

The history of St Mary's Church, Eastrop

The first rector of Eastrop listed on the rectors' board in the church was Henry de Fleming in 1236. But it is almost certain there were others before him who served as chaplains to the manor of Eastrop, which had existed since Saxon times. Although Domesday makes no reference to a chapel at Eastrop, it is likely that the manor had a chapel to serve the 15 smallholders, two villagers, and three slaves and their families who lived on the estate.

In 1536 Eastrop Chapel was disendowed and turned into a mill.¹ This indicates that the site of the chapel was close to the banks of the River Loddon. It is reasonable to assume that the first church on the present site was built in or around 1540, to replace the disendowed chapel, but there is no document which refers to the building of St Mary's. When the rector was asked in 1913 when the church was dedicated, he could only answer, "Cannot find any record."²

A trade directory in 1875 said that the church was,

... supposed to be an ancient structure; though no records have been found for its exact date: it was formerly one of the smallest in the diocese, but in the year 1835 it was enlarged by elongation through the liberality of Lord Bolton and others.³

The oldest remaining items are the church bell, which was made by Ellis Knight of Reading and is inscribed "R.W. 1631", referring to the Lord of the Manor, Sir Richard Whitehead; and the memorial slab to four year old Walter Froudy Younger, dated 12 April 1663, which is now (2015) covered by a carpet.

There would have been repairs and other changes made to the church over the centuries before those changes for which documents still survive. Some of the bricks from a gable of the old church that were found during the renovation in 1886 were dated 1746.⁴

However, it is unlikely that any great changes were made to the church between 1540 and 1835. Eastrop was a small parish whose population had not grown since the 20 households recorded in Domesday. Even as late as 1851, the census shows that the parish contained only 11 inhabited houses and three uninhabited houses. There were 62 people living in the parish, and more than half of those in employment were agricultural labourers.

Eastrop parish comprised the area round the church including Eastrop Farm and the mill, with a spur leading off the London Road towards Old Basing, and two detached portions: one to the south containing part of Hackwood Park; and one to the north, which included Oakridge Farm. The parish contained 436 acres, of which 252 acres were cultivated as arable land, and 181 acres were cultivated as meadow or pasture land in 1841.⁵ Therefore, most of the church rates in Eastrop were paid by

¹ VCH *History of Hampshire*, Vol. 4, 1911. Pps 147-9.

² HRO, 6M74/AR8.

³ *Post Office Dir. Hants*, 1875.

⁴ HRO, 24M66/Pi1.

⁵ HRO, 21M65/F7/68/1.

landowners and farmers. Their interests are reflected in some of the entries in the churchwarden's account for 1823:

		£	s	d
Feb	Sparrow heads		1	0
Feb 23	Cottle's bill for prayer books	3	3	0
Apr 6	Smith clerk his salary	3	0	0
	Smith & wife cleaning church and churchyard one year		6	6
May 27	Church visitation day		8	5 ¹ / ₂
	4 doz ⁿ sparrows heads		1	4
July 18	Sparrow heads			10
	Millard's bill repairing church	1	16	10
Sept 17	Andrew James' bill repairing the churchyard fence		9	0
	John James one day		3	0
	Churchwarden's oath		5	0
	Visitation expenses for sundries		12	6
Oct 4	Pritchett's bill for repairs &c	6	2	8 ¹ / ₂
	Bottle of wine for sacrament		5	3
Nov 6	Mr Higgins' bill for singers' dinners &c ⁶	3	16	10 ⁷

In many villages in the 19th century the churchwardens paid for sparrow heads from the church rates. Landowners and farmers regarded sparrows as vermin, eating their corn. In some other villages there were sparrowhead clubs, which would pay a bounty for sparrows' heads and rats' tails. The tradition of churches paying for sparrow heads died out towards the middle of the 19th century when sparrows were beginning to be regarded as the farmers' friends, for eating caterpillars and other insects that were destroying the farmers' crops. It was also reckoned that the birds ate more seeds of weeds than they ate corn.

An inventory of the goods belonging to the church compiled by James Smith, the church clerk in 1728 listed a bible, a common prayer book, a surplice, a carpet for

⁶ Mr Higgins was landlord of the *Goat*.

⁷ HRO, 24M66/PW1.

the communion table, a silver cup, one bell, two forms (long seats or benches), and “10 Bucketts,” which indicates they were needed because the roof leaked, unless they were for the use of the congregation during long sermons.⁸

Eastrop did not have a rectory until 1910, so the rectors lived outside the village. Eastrop was a poor parish. The value of the living in 1708 was only £38 a year.⁹ The rectors in the 18th century and into the 19th century were either pluralists or had interests elsewhere. Alexander Lytton, rector from 1723 to 1747 was also vicar of Sherborne St John¹⁰, as well as being Headmaster of the Holy Ghost School.¹¹ His successor, Joseph Warton, was also rector of Winslade.¹² While he was rector of both Eastrop and Winslade, he also found time to accompany his patron, the Duke of Bolton, on a continental tour.¹³

It is not clear whether Thomas Warton, rector from 1755 to 1778 and a future Poet Laureate, ever set foot in Eastrop Church. It appears that he spent most of his time in Oxford, where he was elected Professor of Poetry in 1757.¹⁴ He was also rector of Kidlington, near Oxford.¹⁵ While he was rector, Eastrop was served by a succession of curates.

