



St Peter & St Paul, Old Brampton

Heritage Open Day 2025

Architectural Interest

The first recorded history of Brampton is in the Domesday book. Whilst there is no mention of a church, it cannot have been long before a small Norman church (Chapel of Ease) in Brampton.

Although the chapel was formally dedicated in 1253, it is likely that parts of the earlier building (from circa 1100) were incorporated, elements of which can still be seen around the 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.

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.

The South Porch

Has a beautiful ogee¹ entrance arch with its well carved scrolls, its carefully cut and squared stones, and vaulted stone roof. It is all obviously the work of a master mason and is so similar in workmanship to the Chesterfield Parish Church that one is tempted to think it may have been by the same craftsman.

That the Porch was a later addition to the south aisle can be seen by the different kind of stone used for its construction (millstone grit) from that of the rest of the south aisle, and the curious alignment of the porch with the door which is of the late Norman period externally though internally the arch of the door is much higher and of the Early English period. Although the stone of the internal arch has been renewed there is no reason to suppose that it does not exactly respond to the original doorway.

The fine oak doors with their elaborately wrought iron fittings were brought from the chapel of Derwent Hall when it was submerged by the waters of the Ladybower Reservoir and presented to the church in 1957.

The Body of Church -The Nave

Passing immediately into the main body of the church there are two fine arcades separating the nave and side aisles. The two western arches and supporting columns are original as are also the two columns at the east end of the nave, these end columns being square on the north side and prow-shaped on the south. The pillar on the north side is round, whilst that on the south side is quatrefoil²; the capitals³ and abaci⁴ surrounding all these shafts are also different. In fact there are no two sets of mouldings anywhere

¹ An ogee is a curve with an "S" shape, consisting of a concave curve flowing into a convex curve. This double curve is a common architectural element and design feature found in mouldings, arches, and other decorative details.

² A quatrefoil is a decorative element consisting of a symmetrical shape with four lobes or leaves, resembling a four-leaf clover or a flower with four petals. I

³ a capital is the topmost part of a column, pier, or pilaster. It acts as a transitional element between the vertical shaft and the horizontal structure above, distributing the weight and adding aesthetic detail.

⁴ a flat slab forming the uppermost member or division of the capital of a column, above the bell

which are a pair, but though there are such variations they are all unmistakeably of the C12th.

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.

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 remaining arches and centre pillars are replicas of the original ones and date from the last century. In the 18th. century galleries were placed in the north and south aisles and also at the west end of the nave, but in 1822 a brief was obtained for the repairing of the church, which, it states

"Is an ancient structure, is greatly dilapidated arising from damp and age, and the interior parts having been injudiciously arranged in the original planning of them, will not accommodate the larger part of a now much increased population; In order to repair the church and beneficially new model the interior, it becomes necessary to take down the reading desk and pulpit, together with the galleries, pews and seats and to rebuild and raise the same in a regular and uniform manner, removing certain pillars, but supporting their places by the erection of arches, to unroof and raise the north part, and to make additional windows on the south side etc. etc..."

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. However:

The "Derbyshire Courier" 8th August 1868 records:

"The roofs of the nave and south aisles were unsafe from decay, as well as the walls of the clerestoreys, owing to the original stone pillars and arches on each side of the nave having been taken out and substituted by elliptical arches of wide span and inferior material. The whole of these and the chancel arch have been effectually restored, together with the clerestory and south aisle windows, which were divested of their mullions⁵ and tracery heads⁶ and converted into square elongated openings to afford light to the galleries; the church contained four of these useless encumbrances.

The whole of the windows have been reglazed with cathedral tinted glass, the floor of the church lowered to its original level, and re-benched with comfortable benches instead of the wooden box pews. The tower has been thrown open to the church and is now provided with seats for the children. The belfry staircase has been built outside as originally, and all the masonry inside the church has been repaired and cleaned. The outside of the church and tower have been pointed and a new vestry built."

During the "restoration" 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.

