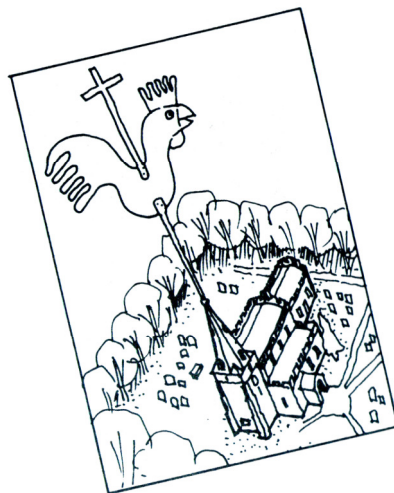




**St. Peter and St. Paul:
Carved figures
at the West end of the
nave**



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and illustrated
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1996

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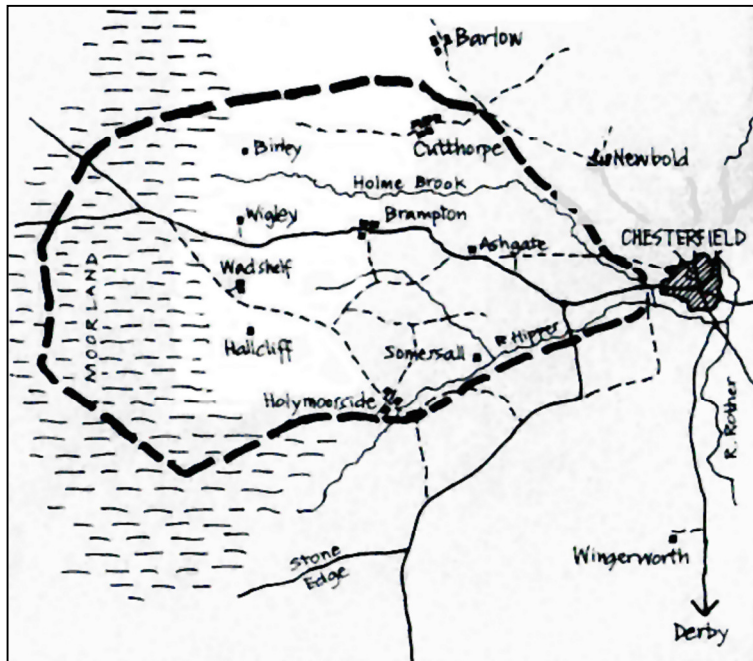
St. Peter and St. Paul *at Old Brampton*

***A welcoming, living, church sharing the
good news of Jesus***

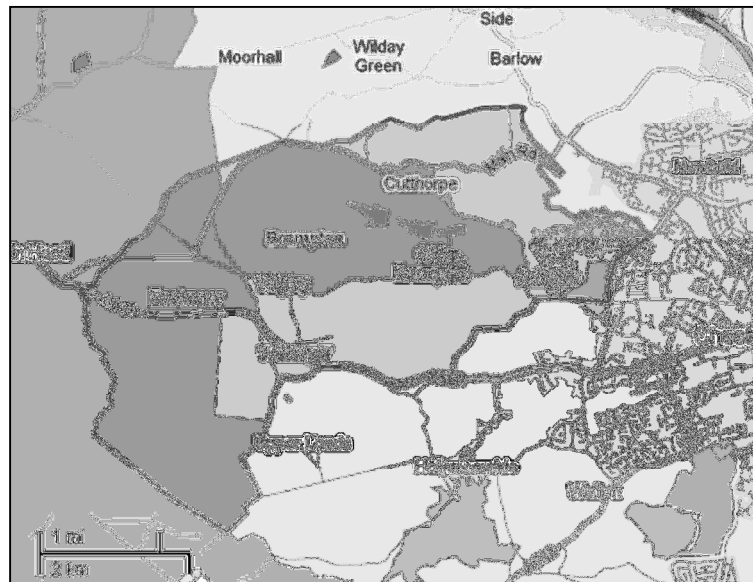


A brief history of Old Brampton Church

The Parish –
as it
was
until
1832....



