

Church of St Augustine of Canterbury West Monkton



The Name West Monkton is a Saxon name and tells us that this area was an ancient manor, which from an early date belonged to the Abbey of Glastonbury and was part of the Hundred of Whiteleigh. In early documents it is spelt in a variety of ways: Morchetona, Monechtone, Munckton or Mounckton.

Dedication The church is dedicated to St Augustine of Canterbury (Festival 26th May).

Date St Augustine's Church dates mostly from the Fifteenth Century but if you look carefully you can find clues to the adaptations and changes that have been made over many centuries right up to the present time.

Site The church is built on a site high above the lowlands and marshy areas of the River Tone, which passes through the parish at Bathpool.

Very Short History: This parish is very scattered; it starts high up on the Quantock Hills and ends at the south-east edge of Taunton. At one time it was one of the largest parishes in Somerset. It has never had a centre, but has been a mix of villages and hamlets and in the past was divided between several land owners, tenant farmers and owner occupiers along with a number of craftsmen and tradesmen.

1088 In the Domesday Book three sub-tenants of the Abbey of Glastonbury were mentioned and sub-divided into Overton, Gotton, Goosenford, Sidbrook, Bathpool and Heathfield.

1372 The Manor produced £58 13s 1¾d and a present of 48 capons which seem to have been sent to the Abbot every Christmas and Easter.

1539 After the dissolution of the Abbey, the part of the parish which was still owned by the Abbey became Crown property and was owned by William Poulet, Marquess of Winchester, whose house was said to be the present Rectory.

1616 The manor passed to the Warre family of Hestercombe.

1812 The Warre family estates were broken up and in there were seventy named 'proprietors' who owned land in the area.

1872 Viscount Portman held the estate for 72 years and then sold it to the Crown, so once again the Sovereign is Lady of the Manor of West Monkton.

Glossary:

Nave The central part of a church, extending from the narthex to the chancel and flanked by aisles.

Clerestory A clerestory is a high wall with a band of narrow windows along the very top. The clerestory wall usually rises above adjoining roofs. Originally, the word clerestory referred to the upper level of a church or cathedral. Clerestory is pronounced 'clear story'.

Bosses In architecture, a boss is a knob or protrusion of stone or wood. In Gothic architecture, roof bosses (or ceiling bosses) are often intricately carved with foliage, heraldic devices or other decorations.

Piscina This is a drain used for water used in cleaning the sacred vessels after mass.

Rood The rood screen (also choir screen, chancel screen, or jube) is a common feature in late medieval church architecture. It is usually an ornate partition between the chancel and nave. The word rood comes from the Saxon word rood or rode, meaning "cross". The rood screen originally had the Great Rood mounted on top of it, this was a large figure of the crucified Christ. Rood screens were removed at the time of the Reformation.

Plan of the Church

Nave and South Aisle There is evidence of the earliest building, which we can be certain stood on this site; this can be seen as you stand in the aisle and look back towards the eastern face of the tower arch. You can see mouldings, these show the height and angle of the previous roof; this would have been much lower than the present roof and there would not have been as many windows so the building would have been much darker.

The Chancel Arch and deeply splayed window at the western end of the South Aisle indicate that these were parts of a building erected after 1200. The South Aisle was added in about 1350 and the North Aisle sometime after that. The changing designs of the window tracery and carvings on the pillar capitals help to show the different building periods.

The Nave roof and Clerestory were added in about 1450. The Clerestory has eight windows, a wooden cornice of foliage and eighteen winged angels holding shields.