Isaac Williamson was rector from 1805 until his death in 1816. He also served as curate at Winslade, Tadley and Pamber.¹⁶ His salary as curate of Winslade was £25 a year, which supplemented his income from Eastrop, which was valued at £42 10s in 1810.¹⁷ He was also Headmaster of the Holy Ghost School, as was his successor, William Workman.¹⁸ The return regarding non-residence in 1810 recorded that Isaac Williamson lived outside the parish in Basingstoke; there was no curate; the parish had about 50 inhabitants; and the church was capable of containing the number of inhabitants.¹⁹

Little is known about what the original church looked like. There appear to be no written descriptions. There is a small watercolour dated December 1831, which is kept in Winchester Cathedral. The reference to the church being one of the smallest in the diocese appears to be borne out by a note on the painting that the length of the church was 38½ft and the breadth was 22ft.

The 1835 enlargement

In 1835 William Apletree, who owned Eastrop House and Farm, conveyed land to the Commissioners for Building New Churches, “to be devoted when consecrated to

⁸ HRO, 35M48/16/112.

⁹ HRO, 21M65/F5/10.

¹⁰ theclergydatabase.org.uk

¹¹ Baigent and Millard (1889) *History of Basingstoke*, p.151.

¹² theclergydatabase.org.uk

¹³ *Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁴ *Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁵ theclergydatabase.org.uk

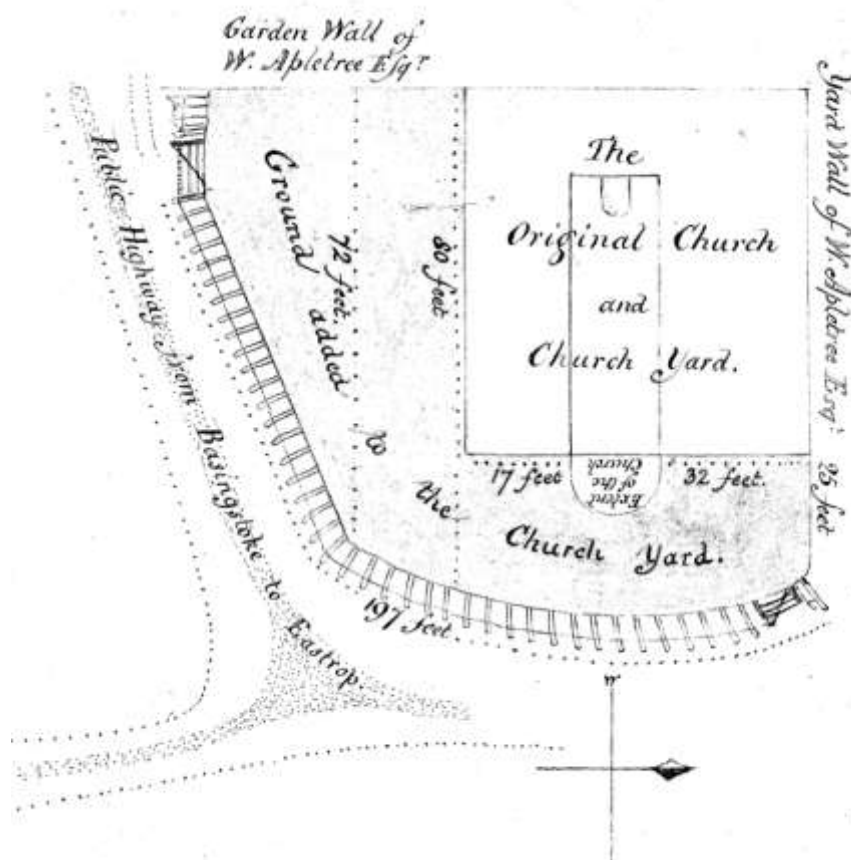
¹⁶ Theclergydatabase.org.uk

¹⁷ M. Smith (ed.) (2004) *Doing the Duty of the Parish: Surveys of the Church in Hampshire 1810*, p.xxix.

¹⁸ Baigent and Millard (1889), p.155.

¹⁹ HRO, 21M65/E7/1/57.

ecclesiastical purposes for ever.”²⁰ The additional land enabled the church to be extended to the east.



Detail from 1835 Conveyance (HRO, 24M66/PB5)

The enlargement of the church seems to have been completed by June 1835. In that month the *Reading Mercury* announced:

We notice with pleasure the improvements in the small village of Estrop near Basingstoke, of which the Rev. William Workman is rector, by the enlargement of the church and cemetery; for which purpose a donation of land has been made by W. Apletree, Esq. The improvements are creditable to the taste of the parties, and have been effected by subscription, to which the Right Hon. Lord and Lady Bolton, have contributed with a munificence and kindly feeling worthy of their work and character.²¹

The cost of the improvements was a little over £286, of which all but £1 was raised by subscription, the largest subscriber being Lord Bolton with £100. The expenditure was broken down as follows:

	£	s	d
Mr Thompson's two contracts	172	0	0
Mr Apletree's disbursements to various Contractors for supplying and erecting iron			

²⁰ HRO, 24M66/PB5

²¹ *Reading Mercury*, June 8, 1835.

gates and iron railings for the churchyard, earth moving, etc.	62	0	0
Mr Glover for chancel windows	8	0	0
Mr Budden for pulpit cloths	7	0	0
Mr Freemantle for repairing organ barrels and for a new barrel for the organ	8	0	0
Mr Leach for cleaning the picture of the Crucifixion	2	0	0
Consecration and other expenses	27	2	2 ²²

The church after the 1835 changes was described as,

a plain structure, consisting of nave, chancel, and small bell-turret containing one bell. There is a gallery at the west end, and over the communion-table there is a fine painting of the Crucifixion. In the church are the vaults of the Workman and Portsmouth families.²³

It is likely that the 1835 changes were little more than extending the church by adding the present brick-built chancel to the east end, and providing a new roof. It is not known how many worshippers the post-1835 church could accommodate. The return in the religious census of 1851 showed estimated sittings of 200, which, even allowing for the extra accommodation in the gallery, seems an exaggeration, especially considering comments made later. The census showed 77 people attending the morning service, although that figure appeared to include Sunday school children, and 100 people attending the afternoon service.²⁴ Again, that figure looks as if it has been rounded up. The religious census that took place in Basingstoke parish on Sunday, 12 February 1882 included Eastrop Church because “certain of its attendants are townspeople.” On that day 74 people attended the morning service, and 95 attended the evening service.²⁵ The population of Eastrop parish had increased from 62 to 141 between the two censuses.