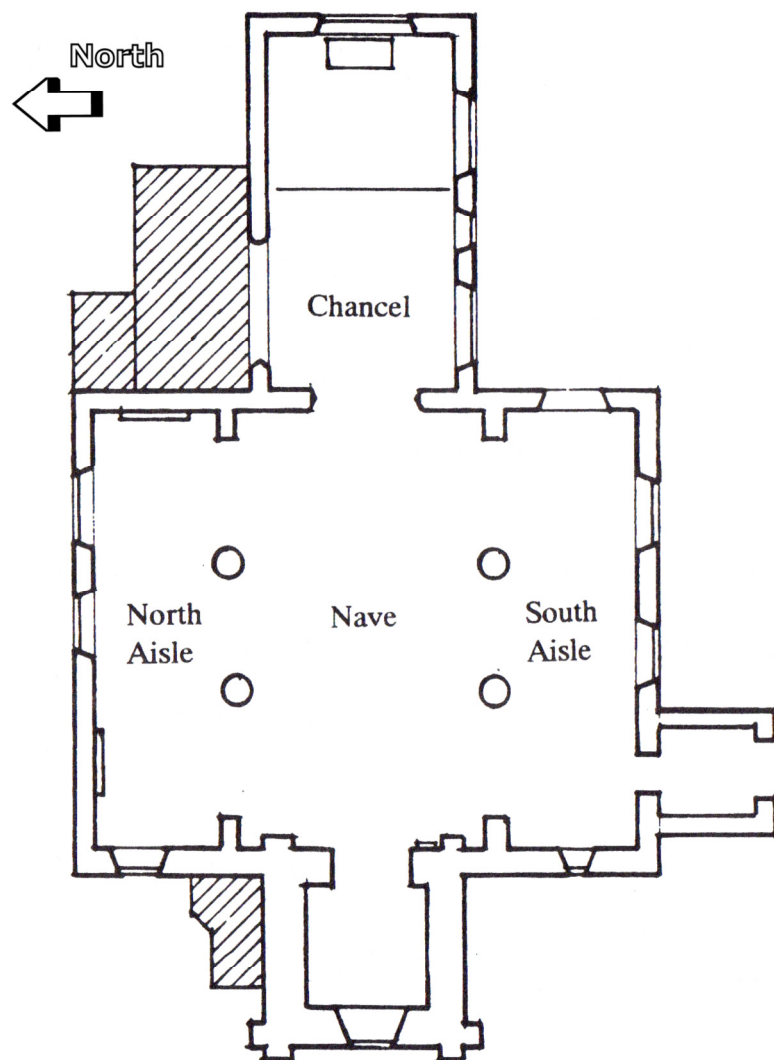
.... and
as it is
now



Exterior:



A plan of the church interior as it is now:



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St Peter and St Paul Old Brampton – an Introduction

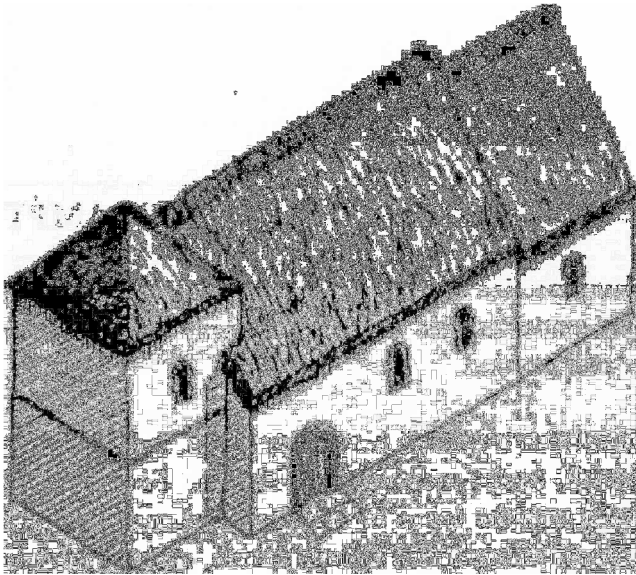
Old Brampton lies on the ancient road westward across the moors; for many centuries this was the only way from Chesterfield to Baslow and beyond.

There has been a church here since 1100, lying at the centre of a large parish, as the map opposite shows. For hundreds of years the church was the focus of religious and community life for this rural area of villages and upland farms, and for the western edges of Chesterfield town. Then, in 1832, St. Thomas' church in New Brampton was built and took away the eastern and southern parts of the parish.

The following pages show how the church has grown and changed over the years, and highlight some of its many interesting and enjoyable features.

