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Steeple Barton. CHURCH.

Until the 16th century Steeple Barton parish included the later parish of Sandford St. Martin.⁶⁸ From 1951 the benefice was held in plurality with Westcott Barton. In 1960 the benefices were united, and in 1977 the united benefice was united with Sandford St. Martin and Duns Tew.⁶⁹

The church was given to Oseney abbey by Roger of St. John between 1186 and 1190, and in 1217 the abbey obtained permission to appropriate the church, subject to the life interest of the rector.⁷⁰ The abbey retained the advowson of an endowed vicarage until the Dissolution, presenting regularly except in 1528 when the bishop of Lincoln presented.⁷¹ The advowson was granted to Oxford cathedral in 1542, and, with the manor, to Leonard Chamberlain and John Blundell in 1546.⁷² It was divided among Blundell's coheirs, and in the 16th and 17th centuries followed the descent of the manor.⁷³ One share passed from Gresham Hogan⁷⁴ to Thomas Waller, who presented in 1661, to John James, who presented in 1712, and to Hogan James, who presented in 1722.⁷⁵ John Taylor of Westminster presented in 1741, and William and Mary Mister in 1808.⁷⁶ The Misters sold the share in 1810 to Samuel Churchill; on Churchill's bankruptcy it was bought in 1839 by John Painter, whose son John sold it in 1861 to the Duke of Marlborough.⁷⁷ Another share of the advowson passed from Gerard and Mary Crocker to Gerard Crocker who presented in 1639, and to Edmund Eyres, who settled it on his daughter Frances and her husband Richard Hill for their lives.⁷⁸ The reversion passed through a number of hands, and in 1721 was sold to the Duke of Marlborough's trustees. Frances Hill surrendered her interest in 1722, and the duchess of Marlborough presented in 1729.⁷⁹ A third share of the advowson was exercised in 1736 by Sir Francis Page, who had bought the manor house and demesne lands of Steeple Barton in 1714 and a share of the rectory in 1715.⁸⁰ The advowson was presumably assumed to belong to the rectory, although it was not mentioned in the conveyances. It passed, with the site of the manor, to Richard Bourne Charlett, who presented in 1807, and to the Hall family of Barton Abbey.⁸¹ In 1910 the duke of Marlborough and A.W. Hall transferred the patronage to the bishop of Oxford.⁸²

Between 1185 and 1187 Oseney abbey obtained papal permission for the church to be served by a group of three or four canons, one of whom should be presented to the bishop and receive the cure of souls,⁸³ but there is no evidence that the permission was ever acted upon, and in 1217 a vicarage was endowed with $\frac{1}{2}$ hide of land, the altar dues, and a house.⁸⁴ In 1230 the vicar failed in his claim to the small tithes of the St. Johns' demesne.⁸⁵ In 1254 Steeple Barton, with its chapels of Sandford and Ledwell, was worth £15; in 1291, 32 marks, and in 1428, £19.⁸⁶ In 1526 the net value of the vicarage of Great Barton alone was £6.8s., and in 1535 the vicar's income from tithes of wool and lambs, 2 yardlands of glebe, and offerings, was £8 gross, £79s. 4d. net.⁸⁷ By 1675 the gross value of the living had risen to £23 13s. 4d., composed of £10 from glebe and £13 13s. 4d. from small tithes,

and by 1707 it had risen to £30 4s.⁸⁸ At inclosure in 1796 the vicar was allotted 27a. in lieu of small tithes, and in 1808 the living was worth £71 a year net.⁸⁹ In 1811 the vicar attempted to levy small tithes in kind, instead of accepting the customary moduses amounting to only £10 17s. a year, but in 1831 the living was worth only £86 gross, £78 net a year.⁹⁰ In 1848 the vicarial tithes were commuted for £50 a year, and in 1851 the vicar received £60 from land and £45 from tithe.⁹¹ The living was endowed in 1862 with £200 from the Common Fund, and the transfer of the advowson to the bishop in 1910 made possible an augmentation by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, bringing the net value of the living to £200. Further augmentations were made by Major P. Fleming of Barton Abbey in 1946 and 1947.⁹²

The vicarage house was beyond repair in 1738.⁹³ It was later described as a small, two-roomed cottage, and in 1831 was let to a labourer.⁹⁴ In 1855-6 it was demolished and a new house, designed by S.S. Teulon, was built on an enlarged site.⁹⁵ It was sold in 1963.