²² HRO, 22M66/PB6.

²³ White's *Dir. Hants*, 1878.

²⁴ John A Vickers (ed) *The Religious Census of Hampshire, 1851*, Winchester, 1993.

²⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, February 18, 1882.



St Mary's Church, circa 1860 (Willis Museum)

The 1886 enlargement

Mary Ruth Shields, the rector's wife, painted the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed on glazed tiles, and in July 1883 they were fixed to the walls of the Chancel, where they remain to this day. However, by 1883, it was becoming clear that cosmetic improvements were not enough. Significant restoration work was necessary, "the walls having bulged in many places, and the interior being quite unsuitable for anything like a decent service."²⁶ The following is a description of the church two years later:

The fabric and its internal arrangements are very much as they existed fifty or sixty years ago, before the great revival in church matters had begun to manifest itself, and in these respects the church is, happily, almost unique in the neighbourhood. The poorest and most mean-looking meeting house presents a more comely appearance, and contrasts favourably with the parish church of St Mary the Virgin, Eastrop. The white-washed walls, unrelieved by a scrap of warm colour; the array of hats, caps, &c. hung round the church during service; the high-backed, narrow, and uncomfortable pews, lined with faded cloth, which affords a harbour for the dust of ages, did not in the least degree accord with our ideas of the decency and order which should prevail in the house of God.²⁷

In 1885, Alderman Henry Allen, one of the churchwardens, asked Walter Raynbird, a local architect and surveyor, from the firm of Raynbird and Sons, auctioneers and estate agents, to examine the church and report back with recommendations on what should be done.²⁸ In the meantime, a group of church supporters met at the

²⁶ *Hampshire Advertiser*, July 7, 1883.

²⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, August 8, 1885.

²⁸ HRO, 24M66/PW8.

rector's house on 1 June 1885 and agreed to form a building committee.²⁹ The committee recognised that they would need to raise subscriptions for rebuilding or restoring the church, and that an account for that purpose should be opened at the Capital and Counties Bank.

Shortly after that first meeting, Henry Allen received a letter from Walter Raynbird reporting that the church,

... although no doubt of extreme antiquity, presents no especial points of interest or character, the interior being very plain the ceiling being plastered, the pews very unsightly and incompatible, and the west end of the church disfigured by the gallery. The south wall and western parts of the north and south walls being the only portions remaining of the ancient structure, the other portions of the north and south walls being rebuilt in a very slight and indifferent manner apparently some 140 years ago.

As you requested that I should report first as to the rebuilding of the church, secondly as to the repairing and adding to the present structure I beg to divide my report into two parts.

First as to rebuilding.

I may observe that the whole of the structure (with the exception of the chancel) is old, dilapidated, the walls being bulged, cracked and settled in several places. The roof although in a state to keep the wet out for some time is of inferior construction and is the cause of the bulging of the walls which have been supported by buttresses on the south side, the present roof being blocked on to a former roof, this being on doubt done when the chancel was built.

The pews and flooring are also very defective and require entire renewing, the plaster ceiling also is cracked and very unsightly. Taking into consideration the above grave defects in the existing structure and the fact that it does not contain sufficient accommodation for the increasing number of parishioners, I think you will agree with me, when I recommend that if funds be forthcoming the wisest plan would be to build a new church reusing the old materials from the present one.

A plain new church to accommodate 200 people could be erected for £2,000 which would be a great acquisition to the parish and neighbourhood and much more satisfactory than in adding to the present edifice which is in fact almost worn out and past repair.

Secondly as to repairs and additions.

Should it be expedient to only repair and add to the present building I enclose a sketch shewing additions most feasible to be made, that is to lengthen the present nave, and add a new aisle on the south with an entrance from the same side; to remove the gallery and pews and to put new boarded floor with more modern sittings, the erection of the new aisle would necessitate the removal of the South wall and inserting stone or iron columns to carry the roof above and as this is a matter (with the present unsatisfactory state of the roof) difficult to estimate without a more thorough examination of the roof and walls which could only be made by stripping the plaster from the ceiling and having the walls and their foundations laid bare.

²⁹ Hants and Berks Gazette, June 6, 1885.

The above being the case, the question of the cost of the additions on the accompanying sketch can only be assessed in a general and approximate degree and until a detailed specification with drawings of the seats, windows, etc are gone into and settled, it is impossible to say what would be the cost of restoration, but I think I am not far wrong in stating the additions shown on the plan giving accommodation for 190 persons with new flooring, pews, lighting by gas, for a few slight repairs to the present structure would cost the sum of £700 and I do not think it would be prudent to calculate on a less outlay than this sum as in work of this kind contingencies will in all probability occur.”

At their meeting on 25 June 1885, the committee agreed to issue the following circular:

The rector and churchwardens finding it absolutely necessary that some permanent structural repairs should be done in consequence of the walls being cracked, convened a vestry meeting where it was thought desirable in view of the growing population of the parish to give such accommodation as would meet the demands for sittings for some years to come rather than execute temporary repairs. A plan was submitted to extend the church on the south and west, repair, light with gas and remove the present unsightly gallery which is so low as to be very little above the heads of persons standing in the pews underneath.³⁰

In other words, the committee decided to opt for the repairing and extending option, rather than a total rebuild.