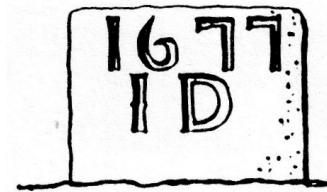
Twelfth Century: The Norman Church

What was Brampton Church like in the 1100's? As a new daughter church of the parish of Chesterfield, out on the edge of the moors, it was probably very simple indeed - a high, steep-roofed nave, a small sanctuary, either square or apse-ended, and at the west end a low, strongly-built tower covered by a pyramidal roof to throw off the rain. The tower housed one or more bells and the priest may have lived in an upper room. The south doorway was enriched with sculptured columns and carved decoration but everything else was extremely plain.



Outside, the walls contain some of the largest stones in the whole building and around the arch is what must originally have been very fine carved decoration.

The church stands right on the crest of the ridge running towards Chesterfield. As you walk towards the porch, the wide space, the forest of headstones and the surrounding trees make a wonderful setting. In medieval times, there would have been no headstones but a churchyard cross to indicate consecrated ground. At that time, the churchyard might be used for dancing, singing and games as well as for burials. Many thousands of burials later, the ground level has risen so much that, where it meets the church, in places it is more than four feet above the floor level inside. Many of the older headstones are beautifully carved and lettered. All face east and look their best in late morning when the sun

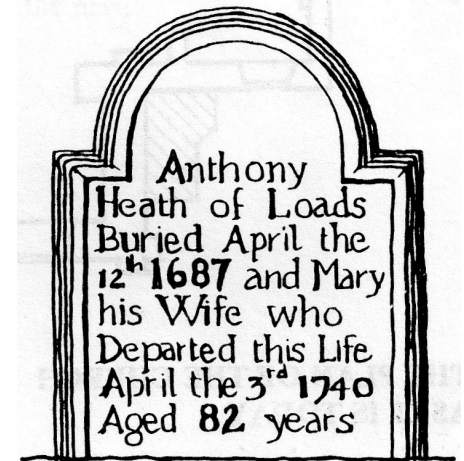


shadows
the
lettering

and



makes it easy to read. A good number of them date from the 18th century and at least one, shown below, from the 17th. The finest stones, the pre-Victorian ones, are all in the southern half of the churchyard, which was always considered the best part to be in.

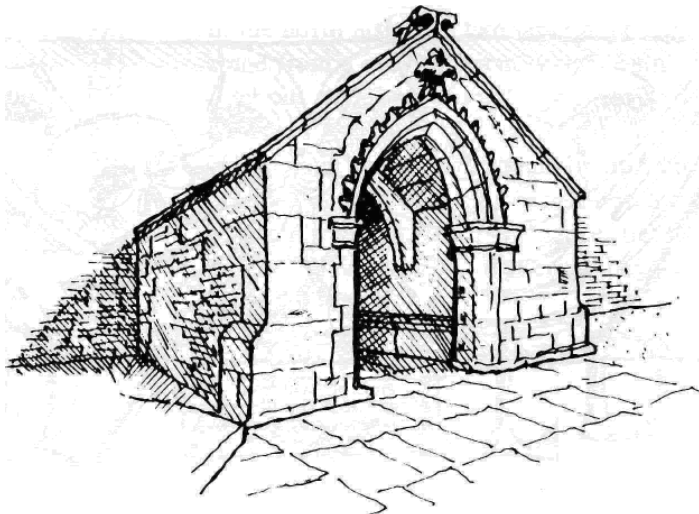


The Porch and the Churchyard

We take it for granted that churches should have a porch, that little room attached rather oddly to one side - usually the south side - of the building and so useful for shaking out one's umbrella. But though the shelter of the porch must have been deeply welcome if you had walked over in the rain from Cutthorpe or Holymoorside several hundred years ago, the porch had a much greater importance than that. As the people's entrance to the building, it was here that the services of baptism and marriage began and it was also the recognised place where legal agreements were signed and oaths sworn - in modern terms, the signing of contracts, perhaps. Hence the fine stone seats down each side at a time when, inside the church, most people had to stand.

