



# SAINT LAURENCE PARISH CHURCH

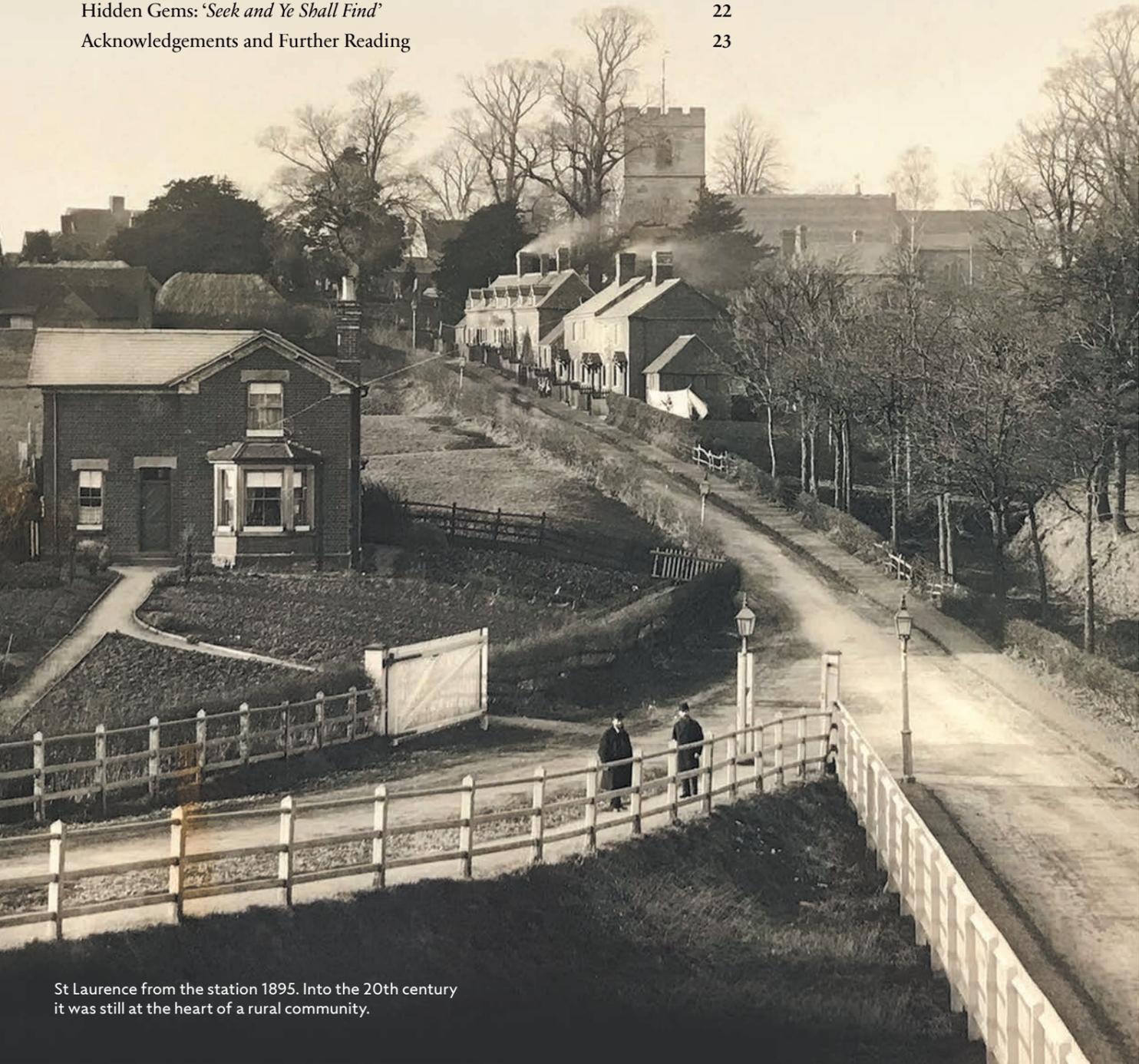
A Brief History and Guide



Stuart Andrew

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St Laurence from the station 1895. Into the 20th century it was still at the heart of a rural community.

# Introduction

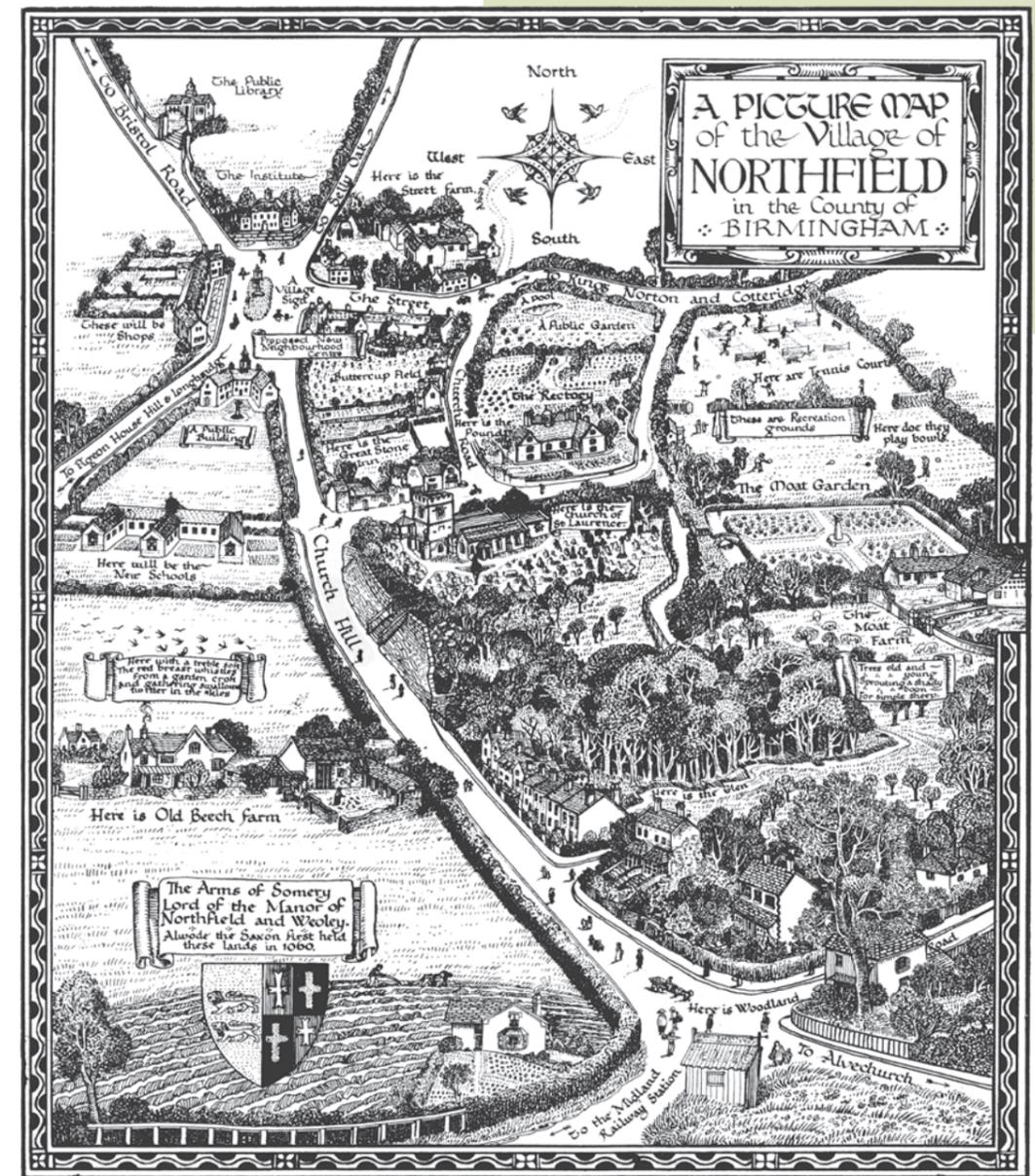
Saint Laurence Church is a Grade I listed building. It is one of only four remaining mediaeval churches in Birmingham, the others being in Kings Norton, Yardley and Sheldon. Until 1911, when Northfield became part of Greater Birmingham, it was in the Diocese of Worcester. For centuries it was at the heart of the old village and is now set in the Northfield Conservation Area. This guide describes the building of a church and the founding of a parish, from Norman times to present day.