To help raise funds, a bazaar was held in the garden of Eastrop House on 6 August 1885. The Band of the K Company of Volunteers provided the entertainment and,

Mrs Shields presided at a stall, in which many beautiful specimens of her paintings found a ready sale. The Misses Allen had a charming display of flowers, bouquets, &c.; while Miss Ada Allen had many visitors to her art gallery ... In another tent the Misses Portsmouth displayed many useful and ornamental articles in needlework, and the refreshment tent did not lack visitors.³¹

A further bazaar was held on two days in June 1886 in the Drill and Masonic Halls.³² By February 1886 a total of £311 4s 1d had been raised, the largest individual amount being £57 10s raised from the August 1885 bazaar. The committee estimated that £500 was needed “for the removal of the South Wall (which now bulges outwards) and for the extension of the Church on the South, and for other much needed improvements.”³³

The faculty authorising the restoration and enlargement of Eastrop Church was issued on 25 June 1886. The faculty authorised the extension of the Church in a westward direction, almost to the wall separating the churchyard from the grounds of Eastrop House, and extending the Church southwards to create a new aisle in

³⁰ HRO, 24M66/PW8.

³¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, August 8, 1885.

³² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, June 26, 1886.

³³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, February 6, 1886.

accordance with a plan drawn up by Walter Raynbird.³⁴ The southern extension was never built.

The estimate of £500 proved to be an understatement. The committee accepted a tender from John Thumwood, a builder from Chequers Road, amounting to £550 17s 5d. They estimated that another £100 would be needed to cover the cost of the faculty and the architect's costs.³⁵

Worse was to come. Work began on the church on 6 July 1886³⁶, and shortly afterwards, while the builders were taking down the south wall, they discovered that the whole building, with the exception of the chancel, was so weak that, "it will be absolutely necessary to restore the whole. This will necessitate a further demand on the generous public to the extent of about £250."³⁷

While the building work was going on, the parishioners held their services in Basingstoke Town Hall, the first of which was on Sunday, July 11, 1886.³⁸

Although the work was nearing completion by that stage, on the afternoon of Friday, 3 September 1886, Miss Sclater-Booth, the daughter of the M.P. for Basingstoke, laid the foundation stone, which bore the following inscription:

To the glory of God, and in commemoration of this church, this stone was laid by Miss Sclater-Booth on the 3rd of September, 1886. Raynbird and Sons, architects. Thumwood, builder.



St Mary's Church, late 19C

³⁴ HRO, 21M65/122F/1.

³⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, July 3, 1886; Kelly's *Dir. Hants*, 1889.

³⁶ HRO, 22M66/Pi1.

³⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, July 17, 1886.

³⁸ HRO, 22M66/Pi1.

The new building was described as being of Gothic design, slightly wider and considerably longer than the old building, of which only the chancel was left standing. The old material, chiefly flint, was used in the foundations, and the exterior walls were built of Bargate stone with Bath stone quoins. The inside of the building was of white brick with red brick lines as a relief.³⁹

The floor was paved with square tiles laid diagonally, of alternate yellow and black, and the mural tablets and other grave memorials were replaced as near as possible to the same positions as in the old church. The windows were of cathedral glass, "arranged in colours which give a warm and cheerful effect to the interior." They were supplied by Glover and Milsom, plumbers and decorators of London Street, who also did the plumbing and painting work. The pews were of pine and were made by George Kent of Chequers Road, who did all the woodwork. Charles Pinder, ironmonger, from the Market Place supplied and fitted the gas lights. The prayer desk was refixed on the south side of the church, and a new carved oak pulpit, the gift of Henry Allen, was placed on the north side of the chancel arch. The font was given by the vicar and churchwardens of Basingstoke, and was the old font that was used at St Michael's church. James Poulter, upholsterer of London Street supplied the matting, and carpet.⁴⁰

The church reopened on Thursday, 18 November 1886.⁴¹ Sunday services resumed at the church on 21 November 1886 after services had been held at the Town Hall for 19 successive Sundays. The parish paid £11 17s 6d (19 x 12s 6d) for the use of the Town Hall.⁴²

By November 1887, the committee finally raised the full amount they needed to meet the costs of the restoration. John Thumwood's bill was £777, and with the other expenses for the architect's fees, the faculty, etc., the total cost was £831 11s.⁴³

Walter Raynbird, the architect, died at Hackwood Home Farm on 6 May 1891, aged 36, from consumption, which manifested itself about twelve months earlier.⁴⁴

The Stained Glass Windows

According to Pevsner, "In the wood-framed E window, rare and unusual Georgian painted glass of 1744, perhaps presented by Peter Serle, then holder of the advowson."⁴⁵ It is not known where Pevsner got the date of 1744 from. I can find nothing in the archives to support that date. The glass is very old, and looks older than 1836 when the chancel was built. The watercolour of the church before the 1836 chancel was built shows a window that appears to be the same shape as the east window. Incorporating a window from an earlier church was quite common, so that could have happened here. Near the top of the window there are three round

³⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, September 11, 1886.

⁴⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, November 20, 1886; Kelly's *Dir. Hants*, 1889.

⁴¹ HRO, 24M66/Pi1.

⁴² HRO, 24M66/PV1.

⁴³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, November 19, 1887.

⁴⁴ *Western Gazette*, May 15, 1891; *Bury and Norwich Post*, May 26, 1891.