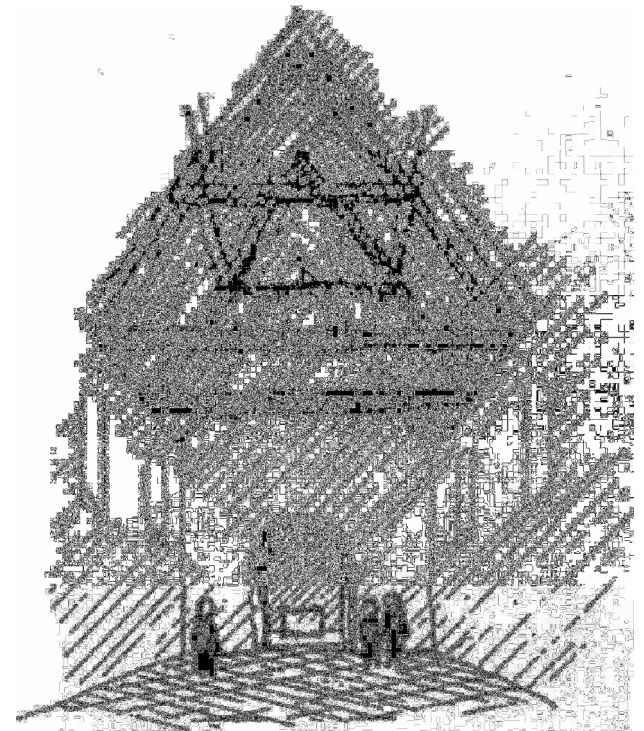
Our porch, which probably dates from the early 1300's (fairly soon after the spire), is unusual in having a roof of fine stone

slabs. The arch which spans the porch shows how wonderfully skilful the masons were at finding a simple but graceful way to support the stonework above.



Inside, the church was much like a barn. There were no pews. Tiny windows let in a dim light and above were the huge, roughly shaped timbers of the roof. The rough stone walls were plastered inside and out and the roof was probably covered with heather thatch,

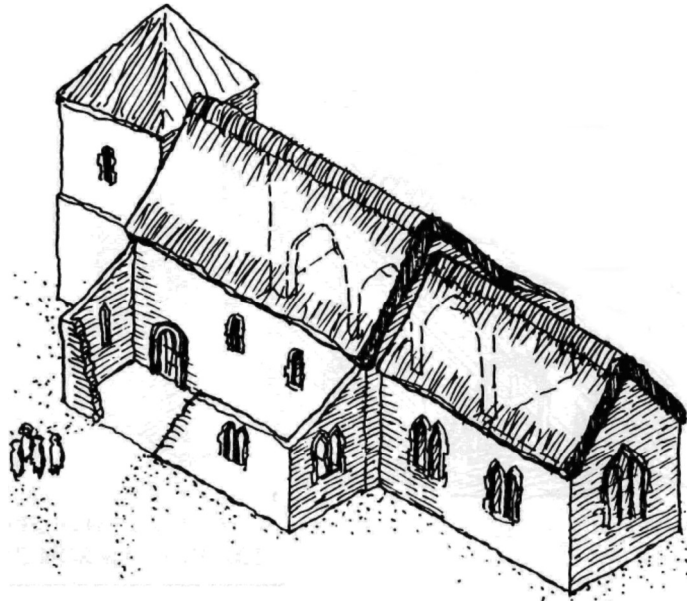
the cheapest and lightest material to hand. Near the south doorway stood the font. The nave was apparently as wide and as long as it is today. A sculptured archway would have led into the chancel; the crude round arch we see today would have been hidden by plaster and was there to relieve pressure on the chancel arch below it. There was probably a huge wall painting of the Last Judgement over the arch and other paintings on the side walls and window reveals. In summer the church was cool and dimly lit, in winter it must have been dark, damp and bitterly cold, but it was the one place in the parish where a large number of people could gather for a common purpose and it must have played an immensely important part in their lives.



There are bits and pieces of Norman work in plenty of Derbyshire churches but a real gem, both inside and out, is the little Steetley Chapel, north-east of Whitwell and just north of the A.619 - it's well worth a visit if you are passing by.