Diocese of Birmingham



Diocese of Worcester



A picture map of the village of Northfield by Bernard Sleight and Ivy Ellis commissioned by Birmingham Civic Society in 1920.

# The Early Settlers



By the 9th century Anglo Saxon England was ruled by three dominant kingdoms – Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex. The British had been pushed westwards to Strathclyde, Wales and Cornwall.

Lesser kingdoms had been absorbed, often after a bloody struggle. One such was the Kingdom of Hwicce. They were West Saxons who followed the River Severn north from the Bristol Channel and commanded the land that we now know as Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and parts of Warwickshire. In the C7th they were defeated at the Battle of Crecenester and their former kingdom became known as West Mercia.

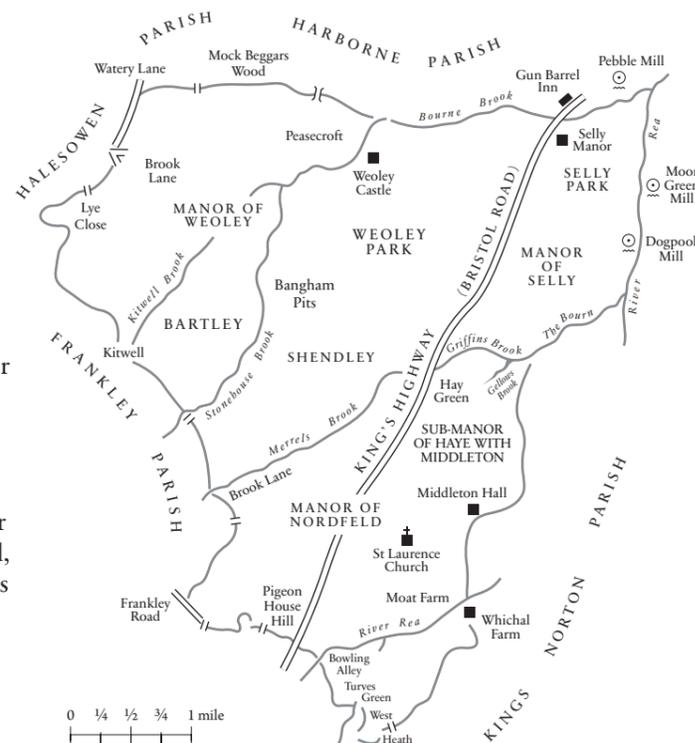
Northfield stems from the Saxon *Nord Feld* – meaning open land to the north of an existing settlement, probably Bromsgrove. It is almost certain that the earliest settlers here were from that Saxon Hwicce tribe.

# The Norman Conquest

After the Norman conquest of 1066, William I defined the feudal system. The king, to whom all land belonged, gave estates to his barons in return for military service. The barons granted manors to knights on similar terms. From this system developed the parish of Northfield.

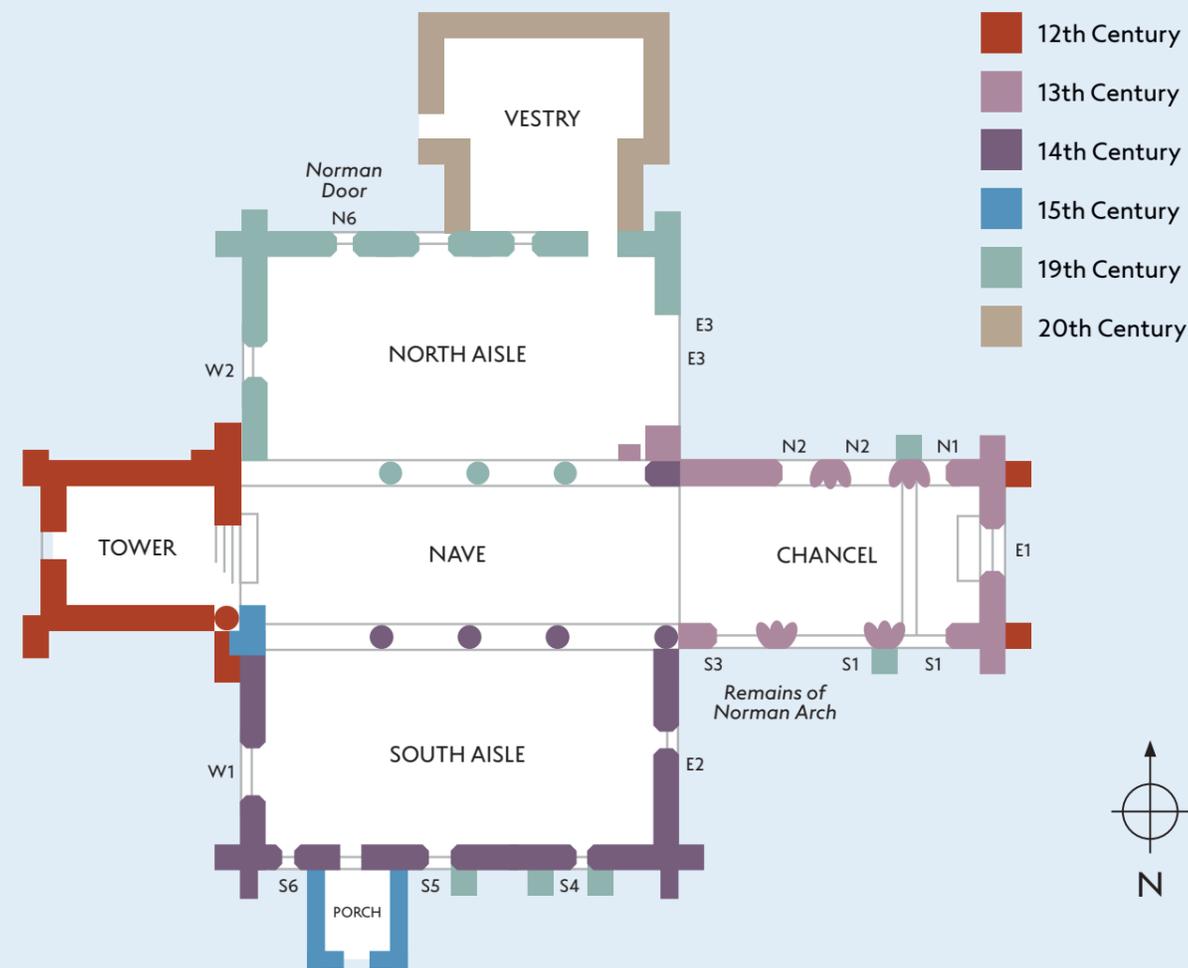
William Fitz Ansculf became Baron of Dudley. Among his vast estates were the neighbouring manors of Northfield, Selly and Weoley. All were confiscated from former Saxon owners. The latter two were given to knights, but William kept Northfield for himself, which is the principal reason for the building of a Norman church on this site. The three manors formed a vast parish of over 6000 acres. It lasted until the Victorian period, after which it gradually became seven parishes where there was once but one.