The only known rector was William of St. John (fl. 1176, 1186), brother of the lords of the manor Thomas and Roger of St. John: he did not serve the church himself.⁹⁶ Richard, vicar from before 1230 until 1259, gave a villein and his family to Oseney abbey, perhaps in return for a corrody granted him in 1258. His successor, Hereward, was able to lend the abbey 5 marks in 1260.⁹⁷

Walter Joust, vicar 1375-1400, was the son of a Barton man,⁹⁸ but other medieval vicars, particularly four Oxford graduates, probably had little contact with their parishioners. William Poole, B.Cn.L., vicar 1464-75, was rector of Calstone Wellington (Wilts.) from 1472; William Barton, vicar 1509-10, was abbot of Oseney. His successor, William Morgan, probably a canon of Oseney, lived at Barton for at least part of his incumbency, but c. 1520 he was reported to have two women in his house, and to fail to say offices at the proper times on feast days.⁹⁹ In 1530 the vicar, John Rogers, had a curate, perhaps because he was non-resident.¹

In the early 13th century land in Barton Ede paid 8d. a year for wax for the parish church, but no further record of it survives.² In 1535 there were five subsidiary altars, and statues of the Virgin Mary, St. Catherine, St. Anne, St. Margaret, St. Osyth, St. John the Baptist, St. Anthony, St. Peter, St. Michael, St. Nicholas, Our Lady of Pity, and St. Clement.³

Giles Bylked or Bilhede, the last vicar presented by Oseney abbey, died in 1551; there were five vicars between then and 1560, including in 1557 Hugh Stepley, a conformist who later sat on Archbishop Parker's commission ad vendicandos clericos convictos. One at least held the rectory of Westcott Barton in plurality.⁴

John Boldren, vicar 1560-77, was a puritan and friend of the reformer Laurence Humphrey, who was himself connected by marriage with the Dormer family of Sesswell's Barton. Boldren bequeathed to Steeple Barton Church two volumes of 'monuments of martyrs', and endowed an annual sermon.⁵ Robert Smith, deprived for adultery in 1601, held Sandford St. Martin in plurality.⁶

Throughout the Civil War and Interregnum Thomas Belcher, presented in 1640,

remained vicar, though he was deprived of Westcott Barton in 1646 and resigned c. 1656 from Sandford St. Martin, livings which he held in plurality.⁷ The next vicar, Edward Cookson (1661-1712), also held Westcott Barton in plurality; he wrote a number of pamphlets against the Quakers, who made several converts in the parish in the late 17th century.⁸

For much of the period 1712-1850 Steeple Barton suffered from absentee vicars and poorly-paid, non-resident curates.⁹ In 1738 the vicar, John Brewer, was chaplain to Sir Francis Page at Middle Aston and fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, but he served Steeple Barton himself, holding two services on Sundays and administering holy communion to a few communicants four times a year.¹⁰ In 1746 the vicar, Anthony Apperley, served the church, and Sandford St. Martin, himself, but in 1747 he moved to Warwickshire. In 1759 and 1771 his curate lived in Wootton, and in 1759 and 1768 also served Westcott Barton, holding one service in each church each Sunday, and administering communion to 12-20 communicants four times a year.¹¹ Edward Walker, vicar 1772-1807, was curate and then vicar (1784-1807) of Sandford St. Martin, and held Lower Ettington (Warws.) from 1782; he lived first at Barcheston and then at Whichford (Warws.).¹² In 1801 his curate, who lived in Enstone, served Steeple Barton, Sandford, Over Worton, and Nether Worton.¹³ In 1805, when the curate served only Steeple Barton and Sandford, there was still only one service on a Sunday, but by 1808 the number of celebrations of holy communion had risen to seven a year.¹⁴ The pluralist Robert Wright, vicar 1808-50, was alleged to have visited the parish only once, to read himself in.¹⁵ In 1809 the curate so neglected the cure that in nine months there were six Sundays without any service.¹⁶ From 1816 to 1837 the church was served by William Gorden, vicar of Duns Tew, who held one service on Sundays for a stipend which rose from £40 in 1816 to £50 in 1821.¹⁷ The number of communicants rose from 18 to c. 35 during his curacy.¹⁸ His successor served the parish from Enstone, for a stipend reduced to £40. In 1847 the parishioners unsuccessfully petitioned the bishop for a second service on Sundays. At that date the curate, an old man, visited the parish 'at least once a week'.¹⁹