Thirteenth Century: The Church is enlarged

The simple Norman church of the 1100's was dramatically transformed between 1200 and 1300. The north and south aisles were added, the chancel was enlarged



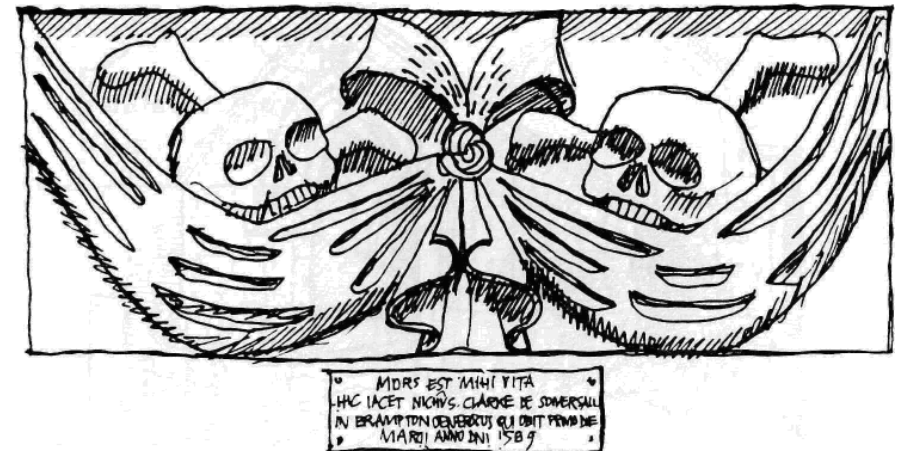
and soon after 1300 the tower was raised and the spire and porch were added. All over Derbyshire, and over much of England, the same things were happening. The population was growing and the church was becoming too small. The parish was large, extending in those days to include Walton, Loads and the present New Brampton, and everybody came to church, crowding in to stand shoulder to shoulder inside. The church now probably seemed not only too small but dark and primitive as well. People were more settled, there were wealthy families in the parish and

At the east end of the aisle, Godfrey Clarke (died 1734) and his wife Catherine, daughter of the Earl of Chesterfield, are commemorated in classical style, very correct and very restrained.

Further down the aisle, in exuberant contrast, is the other Clarke monument, dominated by two homely and well-built angels and bursting with life in all its details. The material is alabaster. Draperies, horns of plenty and baskets of fruit abound, with three coats of arms at the top, the central one shown here, and a splendid pair of skulls and crossbones at the bottom. Gilbert Clarke put it up in 1673 for ten of his family who had died during the century.



Below it, a great deal more modest, is the little brass plate which commemorates Gilbert's great, great grandfather Nicholas, who founded the family's fortunes. It was he who bought the 700 acre Somersall estate and built a new house there and he died in 1589, a year after the defeat of the Armada.



Three Monuments

Digging out a new grave one day early in the 18th Century, the sexton struck something hard with his spade. It proved to be the magnificent stone grave slab of Matilda Le Caus, now on the west wall of the nave, beside the arch into the tower. Matilda belonged to a powerful family, Lords of the Manor of Caushall (perhaps the site of the present Caus Farm in Ashgate?) and with extensive lands elsewhere in the county and beyond. She probably died around 1224 and to have such a monument must have been an important heiress in her own right.



Only a little battered by the centuries, the slab is finely carved and full of dignity. Part of it has been cut away like a window to reveal Matilda's head and shoulders. Her parted hair and head-dress are beautifully carved and she holds her heart in her hands. Her feet appear at the bottom of the slab and in between is a magnificently lettered inscription.

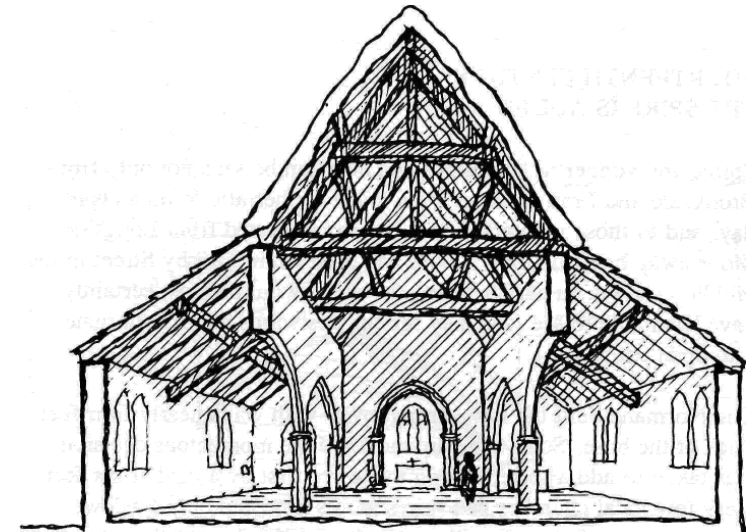
In the north aisle, the two large monuments come from a very different world. Both celebrate members of the Clarke family of Somersall, eminent in Chesterfield from Elizabethan times onwards, and both were originally in the chancel where the rich and powerful, with splendid arrogance, put their family monuments, the bigger the better.

