St James the Great, Fulbrook.

Grade II*

English Heritage IoE 253599

Medieval meeting place, present day meeting place.
You have entered a Norman medieval building which would have been shared in the Middle Ages between the religious order and the community.

A screen in the Norman, round chancel arch would have separated the two. Priests and friars would have conducted their services in the chancel. With no seats or pews in the nave, people would have stood around discussing business or watching the religious proceedings.

The latest building modifications, completed early 2006, made for today's world repeat the original idea for the church to be the village meeting place. Several rows of Victorian pews have been removed, the rear arched tower and vestry areas have been equipped with fine oak panelling, doors and glass partitions above. They form the kitchen and service facilities. Today the church is used for community worship and community functions.

And the green man stares down from the flat roofed medieval rafters above the front pews. He has seen the changing fashions in worship over the ages.
The Early Establishment. There is no recorded early history for Fulbrook church so general known trends have been used to construct a possible scenario. Augustine arrived in Kent from Rome in 596AD to establish Christianity at Canterbury. Birinus arrived in Dorchester on Thames from Rome in 630AD to establish Christianity in the upper Thames area. From Dorchester groups of priests formed Minsters, for living and for collegiate worship, first at Bampton then Langford, Broadwell, and Shipton-under-Wychwood, from which they travelled to villages to preach - and probably to rest and sleep in simple buildings called “chapels of ease”. The rough uncoursed and herringbone coursing on one wall of the nave might indicate a former simple building incorporated and extended by later Norman builders. The early Christian conversions of tribal elements led from Minster groupings to landowners having manors and buying land whilst the ecclesiastical world established abbeys. Leofric of Mercia acquired many manors in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire up to the time the two counties were founded in 1007 and 1016. At the time of the Conquest in 1066 Leofric’s acquisitions had passed to the Godwinson family who owned half of Oxfordshire and more. Harold Godwinson, King of England, lost the battle of Hastings and the land ownership passed to William the Conqueror. William probably used a steward (le Despenser) called Amaury Raoul d’Abetot to administer Fulbrook and the Wychwood hunting forest. Amaury Raoul died after 1096 and his successor continued the role and took the name Robert d’Abetot Despenser. In the 14th Century the manor of Fulbrook was held by Hugh le Despenser, Earl of Winchester. The church was a chapelry associated with Burford church, “ecclesia de Burford et capella de Fulebrook”, although the villages were totally independent entities; both were given in 1170 to the Abbey of Keynsham, Somerset, founded by Robert FitzHamon’s grandson. The abbot appointed the joint vicar of both until the Reformation in the 16th century after which the Bishop of Oxford appointed the vicar. The initial Norman building was extended about 1200 when the northern aisle and arcade were built. The style is transitional Norman, round columns with roundish arch, but a Gothic, pointed arch form has been introduced.
St James the Great through a round arch Norman doorway which is fronted by a late 13th century porch. Although quite shallow, the porch has an interesting inner arch of three orders of shafts and bell capitals. The outer arch is a hollow chamfered arch form with a quatrefoil cross-section.

Unexplained more indistinct markings, as below, might have been attempts to ward off evil spirits and witches.

Various external markings can be found on medieval churches, scratch “sun” dials indicating service times, crosses, as explained right, and various signs to ward off evil spirits.

As the porch existed at the times of the Crusades legend might say the crosses, above, carved into the pillars of the porch are ‘Crusader Crosses’ carved by those local people departing to fight wars in the Holy Land.

The nave wall, Norman chancel arch and the Norman entrance door are probably the oldest sections of this church. The Tower is probably Tudor, 1485 to 1603, from the earlier part of this period.
The priest had a private door into the chancel, the religious domain, and on the door pillar are a badly eroded arc form scratch dial and a very good example of a full round scratch dial. The full round design provided a better shadow indication of service times during poorer light conditions.

The capitals, left, which top the arcade columns are worth noting. Carved and mounted in about 1200 they show the trouble and expense devoted to this church in a small village. Even today Fulbrook has only just over 200 houses.

These capital designs, left, are similar to those found in other medieval churches in the area, eg. Kelmscott, Shilton, Black Bourton, etc., and might indicate a centralised production at, maybe, a quarry or a team of stonemasons travelling from church to church.

The corbels, left, supporting the Perpendicular style (1350 -1450) nave roof are probably from the same era and one wonders whether they portray the faces of the church benefactors or builders. They are similar to those in Burford church.
**The Chancel.**
As this building spans a period of 900 - 1,000 years it is obvious many alterations will have taken place. The chancel was remodelled in the 13th century, possibly to its current rectangular form from an earlier Norman apse (semicircular recess). But the earlier Norman, 13th century round chancel arch remains with roll mouldings and shafts with bell capitals, similar to the porch; the red rosettes painted on the east side were added later in the 13th century. Other wall paintings are indistinct, often obliterated during the Reformation. The chancel east window, three lights with trefoil heads, is also 13th century but with 19th century stained glass. All early stained glass would have been destroyed during the Reformation, 1530 - 1555, except for eagle and peacock fragments in the chancel window (below left).