St Mary's, Selly Oak 1862; St Michael's, Cofton Hackett 1880; St Gabriel's, Weoley Castle 1933; St Bartholomew's, Allen's Cross 1938; St Michael's, Bartley Green 1956; St David's, Shenley Green 1961.



The old parish of Northfield with approximate locations of places.

# The Building of a Church



## The First Church

The Domesday Book of 1086 records a priest living in Northfield. As Mercia became a Christian kingdom in the second half of the C7th and St Chad established Lichfield Cathedral in AD 669, it is highly probable that there was a Saxon church in Northfield. Of that church, probably wooden, there are no remains or records.

## The Norman Church C12th

A substantial church, consisting of chancel, nave, south aisle and probably a tower, was built c1170. The only true signs of that church are the Norman doorway re-set in the Victorian north aisle and

the remains of an arch springing from the meeting of the chancel and east end of the south aisle. The foundations and some stone work of the chancel and tower may well also belong to this period.

## Early English Rebuilding C13th

The chancel and lower stages of the tower were rebuilt c1230 in the Early English style, typified by the change from rounded Norman arches to pointed lancet windows.

## English Decorated Rebuilding C14th

The nave and south aisle were rebuilt c1320. The octagonal pillars separating the nave from the aisle and the Y shaped stone tracery of the windows are good examples of the simple English Decorated style.

## Late C14th – Early C15th Additions

The final period of mediaeval building saw the addition of a fine wood and sandstone porch to the south aisle and the upper stage of the tower, which was to become the bell chamber.

## Victorian C19th North Aisle

Due to the rapid expansion of Northfield, a very sympathetic north aisle was added 1898-1900, with three nave mediaeval windows and the Norman door re-sited in the outer north wall.

## Vestries C20th

The late 1950's saw the addition of much needed vestries, built with the same durable Hollington sandstone as Coventry Cathedral.



The view from Rectory Road showing Chancel, Nave, North Aisle, Vestries and Victorian Lych-Gate.



### The Norman Door c1170

The door was part of the original C12th church and is the oldest piece of architecture in the city. Originally it was situated in the north wall of the nave. It survived a C14th rebuilding of the nave. When the north aisle was added in 1898 it was carefully re-sited in the outer wall, along with three mediaeval windows.

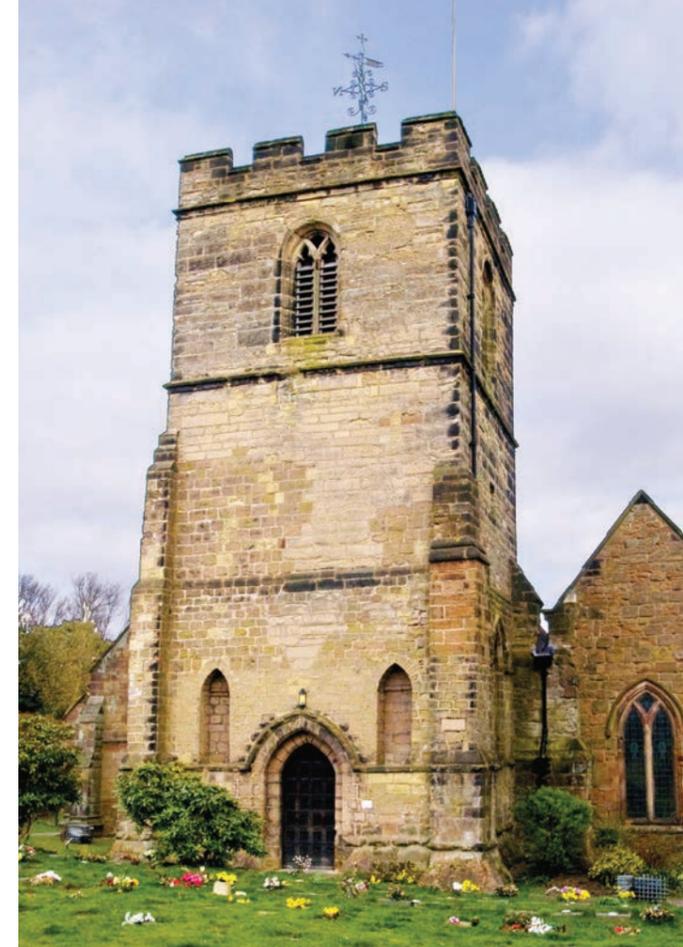
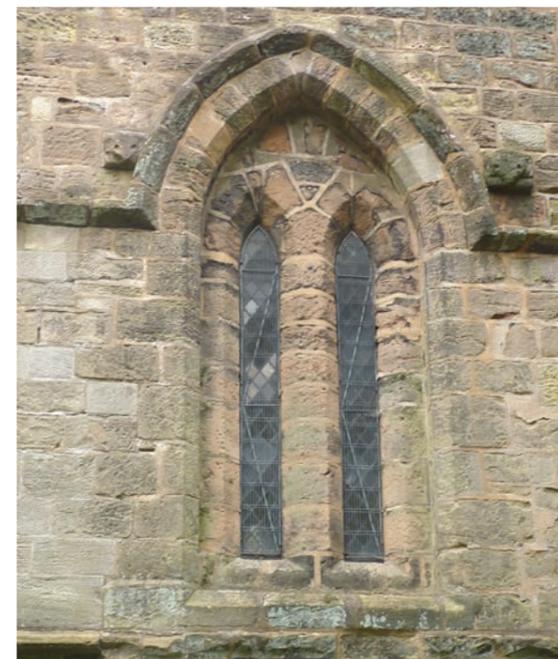
Note the moulded arch over the door and the “beak head” and chevron decorations on the door jambs.



### The Tower and South Aisle

The 12th century Norman church probably had a tower of some sort. Opinion is divided as to how much of the original tower has survived. Perhaps the foundation and some of the stonework, but the majority of the lower two stages date from a rebuilding in the early C13th.

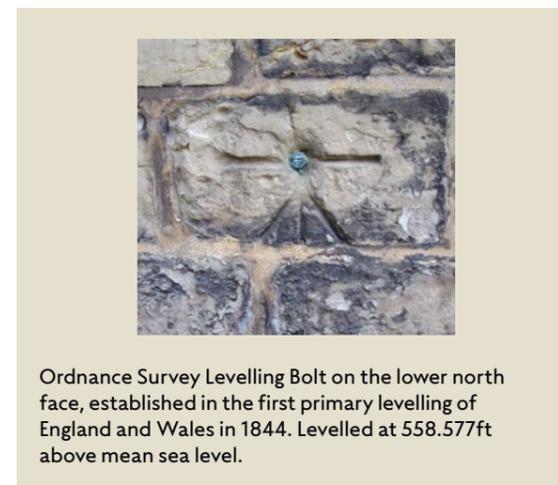
The lancet windows to the north and south, the pointed doorway and niches to the side, which once held religious statuary, are typical of the Early English building style. The upper belfry stage with its louvre windows was added in the late C14th or early C15th. The north face has a Victorian clock and the tower is topped with a replica weather vane (1984), replacing the Georgian original.