MATILDA

everybody wanted to contribute money or labour to enlarge and beautify the church, which was in every way at the centre of life in the parish.

In the drawing of the church on the left, the original Norman building still shows through, but the north aisle has already been added and the chancel extended, with larger windows. The south aisle is under construction. Only when the walls and roof are completed will the new aisle be opened up into the nave; the masons will skillfully insert pillars

and columns within the old Norman wall, allowing the church to remain in use right



through the building work. The Norman south doorway will be dismantled and rebuilt in the south wall of the aisle, where it still stands today. The spire and porch are still to be built; more about these later on. The inside view below shows the church with both aisles completed. Compared with the Norman church there is a vastly increased sense of space. The chancel is much lighter than before but only a dim light filters into the nave from the windows in the aisles. As in Norman times, the walls are plastered and painted and in the north aisle is a chantry chapel endowed in 1264 by Hugh Ingram.

Fourteenth Century: The Spire is added

Spires are wonderful landmarks and ours can be seen not only from Brookside and Pratt Hall but from much further afield: on a clear day, and to those with good eyes, it can be spotted from Longside Moor away beyond Upper Loads and even from Soresby Street in the middle of town. In earlier times, travellers would almost certainly have been able to see it as they set out westwards along Saltergate into open country. The Normans built the low, strong tower with walls nearly four feet thick at the base. Some time around 1300 the momentous decision was taken to add a spire, raising the tower first by a further six feet. Very few local churches had spires at this time and only Baslow, Bolsover and a few other villages in the county share with us this early "broach" form. The drawing opposite shows how the eight-sided spire springs from the square tower; the arch spanning the corner, known as a squinch, is a structural device first used by the Romans.

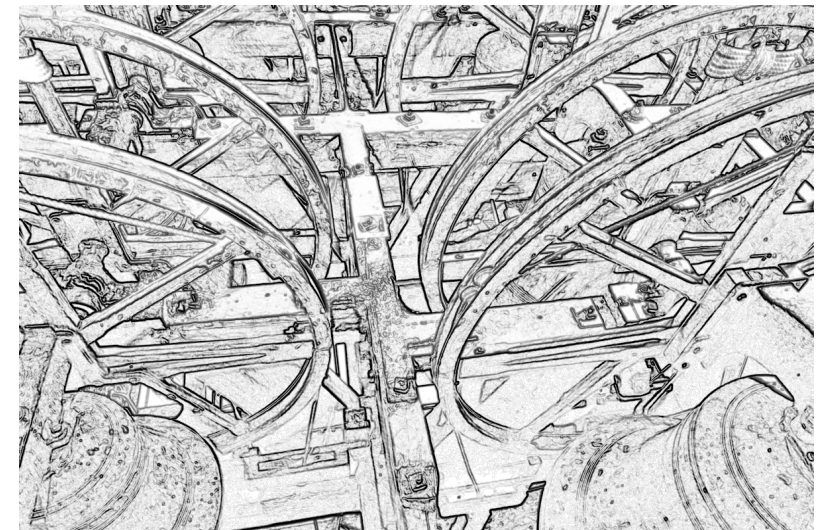
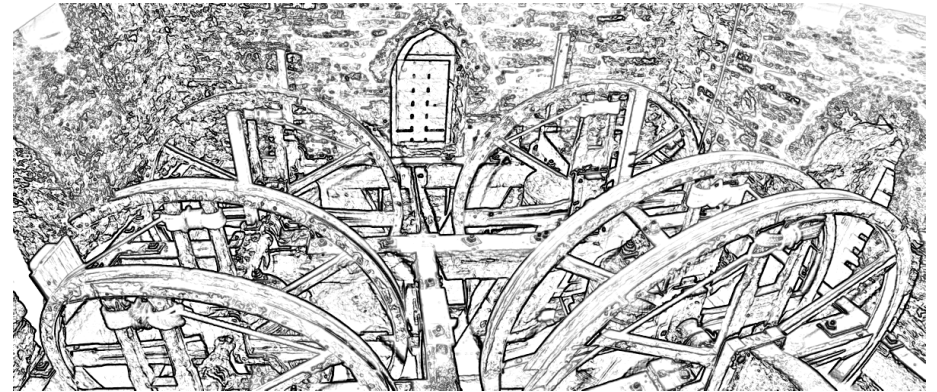
Above the massive tower, the spire looks stocky and strong yet its stonework is only a few inches thick. Spires are very strong and even Salisbury Cathedral's is only six inches thick in its upper parts. So the tower was able to take the extra load of the spire, though the builders added corner buttresses, including, most unusually, the two that face into the nave. In the upper part of the tower, six bells now hang on a massive timber frame. Above them, empty space tapers away to the apex thirty feet above. It's most impressive, but no place to be when the bells are ringing.

