

# St David's Church Moreton-in-Marsh



A brief history of St David's Church, Moreton in Marsh  
and points of interest within the Church



St David's prior to the addition of a spire in 1861

Moreton first appears as a possession of the monastery at Deerhurst in the Vale of Gloucester in the 9th century, but Deerhurst's estates were later seized by the Earls of Mercia, and when Earl Odda died in 1056 they passed to King Edward the Confessor. So it was that the dying king granted Moreton, with other former possessions of Deerhurst including Todenham, to his new Abbey of Westminster in 1065. The grant was confirmed by William the Conqueror, and Moreton remained part of Westminster Abbey's manor of Bourton on the Hill and Moreton in Marsh for nearly 800 years until the manor was bought by Lord Redesdale of Batsford Park in 1856. In 1919 the Batsford estate was sold to Sir Gilbert Wills, later Lord Dulverton.

The Saxon name 'Mortun' meant 'farmstead on the moor'. But for many centuries the Vale of Moreton consisted largely of marshy heath. As a result the district became known from the 13th to the 16th century as the 'Hennemerse', 'the haunt of wild fowl'. Although this description was attached to many local villages, it persisted only in the case of Moreton, gradually evolving from 'in Hennemersh' to 'in Marsh'.

Moreton owes its present form to a 13th century Abbot of Westminster, Richard of Barking, who in the late 1220s built the new town of Moreton in its present position along the Fosse Way in an initially unsuccessful attempt to establish it as a market town. The church, however, is in the original settlement to the east of the Fosse Way still known as 'Old Town'.

There have been at least three buildings on the present site. The first, a simple nave and chancel, was certainly in existence by the late 13th century. Fragments of later alterations to this structure still exist, in the form of part of a 14th century screen in Bourton on the Hill church, at the east end of the south aisle, and 15th century corbels on a house at the corner of East Street. There is a reference to this 'Chapel of St David' in a 1512 bull of Pope Julius II, who allowed burials to take place at Moreton instead of Blockley because of the hardship caused by the intervening floods and hills. The dedication to St David may stem from a well which used to exist to the east of the churchyard whose water was supposed to be good for sore eyes and

which was therefore dedicated to St David. The interior of this church is known to have had a crucifix and a picture of our Saviour, a coffer standing near the high altar, and a light maintained by a gift of land.

The coming of the railway in the 19th century led to a further substantial expansion in Moreton's population, which outgrew even the enlarged Tudor church. Accordingly it was almost completely rebuilt in 1858 by Joseph Gill of Bourton on the Hill to the designs of Poulton and Woodman of Reading, in an appropriate return to the style of the 13th century. The roof of the nave and aisles was raised on new nave arcades, a chancel was built, the side windows raised and tracery introduced, and the east gallery replaced by galleries on the north and south walls. The original plan to add a steeple to the Tudor tower proved impracticable, and in 1861 this was replaced by the present tower and spire. The ring of bells was rehung in 1862, after four had been recast by George Mears and Co of London. Further structural alterations were made by E H Lingen Barker of Hereford in 1891-92, when the three galleries were removed, the chancel extended, a side chapel built, the south aisle widened, and the north porch blocked-off to enable it to be used as a vestry. In 1927 a war memorial altar and reredos of oak was placed in the Lady Chapel, designed by Knapp-Fisher, Powell and Russell and executed by Cecil Grimes of Moreton. In 1979-82 the roof was repaired and renewed and the drainage improved to protect the church's foundations.



The honey-coloured stone from local quarries above Bourton on the Hill has weathered admirably and gives the building an apparent age beyond its years. The visitor approaches it through handsome wrought-iron gates designed and made by John S Scott, which were erected in 1960, and along a path to the west door lined with yew trees planted by a former curate. The churchyard itself closed in 1867 when a cemetery was opened on the London Road.

The main feature of the building is the west tower and spire, over 35 metres high. The three-stage tower is in golden ashlar, with two long lancets on each side above roof level marking the position of the belfry. This contains a peal of 8 bells, which were recast by John Taylor and Co of Loughborough and rehung in 1958, the third being an entirely new bell. The old third bell, cast in 1693 by William Bagley of Chacombe, Northants., was retained as a prayer and saints' bell. The tower is surmounted by triangular-pierced battlements punctuated by pinnacles at each corner, and an octagonal spire with four gabled pointed lucarnes.

Inside, the tower arch is the only survivor of the Tudor church, while the high bases of the nave arcades, their pilaster responds and the north vestry remain from the 1790-91 alterations. The church is of pleasing proportions, its open-beamed roofs, lime-washed walls and piers, the capitals highlighted in pink and red, and generous windows all giving an impression of light and space. Its welcoming air has been enhanced by the rebuilding done in 2004-2006 which involved reordering the chancel, the resiting of the chancel screen, the replacement of wooden chairs and pews by the present seats, and the establishment of a bookstall and coffee bar at the back, the woodwork designed and made by Carlton Smith of Pershore.

The wall to the left of the west door bears a number of early 19th century memorial tablets to local people, including a marble scroll by Soward & Son to John Jefferies Hooper, who died in 1845. To the north of the chancel arch stands the stone pulpit presented by the town's leading linen manufacturer in 1858, which is decorated with motifs recalling the local industries of the mid-Victorian period. On the other side of the chancel arch is the font of the same date, in a similar style, with a modern pointed-cone cover of wood. The side chapel arch is filled by a memorial oak screen of 1910 designed by Frederick Bligh Bond, which used formerly to be placed in front of the main arch. The organ, by Henry Connacher and Son of London, dates from before 1889. The chancel floor is of Broseley tiles.

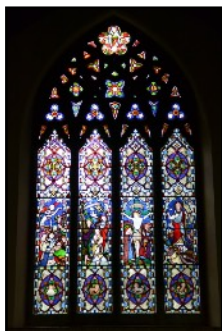
The oak communion table, lectern and font were made by a local craftsman, Trevor Harris, a member of the present church congregation. In the south aisle is an oil painting of the late 17th or early 18th century showing the Venerable Bede translating St John's Gospel, which has recently been cleaned and restored (see on left).



The stained glass memorial window in the north aisle commemorates the Rev Gabriel Stokes, curate 1890-1897, and is by C E Kempe, who also designed the stained glass in Batsford church. The east window of 1858 is by Lavers and Barraud, while the small south window in the chancel, recalling two 18th century parishioners, is the only glass to survive from the earlier church, having been transferred from the organ chamber when the chancel was extended in 1891-92. The east window of 1932 in the Lady Chapel is by Pearce and Cutler, as is that at the east end of the south aisle, dating from 1935. Not on view is the church plate, which includes an Elizabethan silver chalice and paten cover of 1576 with the inscription 'Morton Hinmarsh in ye County of Glosster'.



North Window



East Window



South