**The Monuments.**
Two mural tablets in the Chancel are in memory of the Jordan family, 1637-1672 and 1693 - 1732.

One wall monument of 1695 to the Thorpe family, John Thorpe was vicar of Burford and Fulbrook from 1668 to 1701, has cherubs bearing a resemblance to the Kempster monument in Burford church commemorating the stone mason, Christopher Kempster, who worked with Sir Christopher Wren as a master mason and died in 1715.

Another is a brass plaque to Edmund Rous, died 3rd January 1633, mounted on “Thornback” stone.
The Nave.

Most major building work in the nave and chancel, and even the tower, had been completed while the church was in the ownership of the Abbey of Keynsham and predated the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538 - 40. After that date churches became the responsibility of the parishes and often fell into states of disrepair. The window right shows how the church was adapted by adding more light in the form of a 1350-1450 perpendicular gothic style clerestory windows above an 1150-1250 Early English two light lancet ones. One complete repair is recorded on a wall board for 1827 before the Victorian restorers became prominent. A further extensive repair was again undertaken in 1892. This was the period when Victorian restorers took great interest in local churches and George Edmund Street who was the Diocesan architect in Oxford in the 1850s, (he later built the Law Courts in the Strand, London,) and the Gilbert Scotts were repairing, redesigning, and even to some extent desecrating, churches throughout the land. Often medieval plaster with paintings was stripped from walls and flatter medieval roofs were raised into steeper pitches to withstand the harsh winters and heavy snowfalls in the 1800s and early 1900s. Another famous name from the same era was William Morris who deplored some of the restorers’ work and in 1879 established the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) after an argument with the Burford vicar over plaster stripping being done in Burford church.

The nave window on the south side, above, is 13th century (1150-1250) with two trefoil headed lights and a rere arch (the design around the inside wall of the window reveal). Above a later clerestory perpendicular (1350-1450) window with two cinquefoil lights has been added. A rounded Norman arch, which breaks the rere arch at bottom left, is evidence of an earlier construction and provides background to the pulpit just visible in the left of the picture.
Charity boards add to the story of the times and take one back to school history lessons about the Poor Laws, 1601 and into Victorian times, where the parish was made responsible for its poor people.

After the Dissolution of the monasteries in the 1536-1540 period the parish church also became the responsibility of the parish for maintenance.
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The treble, tenor and sanctus bells were cast by Edward Neale in Burford in 1649 and 1662. He had a foundry in Burford from 1641 to 1685. The number 2 bell was cast by Henry Bagley of Chacombe who briefly had a foundry in Witney around 1732. Henry Bond of Burford supplied a wooden bell frame to hang the bells in 1892; now upgraded to steel. Bell No 2, centre photograph, cast in 1732, bears an inscription WILLIAM PATRICK WILLIAM GARDNER C WARDENS, HB MA MA 1732 which confirms its date. It still hangs in the belfry, together with the one cast by Neale, now part of the ring of 6 rehung in 2004. The 6 ringers operate from the second floor of the tower with the belfry above them.

Henry Bagley was one of a long and famous line of bell founders from Chacombe in Northamptonshire who probably started as blacksmiths. One Henry Bagley, born 1608, was the first to cast bells and open a foundry when he was 24. In 1688 the Bagleys were asked to replace the bells of Lichfield cathedral with the first ring of ten ever to be cast. In 1732 Henry Bagley of “Chalcomb” “who now lives in Witney” published a catalogue of his bells which includes Fulbrook, Witney and Chipping Norton among many others. Bagleys of Chacombe were the largest in England in their time.

Edward Neale was casting bells in Burford from 1641 for some forty years and he died in November 1695. There are 31 of his bells remaining in the Gloucester diocese, all in the Cotswolds and they were noted for their clean tone. On his death bell founding ceased in Burford for 160 years.
The two manual pipe organ was made in 1898 on the instigation of Lily Annette Taylor in memory of her mother, Theresa Blanche Taylor Munday who was the daughter of John and Ann Ryder of Fulbrook parish. It bears a makers inscription:

Peter Connacher and Co
“The Old Firm”
Huddersfield.

This apparently refers to the fact that a younger member of the Connacher family set up in opposition and that this organ was made by the original family company.

The “Great” organ contains four stops: principal, stopped diapason, dulciana and open diapason.

The “Swell” organ has oboe, flute, salicional and rohr flute stops.

There are couplers swell and great to pedal and a 16 foot lieblich bourdon pedal stop.

Currently Fulbrook is fortunate in having four villagers who play the organ.
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The tower is described in English Heritage listings and other sources as 15th century with re-used lancet windows in the lower section and tracery arched windows in the section where the bells hang. Nothing is mentioned about the sundial.

Note the range of tombs from the medieval chest tomb, prior to 1485, which is Grade II* listed (IoE UID 253603), to the Grade II listed bale tombs right which are probably early 18th century (IoE UID 253602). No record could be found for the cast iron headstone to the north of the church. A medieval chest tomb is most unusual as most notable people were buried in the church under the nave at that time and have subsequently caused instability in many medieval church structures due to the number buried and the voids caused as the bodies and coffins rotted and collapsed.
Note the range of windows from the Norman lancet with trefoil head, 1150, through Gothic Early English, 1150 - 1250, (lancet windows) with three light cinquefoil head to the Gothic Decorated period, 1250 - 1350, and the Gothic Perpendicular, 1350 - 1450, which followed the Black Death in 1349. All periods overlap so transitional styles also appear.