

# Holy Trinity Church Elsworth



## **Foreword**

This document is a brief description of Holy Trinity Church Elsworth. It is taken from the publication “The Church and Village of Elsworth, Cambridgeshire” by Betty Evans and was originally available in the church.

The complete book is available from the Swavesey and District History Society.

## **HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, ELSWORTH**

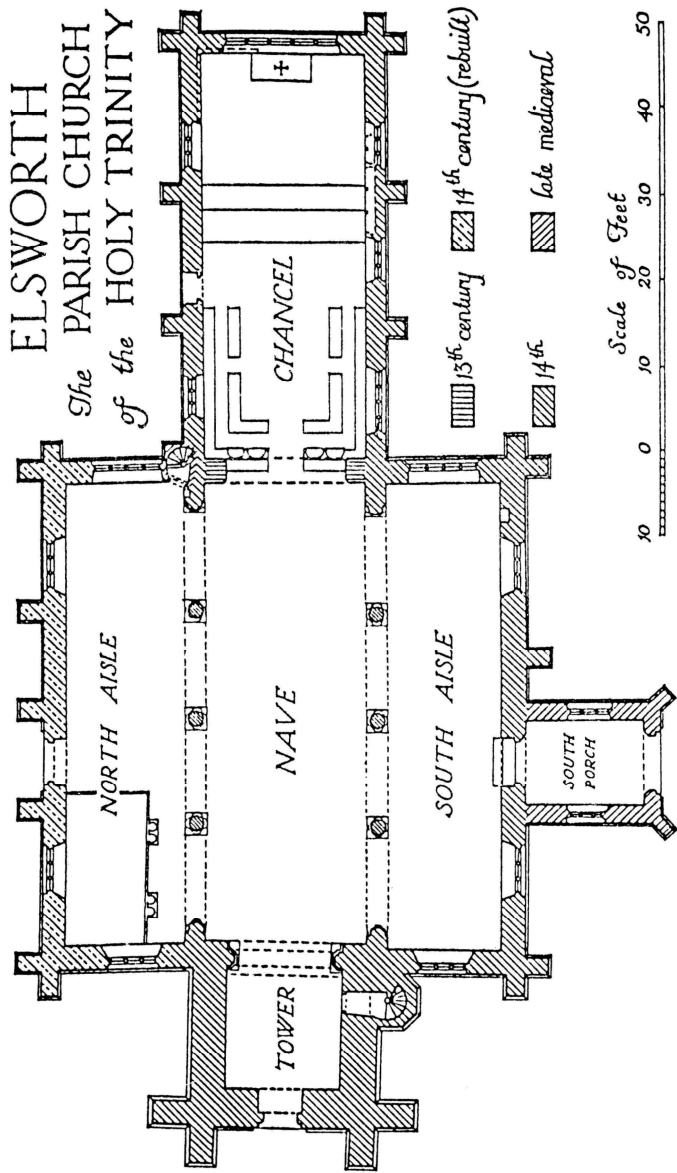
### **Introduction**

The history of the church at Elsworth can be traced back to the 10th century. It was part of the Elsworth estate which the thegn Athelstan Mannessune inherited from his father, and which he left to the Abbot and Convent of Ramsey when he died in 986. His widow laid claim to the land, however, and the manor with the church did not become Abbey property until after the death of their daughter, Aelfwaru, in 1007. It was held by the Abbot until the dissolution of the monastery in 1550.

In medieval times the church was used as a sanctuary, and it had a chantry. Chantries were endowments for the maintenance of priests to sing masses, usually for the soul of the founder. The chaplain was resident and might help the priest at services, and he was responsible for the upkeep of property belonging to his benefice. In 1376 the Bishop of Ely granted a licence to Thomas Baker, chaplain of St Mary's Chantry in Elsworth, to celebrate daily mass for a year on condition that all the money so obtained was used for repairing the houses and buildings of his chantry which had recently been blown down in a great storm. The Chantry priests who followed him had similar licences granted to them. Chantries were suppressed at the Reformation.