Wright died in 1850, and his successor, who lived in the parish, increased the services to two each Sunday with holy communion once a month. Congregations increased somewhat, but were still unsatisfactory in 1854: 120 in the afternoon and fewer in the morning, a decrease since 1851.²⁰ Henry Hall's attempt in 1854 to present a fiercely Evangelical incumbent was thwarted by Bishop Wilberforce, and there was little change in church life or services until the 1880s when a weekly communion was introduced. The total number of communicants rose from 62 in 1872 to c. 92 in 1887.²¹ A mission hall was built in 1888-9, on the corner of the Enstone and Kiddington roads in Middle Barton; it was used for occasional services, as well as meetings.²²

The church of ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, so called by 1273,²³ comprises chancel, nave

with south aisle and south porch, west tower, and north-east vestry; it was almost completely rebuilt in 1850 and 1851. No traces remain of the 12th century church, recorded between 1186 and 1190,²⁴ but it presumably consisted of nave and chancel, and had a tower, of which the north buttress may remain, by 1247 when the place-name Steeple Barton was first recorded.²⁵ In the 14th century the south arcade and south porch were built; the columns of the arcade have elaborately carved capitals, decorated with human and animal heads. At least one new window was inserted in the chancel in the 14th century,²⁶ and a doorway in the north wall of the nave. Also in the 14th century a new window was inserted in the west wall of the south aisle. In the 15th century the lower stages of the existing tower were built.

The chancel needed repair c. 1520.²⁷ In 1548 a parishioner left £20 'for the building of the steeple', presumably the top part of the tower, and in 1551 another left £10 for the repair of the church.²⁸ The east window of the chancel may have been replaced about the same time. In the 17th century the chancel arch was boarded up, and in 1686 the royal arms of James II supported by angels were painted on the upper part of the boarding.²⁹ The chancel was in 'a most miserable condition' in 1745; it may have been repaired in 1752 when work was done on the east wall of the nave.³¹

/About the same date two new windows were inserted in the north wall of the nave.³⁰

The chancel was rebuilt in 1850, at the expense of Viscount Clifden, the chief impropriator, to designs of J.C. Buckler; the nave was largely rebuilt in 1851, by the same architect. Only the south arcade and the tower seem to have survived untouched, but other parts of the medieval church were replaced in the 19th century building, including the carved stops above the windows in the north wall of the nave, the piscina in the south wall of the south aisle, and the north doorway.³² The chancel was restored in 1877.³³

The plain tub font is probably 12th-century. No wall monuments or tombs survive, although the old church contained some to members of the Dormer, Blundell, Humphrey, and Sheldon families. The Dormer monuments were removed to Rousham church in 1851.³⁴

The church plate includes a chalice of 1571-2. There are five bells, two of 1698, three of 1851.³⁵

The churchyard was extended in 1880, 1916, and 1947.³⁶

Notes.

