

Annex B

Church Buildings Council
Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3AZ

Pastoral Measure Report: Astwood, St Peter

Diocese: Oxford	Dedication: St Peter	Listing: II*	NGR: SP 950 473
County: Buckinghamshire	Parish: Astwood	PM: 2259	Cons Area: No

Location and setting: The small Medieval church of St Peter is located at the north-western edge of the historic village of Astwood, which now stands on the south side of a busy road, the A422, from Milton Keynes to Bedford. Kempton Racecourse is close and there are many stables in the area, although due to its location Astwood is increasingly becoming a commuter village. The Swan Inn and Astwood Grange are Grade II listed and 17th-century in parts, there is also a village hall adjacent to the Swan and a number of historic farmhouses.



The church seen from the south-east

A broad driveway through a farm type wooden gate leads to the church, with parking for three or four cars. The short church tower has some landscape value, the church stands in the south-western part of the small churchyard which is laid to grass, with several mature trees. A house is close to the west fenced boundary. There are monuments since the late 17th century concentrated around the south side, and two War Graves near the tower. The churchyard is still open for burial, and there are cremation burials.



Map of the area from English Heritage

Archaeology, Ecology and History: Astwood is a historic village, the first mention of a church is in 1187 in regard to Tickford Priory holding the advowson of a chapel here, vicars are recorded since 1298. 12th and 13th-century moulded stonework is said to be built into the upper tower, not seen. Most architectural details are now of the 14th century when the chancel was lengthened and aisle added, and the 15th when the tower (?) was “dropped in”. The clearstorey, aisle roof and some of the fittings are of the mid or late 16th century.

The church was hit by two German bombs in 1940 which damaged the nave and porch. The nave was unroofed until 1963 when a concrete truss roof was put in and the interior renovated, work on the floors unearthed the “Weston” brass now displayed in the church. More renovation was undertaken in the 1980s.

Archaeological remains can be expected on this site, and the local authority and HER should be consulted if any development is considered. There are no designations relating to the ecology, despite this the ancient churchyard is potentially an ecological reservoir, although no audit has been undertaken.

Ground plan: 3-bay nave with south aisle, west tower, chancel, south porch.

Dimensions: Nave 16m (52ft) x 5m (16ft), aisle 3m wide, chancel 9m (30ft) long.

Building materials: Limestone. Flat leaded roof to the aisle, nave roof replaced in concrete following war time bomb damage, tiled chancel and porch, the latter also rebuilt in concrete and brick.

State of repair: Based on the latest Quinquennial Inspection Report by Bruce Deacon architect of Bedford, September 2008. The report indicates that the church is generally in sound condition though it identifies some areas of wall and the tower which require repointing, and the remnants of render may be causing damp.

Energy use: Gas heating, pendant lamp lighting.

General description: 3-stage short and thick embattled west tower of coursed rubble masonry with decreasing angle buttresses. Polygonal stair turret on south-west corner. Lozenge clock faces to south and north on middle stage, much renewed. 2-light belfry openings, alternately square-headed (east, west) and pointed.

Good unrestored 14th-century tracery to the south aisle windows which decrease in size from east to west, the easternmost a fine 3-light, the others 2-lights. Late 15th- or early 16th-century clearstorey 3-light windows of plain arches and one square-headed similar north nave window below (but pointed on inside) in the east bay. In the west bay a blocked pointed 14th-century doorway.

The lower and steeply pitched chancel roof decked with tiles stands out from the rest of the building. The north chancel wall is blind and concrete rendered but for a small square-headed cusped low-side window in the west bay, a partly blocked window in the west bay of the south walls has a stepped ledge inside, square-headed 2-light to the east bay. East window is a fine tall pointed Perpendicular 3-light.



The church interior looking east

The tower is still used for bell ringing, the ringing floor enclosed within a wooden screen within the pointed tower arch. Attached to this are photographs of the church showing the war damage. Looking east, the walls are bare except for the aisle and chancel which are whitewashed, plain glazing throughout gives the interior a soft and mature ambience.

The arcade of pointed arches appears to be of the early 14th century with hollow moulding to the arches, quatrefoil piers and moulded square bases (could these be earlier?) and circular caps. The tower cuts into the west column and was clearly inserted at a slight angle (the west edge of the curtilage is close, as noted already – is this the reason?), though the west window is aligned on the tower arch, ie is slightly asymmetrically placed in the wall.

As noted above the nave roof has concrete trusses, but the aisle has a late 15th- or early 16th-century structure. The floor of the nave is of concrete and boarding following the war damage, the nave seating is of poor quality (early 20th-century?) benches, brought here from elsewhere.

The south aisle however has benches with 16th-century ends, straight-topped and moulded with buttresses, perhaps contemporary with the open timber roof structure and the clearstorey. The aisle has an attractive uneven patchwork of (16th-century?) bricks, and a ledger with brasses, see monuments below. The sinking may be due to burial vaults. 14th-century piscina in the south wall.

The organ is located adjacent to the chancel arch on its south side. The chancel arch itself is of the same style and date as the arcade, but looks restored. String course above, above this again the Royal Arms. The chancel floor is of stone flags with several 17th- and 18th-century ledgers, mostly to the Lowndes family who are also well represented in the mural monuments. The choir stalls have attractively inlaid ends with floral and Eucharistic images, dated 1883. There is a simple piscina in the window ledge in the south wall, square aumbry opposite.

Furnishings and fittings:

Altar: Oak holy table with turned legs, 18th-century?

Reredos: None.

Pulpit: Octagonal pulpit with fielded panels, 18th-century but much restored.

Lectern: Wooden reading desk.

