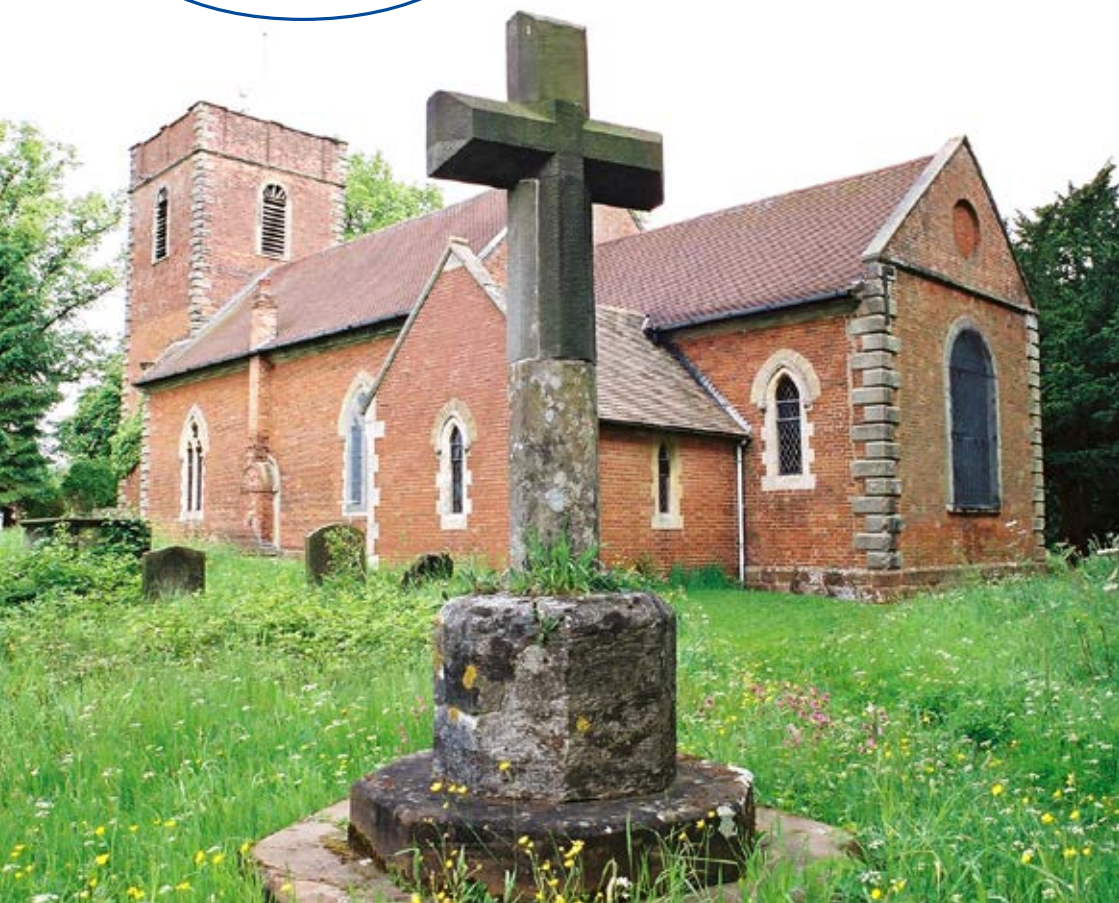


St Swithin's Church  
Barston

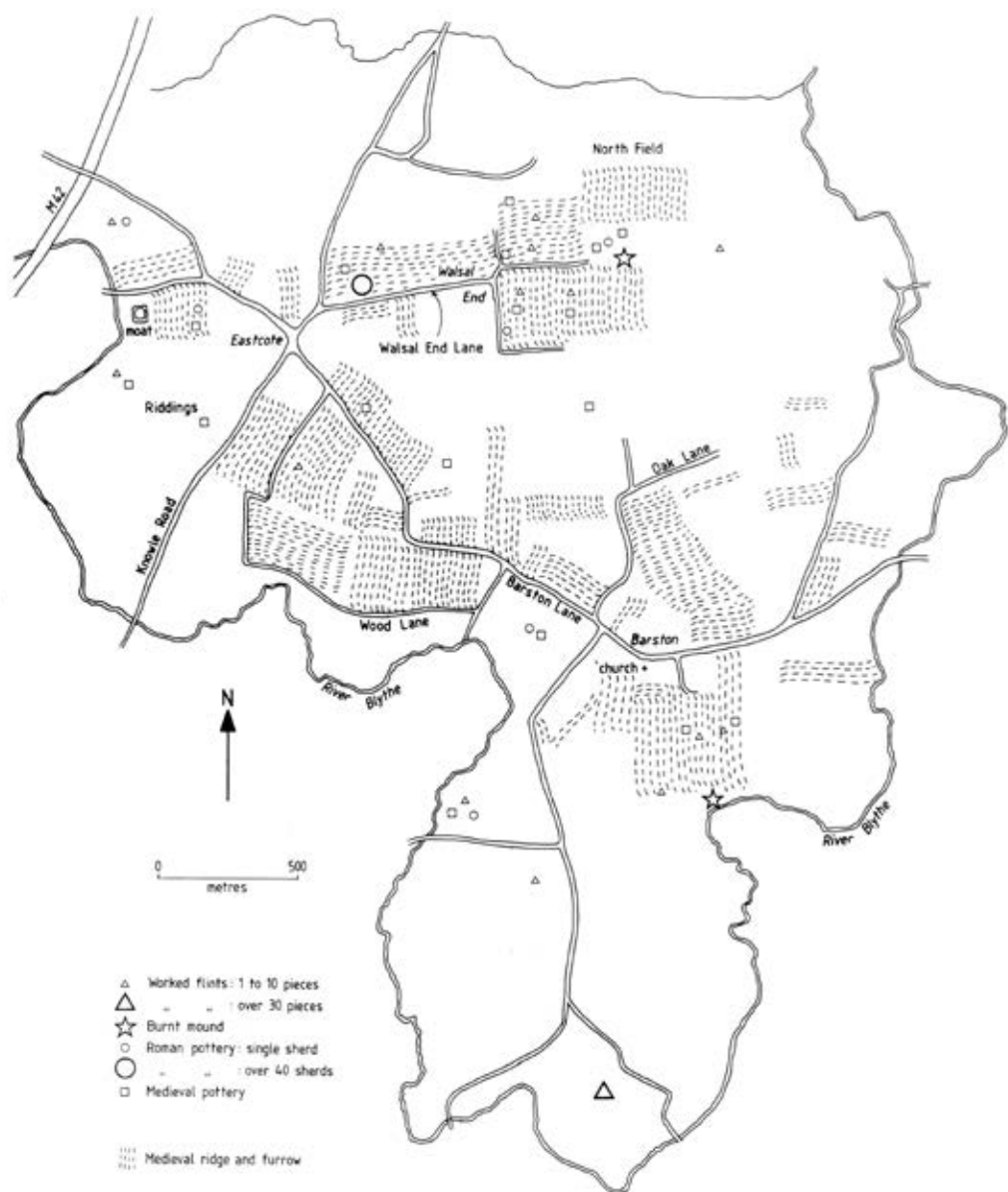
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# The History of St Swithin's Church Barston



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND  
DIOCESE OF  
BIRMINGHAM



# Parish Church of St. Swithin Barston

*Present church built circa 1721-1727 on site of original church  
(going back to about the 11th Century)*

In Saxon times Barston, sometimes known as 'Bertanestone' or 'Bercestone' included almost all of Berkswell. In the reign of Henry II and King John, portions were given to the Knights Templars and on their dissolution to the Hospitallers. The foundations of the former, including alms-houses and the Temple can still be found in nearby Temple Balsall. A tradition suggests an underground passage from the Temple to our Church, but this would run beneath the River Blythe, as in ancient times the land formed part of the forest of Arden. This seems improbable as there would have been no difficulty in moving discreetly between the two places.