⁴⁵ N. Pevsner and others (2010) *Buildings of England, Hampshire: Winchester and the North*, p.159.

pictures. The middle one is of a chalice inside a crown of thorns, and the two on each side show the face of a cherub resting on an angel's wing.



Detail from East Window - Copyright Andrew Redbond

The stained glass in the lancet window on the north wall of the chancel is of *Christ blessing the children*, and shows Christ holding a little boy. The text at the bottom of the window reads:

To the Glory of God and in fondest memory of Arthur Percy Jennings of London born Jan^y 11th 1874 run over & killed on a visit in this Parish July 16th 1878.

Next to the window is a brass plate inscribed by someone with a weak grasp of arithmetic as follows:

This window is dedicated in sweet memory of Arthur Percy Jennings killed by accident nearby July 16 AD 1878 aged five years.

The generally accepted story of his death is that his family were on holiday in Eastrop, staying at the *Goat*. Little Percy had been promised a ride on the brewer's dray when it delivered to the inn. Hearing the sound of horses, the lad dashed into the road and was trampled on and died instantly. His father, a stained-glass artist, designed, painted, and made up the window, and included a picture of the brewer's dray at the bottom of the picture.⁴⁶

The father, John Jennings, was born in Southwark but married a Basingstoke girl. According to newspaper accounts, they were staying with a family called Yates, who lived at Vine Cottage, Goat Lane. On the day of the little boy's death, the adults went on the Hampshire Friendly Society's excursion to the South Coast, leaving Percy with other children in the charge of Mr Baker at the *Goat*. Percy was standing by the front door of the *Goat* when a boy at the other side of the road called him. As he ran across the road, a horse and cart belonging to Messrs Smith Brothers came round

⁴⁶ D.H. Bournon, unpublished manuscript.

the corner from Wote Street on its way to Eastrop Mill and knocked him down, one of the wheels passing over his neck.⁴⁷



Christ blessing the children, and detail of cart - Copyright Andrew Redbond

⁴⁷ *Hampshire Advertiser and Hants and Berks Gazette*, July 20, 1878.

The stained glass in the lancet window on the south wall of the chancel, *the Light of the World*, showing Christ holding a lantern, was also by John Jennings. It was dedicated to the memory of Mary Ruth Shields, the rector's wife, who died on 19 January 1888, and was a gift to the church from a Mrs Philipson of Tynemouth, probably a relation of the deceased.⁴⁸



The Charge to Peter - Copyright Andrew Redbond

⁴⁸ HRO, 24M66/PV1.

The Church received another gift in memory of Mrs Shields. On Christmas Day 1888, the Rev Shields wrote in the Church Journal:

This day a lectern given by the congregation and friends was used for the first time.

Inscription:

To the glory of God and in loving memory of Mary Ruth Shields 1887.

Note the "1887" is in mistake for 1888, but may be altered.

The brass lectern is still in the church. The alteration is barely discernible.

Following the death of Richard Shields, the Churchwardens paid for a faculty to erect a stained glass window in his memory in the south window of the nave. They commissioned John Jennings to make the window. This is the rather splendid window, *the Charge to Peter*, which bears Jennings' signature at the bottom. It shows the apostles with sheep, and the quotations, "Feed my Sheep", "Feed my lambs" (John 21: 15-17). At the foot of the picture, there is the text: "To the Glory of God and in loving memory of Richard John Shields 18 years Rector of this Parish who died August 14 1897 Erected by his Widow and Sons." The Churchwardens' accounts show a payment to John Jennings of £4 5s. in March 1899, and a receipt during 1899-1900 from John Jennings of £2 2s 6d, half his fee as a gift to the church.⁴⁹

John Jennings' (1848 – 1919) home and studio was at 96 Clapham Road, Kennington. His work includes windows in the Holy Rosary Church, Brixton; St Peter's at Seal in Kent; St Thomas a Becket, Pagham, Sussex; St Joseph's Tadcaster; the Church of St Mary, Llanfair Kilgeddin; and the Church of St Cybi, Holyhead.

More room needed (1)

When the rebuilt church was opened in 1886, it was estimated that the new church would accommodate between 150 and 200 persons, "being more than adequate for the number of parishioners."⁵⁰ However, in 1898 it was reported that the rector was, "presented with an additional supply of campstools to meet the increasing demands for accommodation at St Mary's Church. On Sunday evening last every inch of room in the church was occupied."⁵¹

In an unofficial religious census conducted by the *Hants and Berks Gazette* on Sunday, 15 March 1903, the observer estimated the seating accommodation was 170, and counted 47 men, 56 women and 46 children at the morning service, a total of 149; and 59 men, 89 women and 16 children at the evening service, a total of 164.⁵²

The increase in the number of people attending St Mary's was partly due to the increase in the population of Eastrop. There were 51 people living in the parish in 1801, 69 in 1831, 141 in 1881, and 283 in 1901. Another reason is that the

⁴⁹ HRO, 24M66/PW2.

⁵⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, November 20, 1886; Kelly's *Dir. Hants*, 1889.

⁵¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, February 5, 1898.