- 68 Below, Sandford St. Martin, church.
- 69 Bodl. MS. Oxf. Dioc. c 1720; 1722/2.
- 70 Oseney Cart. iv, pp. 158-9.
- 71 Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. d 460.
- 72 L. & P. Hen. VIII, xvii, p. 490; xxi (2) pp. 160-1.
- 73 B.L. Stowe Ch. 644; Bodl. MS. d.d. Tyrwhitt-Drake c 2, no. 5a; P.R.O., C 142/251/167; C 142/314, no. 153.
- 74 Bodl. MS. d.d. Tyrwhitt-Drake c 2. no. 5a.
- 75 Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. c 42. f. 229.
- 76 Bodl. Cal. Presentation Deeds 1st ser. p.11.
- 77 Blenheim Mun. box 175.
- 78 Bodl. MSS. Top. Oxon. c 42, f. 229; d.d. Tyrwhitt-Drake c 2, no. 32.
- 79 Blenheim Mun. boxes 162, 175; Bodl. Cal. Presentation Deeds 1st ser. p.11.
- 80 Bodl. MS. Oxf. Dioc. b 111, no. 55.
- 81 Bodl. Cal. Presentation Deeds 1st ser. p. 11; MS. d.d. Par. Steeple Barton b 5, f. 29v.
- 82 Bodl. MS. Oxf. Dioc. c 1720.
- 83 Oseney Cart. iii, p.374.
- 84 Ibid. iv, pp. 158-9.
- 85 Ibid. pp. 165-6.
- 86 Tax. Eccl. (Rec. Com.), 31; Val. Norw. 307, 507; Feud.Aids, vi. 375.
- 87 Subsidy 1526, 265; Valor Eccl. (Rec. Com.), ii. 183.
- 88 Bodl. MSS. Oxf. Dioc. c 155, f. 12; Top. Oxon. c 579, f. 329.
- 89 O.R.O., inc. award; Bodl. MS. Oxf. Dioc. c 446, f. 172.
- 90 Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. c 579, ff. 321-9; Rep. Com.Eccl. Revenues [67], pp. 786-7, H.C.(1835), xxii.
- 91 O.R.O., tithe map 358; P.R.O., HO 129/160.
- 92 Lond. Gaz. 22 July 1862, p. 3652; Bodl. MSS. Oxf. Dioc. c 1720, 1721.
- 93 Secker's Visit. 150.
- 94 Bodl. MSS. Oxf. Dioc. b 34, f.41v; b 38, f. 192.
- 95 Ibid. c 1721; c 1722/2.
- 96 Oseney Cart. iv, pp. 152-4.
- 97 Ibid. iii, pp. 38,74; iv, pp. 165-6, 169.
- 98 Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. d 460.
- 99 Emden, O.U. Reg. to 1500, 1491, 1314; Visit. Dioc. Linc. i(L.R.S. xxxiii), 128; Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. d 460.
- 1 Visit. Dioc. Linc. ii (L.R.S. xxxv), 52; cf. Emden, O.U. Reg. 1501-40, 490.
- 2 Bodl. MS. Ch. Oxon. 4189.
- 3 Bodl. MS. Wills Oxon. 178, f. 109.
- 4 O.A.S. Rep. (1912), 107; Oldfield, 'Clerus Oxf. Dioc.'.
- 5 O.A.S. Rep. (1912), 107; Bodl. MS. Wills Oxon. 185, f. 451; D.N.B. s.v.Humphrey.
- 6 Cal. S.P. Dom. 1601-3, 13.
- 7 Bodl. Cal. Presentation Deeds 1st ser. p.11
- 8 B.N.C. Reg. (O.H.S.lv), 198.
- 9 e.g. Bodl. MSS. Oxf. Archd. Oxon. e 4, ff. 18v.,22; d.d. Par. Steeple Barton c 1, f. 9v.
- 10 Secker's Visit. 149-50.
- 11 Bodl. MS. Oxf. Dioc. d 557, f. 73; d 560, f. 89; d 563, f. 93.
- 12 Ibid. d 565, f. 153; c 327, p. 173; Oldfield, 'Clerus Oxf. Dioc.'; McClatchey, Oxon.Clergy, 1777-1869, 56.
- 13 Bodl. MS. Oxf. Dioc. c 655, ff. 150-1; below, Sandford St. Martin, church.
- 14 Bodl. MS. Oxf. Dioc. d 569, f. 109; d 571, f. 105.
- 15 Bodl. MS. d.d. Par. Steeple Barton d 2, f. 1 verso; Wing, Annals of Barton, 51.
- 16 Bodl. MS. Oxf. Dioc. c 659, f. 91 and v.
- 17 Ibid. b 16, ff. 95v.-96; b 16, f. 104.
- 18 Ibid. d 575, f. 105; d 577, f. 106; b 38, f. 192