In 1868 further extensive alterations and repairs were made, the central pillar and arches were replaced, but the 1822 wide arch was retained thus giving the unusual double arch on the north and south walls of the nave.

⁵ Mullions are vertical structural members, often made of stone or other materials, that divide a window or door into smaller sections. They provide support for the frame and glazing, and can also be used for decorative purposes. Mullions are typically paired with transoms, which are horizontal members, to create a grid-like structure for windows.

⁶ These designs, known as tracery, divide the window into smaller sections using stone bars or ribs, creating decorative patterns. Essentially, tracery heads are the decorative elements that fill the upper part of a window opening, providing both structural support and aesthetic appeal.

The clerestories⁷ were added in the fifteenth century and with them a necessary realignment of the roof of the nave, the original position and alignment of the roof being seen from the outside of the church at the east end of the nave, and inside the church on the wall of the tower. The battlements were also added at this time.

The Body of Church – the Aisles

Turning to the Aisles that on the north side would seem to have been built first, although the stone of the south wall is more weathered. The North Doorway now walled up, and hidden inside the church by one of the Clarke monuments, is undoubtedly of the 12th century and part of the original building. The position of this door shows the original level of the ground which falls steeply on the north side of the church towards Linacre. but which over the years has been raised and levelled.

At the east end of the north aisle there is a piscina⁸ of the 13th century which, though mutilated is well shaped and must have been part of the chantry chapel founded by Hugh Ingram in 1264.

There is little doubt that the figures of St. Peter and St. Paul (brought into Church in 1988), with the figure of Christ seated under a canopy and showing the marks of the four wounds, together with the figure of the Virgin Mary, an angel and other carved stones let into the outside walls of the south aisle, were originally parts of a carved reredos⁹ for the high altar, or for the altar of this chantry chapel. At the time of the Reformation these would be dismantled, but instead of being destroyed as were so many ornaments at this time, the pious folk of Brampton preserved them by placing them in their present position, where alas, they have fallen victims to the wind and rain of passing years.

Close to the piscina is a niche containing the Roll of Honour for the 1914-1918 war. It is a recent addition and has a carving of St. George and the dragon, and the illuminated book is behind a delicate wrought iron door. The niche itself was probably originally an aumbry for the chantry chapel. Above this Roll of Honour is the

⁷ the upper part of the nave – high section of wall - containing a series of windows – to admit light and air

⁸ A piscina is a shallow basin placed near the altar of a church, or else in the vestry or sacristy, used for washing the communion vessels

⁹ Reredos - an ornamental screen covering the wall at the back of an altar

flag of the Chesterfield Branch of the Royal British Legion laid up at Old Brampton when the new colours were dedicated in 1971, the Jubilee of the Legion.

There is little to say about the South Aisle except that it is substantially in its original condition apart from alterations to the stonework of the windows. The small Early English lancet window in the baptistry is worth noting; the lower part being original, but the upper part restored in 1868. The present font also dates from the same period. Its immediate predecessor stood in the sanctuary and was of the common 18th. century pedestal and fluted bowl design. It is now in the Old Vicarage garden where it forms the stand for a sundial. No trace has been found of the original font.

Turning to the West wall of the Nave on either side of the beautifully proportioned Early English arch leading into the tower, there are massive buttresses, added to strengthen the tower when the upper storey and spire were added. Here also are two monuments. The first is to Matilda (sometimes referred to as Maud) le Caus. It is a very curious sepulchral monument, apparently of the thirteenth century, which was discovered more than a century and a half ago on digging a grave, and is now placed upright against the wall of the nave. Within a quatrefoil at one end of the stone is the upper part of a female figure holding a heart in her hand, sculptured in bas-relief; at the other end, her feet and the lower part of her drapery appear as through an oblong opening. (This mode of exhibiting parts of the figure through quatrefoil openings hardly occurs we believe, except among the ancient gravestones of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

Turning towards the Chancel the site of the doorway (now walled up) which led to the rood-loft which formerly spanned the chancel archway can be seen at the east end of the north wall of the nave. The timbers of the rood are said to have been used in the construction of the present somewhat insignificant pulpit.