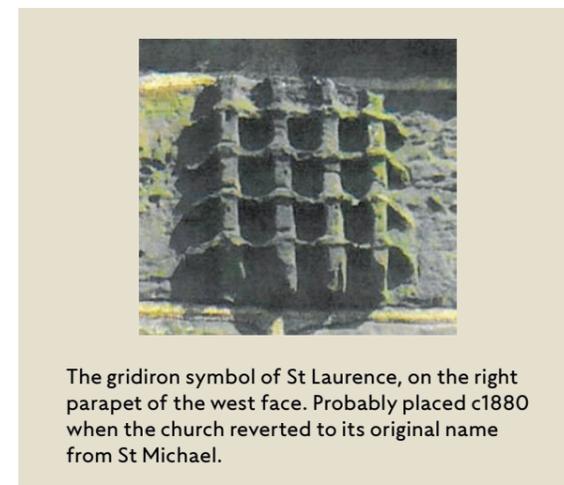
View from the west.

The south aisle, rebuilt in C14th, has typical Y shaped window stone tracery. Between the aisle and tower is a large buttress that once housed a staircase to the upper stage.

The C13th lancet windows to the south and north faces of the tower have dripstones above the arch, a feature of all of our windows. To the side are two inset figures, probably taken from the original Norman church. Although much weathered, particularly to the north, they do seem to represent animal heads.



Ordnance Survey Levelling Bolt on the lower north face, established in the first primary levelling of England and Wales in 1844. Levelled at 558.577ft above mean sea level.



The gridiron symbol of St Laurence, on the right parapet of the west face. Probably placed c1880 when the church reverted to its original name from St Michael.



Dinah Withers outside the porch of St Laurence church c1890.

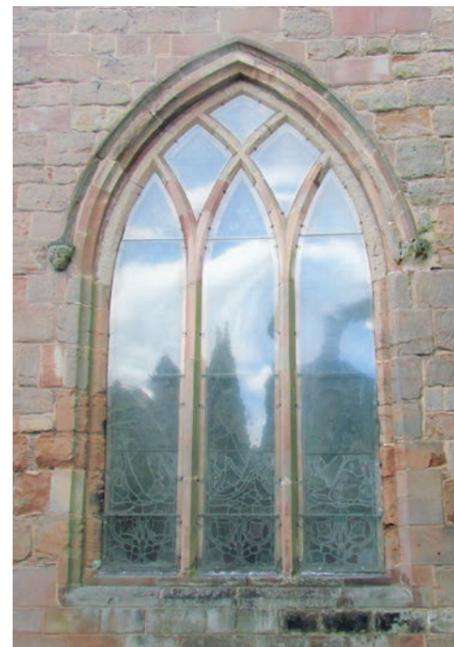
Withers is an old Northfield name and often appeared in parish registers. It has been suggested that Dinah Withers was the local midwife.

## The Porch to the South Door 1890

The fine porch was added in the late C14th. It has a sandstone base, oak frame and plain barge boarding. Inside are mediaeval benches as this was also a place for meetings, notices and for burial and marriage services. *"Five husbands have I had at the church door,"* said Chaucer's wife of Bath.

## South Aisle East Window C14th

The early English Decorated style is typified by Y shaped stone tracery to the windows. Here we have the largest window of the aisle with a double Y, an intersecting tracery. Behind the drainpipe, springing from the chancel and aisle, is the remains of a Norman arch in a green tinged sandstone. In all probability it was part of an original C12th south aisle, corroborated when the current aisle floor was excavated in 2021.



A view from the east, with the huge lancet windows and clasping buttresses of the chancel, the south and north aisles and the tower. The dripstones above the chancel and south aisle windows have much eroded carved heads at their ends, possibly of kings and queens.



The view from the tower to the East window. The font, pews, brass eagle lectern, pulpit fashioned from mediaeval chancel screen panels and the current screen all are part of an ambitious Victorian re-ordering.

## The Nave and Tympanum

The nave existed in its current size in the original C12th Norman church. It was rebuilt during the enlargement of the south aisle in the early C14th.

It is separated from the south aisle by four bays with octagonal pillars and pointed arches. The north aisle was added during the Victorian expansion of 1898-1900. The pillars here are of a quatrefoil design. The Norman door and three mediaeval windows of the original nave were dismantled and re-set in the outer wall of the new aisle.

The roof is mediaeval, of a similar construction to the chancel. Purlins, wall and ridge beams run the length of the nave. Above each column is a triangular arrangement of principal rafters and tie beams, further strengthened by collars and arch braces. The wall beams are decorated with rectangular mouldings, known as billeting. They are a feature throughout the church, unusual to be so widely used.



Between the nave and chancel is a very rare arrangement - a mediaeval wooden Tympanum, resting on a tie beam. Plasterwork, probably placed after the reformation of 1536-7, was removed in the 1940s to reveal traces of an original doom painting. It was a portrayal of the Last Day of Judgement, a very catholic reminder of the joy of Heaven and the agony of Hell.

Eye witnesses report the finding of decayed mediaeval figures hidden behind the plasterwork. The rood tableau figures of Christ on the Cross, Mary and John were placed on the tie beam in 1956.

**The Nativity Window, South Aisle (S6)**

Regarded as The Orphans' Window. Ordered by E.G. Jepson Esq, Leeds. The brass plaque below the window reads:

In remembrance of their orphaned childhood watched over in this parish.  
ANN HANNAH JEPSON and JOHN BOLLARD WILSON her brother have erected this window, Christmas 1867.



The Nativity Window, South Aisle

**The Parish Chest and the Care of the Poor**

The church has always had a role to play in the care of the poor. After the closure of the monasteries in 1537, this became an increased burden and the Poor Law Acts of 1597 and 1601 made them the legal responsibility of the parish.

The Parish Officers, elected from the local residents, governed the parish under the incumbent. Every man had to take his turn in one of the offices – Churchwarden, Overseer or Constable. The annual Vestry Meeting agreed the poor rate to be levied on all the inhabitants of the parish. The wardens were responsible for the fabric and maintenance of the church. The overseers collected the alms and distributed them to the old, sick, poor and orphaned of the parish. The constables maintained law and order and removed any vagrant that might become a burden on the parish. Well into the C19th, the Parish was the forerunner of the Welfare State.



Above: The Parish Chest of 1789, replacing one stolen in the previous year. It would have held records and probably alms money. Note the three locks, held by separate officers of the church as security. Found and restored in 2010.

Right: Extract from *Chronicles of the Parish Chest*, 1958.

It is clear from these excerpts that in those days a "local health act" and "local assistance board" was run by the village people and that among themselves they cared for their less fortunate neighbours.

When sickness came to a villager the Overseer helped, as can be seen from the following entries in 1682

	s. d.
"Pd for tendinge Bess Bates childe	0 6
pd for maintenance for her childe	1 0
pd for one cake for Mrs Middlemore for cureigne Bess Bates childe	1 0
Pd for one shroud for Bess Bates childe	2 6
Pd for layinge forth Bess Bates childe	8
Given to Bess Bates when her children were sick	1 0
Pd for ye Buryall of her child	1 0"

The Churchwardens had a wider duty of charity than merely for their own parishioners and in William Squire's account for 1699 there are these recorded payments :-

	s. d.
"given to John Tombs & Henry Cook merchants taken by Turkis pirates	1 6
Given to Joseph Cragg & three more seamen having suffered great imprisonment	1 6
Given to Thomas Jones Master of a ship the ship being cast away	1 0
Given to Jo Colle and Rob Spencer of Boulton in Lestershire their houses being burnt	0 6
Given to Tim Marshall & Jo Gray they being decayed by the fall of Colemines	0 6
Given to Ma. Huddames, Eliz. Beringfield & Su. Haircood their losses by an inundation	1 0
Given to John Osborn & Henery, Merchants taken by Turkish Pirates	1 0"



Above: The complete and unspoiled C13th Early English chancel, with the high altar, choir stalls and stained glass part of a Victorian re-ordering.

