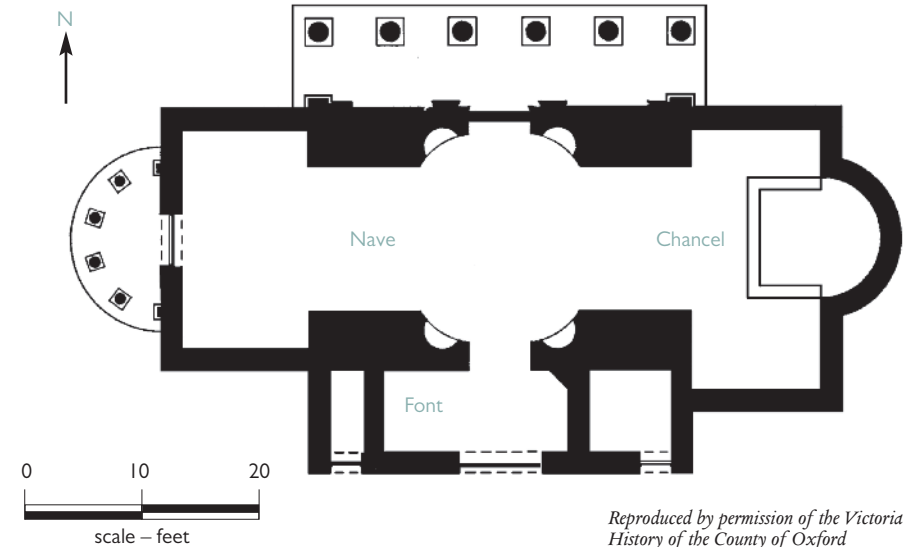
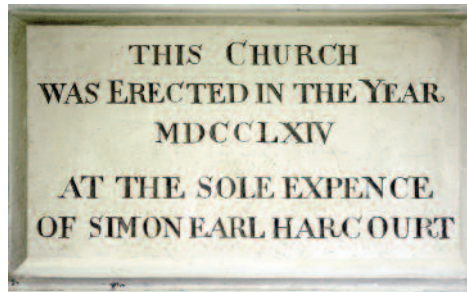
The former village was situated between the house and church with cottages and larger houses clustered around a triangular green. In 1694 the village inn was described as 'disorderly'. In the 1760s Simon Harcourt decided to build a new house and to landscape the surrounding land into ornamental gardens for which 'Capability' Brown was called in. This necessitated the complete clearance of the village and the demolition of all the houses. It is said that this act inspired Oliver Goldsmith to write his poem *The Deserted Village* in 1760 – his village was called 'Auburn', although several other landowners were doing similar things throughout the country. A new village was built on the road to Oxford consisting of an identical row of attractive brick-built semi-detached cottages on either side of the road. Each cottage had a garden to compensate for the loss of the village green. There was also a blacksmith's forge, an inn and a parsonage. This new village with its symmetrical layout is typical of a planned settlement.

Simon Harcourt initially employed the architect Stiff Leadbetter to design his new house. Simon's son, George Simon, subsequently engaged Capability Brown to make alterations to the house as well as the gardens. Later additions were carried out by Robert Smirke.

The CHURCH

HISTORY

Simon Harcourt's landscaping included the demolition of the medieval church, which lay some 20ft (6m) nearer the house than the present building. The churchyard was incorporated into the landscaped gardens. The church had belonged to Abingdon Abbey in the 10th century; the abbey had regained it about 1115. Despite many disputes with successive owners of the manor, the abbey retained the advowson (the right to appoint incumbents) until its dissolution in 1538. The original church was dedicated to All Saints, as were both its successors. This early church consisted of a tower, nave and chancel, porch, chancel screen and gallery. In 1762 it was said to be ruinous when a faculty was granted for the building of a new church at a cost of about £800. Many of the monuments in the church were destroyed or dispersed, although a few ledger stones, the earliest dated 1613, were used to pave the vestry floor. Windows, a doorway and other architectural fragments found their way to



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Baldon House in Marsh Baldon, where they were incorporated into various garden buildings. The five bells, given to the church by the first Viscount Harcourt and cast by Rudhalls of Gloucester, were sold to help pay for the new church, on which work started in 1764 (a brass plate in the south 'transept' records the erection of the church in 1764 'at the sole expence of Simon Earl Harcourt').

The new church was intended to be an 'eye-catcher' in Harcourt's newly landscaped gardens. It was designed by Simon Harcourt himself, helped by James 'Athenian' Stuart who was an authority on Greek antiquities. Stuart had published *The Antiquities of Athens* following travels in Greece paid for by the Dilettante Club, of which Harcourt was a founder. Notwithstanding this, All Saints is more Roman than Greek in style. It is said to have been inspired partly by Chiswick House, Middlesex. The result was a domed temple with a portico on the north side. The principal mason employed on the church was John Hooper, who had previously worked at Ditchley Park, Oxfordshire. The convenience of worshippers, who now lived at some distance from their church, was a low priority.

DESCRIPTION

The church is built of ashlar blocks of oolitic limestone; its plan is unusual. On the north side is a pedimented Ionic portico which may once have been an entrance, though the wall is now blank; a semicircular portico with Ionic columns forms the main entrance at the west end, which is through a glazed wrought iron door.