⁵² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 21, 1903.

congregation was swelled by people from outside the parish, as is the case today. It was already observed at the time of the 1882 religious census that townsfolk from Basingstoke were worshipping at Eastrop. At a time when there was a division in the Church of England between the high church and evangelical wings, it was not unknown for people to worship outside their parish. Although Henry Allen lived in Basingstoke before moving to Eastrop, according to his obituary, he attended the parish church at Eastrop, "the absence of ritualistic observance in the services at Eastrop church being in accordance with his views."⁵³

In 1894 Misses Harriet and Elizabeth Portsmouth had given the church an American organ. However, at the vestry meeting on 2 April 1900 the rector, Richard Woodroffe Boyce, said that a pipe organ was essential as the present organ was not powerful enough for the church with such a large congregation, the sound not being heard at the end of the church. He said that the church was, "worthy of a larger organ. It was the only Evangelical Church of the Church of England in the town of Basingstoke."⁵⁴

It was clear that more room was needed, not only to accommodate those wishing to attend Sunday services, but for other church activities. The last requirement was met in 1907 by the building of the Parochial Church Hall in Goat Lane. The hall, designed by Fred Halford of London and built by John Harris of Basingstoke at a cost of "upwards of £960," was 48ft long and 25ft wide and could accommodate 200 persons.⁵⁵ John Harris was a builder and contractor based in Basing Road.⁵⁶

A meeting of the congregation was held in the Parochial Church Hall on 16 December 1907 to discuss the possible enlargement of the church. The rector said that their "energetic vergers were frequently at his wits' end to know how to accommodate the people," and another speaker said he had seen some people not able to get into the church. It was agreed that more accommodation was needed. The only problem was how. C.F. Simmons, an estate agent who lived at Eastrop Fields, said he agreed that some enlargement was necessary, but,

Where was the money to be found? The church afforded ample accommodation for the parishioners; but they could not lose sight of the fact that a large majority of the congregation did not live in the parish ... There was no question that at the present moment there was a desire on the part of a good many people in Basingstoke for a Church of England Service of a moderate character ... He did not think that much of the cost of enlargement ought to fall on the parishioners of Eastrop, because, as he said, there was sufficient accommodation for them.

William Simpkins, the clothing manufacturer, said he thought the site on which the church stood was too small for any great extension. His proposal was to build a new church on a new site that would be capable of holding 600 people. Some others supported that view, saying that the present site was too small for a big church. Most speakers, however, argued that it would be a shame to take the church away from where it had stood for so long, surrounded by the graves of so many who had been

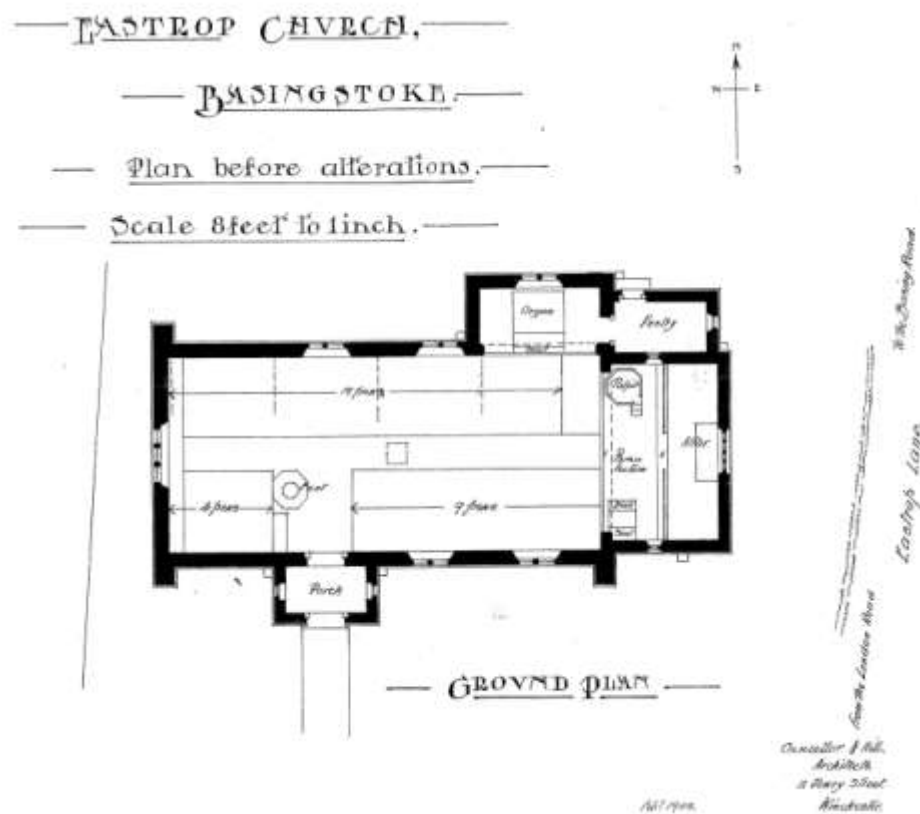
⁵³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, February 13, 1892.

⁵⁴ HRO, 24M66/PV1.

⁵⁵ HRO, 24M66/PW17 *Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, 1906-07*.

⁵⁶ Kelly's *Dir. Hants*, 1911.

attached to it in the past. Those who supported extending the church on the existing site were split between those who proposed that the church should be extended westwards, and those who proposed that it should be extended eastwards. The meeting concluded with a resolution asking the Church Council simply to consider the possibility of enlarging the church.⁵⁷



Plan of St Mary's Church before 1912 (HRO, 24M66/PW32/1)

The rector, Crawford Hilles, commissioned Cancellor and Hill, architects, of 12 Jewry Street, Winchester to produce a report. Bertram Cancellor reported on 9 March 1908:

The present church consists of a chancel, nave, organ chamber and vestry, and the total accommodation provided is for 150 persons. The present chancel is so short that it is impossible for the choir to obtain sitting accommodation in it; they are therefore obliged to occupy the front pews. The area of the present churchyard is somewhat small and gives very little opportunity for increasing the building. It is possible to obtain an extra 12 feet in length at the east end, but the present building comes within six feet of the western boundary ... There is nothing of architectural merit in the present building, and I do not think there is any reason why this should not be pulled down to make way for a better building.