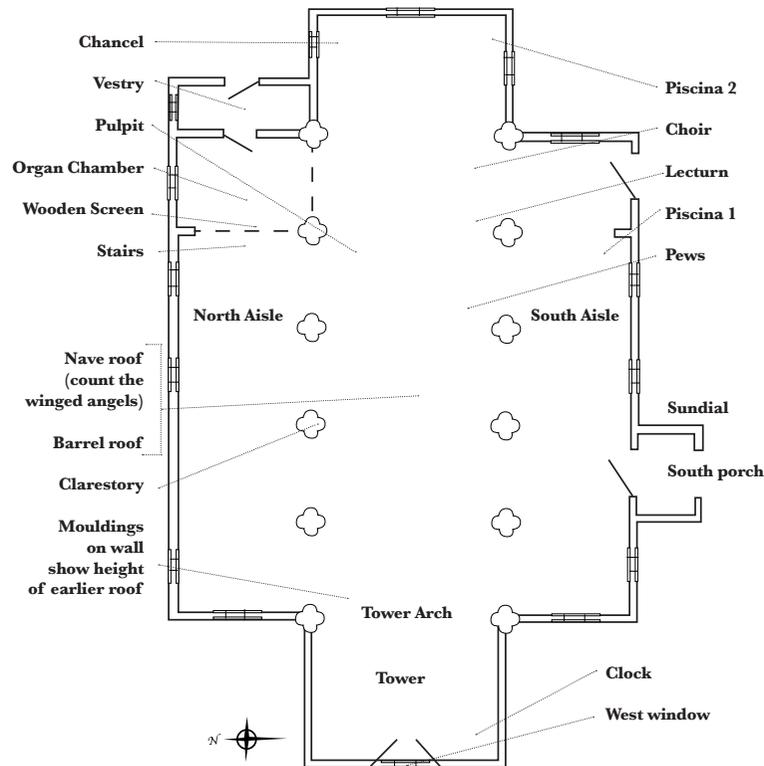
The barrel roof 36 feet high at the centre, has fifty-one bosses, mostly of floral design and eleven ribs. It is thought that that the wood for these ribs came from the Quantock Wood, which was part of the parish.

The Pulpit The original pulpit had been erected in 1739 at a cost of £28 0s 0d by Thomas House in the 'same place as the old one stands' this would have been on the south side of the east end of the Nave. In 1760 the pulpit was moved to the corner on the north side and the present pulpit, made of Beer Stone and designed by Taunton architect, George Strawbridge, took its place during the great restoration of 1883.

North Aisle Outside the organ chamber is a little wooden screen made up of 17th/18th century materials saved from the ancient woodwork at the restoration. Some of it is probably from the pulpit, some parts of family seats, as you can read the name of the seat owner, 'House of Lambricke', the date 1614 and you can see the remains of pegs on which churchgoers would hang their clothes.

The Tower Arch dates from about 1350 and some stones show signs of axe dressing which may indicate that at some time they have had another purpose.

The Tower and Bells: The Ringing Chamber, which houses the clock mechanism and from where the bells are rung, can be found up a steep staircase. It is difficult to be clear about the history of the bells in the tower but it is known that the oldest bell was cast in 1668 in Bristol. In 1747 three more were added and tuned together; in 1804 a further heavier bell was added and finally in 1881 the tenor weighing 19 and half cwt. They were all returned and re-hung in 1935, the bell frame at this time being at the top of the tower. This would have made a heavy and rather difficult set of bells to ring and would have caused a good deal of movement on the tower. In 1985 work began to make this heavy ring into a lighter and more manageable ring of 8. A new treble bell was donated by Prebendary Henry Warren and the new 2nd by Captain Campbell. All the bells were then taken to Whitechapel Foundry and returned and eventually re-hung in a new bell frame on two layers further down the tower in 1986 with the new tenor now weighing just over 17 cwt. A climb past the ringing chamber up the more worn stairs there is a viewing platform, which looks down over the bells. Even further up the worn steps and through a narrow trapdoor the roof views are spectacular - far and wide and near - not least the lovely Glebe Court garden.



The Chapel of St Mary and St Margaret The eastern end of the South Aisle was built in 1883 when a lot of other alterations also took place in the church. The work was done so beautifully that the old and new match almost perfectly. This extension was then either used as a Rectorial pew or to contain the choir. Some of it also became a 'place where the Rector never looks'. In 1966, this space was turned into a side chapel and on May 26th 1966 it was dedicated to St Mary and St Margaret of Antioch. These saints were chosen to commemorate two little Chantry Chapels in the parish that had been destroyed between 1547 and 1553.

The Clock At the same time as the three bells were recast in 1747 the church clock was also mended by Mr. Bailey, the bell founder. As village church clocks go, this bedstead clock is an ancient timepiece and it is thought to be the work of a local blacksmith. In 1955 the clock was completely overhauled and the dial added through the generosity of Madame Julienne, the last of the Beadons, who lived at Gotton Manor. The clock was wound daily until the tower captain retired in the early 90's. At the turn of the century the mechanism was removed and an electric motor was added and returned by 2002.

Stained Glass Windows The east window was redesigned in 1883 to include a memorial to Revd W Kinglake. The 15th century four-panel window was taken out and replaced by a new three-pane window depicting the birth, death and sacrament of Jesus - look for doves and the repetitive shape of the chalice. Most of the windows are by Heaton, Butler and Bayne. The exception being the East window, showing the Risen Christ, which is by Clayton and Bell.