For many years the 'Chappell' dedicated to St Swythin belonged to the Church of Berkswell, who provided a Curate. The curate was licensed to Berkswell-cum-Barston.

The old 'Chappell' was burnt down in 1721 and the present church built. The following in Latin formed an inscription, now obliterated, above the West door:

*This Church, nearly destroyed, was rebuilt by the generous help of this County A.D. 1721. Thomas Fisher.*

This is a Fisher of the family the oldest Church reference to which may be found

inscribed on the second highest pitched bell. 'Abraham Fisher Gave Mee William Bayley Made Mee 1691'. The memorial tablet in the south wall in the nave commemorates, inter alios, 'John Gough Fisher second son of Thomas Fisher of Springfield in this County, Knight.'

The present building was Georgian before the Victorian 'restorers' got at it! Examples of the round-headed arches remain in the tower windows, in the south wall of the nave (the blocked off south door now housing the Charities Board) and in the east window. These arches, thought to be pagan in concept, offended the Victorians and similar ones elsewhere in the nave and

chancel, together with the chancel arch, were replaced by the present Neo-Gothic style. This work was carried out in 1897 at which time the gallery at the west end of the nave and a carved wooden chancel screen were removed and the vestry and north porch added. It is thought that the thickness of the walls is determined by those of the old Chapel now increased by the brickwork externally and plaster inside.

The Church has a peal of six bells. Five were restored and a sixth added in 1960. They are inscribed as follows:

1. John Taylor & Co., Founders, Loughborough, 1960. Peter Dawson, Vicar. George Clive Jackson & Percy Findon, Churchwardens.
2. Abraham Fisher Gave Mee William Bagley Made Mee 1691.
3. Matthew Bagley and William Bagley Med Mee 1689.
4. No inscription... In 1963 it was suggested that it is reputed to be of the 14th Century.
5. Mr. Robert Boyse Minester 1728 (Made by Joseph Smith).
6. William Shagthwall and John Eaton C W Matthew Bagley Made Mee 1683.

The 1963 Order of Service booklet mentions the following bellringing customs in former days in Barston:

- i) The chiming of the bells for Sunday services, preceded by a Sermon Bell, and followed by another for the last five minutes; also a bell rung at 8am. Until 1894 a bell was rung after Morning Service known as the Pudding Bell.
- ii) The bells were rung on Principal Festivals and on New Year's Eve, also for Weddings on payment of a fee. On November 5th in the evening (but at one time 5am, the ringers receiving 5 shillings from the Churchwardens).
- iii) The Death Knell was sounded within 12 hours after death; each bell tolled three times for a male; twice for a female; and the age was given on the tenor.



**I**n September 2009 the Bell Tower was completely refurbished. This involved the installation of a new sink and draining board, together with shelving and a drop leaf table along the South Wall. This work followed on from the complete repainting of the Church, Bell Tower and Belfry.

Plans and elevations of the pulpit and prayer desk dated 1854 were acquired in entrepreneurial manner by a London gallery who offered them to the 1933 incumbent for 30 shillings. His reply is amusing...

*“Dear Sir,  
I am in receipt of the Original Drawings relating to Barston Church. They are of no use to us, or I should think to anyone, and certainly not worth 30 shillings. I might give a couple of shillings for them, and I should not think anyone is likely to give you as much. If you wish me to return them, kindly send me sixpence for the postage.  
Yours faithfully, J. Barker”.*

The drawings remain in the Church's possession to this day. One wonders if he had a reply. A note in the Warwick records shows these furnishings to have been erected on 2nd March 1854; carved by Rattee of Cambridge, the other work by Kendrick Builders of Birmingham.

It is also noted that the present font was installed, made from a design by Dudley Male of Birmingham and that the old font in two portions was buried under the foundation stone of the new one, the date of this being 18th August 1854.

