

= St Thomas the Martyr 's Church , Oxford =

St Thomas the Martyr 's is a Church of England parish church of the Anglo @-@ Catholic tradition , in Oxford , England , near Oxford railway station in Osney . It is located between Becket Street to the west and Hollybush Row to the east , with St Thomas Street opposite .

= = Overview = =

The church was founded in the 12th century , dedicated to St Thomas Becket . The building still retains some of its original architecture , although substantial expansions and repairs have been made , particularly in the 17th century (under the curacy of Robert Burton) and in the 19th century .

The church played a significant role in the early stages of the Oxford Movement , being the site of daily services as well as such ritualist practices as altar candles and the wearing of Eucharistic vestments . The leaders of the Movement preached at the church , and the early Tractarians were closely associated with St Thomas 's .

= = History = =

= = = To the Restoration = = =

It has traditionally been held in Osney that the church was founded in the reign of Stephen , but this is unlikely to be true , as Thomas Becket was not martyred until some fifteen years after Stephen 's death . It is known that in the 1180s , the site was granted to the canons of the nearby Osney Abbey , and a chapel was erected on the site around 1190 . From the mid @-@ 13th century the Osney area was referred to as the parish of St Thomas ' , but it remained nominally a chapel of the abbey until the dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII , when it was placed under Christ Church , Oxford . Christ Church treated it as a conventional parish church with a curate , and from the mid @-@ 19th century the incumbent was styled a vicar .

After the curacy was placed under the patronage of Christ Church , the incumbents were mostly scholars or members of the college ; from 1616 to 1640 the curacy was held by Robert Burton , author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* , who enlarged the church . In the English Civil War the medieval stained glass in the church was destroyed , partly due to the vandalism of Parliamentary troops captured at Cirencester in 1642 and imprisoned in the church . Following the Restoration the holders of the curacy changed rapidly , often remaining in the position for only a few years at a time . From at least 1713 Christ Church leased a house in High Street to parish trustees and the profits were used for repairing the church . This continued until 1923 , when the house was sold .

= = = 19th and 20th centuries = = =

By the early 19th century , the church and its parish were showing signs of neglect . In 1802 only ten communicants are recorded , and in 1814 some 90 % of the parish was thought to be non @-@ churchgoing . The church was further reduced by the creation of the parishes of St Paul 's in 1837 , St Barnabas ' in 1869 , and St Frideswide 's in 1873 .

The curate from 1823 to 1842 , one John Jones , brought a significant turnaround in attendance ; perhaps the most unusual innovation was a houseboat ? the " Boatmans ' Floating Chapel " ? acquired in 1839 , for use as a chapel serving the families working on the river and the Oxford Canal . This boat was St Thomas ' first chapel of ease ; it was donated by H. Ward , a local coal merchant , and used until it sank in 1868 . It was replaced by a chapel dedicated to St Nicholas that remained in use until 1892 . A second chapel was built in 1860 , dedicated to St Frideswide , later replaced by the new parish church of St Frideswide 's , which took on the parish of New Osney in 1873 .

Major repairs were carried out beginning in 1825 . The floor @-@ level was raised above flood

@-@ level , a full three feet . The roof was rebuilt , the south wall was rebuilt using the original materials , and the main features of the 12th @-@ century chancel arch were discarded .

The vicar from 1842 to 1892 was Thomas Chamberlain (later founder of St Edward 's School) , a firm believer in the Tractarian movement , who introduced daily services as well as such ritualist practices as altar candles and the wearing of Eucharistic vestments ? the latter causing him to be rebuked by Bishop Wilberforce in 1855 . Many of the leaders of the Oxford Movement , including Edward Bouverie Pusey , Henry Parry Liddon , John Mason Neale , Charles Fuge Lowder and Edward King preached at the church . In the early days of the movement , Anglo @-@ Catholicism was closely associated with St Thomas ' . In 1847 Chamberlain founded the Community of St Thomas Martyr , which was devoted to the assistance of the poor of the parish , by now heavily slumland ; this sisterhood remained active until 1958 . The convent buildings for it were built in 1886 , but have since been demolished . In 1846 the north aisle and vestry were demolished and a new aisle of five bays with a vestry at its west end was built in its place . The blocked tower arch and two blocked windows in the chancel were opened and a new chancel arch was built .

The vicar from 1896 to 1908 was T.H. Birley , later Bishop of Zanzibar . In 1897 the building was again re @-@ roofed and a vestry built against the north wall of the tower . St Thomas ' was declared an ancient parish in 1948 .

In 1994 the Church of England introduced women priests . Like several other parishes , the people of St Thomas ' decided not to accept the Ordination of women . Under the terms of the resolutions passed by General Synod , the Archbishop of Canterbury placed the church under the care of the Bishop of Ebbsfleet . He is a Provincial episcopal visitor who oversees the parish even though it is in the Diocese of Oxford . At present , the congregation maintains Anglo @-@ Catholic traditions . The building has been added to the English Heritage ' Heritage at Risk ' register .

= = Architecture = =

The church has a nave with a north aisle and vestry , a Perpendicular Gothic west tower , a chancel and a south porch . The nave was rebuilt in the late 15th or early 16th century to meet a tower of approximately the same age ; it is often dated to 1521 , but appears to be built on older foundations . The southern side of the nave contains what are probably thirteenth @-@ century buttresses and a pair of Perpendicular Gothic windows . The north aisle was originally built in the 13th century , and rebuilt by H.J. Underwood in 1890 ; the vestry was built in the 17th century and rebuilt in 1846 to designs by Chamberlain , through the generosity of the curate , Alexander Penrose Forbes . The church has been reroofed at least twice , in 1825 and 1897 .

The chancel , which has a ceiling decorated by C. E. Kempe , has three windows in the style of the late 12th century , and a priest 's door built into the south side circa 1250 . A south porch was built in 1621 at the behest of Dr Robert Burton , whose arms are carved in the gable above the date . A candelabrum given by Ann Kendall in 1705 hangs in the chancel . The chancel ceiling was decorated with a pattern of gold stars on a blue background in 1914 . Two years later , an altar was erected at the east end of the north aisle , and an aumbry placed in the north wall of the chancel . The royal arms of William IV are displayed in the tower .

St Thomas ' church has been a Grade II listed building since 1954 .

The churchyard contains Combe House , a 1702 building originally built as a school , as well as a vicarage designed in 1893 by C. C. Rolfe . The remains of an earlier Rolfe building , the 1886 Sisterhood of St Thomas , are also present ; in 1974 , these amounted to a single cottage and a sculptured brick gateway .