Ironically, it was less than ten years after the drastic alterations of 1823 that the size of the parish was greatly reduced when St. Thomas' church was built, making the galleries and all those extra seats unnecessary!



Nineteenth Century: Decay, repairs and improvements

"The church is greatly dilapidated, arising from damp and age, and the interior parts will not accommodate the larger portion of a much increased population"; so ran a report on the church soon after 1820. At this time there were galleries at both the east and west ends of the nave and the pulpit and reading-desk probably stood among box pews somewhere in the middle of the nave, a common 18th Century arrangement. Now everything was stripped out, the church was repaired, and daring - or reckless! - structural alterations were made to squeeze in more people. The two nave pillars nearest to the chancel were taken out and new arches were built spanning over where the pillars had been. The huge openings thus formed allowed large galleries to be built in each aisle; the drawing opposite shows how they may have looked. With new seating and other improvements, the total cost was £669. By 1870, the fabric was in trouble. The alterations had certainly been too daring and the structure was judged unsafe. Out came the galleries and new pillars and arches were made, carefully copied in detail from the surviving originals, but the big arches remain and can still be seen in the walls of the nave. With the west gallery removed, the lovely archway into the tower, which had long been blocked up, was re-opened and the church interior began to take on its modern appearance.



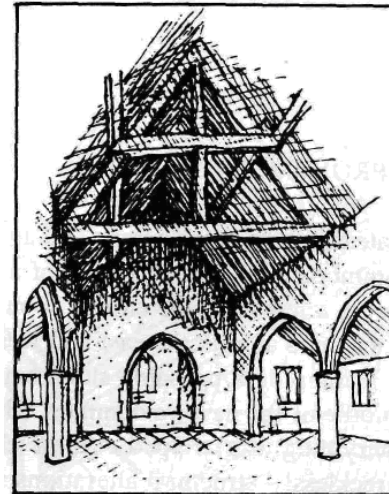
The Bell Tower – as it is now but very much as it was originally constructed - now with 6 bells.

Fifteenth Century: Bringing in more light

The church was as large in the fourteenth century as it is today, but it was poorly lit and there was only a dim half-darkness in the nave. The new churches which were now being built were filled with light, like St. Mary's, Chesterfield, completed round about 1370, and everywhere the old churches began to be altered to make them as light as possible too. So it was that some time after 1400 the last great structural changes to the church took place. The steep old roofs were removed and the walls of the nave were raised, with clerestory windows to bring light flooding in. At the same time, the windows in the chancel and aisles were enlarged. The new roofs, covered with lead sheets, were much flatter than the old thatched roofs and were hidden behind a fashionable line of battlements to give a lively silhouette against the sky. Everything that was done here can be seen in very much the same form elsewhere, locally in Baslow and Ashover and in many churches further afield.

Inside, the chancel was the vicar's domain but the nave belonged to the people and was their village hall and social club as well as their place of worship. Dogs were allowed in, provided they behaved themselves. By now there were probably some simple benches, the walls were more richly painted than ever and there was probably stained glass in some of the windows. On the east wall of the nave was a rood-loft, a timber gallery cutting across the chancel arch, with figures of Christ, Mary and Saint John above. The simple old rood-loft in

Wingerworth Church still survives, the only remaining one in the County.



Left: the fourteenth century nave



Below: the fifteenth century nave