Right: The Lepers' Squint



**The Chancel and Sanctuary**

Sir Nikolaus Pevsner in his renowned *Buildings of England*, 1951, wrote: "The glory of the church is the complete and unspoiled C13th chancel." In the church's Statement of Significance it is classed as exceptional, of national importance.

The original Norman chancel was replaced c1230 in the Early English style. It is typified by triple lancet windows with moulded heads and flanking shafts. They are linked by segmental moulded arches. A single lancet window is located in the south side with a low sill. Originally, this may have been the entrance to a long lost Norman chapel. To the left is a blocked priest's doorway, clearly seen from the outside.

The raised altar, encaustic tiles by Minton, choir stalls, chancel screen and stained glass windows are all part of the Victorian return to a pre-reformation style of church ordering.

There is a low sided window on the north side of the chancel, now blocked. It was known locally as "The Lepers' Squint." As there is no known record of lepers in Northfield, a more likely explanation is that a window or shutters were opened at the celebration of the mass so that farm workers could hear the Sanctus bell being rung.

St Laurence chancel has few memorials as the landlords were absentees. The brass floor plate is dedicated to Dame Margaret Clarke and later to Rector Henry Clarke, on his death in 1880.

**Revd Henry Clarke and The Oxford Movement**

Following the Reformation of 1537, the founding of the Church of England and Cromwell's Commonwealth of 1649-1660, all traces of Catholicism were swept away. Protestant forms of worship required services around the pulpit and the communion table rather than altars and Masses behind closed chancel screens. Churches became plainer and filled with heavy Elizabethan, Jacobean and Georgian woodwork.

**The Oxford Movement**

The Oxford Movement was led by John Keble in the early Victorian period. It emphasised the Catholic teaching and sacramental nature of the church, reflecting a pre-Reformation style of worship.

**Revd Henry Clarke, 1804-1880**

Over the centuries many rectors have left their mark on this church, but perhaps none more so than Henry Clarke. He was appointed curate in 1829 and then rector in 1834.

He was a keen follower of the Oxford Movement and restored the status of the chancel and sanctuary, with its separation from the nave with a chancel screen and the focus of worship at the high altar. He began the process of installing stained glass and virtually all of the fixtures, fittings and furniture you see today are driven by his vision.

At his death in 1880 he had served the parish for 51 years, a remarkable achievement.

The inscription on his south aisle memorial window reads:

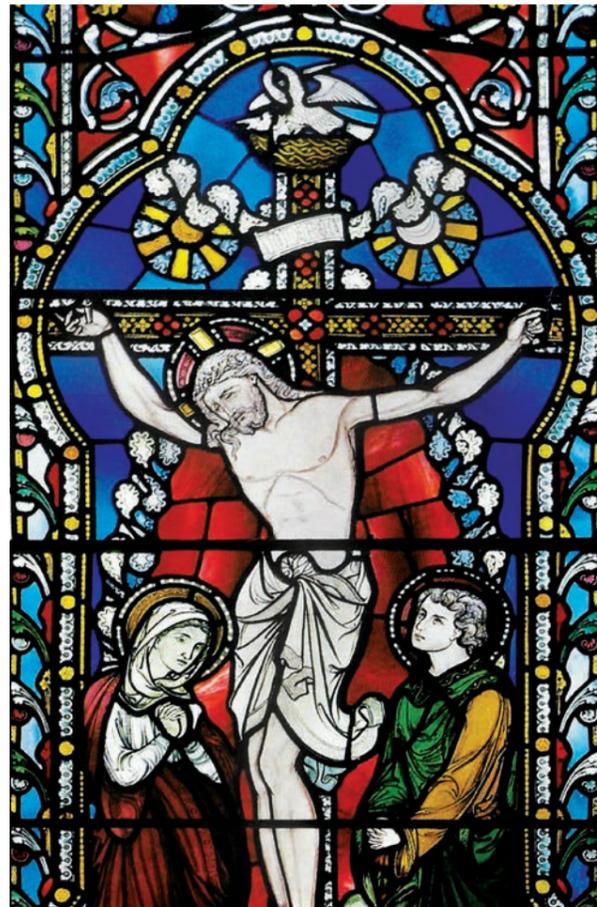
*"Lord now lettest thy servant depart in peace. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation."*

Luke 2.29



Above: Encaustic tiles by Minton. The revival of a mediaeval technique.

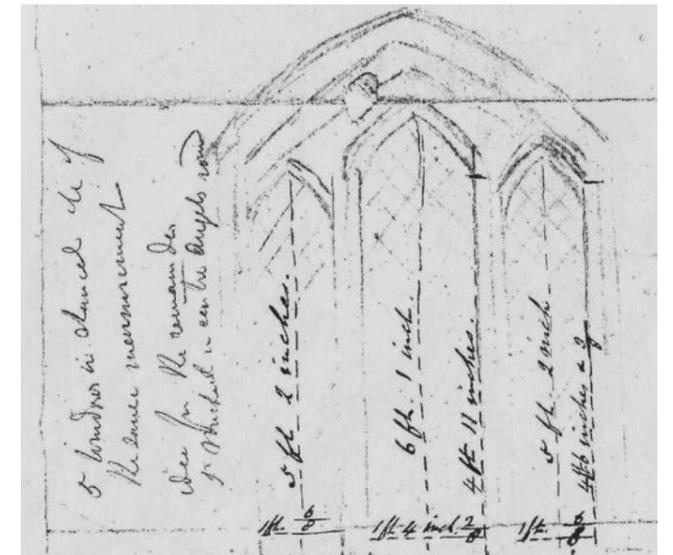
Right: Centre medallion of the East window by Hardman's 1870. Commissioned by Henry Clarke in memory of the parents of his wife, Agnes. The scene mirrors the tympanum tableau.



**St Laurence, Hardman's and Pugin: the Victorian glazing of a church**

Right is a drawing and measurements of the proposed glazing of S1 window in the chancel, taken from a letter sent by Henry Clarke to Mr Hardman on July 3rd 1849. Annotated notes describe the potential subject matter. Could they be by Hardman, or even Pugin himself?

The final subject matter shows St Michael surrounded by seraphim and angels. For 100 years from c1770 the church was attributed to St Michael. Henry Clarke simply called it Northfield Church. It regained its original dedication to St Laurence, possibly at the time of Clarke's death.



**Letter of March 1 1850:**

Mr Clarke hopes that when Mr Hardman sends the window for Northfield Church, he will send with it a wire grating to defend it from the outside. (from) Northfield.

**Letter of March 20 1850:**

My Dear Sir, I am obliged to you for sending the window which is satisfactorily put up and is much admired.

**Rough Order Book entry:**

Pugin Cartoon Account  
March 12th, 1850 £28. 0. 0d

As Pugin died in 1852, this is the only one of our windows that can be directly attributed to him.



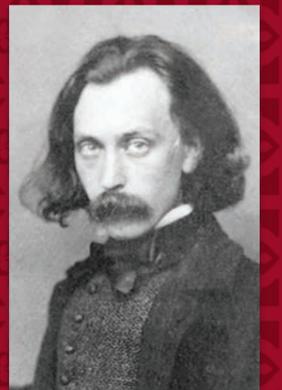
S1 window. St Michael with angels and seraphim.