Piscina 1 In the South wall, near the chapel, is a piscine; a rather unusual stone-carved cat's head covers the drain. The piscine indicates where the altar of the little Chapel of St Mary may have stood.

Monuments On the south wall of the Chapel: 18th century monument in Latin to Alexandra Popham, a previous Rector. The inscription says he is buried 'underneath here' when in fact he is buried in North Pethererton Church.

Brass On the North wall of the Chancel: thought to be of Henry of Abyngdon, Rector 1436 - 57. The costume is of a priest in 15th century academic dress and is very unusual.

South wall Musgrave Tablet records the foundation of a bread charity founded in 1727 which used to give out bread to those in need.

The Stairs These stairs, behind the pulpit, were uncovered in 1883. They would have led to the Rood Screen, which was abolished at the Reformation. The doorway to the stairs is just over a metre from the floor, it is not known why. The top exit of the stairs is blocked up. Next to the door is an ancient Aumbry or cupboard, or it could be another Piscina, but there is no record of an altar here.

The Lectern The brass lectern replaced a wooden reading desk, which had once been in the Nave but was moved to the Chancel in 1751 at 'the sole proper cost and charge of the Rector'. He was Revd J Sanford and he used the original site of the desk to construct a pew for his 'own private use as owner of Walford House'.

Choir The ends of the choir stalls were carved at the local carpentry class held in the village at the beginning of the 20th century at the direction of Mr Giles. Mr J Millington, the schoolmaster at the time, did a lot of the work.

The Organ The organ was made in 1829 by Smiths of Bristol and was originally put in a gallery at the west end of the church. It was moved to its present position in 1883 at a cost of £18 15s 0d. It is a two manual instrument with sixteen stops.

Sanctuary This area was remodeled in 1883 with a new altar and reredos in Beer Stone designed by Strawbridge.

South of the Sanctuary put in memory of Revd F C Kinglake, who succeeded his uncle in 1881 this depicts Angels bringing news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds, Jesus carrying a lamb and the empty tomb. Notice details such as some cheeky cherubs, a crown of thorns and arum lilies. There are many details to look for in the stained glass windows such as angels, pomegranates, haloes, doves, holes in the feet and hands of Jesus that all have significance to those who 'read' the stories in them.

Piscina 2 On the east end of the south wall is a small piscine, it has a groove in it that shows it was meant to hold glass so was probably originally part of a window.

The Pews These are made of solid oak and in 1883 replaced some from 1760 when the church was 'new pewed and new floored'. Some of the old pews were box pews and were allocated to various houses in the parish, about 130 for men and 120 for women with other benches in the singing gallery under the belfry for the 'men belonging to the cottages' and the men-servants belonging to the parishioners. When the new pews were put in they were allocated 'to such parishioners as may require them' at a charge of 5s for one person and 30s for a whole pew. Some seats were reserved near the pulpit for 'those with defective hearing or who otherwise ought to be placed nearest to the minister'. Payment for pews lasted from 1580 when seats were rented for 4d to 1919 when it was abolished in favour of free-will offerings as a form of income.

The Font This dates from 1883. The previous one was taken down to the Mission Church in Bathpool. There is also a 15th century font which is much worn and is at the back of the church for safe keeping.

The Porch This became the principle entrance to the church from 1827. In the porch floor are some ancient, and very worn, memorial slabs dating from the late seventeenth century. At that time this was the cheapest place to be buried within the church and the slabs indicate that there are many vaults under the floor. One used to say:

Here I lie at the Church Door;
Here I lie because I'm poor;
The further in, the more you pay,
But here I lie, as snug as they!

Outside the church

The Tower Most of the tower seems to have been built at the end of the fourteenth century. The buttresses are built of Ham Stone and the walls of Devonian Slates or Monkton Ragstone, which may have been quarried at Coombe which is about half a mile away. It has been suggested that the tower was once plastered and a painting from 1840 certainly shows it 'ivy mantled'. There used to be a row of iron spikes on the north side, put there to stop rowdy ball games taking place and above them was a colony of bees that lived there for at least 50 years; both were removed in 1976.

On the south side of the tower is an empty niche whose statue was removed by the Reformers in the sixteenth century.

The South Porch This is mostly from the fifteenth century and it was used as a Parish Meeting Place when no Church house was available. There is a carved angel over the inner door, a holy-water stoop in the east wall and, over the exterior door, an ancient sundial dated 1725.