Other woodwork: There is a 17th-century chest in the south aisle with three carved panels, and a chair of possibly the same date in the chancel.

Font: 13th-century font, plain octagonal bowl on base with 4 slender shafts and remains of carving between.

Stained glass: None.

Monuments: A small but important collection, firstly a Royal Arms above the chancel arch square, painted on canvas in plain black wood; at the top, WmiR (William IV). On north nave wall, brass mounted on wood probably of Roger Keston, died 1409. In south aisle floor (not in chancel as it states in listing description) brasses to Thomas Chibnale died 1534 and wives within one ledger.

Several ledgers in chancel.

On north chancel wall 3 monuments, described from west to east:

- 17th-century tablet with faded Latin inscription to Samuel Cranmer (relative of Thomas?), Corinthian columns supporting entablature broken forward over columns and broken segmental pediment with inner scrolls and central cartouche of arms. The columns stand on a moulding broken forward under them and are supported on brackets of cherubs' heads between which is a small panel with white marble curved floral surround. The shafts of the columns, the frieze and the inscription panel are of black marble, the mouldings and pediment grey marble, and the caps and brackets white.
- In the centre is a monument to Margaret, wife of William Lowndes, probably by the same hand. An arched panel flanked by panelled pilasters, Sienna marble with white angles supporting cornice and broken pediment with central turn. Scrolls on outer sides of pilasters of red marble with white edges, and Sienna apron with white edges and central cartouche of arms.
- Monument to William Lowndes, 1773, of Astwood Bury has a white inscription panel in Sienna marble surround, cornice and grey marble curved top with central portrait medallion. The panel stands on a string with alternative flutings and roundels above a curved apron with central coat of arms. Signed *Vidler fecit*.

Various brass plaques.

Bells: There are three bells, the first one is inscribed 'Sancta Katerina Ora Pro Nobis', the second one 'Sit Nomen Domini Benedictum', both by John Walgrave, these are from the early 15th century and listed for preservation by the Council; the third was by James Keene in 1631. Good turret clock. Possibly important wooden bell-frame – ladder has woodworm (so not seen).

Organ: 2-manual organ which has been brought from elsewhere and rebuilt several times according to seemingly contradictory plaques attached to it – possibly worthy of research. There is also a small harmonium, neither apparently used for some time.

Communion plate: 1 cup of c 1570, and a 17th-century knife and fork (! Pevsner).

Registers: From 1666, kept at Buckingham CRO.

Communion rails: Oak, plain with frilly iron standards.

War memorials: Stone tablets in memory of lives lost during World Wars I and II in south aisle. Two war graves, one to Private S C Wright of the Military Police died 21st November 1943 and his brother A G Wright who died in June the same year in Japanese captivity; and J A Bacon, Royal Army Service Corps, November 3rd 1945.

Bibliography:

Pevsner, N, Williamson, E (1994). *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire*. RCHME 1913 *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Buckinghamshire: North* - Volume: 2 - Page: 57.

Other churches nearby:

Chicheley, St Lawrence: Grade I Medieval church with 18th-century embellishment and interior. 14th-century nave and north aisle, 15th-century central tower with exceptional 19th-century carved detail by William Oldfield, 16th-century clearstorey and two storey south porch, chancel dated 1708 on rainwater head. Rubble limestone with ashlar dressings to chancel, ironstone to tower. Flat lead roofs, tiles and stone coped gable to south porch. Battlemented parapets to nave and north aisle. Inside the tower has 18th-century ringers gallery, formed into rood loft with screen by J N Comper 1905. Tall tower arches and lierne vault above. 18th-century chancel screen, enriched plaster chancel ceiling and cornice, panelled dado, floor of black and white marble, arcaded reredos. Monuments include several to Cave family, 16th, 17th, 18th centuries, exceptional collection. Churchyard memorials since the 18th century. 2 miles south-west.

Sherington, St Laud: Grade I Medieval church. Nave, north aisle and crossing mid 13th-century, south aisle and porch mid 14th. Chancel rebuilt, upper part of central tower, clearstorey, nave and aisle timber roofs c1475. Limestone rubble and dressings. Lead roofs, but old plain tiles to chancel roof. Plain parapets to nave and aisles, battlemented to tower and west end. The plan consists of a 2 bay chancel with north vestry. Central tower, 4 bay aisled nave with 2-storey south porch. Perpendicular 3-light chancel windows. Central tower is of three storeys. Nave south aisle has two south windows of 3-lights with flowing elaborate tracery of c1330. Porch has stone vault with carved boss. 13th-century Piscine in north aisle, partly obscured by nave north wall, trefoil head. South aisle ogee-headed 14th-century triple sedilia in chancel. 15th-century font. 1783 brass 'spider' candelabrum, pulpit also 18th century. Listed lych-gate, churchyard memorials since the 18th century. 2½ miles west.

Assessment of significance: The church has considerable architectural significance and landscape value, a key component of the village, and considerable archaeological significance, as has the site. It has some ecological potential significance. The bells, clock, font, brasses, Coat of Arms, 17th- and 18th-century monuments and woodwork are of considerable significance. The other furnishings and fittings are of local historical significance as an ensemble.

Assessment of sustainability and potential for change: The building is in good condition and inherently sustainable in terms of its materials, and offers potentially useful space in the nave and tower space. Although the Council understands that previous suggestions to bring all community activities together in the

church have not been taken forward, the Council thought this approach might be reconsidered given the significance of this relatively small building, which is the architectural and historical heart of the village.

The Council's advice is not binding on the DAC or Chancellor and any changes would be subject to the granting of a faculty and usual consultation procedures.

Compiled by Joseph Elders 25th October 2011 after a visit to the site on 10th October 2011.