Mr Cancellor enclosed a plan of a church on the existing site which was capable of accommodating 300 people, but pointed out that this would have involved interfering

⁵⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, December 21, 1907.

with graves on either side of the church and would cost about £2,650. A new church on a new site would cost less.⁵⁸

The Church Council met on 24 March 1908 to discuss the architect's report. Unfortunately the Church Council records for that period have not survived – records begin in 1920 – but the rector reported in the Eastrop Parish Magazine that neither of the two schemes were received favourably. The Council considered the scheme for building on the existing site would have involved an outlay out of proportion to the additional accommodation provided, and “from the display of sentiment evinced it was evident the Council was not prepared to adopt the alternative.”⁵⁹

The Church Council decided to commission a new plan, and met to discuss it on 26 May 1908. However, once again the Council rejected the plan. However, they did agree to pass a resolution that the rector be asked to appeal for funds to build a new church. In October, another plan was drawn up, to extend the church to the south, without disturbing any graves. Without endorsing that specific plan, those on the Council who were opposed to building on a new site, considered that the plan confirmed that it was possible for a church of sufficient size to be built on the existing site. The Council, therefore, confirmed the earlier resolution, with the addition of the words, “on the present site.” About 40 members of the congregation met on 14 October and, again without endorsing the specific plan on the grounds that they ought to know how much money they were likely to have before committing themselves to a specific plan, they agreed the proposition that,

This meeting of parishioners and members of the congregation approves of the Council's appeal for funds for church extension on the present site, and pledges its support.⁶⁰

Having decided to reject the proposal to build a new church on a new site, there was clearly some disagreement as to which plan to adopt. In July 1909 the rector announced that £931 2s 6½d had already been paid, or promised, to the Church Extension Fund, but, “owing to the many difficulties in the way of the proposed church extension scheme,” the Church Council had asked the Bishop of the Diocese to appoint a Commission of Enquiry.⁶¹

Despite the passage of a year, the rector had to announce in July 1910 that,

The question of the Church Extension remains unsettled ... After a full and careful consideration of the terms of reference as submitted by the Bishop, i.e. (1) church accommodation, and (2) a rectory house, the Commission reported unanimously (1) that an additional accommodation of at least 80 seats should be provided, and (2) that ... the property known as Eastrop House should be purchased for a rectory on the favourable terms offered by Mr Barton.⁶²

⁵⁸ HRO, 24M66/PW32.

⁵⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, April 4, 1908.

⁶⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, October 17, 1908.

⁶¹ HRO, 24M66/PW17 *Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, 1908-09*.

⁶² HRO, 24M66/PW17 *Annual Report and Statement of Accounts, 1909-10*.

The purchase of Eastrop House, St Mary's next door neighbour, whose grounds lay to the west of the churchyard, meant that the Church could be extended to the west if necessary.

The argument between the westendians and the eastendians came to a head at a meeting of the vestry on 26 June 1911. The rector proposed that the chancel should be rebuilt and extended eastwards as far as the road with heating apparatus and an organ chamber. But F.G. Makepeace, one of the churchwardens, moved an amendment that,

The Church Extension Fund be used to extend the church westwards on the lines of Mr Jackson's plan (Design IV) which provides accommodation for about 70 additional sittings.⁶³

The rector was outvoted and the vestry decided to adopt T G Jackson's plan.

The 1912 extension

In their petition to the Bishop of Winchester for a faculty authorising the works, the rector and Henry Barton, one of the churchwardens, estimated that the cost of the extension would be £1,100, of which £964 was in hand or promised. The Bishop granted the faculty on 20 October 1911.⁶⁴

In the Eastrop *Parish Magazine* for January 1912, the rector was able to announce:

The Architect hopes to visit us next week. I hope the actual operations will begin early in March at the latest. The Deed of Appropriation whereby the necessary portion of the Rectory ground is transferred to the church site has been duly executed. Thus the last requirement has been met, now for the actual spade work, the bricks and mortar.⁶⁵

Work began in April 1912. While the work was going on the parishioners held their services in the Parochial Church Hall, the first of which was held on Sunday, 14 April.⁶⁶

On 16 May 1912 the Countess of Northbrook laid the foundation stone for the extension. The Archdeacon of Winchester gave an address in which he said that there were differences of opinion, which showed that people were taking an interest in the question of the church extension and trying to make up their minds as to what was the best thing to do. A difficult and delicate question it was, but he hoped that all doubts and differences were at an end, now that the foundation stone had been laid.⁶⁷

The re-opening and dedication service took place on Thursday, 26 September 1912. The service was conducted by the Bishop of Guildford. Sixteen clergy were present

⁶³ HRO, 24M66/PV1.

⁶⁴ HRO, 21M65/122F/5.

⁶⁵ HRO, 50A07/E6.

⁶⁶ HRO, 24M66/PI2.

⁶⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, May 18, 1912.

and a very large congregation.⁶⁸ The *Hants and Berks Gazette* reported that the extension formed the western portion of a new nave,

...and its approximate dimensions are 35ft long by 28ft wide, and the height to the springing 20ft 6in, the weather vane on the turret reaching a height of 54ft ... The new portion will afford accommodation for 104 persons. A heating chamber, 12ft by 8ft has been constructed. The Church will now have two entrance doors, the new one being in the west end, and over it a graceful four-light window, there being two other windows on either side of the new structure. These traceried windows are a very pleasing and effective feature. The flint and stonework of the walls and buttress give the impression of solidity and permanence, while the materials and workmanship have been throughout of the best. The architect was Mr T.G. Jackson R.A. ... and the builder was Mr John Harris of Basingstoke. The pulpit has been transferred to its old position on the north side, and the choir stalls have been placed alongside the chancel.⁶⁹

The architect, Thomas Graham Jackson (1835 – 1924), served his articles with George Gilbert Scott. His works included: most of Hertford College, Oxford, including the Bridge of Sighs over New College Lane; the chapel at Radley College; Radcliffe Science Library; the chapel at the University of Wales, Lampeter; All Saints Church, East Stratton, St John Evangelist, Northington; and the underpinning and stabilising of Winchester Cathedral in collaboration with the engineer Sir Francis Fox.⁷⁰ He also published *Six Ghost Stories* (1919).