### **The Building**

The present building is notable for being almost entirely of one period, early 14th century. The walls are constructed of field stone and local limestone rubble, and, inside, of clunch. Evidence of the earlier church can be seen in the use of 12th century stonework in the fabric. The nave and chancel of the new church were the first to be built and the north and south aisles were then added. The north aisle encroached on the old roadway linking The Causeway to The Drift, and it suffered from subsidence; it had to be entirely reconstructed in the restoration of 1892.



## **Nave**

The nave has four lofty arches on each side with clerestory windows above. The roof is modern, but the position of the original roof can be determined from the 15th century wooden figures on stone corbels which supported it. These eleven carved statues may represent the eleven apostles. Five of them hold blank shields; one, on the south side, holds a small hand organ; the others have their hands slightly apart, as if in prayer. At the east end of the north arcade is a moulded doorway with a piscina partly cut into it. This doorway leads to a 16th century roodloft stairway with a doorway at the top in the angle of the nave. The organ was installed in 1910.

In his account of the church, dated 1745, William Cole describes the nave and chancel as separated by a screen over which were the King's arms. The lower part of the medieval screen, which remains, has restored panels in the south side. The pulpit is of the same period, also restored. Cole describes it as under a canopy on the north side of the screen. In 1886 two No 4 Poviett stoves were placed in underground chambers beneath the nave floor, and covered with gratings. This was the first time the church had been heated.

## **Chancel**

The chancel arch is 13th century. On the south wall is a fine double piscina with stone shelves and built together with three sedilia (seats). This type of piscina belonged to the reign of Edward I (1272 - 1307) and points to the early dating of the chancel. One of the drains was used by the priest for washing his hands before the consecration and the other for rinsing the chalice. At some time following the Reformation the piscina and sedilia were boarded up, and they remained hidden and forgotten until 1850 when the wainscoting was removed during repairs to the chancel. They were then properly restored. On the east end of the north wall is a medieval aumbry, and adjacent to it a similar one, blocked up. Aumbries were used for the safe keeping of the sacramental vessels, and originally had doors.

Under the altar is a vault, build in the 1720s by the Holworthys, where lie Matthew (d 1726) and his wife (d 1749). She was a generous benefactress to the church and in her will left £80 for an altar piece and communion rail. She had planned the altar piece before her death and had discussed it with William Cole on his visit in 1745. This was the reredos which now forms part of the [vestry](#) wall. Originally it was placed against the east wall in the chancel and it extended in height to the springing of the tracery of the east window. It was moved out of the chancel during the restoration of 1892 and a new east window was inserted to the memory of the Reverend Edward Cheere of Papworth Hall, who contributed £300 to the restoration fund. The side windows of the chancel are Decorated.

The stalls are early Tudor work with poppy heads and linenfold panelling at the back. The small lockers under the bookrests are unusual. The desks are returned (i.e. face east) and underneath are fitted with lockers which have their original panelled doors. The carved oak chair in the sanctuary is 17th century.

On the floor of the north side of the chancel are monuments to Samuel Disbrowe, Lord of the Manor and Keeper of the Great Seal of Scotland; William Lunn; his son Edward Lunn; Thomas Whincop; and Mary Waller. Samuel Disbrowe's grand-daughter was Elizabeth Holworthy and the Holworthy memorials are on the north wall. There are three late medieval brass indents in the chancel floor: (a) for a man and wife, with an inscription plate; (b) for an inscription plate; (c) for a priest (? Robert Truslove), with an inscription plate.

The credence table, a memorial to Mark and Sophy Braybrook, is modern and was made in the village by John Throssell Jr.

## **South Aisle**

The fine windows of the south aisle are Decorated. There is a piscina in the south wall. The late medieval pews are of simple design with carved poppy heads. The roof is of the same date as the chancel. The porch is an addition

and is late medieval. The font is a late medieval structure of limestone, with four kneeling bays. Cole described it as standing under the arch of the last north pillar.

On the west wall of the south aisle is a stone inscribed with details of benefactions to the parish in the 17th century. These and others have now been embodied in a single scheme by the Charity Commissioners. The names of the main benefactors have been commemorated in the village in the names of restored cottages in Brook Street (Holworthy and Desborough) and modern council bungalows in Fardell's Lane (Franklin's Close).