Left: The font with its richly carved 18th-century Italian cover (Rob Judges)

Right: Harcourt monuments in the north side of the nave and one of the iron chests (Rob Judges)

Below right: Monument to Julian Harcourt in the south transept, died 1862 aged two (Rob Judges)



The east end has a small apse. On the south side is a 'transept' or 'aisle' with tall wrought iron and glazed doors. Whether these very elaborate wrought iron doors were introduced with the alterations carried out in 1880 or are part of the original design is unclear; certainly they are an unusual feature. There are semicircular windows high up in the walls and around the drum of the central copper-covered dome.

The interior of the church is quite austere, relieved somewhat by several ornate Italian pieces introduced in 1880 by Edward William Harcourt, who decided to refurnish the building as a private chapel following the construction of a new church nearer the main road. In an alcove in the south transept is a quite simple stone font of 1843, surmounted by a very tall and richly carved Italian 18th-century Baroque wooden cover with a figure of St John on the apex. The lectern is also Italian, probably late 17th century, the wood of its base carved with figures in relief. The stalls are the only seating in the church and are arranged in collegiate pattern facing inwards; they are in 16th-century Italian style with a shell motif and fluted Corinthian half-columns. On the chancel screen are four Italian 17th-century angels carved in wood.

The blue carpet was used at Edward VII's coronation in Westminster Abbey in 1902 and acquired from the Board of Works after the ceremony. The wreaths in glass cases were used at Edward VII's funeral in 1910.



In the vestry is a painting 'The Good Samaritan' by the poet William Mason, intended as an altarpiece. The Revd William Mason was the biographer of the poet Thomas Gray, author of *The English Garden* and a friend of the Harcourts. Mason also helped George Simon Harcourt to design various features in the

gardens including the flower garden, a grotto and a water garden. He also wrote a number of hymns which were played on a barrel organ in the church.



There are several Harcourt monuments in the church, together with five 19th-century busts of members of the family and a seated figure of William Harcourt (d.1831). On the floor on the north side of the nave is a full-length recumbent effigy of Sir William George Harcourt (d.1904). He was an MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons. In the south transept is a monument in white marble to Julian Harcourt, who died in 1862 aged 2; it comprises a figure of a dead child on a small tomb chest. Above, Marie-Therese Vernon Harcourt (d.1863) is commemorated by a portrait in profile in white marble in a wooden frame. Other memorials in the south transept record



Left: 17th-century tapestry depicting the tribes of Israel (Rob Judges)

Right: Monument to Byron Eaton (d.1703) now on the north chancel wall (Rob Judges)

Below: The Pollard monument in the churchyard (Rob Judges)



There is one small bell hung in a belfry above the vestry. A plaque on the south wall by the vestry door records that it was taken by Germans in Flanders, recaptured at Messines Ridge by the New Zealand Imperial Force and presented to Viscount Harcourt in 1917 by Colonel Norman Shepherd. Previously there had been a small sanctus bell in the church, apparently remaining from the 18th-century set. Since this could not be heard in the village, the parish clerk was

former rectors and their families. An elaborate Baroque monument to Dr Byron Eaton (d.1703), rector, consists of a wall tablet flanked by Corinthian columns and surmounted by a bust under a pediment with a heraldic shield and reclining cherubs. It came from the medieval church and until 1991 was fixed to the external south-east wall; it was brought inside for its better protection against the weather and placed on the north wall of the chancel.

On the walls hang four hatchments dating from 1809 to 1891 and all to members of the Harcourt family. Hatchments depicted a family's coat of arms and were hung on the front of a house soon after a member of the family died. They were later mounted in lozenge-shaped

frames and brought into the church. Above the west door is a large 17th-century Flemish tapestry depicting the Tribes of Israel.

On the walls of the nave and chancel are a number of panels containing biblical texts, the Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments and The Apostles' Creed.

A war memorial to those who died in the two World Wars was brought from the 19th-century church in the 1990s and re-erected on the south wall of the chancel.

There are two large iron chests in the church. Each has an elaborate lid and locking mechanism. They may be part of the Italian fittings and furnishings brought here in 1880.



RECENT HISTORY

obliged to advertise the times of the services by walking up the village street with a handbell.

In the churchyard is a monument to Anthony (d. 1577) and Philippa (d. 1606) Pollard consisting of recumbent stone effigies under an elaborate canopy with Flemish decoration, bunches of fruit, strapwork and heraldic shields. This, too, came from the old church and has been provided with a shelter to protect it from the elements.



A new church – also dedicated to All Saints – was built nearer the village in 1872–74 by Clapton Rolfe of Reading. After the Harcourts moved from Nuneham the old church became disused and it was believed that when the estate was sold to the University of Oxford the church went with it. In 1979 it was discovered that this was not so. The church was formally declared redundant in May 1980 and vested in The Churches Conservation Trust the following year. Since then repairs have been carried out by the Trust, initially under the supervision of Mrs Penelope Adamson ARIBA and more recently by Mr William Hawkes ARIBA. The Victorian church was also declared redundant and is now used by the University as a store, St Peter's, Marsh Baldon, becoming the parish church for the village.

The registers date from 1715 and are deposited in the Oxfordshire Record Office, Oxford.

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THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that it is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

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Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

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On B480, NW of Stadhampton

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off B4009

St Peter, Wallingford
In Thames Street, east side of town centre

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