The first mention of music in Barston records appears on 5th November 1821 – ‘for repairing the Bassoon £2.2.0.’ This indicates that there was a Church Band and an entry for 31st December 1840 notes ‘for fiddle strings 5 shillings’. It seems likely that the band was housed in the now demolished gallery at the back of the nave. On 24th February 1865 the Church was presented with a harmonium by a Mrs Bennett and on 27th February 1867 books were bought for the choir. The present pipe organ was installed on 25th November 1903 by the firm of William Hill & Sons, who built Birmingham Town Hall organ. The electronic blower was added in 1947 and although the instrument is small, it is commended by the knowledgeable.





The Church has been scheduled under the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act as being of architectural or historical interest. L. F. Salzman in his History of Warwickshire implies that the twisted balusters of the communion rail are ancient but does not attempt to date them. Suggestions have been made that they are Jacobean, though it seems improbable that they ante-date the fire of 1721.

In recent times a bier of some antiquity and no longer used was returned to the Langton family, as it was originally provided by them, to enable the coffin to be carried from the road to the Church more easily.

Over the years there have been many charitable bequests made principally toward the relief of the needy in Barston. It is a reflection of our times that the Trustees find it increasingly difficult to establish a need requiring help. A list detailing the charities is displayed on the board facing the entrance on the blocked off south door arch. A scheme for the regulation of the charities was drawn up on 27th November 1972 by



the Charity Commissioners and they have been rationalised into the Barston Relief in Need Charity and the Joseph Guest Charity for the assistance of poor boys and girls resident in the parish.

The stained glass of the east window dates from 1863 and almost certainly saved that window from the Victorian renovators. This was removed and professionally cleaned in 2008.

In 1970, a stained glass window was added to the north side of the nave in memory of Frederick Gillman, a local farmer who died suddenly at the age of 34. Depicting the impact of the changing seasons on agricultural life, it was designed and made by Nora Yoxall and Elsie Whitford. Then in the year 2000 another window was commissioned for the south side of the church to celebrate the new



Millennium, funded by members of the parish and congregation, and designed and created by The Art of Glass of Earlswood. This window, which beautifully complements the one opposite shows various scenes and features of life in Barston

at the turn of the century and aptly incorporates the biblical text 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever' (Hebrews 13:8).

During 1988 agreement was reached by the PCC to allow three church pews to be removed from either side of the front of the nave of the Church, the purpose being to provide room for a keyboard to be positioned, and also for performance and acting during Services.

Hatchments became popular during the 17th century in England amongst the nobility, who used them to display their coats of arms at the time of bereavement. These lozenge shaped wooden boards were hung outside the family home to signify a death in the family, thus notifying the neighbourhood of their loss. After a week or two the hatchment would be taken to the local church to be displayed there. On the whole, this was a short-lived tradition, though, some hatchments dating as late as the 1940s do exist. The term hatchment is a corruption of the word 'achievement' or armorial shield.

The design of a hatchment can tell us a number of things:

- i) A hatchment where the left-hand side is black and the right hand-side white shows that the notable was male, married and died before his wife.
- ii) If this is reversed so that the black is on the right-hand side and the white on the left, this tells us that the notable was female, married and died before her husband.
- iii) A hatchment with an all black background and a single coat of arms was for spinsters or bachelors.

The ones on view in the Church on the south wall, were restored in 2003, and are of the Fisher family.

Registers of baptisms, marriages and burials dating from 1598 are held in the Record office at Warwick and an index of all the Warwick records relating to the parish are retained in Church and may be seen on application to the Minister.



Nearly three centuries have witnessed Christian worship within its walls and our prayer is that it will long continue as a centre for the praise of God and the teaching of the Gospel.

Looking outside the Church, the standing cross in Barston is made of red sandstone. The two steps and the socket stone are octagonal and chamfered on their upper outside edge. The squared end of the shaft is mortised into the socket and the shaft rises through chamfered corners to a tapering octagonal section. The remainder of the cross shaft and the head are 19th century additions which raise its height to 2 metres.

