

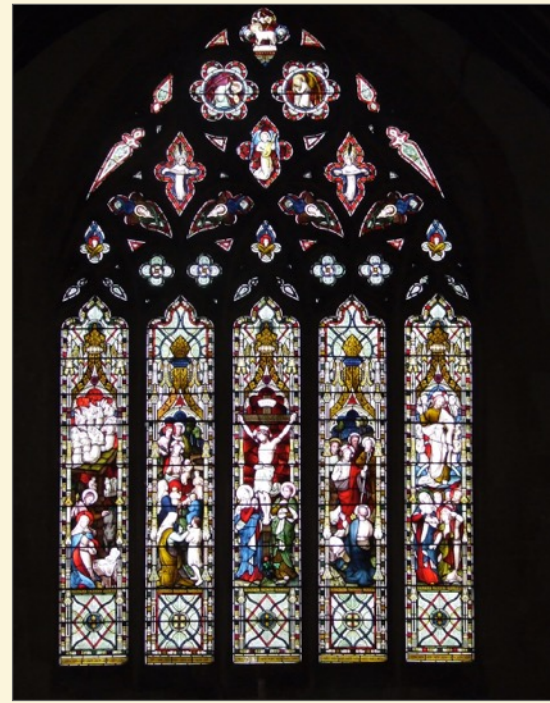


14th century piscina (top) in chancel. Memorial tablet with skull & crossbones outside south wall (bottom)

A recent member of the community and local historian, Catherine Meadows, penned this affectionate tribute to the church

T True Thomas Merkes was rector of this church,
O Over five long-drawn centuries ago;
D Dedicated to Saint Thomas à Becket,
E Each stone a mellow testament, to show
N Neither storm, nor strife, nor time's long passage,
H Have dealt more than a passing blow:
A All those who've lived in this sweet village
M Made safe the lovely heritage we know.

C Clear across the rolling Cotswold country
H High stands the steeple there for all to see,
U Until one day we hear the joyful message
R Rudhall's bright bells ring out so Bliss-fully;
C Calling all around to come and worship
H Here, gathered in this shrine of history.



East Window

St. Thomas à Becket Today

The most famous former rector of St. Thomas à Becket was Robert Wickens whose concordance of the Bible was published in 1654, and received worldwide acclaim.

Today it is still the Bible that is at the centre of what we are about as a church. It is the clear and authoritative witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13: 8). Services continue at St. Thomas à Becket to this day, twice a month at 9:30 on the second and fourth Sundays of the month. You would be most welcome to join us at any of our services. For more information contact one of the church wardens.

ST. THOMAS A BECKET

TODENHAM



TODENHAM CHURCH

There has been a visible Christian witness in Todenham since the late 12th century, and the oldest part of the present church building dates back to the 1330s. This leaflet aims to point out the major items of interest, and introduce you to the church of today.

Todenham Church and Village



South Transept and Van Notten Pole Memorial

The top picture shows the south transept with the piscina in the corner.

The bottom picture is of the memorial to Lady Louisa Pole, and her husband Sir Peter Van Notten Pole, lord of the manor in the 1800s.

The village of Todenham, lying 3 miles north-east of Moreton, takes its name from "Teoda's ham" or water-meadow, an appropriate description of the low-lying northern part of the parish (although the present village sits atop a hill). It was given to the monastery at Deerhurst in 804 by Aethelric in order to secure his right of burial there.

Later it became the possession of Westminster Abbey, before being passed in 1545 to Sir William Petre, Secretary of State to three monarchs. In 1783 it passed into the hands of the Van Notten Pole family. In 1951 the estate was divided and sold off.

The earliest record of a church in Todenham dates from 1157, when the Pope confirmed Westminster Abbey in possession. The fact that it was dedicated to St. Thomas à Becket, canonised in 1172, also suggests a late 12th century date.

In the late 1330s a whole new church was built, and in 1404 Thomas Merke, the Bishop of Carlisle who had been deprived of his see by Henry IV took over. Shakespeare has Henry say of Merke:

"Choose out some secret place, some reverend room ... and with it joy thy life." (Richard II)

Evidently Todenham fitted the bill! And there is a tradition that on his death in 1409 the Bishop was buried in Todenham Church.

Another distinguished rector was Robert Wickens (1649-1661) whose concordance of the Bible was

published in 1654. A lord of the manor was the Tudor Secretary of State William Petre, tutor to George Boleyn, and survivor of four reigns. He was noted for having done "great service in suppressing religious foundations"!

Over the years different parts were added to the building – a south porch, north aisle, tower and spire in the 14th century, a north chapel in the 16th, a set of bells in 1713, and the stained glass window and pulpit in 1879.

The weather has also taken its toll. In 1768 the top of the spire was struck by lightning and fell through the roof of the nave – and the first repair was so badly done that it had to be taken down in 1772 and replaced. In 1962 severe gales left holes in the roof, and extensive repairs had again to be made.

Inside the church, on the south wall, are an ornate 14th century piscina and credence. There is another piscina in the south transept, and a third one half-hidden in the north chapel below a stairway which formerly led to the roof loft.

The 13th century font was removed at one point, but was restored by churchwardens in 1773, and bears their names. Above the door to the vestry there is a 17th century brass to William Molton and his wife Millicent, with a quaint rhymed epitaph, which begins with the words:

"Stay passenger this tomb doth hold
A coffin full of holy mould."