**A.W. Pugin, 1812-1852 J.H. Powell, 1827-1895**

Augustus Welby Pugin was arguably the finest Gothic Revival architect and designer of C19th. His work in Birmingham includes St Chad's Cathedral. In 1838 he persuaded John Hardman, a button maker, to open an ecclesiastical metalwork factory.

In 1845 they began to manufacture stained glass. After his death in 1852, Hardman's nephew, J.H. Powell, became the principal designer for the Hardman Studio. Their work has filled St Laurence and countless churches across the world.



**The art of stained glass**

This mediaeval art was all but lost after the Reformation of 1537 and a break with Roman Catholicism. The Victorian Gothic revival saw the second great age of ecclesiastical stained glass making. The glass symbolises Christ as "Light of the World" and gives a pictorial interpretation of the Scriptures, important at times when few people could read.

A design, or cartoon, is drawn on paper. Coloured glass is cut to shape using a grozing iron. Detail is painted onto the glass with black pigment and re-fired. H shaped lead strips (calms) are soldered to join the glass, then a cement is injected to make it water tight. Metal bars, ferramenta, are placed in the window openings to hold the glass panels, which are held with copper wire.

**Restoration**

Over the decades glass dulls and the black pigment detail fades, particularly on faces.

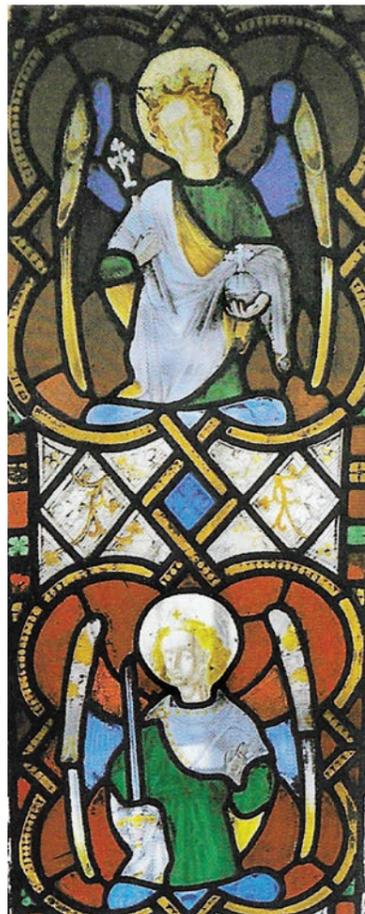
The 1990s saw a major renovation of much of our glass by the Hardman Studio. The windows in the outer wall of the north aisle, yet to be restored, clearly show how they deteriorate with age.



David Cowan repainting detail at Hardman's Studios 1995.



S4 window. Simeon and Anna at the Presentation in the Temple.



Pugin Window undergoing restoration at Hardman's Studios, 1995.



Top and above: Partial restoration of the Pugin window.

**The Chancel Glass: The key moments of the life of Christ**

Some churches have artistically finer and grander windows than ours, but few have a more consistent and planned subject matter. The driving force was Revd Henry Clarke, with all but two of Hardman's windows being completed in his lifetime.

Windows are often made up of several sections, known as lights. The window is described by the direction in which it faces and by the subject matter of the individual light. The plan of St Laurence church on P5 shows the letter and number of the windows.

In the Chancel windows you see the key moments in the life of Christ: Annunciation; Baptism; Teaching; Healing; Miracles; Transfiguration; Passion; Rising in Glory and Ascension.

E1, 1870. Passion of Christ in medallions.

S1, 1850. St Michael with angels and seraphim.

S2, 1853. Wedding at Cana; Ascension; Jesus healing the sick man of the palsy.

S3, Date unknown: Transfiguration of Our Lord with Moses and Elijah.

N3, 1859. Good Samaritan; Baptism of Jesus by John; Healing of the lepers.

N2, 1859. Lake Galilee: Jesus walking on water; Annunciation; Raising of Lazarus.

N1, 1853. Jesus heals the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue; Christ in Glory; Jesus heals the widow's son.



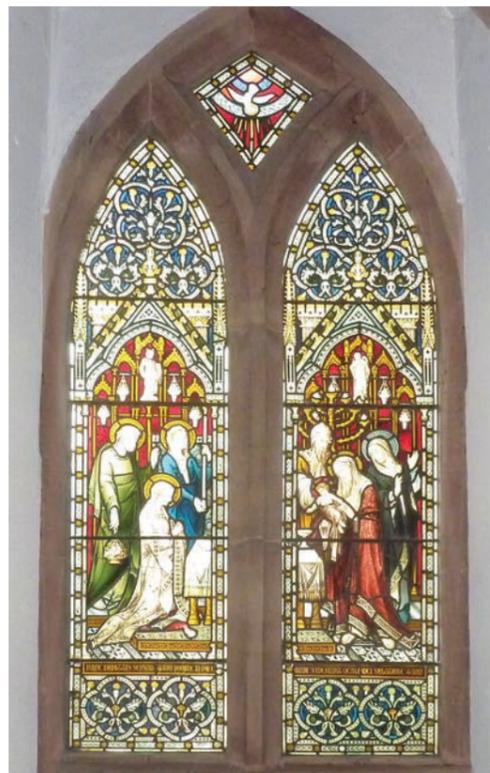
Jesus at Gethsemane before his arrest.



Peter denies Jesus.



N2 Lake Galilee. Left to right: Jesus walks on the water; annunciation; the raising of Lazarus.



**The South Aisle**

At the beginning of C14th Roger de Somery was the tyrannical Baron of Dudley. Records state that, “He bears down on us harder than the King... He besets our houses in order to do murder.” On his death in 1322, the estate was divided between his sisters, Joan and Margaret. Joan took up residence at Weoley Castle and Margaret at Dudley Castle.

This was an age of the Cult of the Virgin Mary and it is probable that Joan de Somery had the aisle rebuilt to establish a Mary Chapel. The piscina, a basin set in the outer wall to wash the holy vessels, and an aumbry to the right to hold the bread and wine suggest that this was the case.

The aisle is of the simple English Decorated style. The Presentation in the Temple window (left) with classic Y shaped stone tracery and the octagonal columns of the arcade are typical of early C14th church building.

The base of the column at the east end shows rough cast stone corresponding to the height of the chancel step. The columns at the west end have only dressed stone. Clearly, the floor level has been altered, possibly during the Victorian re-ordering, sloping downwards to the east to give greater importance to the chancel.



Piscina set in the outer wall.