In conservation terms, it is listed Grade II. It is scheduled National Monument number 30025. 'Scheduling' refers to the legal system for protecting and conserving nationally important archaeological sites in the U.K. English Heritage takes a leading role in identifying sites in England for designation by the Secretary of State for The Department for Culture, Media and Sport - (used to be The Department of National Heritage).

The original list of protected monuments was set out in a schedule attached to the first Act of Parliament in 1882 and so the standing cross at Barston has been duly 'scheduled' - long may it stand!

## Ministers of St Swithin's

1917-40	John Barker
1940-43	William Leatham
1944-50	George R. Mortimer
1950	A.L. Palmer
1951-57	Frank Hines
1957-58	Ronald Arthur Smith
1959-63	Peter Dawson
1964-72	Brian James Bert Easter
1972-76	Richard Hacking
1976-79	Keith Charles Comber
1979-85	Interregnum
1985-95	Alan Victor Golton
1995-04	Eric Watson Russell
2005-12	Roger Turner
2013-14	Stephen Thomas Mayes
2015-present	Duncan Ballard

## Definitions

### Aisle

From the Latin 'ala' and the Old French 'ail', sometimes written Isle, Yle, and Alley.

### Nave

The name is derived from the Latin 'navis', a ship, possibly with some reference to the 'ship of St. Peter' or the Ark of Noah.

### The Chancel

Originally called 'cancelli', from which the name is derived.

### Prayer Desk

Also called a 'prie-dieu', a prayer desk is a kneeler with a small shelf for books. The Prayer desk is usually used by the Minister(s).

### The Pulpit

An English word, from Old French, from Late Latin pulpitum, from Latin, wooden platform.

### The Lectern

The place we read from the bible, is an English word: lettorne, lectorn, from Old French lettrun, from Medieval Latin lectrinum, from Late Latin lectrum, from Latin lectus, past participle of legere, to read.

### Pews

From the English word pewe, probably from Old French puie, balcony, from Latin podia, plural of podium, balcony.

### Font (basin)

The place where people are baptised. The water is never tipped down the drain because it has been set apart (sanctified) for a special purpose. After the Baptism the water should be returned to the ground. Font is from Old English, from Late Latin fons, font- from Latin, fountain.

## Additional dates from the past

- 1721-1727 St Swithin's Church, Barston Church rebuilt.
- 1897 The Low ceiling was removed, and beams displayed. The gallery at the West End was also removed. The windows shaped originally like the ones in the tower were reshaped and the vestry and the North Porch were added.
- 1902 A Lamp was placed over the Church Gate.
- 1903 The Organ, a beautiful little instrument built by William Hill & Sons of London, was bought by public subscription.
- 1916 Alms Dish purchased by Ladies' Sewing Party.
- 1917 A beautiful pair of brass candlesticks for the Altar were presented by S.S. Guest, Esq.
- 1918 The Churchwardens Wands were given by Mr Joseph Ward.
- 1921 A piece of ground between the Churchyard and Road was added to the Churchyard and Consecrated, and at the same time the War Memorial Tablet and Font Ewer (in memory of Mr Guest) were dedicated.
- 1925 The roof was retiled at a cost of £200 and again in 1989 but not at the same price.
- 1931 The walls were painted and electric light was installed. The Pulpit Lights added later, were the gift of Mr W.A. Ledbrooke and Mrs Woolley in memory of their father and mother.
- 1933 New drain made from stoke hole.
- 1935 Churchyard plan and register made. Framing the gift of Mr P. Findon.
- 1936 Oak panelling, the gift of Mrs Guest in memory of her son, Peter Elliot Guest, was put on the East Wall. Additional heating apparatus (radiators and overhead pipes) were installed.
- 1938 Clock face painted.



St Swithin's Church  
Barston



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