There are five late medieval brass indents on the floor: (a) for man and wife, with an inscription plate; (b) the same; (c) for a small unidentified figure, with an inscription plate; (d) for two figures and an inscription plate; (e) for a figure (? female) with an inscription plate.

## **Tower**

The tower is 14th century and the west door is original. In the south-east corner of the tower is a projecting part-octagonal stair turret which leads to the bell chamber. There are four bells, which hang in an old cross-braced frame. The first, the treble, is inscribed "Christopher Grey made me 1675"; the second, the tenor, bears the inscription "cum moveo ad moneo" with the initials of the churchwardens, and is dated 1616; the third has an obliterated inscription; and the fourth is by Thomas Norris and is inscribed "non vox sed votum, non musica cordeala sed cor 1628". These bells have recently been restored and can now all be rung again.

The plain chest in the tower is 18th century. On the floor is a stone monument carved with the Disbrowe family arms to Rose, second wife of Samuel Disbrowe. She died in 1698 and her name appears among the benefactors listed on the south-aisle wall.

## North Aisle

On the floor is a brass indent for a man and wife, two groups of children and an inscription plate. Altogether there are nine brass indents in the church for brasses of the 15th and 16th centuries. All the brasses had been removed by the 18th century.

The north aisle was completely rebuilt in 1892, following a survey made by J L Pearson in the 1860s and his designs were executed by W M Fawcett in 1891-2. A church restoration fund was set up by the Lord of the Manor, Captain Walter Duncombe of Waresley Park, the Reverend Edward Cheere of Papworth Hall and His Grace the Duke of Portland, the patron. The Rector, the Reverend H K Hutchinson, had the arduous task of raising the sum, and a plaque on the wall commemorates the complete restoration. The church was closed on 2 August 1891 for the rebuilding, and Sunday services were held in the school during that time. The re-opening was on 14 April 1892, which was described in the *Cambridge Chronicle* as a gala day. The Bishop of Ely conducted the service, which was attended by neighbouring clergy and gentry, and it was reported that fully five hundred people were estimated to have been present. A public tea took place in Mr Witherow's barn after the service and the *Chronicle* stated that "afterwards all the children of the village were entertained free of cost. In the evening a service of song was held in the schoolroom, which was crowded to excess. The children and members of the choir, who gave the service under the conductorship of Mr Billing, acquitted themselves remarkably well." Mr Billings was the schoolmaster and church organist at the time.

## Vestry

The original vestry was demolished in the late 16th century. The present one was constructed in the 1892 restoration, using an 18th century reredos on the south side. It was moved from the east end, and William Cole is probably referring to it when he writes that "Mrs Holworthy proposes to make an elegant altar piece under the East window". Fashions change, and a writer in *Kelly's Directory* of 1883 states that "the East End is disfigured by a hideous



quasi-Ionic reredos, for which an East window has been destroyed". It has coupled Ionic columns which support a pediment (now broken) and flank a central panel painted with the ten commandments. Side panels carry the Lord's Prayer and the Creed.

## **Church Plate**

The church plate consists of an ornate early 16th century South German brass dish and four silver pieces. They are a cup, a cover paten, an alms dish and a flagon, and they are all inscribed "The gift of Mrs Elizabeth Holworthy to the Parish Church of Elsworth in Cambridgeshire 1733"; they have the London assay marks for that year. A pewter wafer box was presented in 1971 by parishioners in memory of William Hinson, sexton, and is inscribed "Thank God for his Faithful Servant Bill Hinson 1902 - 1971".

## **Exterior**

Outside, over the entry to the south porch, is a weathered sundial inscribed "mox nox" and dated 1628. In the western end of the south wall of the chancel, below the third window, is a blocked rectangular low-side window of the 14th century. It has an iron grill and staples on the jamb for an outside shutter. The purpose of low-side windows is hotly debated. They may have been used to display lights, but it is more probable that the Sanctus bell was rung from them for all the village to hear. They are usually to be found on the village side of the church.