The pillars of the chancel arch are original and of the 12th. century but the present pointed arch surmounted by the cruder and wider flat rounded arch is all part of the 18th. and 19th. century "improvements" which we have already found in the nave. The wall above the arch shows where the addition of the clerestories necessitated the raising of the roof, the upper part of the wall being less thick than the lower part.

The Chancel itself has been so restored that only the walls themselves remain of the original building. The stonework of the windows have all been altered from time to time, and the stained

glass here and throughout the church is typical of the 19th. and early 20th. century craftsmanship.

The Church Tower

There remains to be considered the Tower and Spire, the most conspicuous part of the building and perhaps its best feature, plain and simple though it undoubtedly is. Of no great height it is yet visible for many miles around, and in former years must have been a welcome sight for travellers crossing the bleak East Moor. The lower part of the tower is of the 12th. century and thus part of the original church, as its massive walls, nearly 4 feet thick at the base, and beautifully proportioned arch giving access to the nave clearly show. The upper part of the tower is of later date; probably 13th. century and contemporaneous with the porch. The tower is square, the spire upon which it rests is eight sided. Its erection necessitated the building of the massive buttresses to be seen on the west wall of the nave.

Access to this upper part was by means of an outside staircase (as at present) and a doorway leading into the ringing chamber has a stone lintol of very early date which was obviously a former gravestone. On this and on a similar lintol over the small window in the chamber are engraved stylised forms of crosses and swords. The original staircase was replaced by another in 1868, but this was so poorly constructed that the whole thing threatened to pull away from the church and tower, and had to be strengthened and re-roofed in 1971.

The church clock commemorates the Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897 and was put in by public subscription. John Smith & Sons were the clockmakers.

The attractively proportioned broach¹⁰ spire erected either at the same time as the upper portion of the tower, or soon afterwards now houses six bells, the latest one being added in 1923 by Edwin Clay Barnes, High Sherriff of Derbyshire, when the other five bells were re-cast.

The Church Exterior

On the outer walls of the church, in addition to the carved figures already described there are a number of other small carvings. A lion

¹⁰ A spire atop a square tower. Broach spires are usually octagonal, and each triangular face of the spire is termed a 'broach'

on the west side of the porch, and between the figures of St. Peter and St. Paul on the south side a head holding a man in its mouth; above the priest's door another grotesque head with foliage from its mouth; on the south east buttress of the chancel a stone carved with crossed swords (similar to those in the tower ringing chamber), and above the east window three rose bosses. The figure of St. Christopher above the south door was designed by Miss H. Shipton, the daughter of a former Vicar, who was also responsible for the design of the lych-gate in 1885.

The position of the north door (the "Devil's Door" out of which, the old wives said the devil fled when a child was brought in at the south door for baptism) indicates the original level of the ground outside, as does the position of the window on the west side of the tower which is now only a foot or two above ground level. Incidentally this window and those in the tower above are the only ones left in their original state, and the lower window mullions are very badly worn. All the other windows have been altered or repaired at various times. Doubtless the prevailing winds from the south west are the cause of the stones on the south side being more weathered, and this weathering made it necessary to put in a new plinth along the south aisle at some unknown period, probably in the 19th. century.

At the (West) entrance to the churchyard, the lychgate already mentioned is thatched, now with the customary straw or rushes, but originally with heather from the nearby moors. The War Memorial was erected in 1920 by public subscription to the memory of those who fell in the Great War 1914-1918. Shortly after its erection the cross was blown off in a storm and a lengthy wrangle ensued over its alleged faulty construction. It was eventually repaired, and since then it has stood firm though the stones forming its base have had to be reinforced from time to time because of earth movement resulting from the heavy traffic which now uses the road and passes within a few feet of the memorial.

A bus shelter in the form of a lychgate was erected by the Brampton Parish Council at the East entrance to the churchyard, and opened by Geo. Kenning Esq. in June 1977 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. It's a replica of the lychgate at the main (West) entrance to the churchyard.