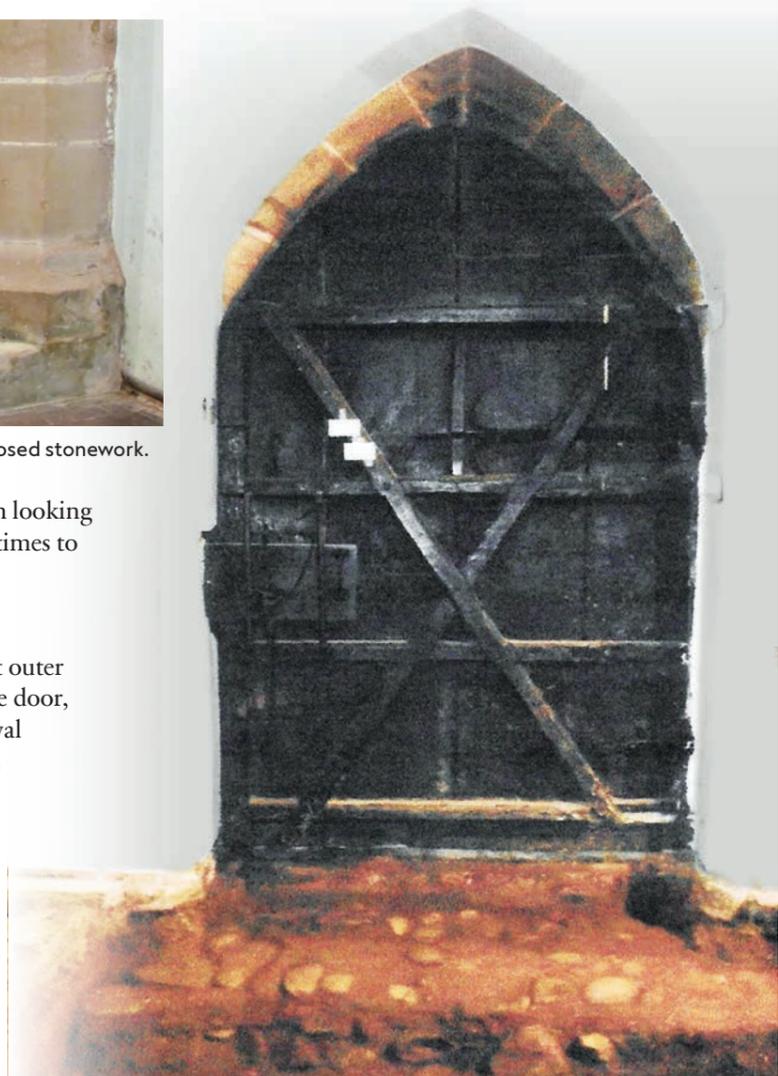


East end column exposed stonework.

The outer wall has a very significant lean, clearly seen when looking along the length. Buttresses were added during Victorian times to prevent its collapse and also to the chancel.

The excavations for a new internal porch in 2021 revealed foundations of cobbled stone inside the line of the current outer wall, clear evidence of the existence of a previous aisle. The door, metalwork and huge lock may well date from the mediaeval period. A later wooden “draught excluder” panel has been added to the outer face. The internal glass porch was completed in 2022.

Right: Excavation of 2021 showing foundations of an original C12th south aisle.



**The South Aisle Glass**

As well as illustrating the early life of Christ from Annunciation to Presentation in the Temple, the windows are a remarkable tribute to the Clarke family: E2, 1863. Henry Clarke’s Father, Major General Sir William Clarke Bart, who died at Seringapatam in the East Indies 1808. S4, 1881. Revd Henry Clarke, after 51 years of service to St Laurence. S5, 1907. Henry Clarke’s wife, Agnes Mary. The Annunciation window (below) raised some questions as it was a change in Hardman’s style.



Was it in fact by Kempe as it resembles his north aisle work? The answer was provided by Hardman’s Order Book entry: “Canopy to be late Century XV/silvery white. Blessed Virgin Mary both hands crossed across the breasts or both outstretched.”



E2, 1863. Adoration of the Magi and shepherds; tracery of angels with harps and lutes (above). S4, 1881. Presentation in the temple: fulfilment of the promise to Simeon. S5, 1907. Annunciation with Mary and Gabriel. S6, Christmas 1868. Nativity. Regarded as our “Orphans’ Window.” W1, 1976. Modern decorative glazing of rectangular patterns of tinted antique glass with angels executed in silver stain, replacing glass vandalised in 1975. Original subject: Holy women at the sepulchre 1866. Two medallions representing the Holy Eucharist were added in 2010 by Hardman, their final work for St Laurence before ceasing trading.



The medallions, representing the Holy Eucharist, (above) were placed in W1 modern window in 2010. They were the inspiration for the glass etching on the internal porch doors in 2022.

Above the porch is a fine C18th Royal Coat of Arms, the symbol of the monarch as Defender of the Faith.

## The Tower

There was probably a tower of some sort in the original Norman church, but the two lower stages date predominantly from a rebuilding at the start of the C13th. The tower floor is accessed from the nave by a huge pointed arch, with three chamfered arches and a hood moulding, terminating to the right in a fine mediaeval head. The left side is obscured by a buttress, probably added when the staircase was closed off.



The arched entrance to the base of the tower.



The remains of a stone staircase to the upper tower.

The lancet windows in the north and south walls are typical of the period. The upper floor was reached by a stone staircase set into the buttress between the south aisle and tower. It has been blocked, probably when the final stage was added in the late C14th or early C15th, but remains can be seen in the south east corner.

## The Bells

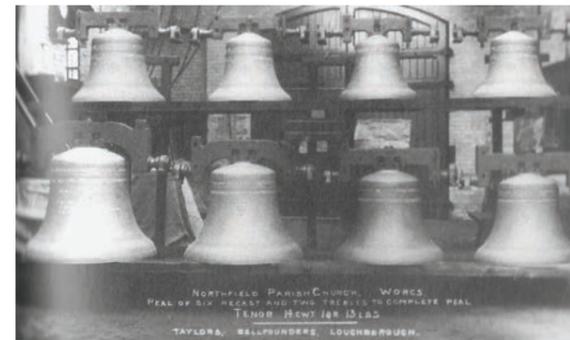
*"I to the church the living call,  
And to the grave do summon all."*

The C14th tower had a bell cote set above the west door. The blocked diamond shaped opening above the door almost certainly once housed a bell. It was clearly often tolled from outside the door, as seen by the grooves in the arch, created by the pulling of a rope.

By 1552, three bells had been placed in the upper stage. Two more were added before being recast and made up to six in 1730 by Joseph Smith of Edgbaston. The bells saw great service for almost 200 years, until in 1923 it was decided to recast again and add two more. This time Taylors of Loughborough were given the contract. The wooden frame of 1637 was adapted to take the additional bells. The original inscriptions were retained and the ring was made up to eight.



Grooves worn by the rope from a bell once hung above the door.



The eight bells recast by Taylors of Loughborough 1923.

## The Millennium Bells

The eight bells of 1923 were hung on the original wooden frame of 1637 in the upper stage of the tower and were rung from a middle chamber. By the end of the C20th the frame had deteriorated badly and, despite repair work, was beginning to move the tower walls. English Heritage insisted that the wooden frame must remain in place, so it was decided that a steel frame was to be placed in the ringing chamber below.

Once again Taylors of Loughborough, the last surviving bell founders in the United Kingdom, were given the job of removing the bells and taking them to the foundry to be renovated.

On March 4th, 1999, two further bells were cast, giving St Laurence a ring of ten, very unusual in a church of this size. They were hung from the new steel frame below the old wooden frame, meaning that it was no longer possible to ring from the middle chamber of the tower. The bells are now rung from the ground floor, giving the congregation sight of this ancient art in action.

Each bell is attached to a large wooden wheel which pivots on the frame. A rope is tied to the wheel spokes, run partly round the rim and falls through holes and pulleys to a new steel guide frame in the base of the tower.