The finished church comprised the 1835 brick chancel, the 1886 nave and the 1912 nave and turret. It held 275 sittings. In 1913 Miss Portsmouth paid for the lych gate as a memorial to her relatives interred in the churchyard.⁷¹



St Mary's Church after 1912 - Copyright Tony Bryer

⁶⁸ HRO, 24M66/Pi2.

⁶⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, September 28, 1912.

⁷⁰ *Oxford DNB*.

⁷¹ Kelly's *Dir. Hants*, 1915.

Memorial Tablets

There are the following memorial plaques on the walls of the 1886 section of the church:

- to Edward Wanstall who died August 7, 1839 and Anne, his widow, who died on August 20, 1866 (Edward Wanstall was curate when William Workman was rector);
- to William Workman and his family;
- to Richard Woodroffe Boyce, rector 1897 – 1906;
- to Alexander Johnston Chapman, rector 1917 – 1920, who died November 19, 1920;
- to Oswin Shields, MD, Captain in the RAMC 1915 – 1919, son of the late Rev R J Shields, who died at sea, 27 February 1920, aged 47; and
- a tablet that reads, “The Choir Stalls of this Church were presented by Tom Thornycroft in memory of Gladys Evelyn Thornycroft, His loving wife, constant companion and greatest friend, who passed into the Unknown World October 2nd 1927.” The reference to the “Unknown World”, seems an odd sentiment to find in an evangelical church.

In the central aisle and in the chancel there are memorial slabs that are covered by the carpet. These are to Walter Froudy Younger (1663); William Moth (1759) and his wife Sarah (1775); Ann Moth (1796) and George Moth; Isaac Williamson (1816) and his wife, Mary (1822); and members of the Portsmouth family, whose vault lies under the chancel.⁷²

More room needed (2)

In 1963 the Parochial Church Council learned that a new Church Hall would be needed as the Council intended to requisition the site of the existing hall as part of the Basingstoke Development Plan. In 1966 the rector reported that the rectory was rapidly becoming uninhabitable. It was therefore decided to demolish the old rectory, and build a church hall and a new rectory in the rectory grounds. The old rectory was demolished and the new rectory built in 1966.⁷³

On 7 April 1970 the church applied for a faculty for the erection of a lobby with a glass front, joined to the west of the Church with vestry accommodation and male and female toilets. A plan dated December 1968 enclosed with the application showed that this vestibule was the first stage of a design by Michael Manser of Michael Manser Associates, 8 Cromwell Place, SW7. The second stage was the building of a new church hall to the west, connected to the church by the vestibule.⁷⁴

⁷² HRO, 24M66/PB1, Plan of Eastrop Burials.

⁷³ HRO, 24M66/PP1.

⁷⁴ HRO, 21M65/122F/10.

In January 1973 a piece of land was transferred from the rectory ground to the Parochial Church Council.⁷⁵ This provided the space to build the new church hall. The hall was built by H.M. Edwards, a Basingstoke firm, and completed in December 1974. The 1907 hall was demolished at about the same time.⁷⁶

By 1990, the congregation had swelled to such an extent that it was impossible to fit them all into the church, and two Sunday morning services had to be held to accommodate them all. A few years later, the number of regular attendees was approaching 500, and three Sunday services were having to be held in the Church and church hall.⁷⁷ In 1994, as a short-term solution, services were held in the former cinema building that stood in Lower Wote Street, prior to its demolition.⁷⁸

It was decided to use the land between the church hall and Goat Lane to build a new hall, or auditorium, so that everyone could worship together.

The auditorium was designed by the architects Plincke, Leaman and Browning, whose designs included Winchester Cathedral Visitors' Centre; Naomi House children's hospice; St Mark's Church, Kempshott; and the extension to St John's Church, Hook. It was built by Floreat Construction.



Auditorium under construction - Copyright Andrew Redbond

The auditorium cost around £1 million to construct, 90 per cent of which was raised by the congregation over a three-year period. It was officially opened on Sunday, 4 February 1996 by the Bishop of Winchester.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ HRO, 24M66/PB20.

⁷⁶ HRO, 24M66/PP2.

⁷⁷ *Basingstoke Gazette*, February 9, 1996.

⁷⁸ *Basingstoke Gazette*, March 18, 1994.

⁷⁹ *Basingstoke Gazette*, February 9, 1996.

St Mary's Church complex now (2015) comprises, from east to west, the brick-built chancel of 1835; the 1886 nave faced with honey-coloured stone on the outside with a flint dado; the 1886 porch; the wider and taller 1912 extension to the nave, faced in the outside with grey stone, and topped by a bell-turret with its solitary bell; the vestibule, or entrance hall with its bookshop and toilets; and the church hall. Running alongside, and in front of, the church hall is a wide corridor with a glazed roof leading from the entrance hall to the rectory. The corridor separates the auditorium from the church hall. The auditorium is a large, roughly square structure, mostly of brick, with an impressive pyramidal roof, tiled on the outside, timber-lined inside, and topped by a small glazed lantern. It accommodates 500 on tiers of bench seating which face the free-standing altar, and is fitted with loudspeakers.

Bob Clarke



Inside the Auditorium