East of the chancel is the medieval base of a churchyard cross; and on the chancel gable stands a weather damaged Decorated wheel cross. Although imperfect, it and the chancel, nave and south aisle form one of the most important works of the Decorated period in West Cambridgeshire.

The church clock on the tower was given to the village by the Lodge family in 1869 in memory of Oliver Lodge, Rector 1837 - 1845. He was the grandfather of the distinguished scientist of the same name. The Lodge family grave is on the north side of the chancel and is one of the remaining

monuments in the old churchyard. The last burial in the old churchyard was in 1894, the first in the new in 1905. The war memorial was erected in 1921.

## The Rectors

The advowson of the living was held by the Lord of the Manor of Elsworth from Anglo-Saxon times up to the 19th century. Today it is held by the Bishop of Ely and the Crown in turns.

In 1185 an order was made by Pope Urban III for the revenues of Elsworth church and manse to be used for the upkeep of the priory at St Ives, and Manfred was named as the priest. A century later the rector's holding is recorded as 2 virgates (about 60 acres).

Following the founding of Cambridge University in the 13th century, it became the practice for dons to take livings in the surrounding villages to augment their stipends. The first rector of the new stone church was probably *John de Merton*, a Fellow of University Hall. The exact date of his institution is not known, but he is named as rector of Elsworth on his appointment as Advocate of the Court of Arches in 1356.

There were four Heads of Houses among the pre-Reformation priests, Henry Graneby, Simon de Neylond, Thomas Atewode and John Watson. *Henry Graneby* (1386) of Michaelhouse was an important figure in the church, and in 1389 took up an appointment in London. But in 1401 he was made Master of his college, and he came back to the Elsworth living by exchanging his London one with *Simon de Neylond* (1389), the warden of [King's Hall](#), who had succeeded him. *Thomas Atewode* (1432) was Master of Gonville College, and he also held the livings of Lolworth (1408), Boxworth (1431), Lopham, Norfolk (1446) and Mutford, Suffolk (1452). He was Chaplain to the Duke of Norfolk, and was described as a "worthy man and liberal benefactor". He greatly extended his college buildings, retired as Master in 1454, went to live in Mutford and died two years later. In his will he desired to be buried in Elsworth, and directed that a marble monument should be erected in the chancel of the church to the memory of himself and his mother. This suggests

that he had strong links with the village (see *Village*). There is no evidence today of the marble memorial, nor is it mentioned by William Cole. *John Watson* (1516) was Master of Christ's College and twice Vice-Chancellor of the University. He was the friend and correspondent of the great European scholar, Erasmus, and invited him to stay in Elsworth, describing the house as "very handsome and tolerably convenient". He was chaplain to Henry VIII, and was selected by the University to answer the King's questions relating to his divorce. He retired in 1536, two years after the Act of Supremacy.

The next incumbent was *Robert Truslove* (1536). He started the parish registers in 1538, and the records are complete to this day, volume 1 being on parchment. He died in 1559 and was buried in the church; the late medieval memorial on the chancel floor with a brass indent to an unknown priest might be to him.

Ramsey Abbey was suppressed in 1550, and the Elsworth estate and advowson were granted to Dr Thomas Wendy of Haslingfield, who was court physician to Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary I. The appointment of *Philip Baker* (1559) one year after Mary had died suggests that Elsworth still clung to the tenets of the old faith. The new rector was noted for his Roman Catholic leanings. He was the Provost of King's College and Vice-Chancellor of the University in 1561-2. He was attacked for his popish opinions, and a Commission of Enquiry was set up. On this, he fled in 1570 to Louvain, which had become a centre for English Catholics escaping from the law, and he was deprived of his Provostship and other preferments. He died in Louvain in 1601.

The result of the Commission of Enquiry was that on 27 August 1571 all the clergy of the diocese were summoned to Elsworth church to subscribe to the Liturgy and Articles of Faith. Everyone signed, including the new rector of Elsworth, *Robert Holbeam* (1571), a Fellow of King's College. The following year he married Elizabeth Drury of Elsworth, whose family had leased the manor from Ramsey Abbey in 1535 for 60 years. They had seven children,

and Holbeams continued to live in the village for the next three hundred years.