The Aisles The porch and aisles are battlemented and have some gargoyles as part of the roof draining system and some Hunkypunks as decoration. (Hunkypunk is the Somerset name for Gargoyles which are not part of the guttering system.) Over the porch are two pairs of monkeys holding a human face between them. The 15th century drip stones on the end of the window mouldings are carved as human heads, including a monk and two royal persons (King Henry V and Queen Catherine?).

The Churchyard The burial ground is in three sections from 1888, 1910 and 1952. There are four ancient table tombs; one near the south porch dates from 1688.

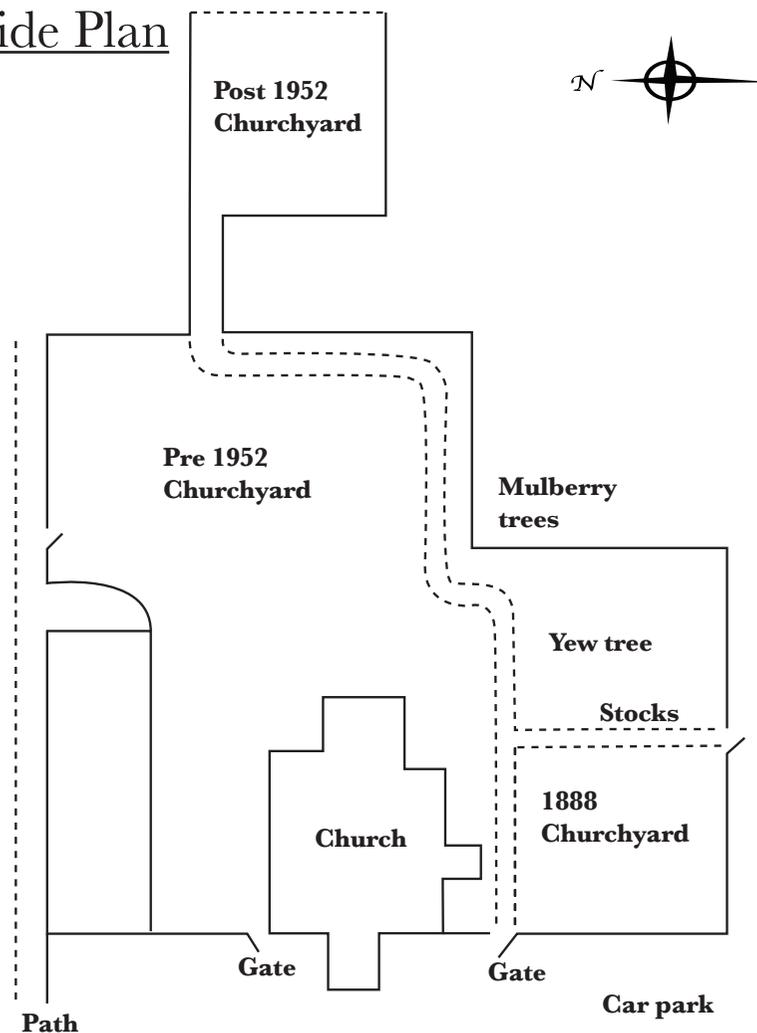
Notable memorials

- Kate Standish, who was killed on the Bristol road by a motor accident in 1916.
- To the mate of the 700 ton sailing ship, JKL of Bristol, who died on his way home from the wreck of the ship in a storm in the Gulf of Mexico on October 29th 1863.

Stocks and a whipping post These may have been brought to the churchyard when the Commons at Bathpool or Monkton Heathfield were enclosed. A painting from 1880, by Harry Friar, shows the stocks on a portable base that no longer remains. The little building to the right of the stocks in the south-eastern wall of the Churchyard is thought to have been used as a mortuary, the door in the wall was made to make it easy for coffins to be brought into the churchyard.

The Yew tree over the stocks is said to be at least as old as the church building. In the newest part of the churchyard you will see a grave that seems to be 'facing the wrong way'; it is of Maurice Roynon, priest, who died in 1954 and who is buried facing his flock.

Outside Plan



Charities The Spital Charity was founded in about 1176 to provide a Leper Hospital and still continues today when it provides Alms Houses for four elderly ladies. The Rector is Chair of Trustees for the charity.

The Rector and Churchmen founded the parish school in 1846, originally a school for all children in the parish aged five to fourteen, it is now West Monkton C of E Primary School which still has close ties with the church.

There were many parish charities administered by the church such as the Richard Musgrave Bread Charity, the John Hare Shirt Charity, the Betty Paul Red Flannel Charity and the John Beauchamp Coal Charity.