The records of the Archdeacon's Visitations in the 17th and 18th centuries show growing signs of dissention in the parish. In 1621, during the tenure of *Richard Franklin* (1614), James Papworth was presented for "going out of church during the sacrament of baptism in a scoffing manner"; and in 1624 the Sabbath was profaned by "unlawful ringing of the bells". Richard Franklin died in 1632 and was buried in Elsworth.

In 1638 the Bishop of Ely, Matthew Wren, toured the diocese and subsequently held a consistory court in Great St Mary's church in Cambridge. The rector of Elsworth, Dr *Thomas Whincop* (1631), and his churchwardens, William Pamplin and John Stallebrass, were ordered "to make 4 ascents; to turn the desk; to enter strange preachers' names in the paper book; to keep communion at marriages". Two parishioners were also before the court: John Barton, for "setting in the pew which causeth the church to be most ununiform"; and Henry Gray, who was fined for living from his wife.

Thomas Whincop was also rector of Lolworth (1635) but he had to relinquish that living in 1644 as the Puritans forbade pluralism. The Whincop arms were still displayed over the Elsworth rectory door a hundred years later when William Cole visited the house and described it as being "very old and large".

At the Archdeacon's Visitation of 1676 *Nicholas Dickons* (1660) was presented for failing to read divine service on Wednesday and Friday of Ember Week; and John Papworth, his churchwarden, appeared for having no surplice. No recusants of dissenters were found.

For nearly one hundred years, from 1694 to 1791, the living was held in succession by *William* and *Edward Lunn*, father and son. William was Archdeacon of Huntingdon, Prebendary of Lincoln, and a Justice of the Peace. His tenure of office for 52 years is the parish record.

The Lunnns were followed by another father and son, the Matthew Holworthys. They were the descendants of Samuel Disbrowe, who bought the manor in 1656. *Matthew Holworthy sr* (1791) inherited the manor in 1765 when he was only ten years old. He was Edward Lunn's curate in 1789, and two years later on the death of the old Rector, he presented himself with his own living. At the enclosure of the village in 1803, land was allotted to him in lieu of tithes, and he then owned nearly all the land in the parish. His son *Matthew Holworthy jr* became his curate in 1816 and followed him as Lord of the Manor in 1826 and as rector in 1827. He died ten years later, and the long association with the village by the Disbrowe family and their heirs, which had lasted for nearly 200 years, was terminated.

The advowson then passed to the Duke of Portland, and the rectors continued to live in the manor house until a new rectory was built. *Oliver Lodge* (1837) was the grandfather of the distinguished scientist of that name. His grave is in the old churchyard. At that time the Baptist movement in the village had grown very strong. A Strict Baptist chapel with its schoolroom had been built in 1830 to accommodate 400 persons, and there was a resident minister who lived in the manse nearby.

*Philip Bagge* (1845) helped to found the Church of England school in 1847 for boys and girls and infants, and he was the sole manager. From then until the end of the century the church history is one of struggle against decay, reflecting the declining prosperity of the village and the rapid fall in population. *Henry Coddington* (1881) did not reside in the village at all, but left the duties to his son Charles, the curate.

The church was extensively restored in 1892 under *Henry Hutchinson* (1884). Further repairs were carried out in 1934 by *Lawrence Iggulden* (1927). *Wilbert Awdry* (1946) is known to countless numbers of children as the author of the "Thomas the Tank Engine" books. The first stories were written in Elsworth rectory.

The burden of repair and restoration has continued to be shouldered, like Christian's pack, by recent incumbents. A new appeal was started by *Brian*

*Dupré* (1955), and the work has been continued by *Hugh Mosedale* (1961). He is the first rector to hold the combined living of Elsworth and Knapwell with that of Boxworth, and thus to bring together the old rival foundations of the Abbey of Ramsey and the See of Ely.

In 2008 post of rector changed as Elsworth became part of a team ministry with *Fiona Windsor* occupying the vicarage in Elsworth. During 2012-2013 the South porch has been extensively restored.

### **Note 1**

King's Hall (not to be confused with King's College) founded 1337 by Edward III. It became part of Trinity College in 15