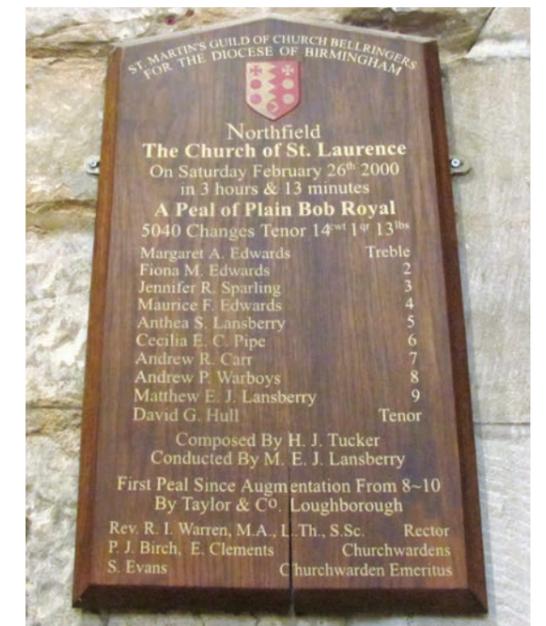
The new steel frame with bells and wheels and the C17th wooden frame still in its original place above.



The bell ropes are dropped through the roof and held in a safe position in the frame. They are lowered by a rope and pulley "spider" when they are to be rung.



The casting of two new bells by Taylors of Loughborough. A new Treble and Second, March 4th 1999.



The Millennium Peal Board. The St Laurence Ringers are affiliated to the prestigious St Martin's Guild.

## The North Aisle

The north aisle was added in 1898-1900 by the noted architect, George Bodley. It is built in C14th style to match the south aisle, but with more elaborate quatrefoil columns and moulded arches. The Norman doorway and the three windows of the original nave were moved stone by stone and rebuilt in the aisle north wall. The windows to the east and west ends are new, but in a sympathetic style.

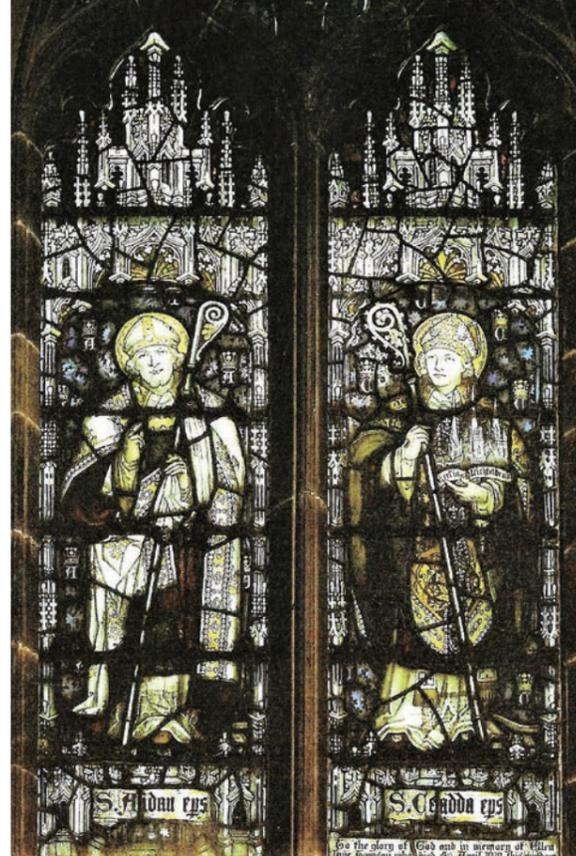
The most prominent C20th additions are the First World War memorial, the oak panelling and the St Laurence altar. The organ of 1937 was donated by Lord Austin in memory of his only son, killed in action during the war. In the 1940s it was moved to the base of the tower and was then rebuilt in 1983 in its current position, making use of an instrument from the redundant church of St Jude, Hanley. The vestries date from 1959.

## The Windows by Hardman and Kempe

Henry Clarke's vision for displaying the life of Christ within the windows was completed in 1870, with His appearance to St Thomas and the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles.

The "Saints Windows" at the west and east ends are by the Kempe Studio. They chart the return of Christianity to England after centuries of invasion.

Charles Eamer Kempe (1837-1907) was a contemporary of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and was one of the great glass makers of the late Victorian period. He was much influenced by C15th glass making, with its use of silver wash, few but vibrant colours and often with pearls decorating the robes. The St Augustine and St Aidan windows have the Kempe Studio wheatsheaf motif on the lower left side, against the stonework.



W2 St Aidan and St Chad, 1912.



The St Laurence Chapel and organ, 1941.



E3, St Laurence. Martyred in Rome, AD258.

## Hardman's Windows

**N6, 1870.** Descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles; Our Lord's appearance to St Thomas.

**N5, 1878.** Elisha multiplies the widow's oil; Disciple at Joppa named Tabitha or Dorcas, raised by Peter. Both representing charitable works.

**N4, 1870.** Our Lord among the doctors in the temple; Our Lord in the house of Martha and Mary.

## Kempe Studio Windows

**W2, 1912.** St Aidan and St Ceadda (St Chad)  
In AD635 Aidan established a monastery on Lindisfarne and brought Christianity to Northumbria. His pupil, Chad, came to Lichfield in AD669 and became the first Bishop of the Midlands.

## E3. St Augustine; St Laurence; St Wulstan

Laurence was a Deacon in Rome before the Empire became Christian in AD313. He was martyred for his faith on a gridiron in AD258. Augustine arrived in Kent from Rome in AD597 and established Canterbury Cathedral. He was known as Bishop to the English. Wulstan was Bishop of Worcester at the time of the Norman Conquest and became the last Saxon bishop to retain his seat.

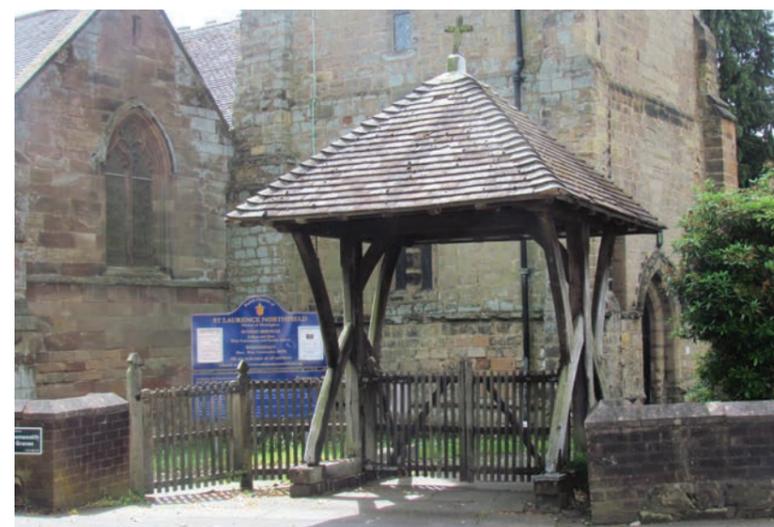
The ancient trackway from Bordesley Abbey, Redditch, to Halesowen Abbey climbed steeply up Church Hill through what was an ancient "hollow way." The churchyard wall with its steps is Grade II listed and is designed to retain a level churchyard to the west of the tower. Its age is uncertain but the yew trees either side of the gate date from C12th. On the hill below and opposite are C18th nailers' cottages, a terrace of Victorian houses and the church school of 1837, now apartments. All are part of the Northfield Conservation Area.



Church Hill with the churchyard wall and steps 1921.

The churchyard is approached from the north, past the C17th Village Pound and Great Stone Inn, a C15th timber framed building with a C18th brick skin. Entry to the churchyard is through the lychgate (*below*), with its oak frame and tiled roof. Lych is the Saxon word for corpse. The gate was the place where coffins were rested while waiting for the priest and where prayers were said before entering the churchyard.

The churchyard has been used as a burial ground for centuries and continues to be so. We maintain one World War 1 and fifteen World War 2 Commonwealth graves. There are many handsome headstones, the oldest dating from the early

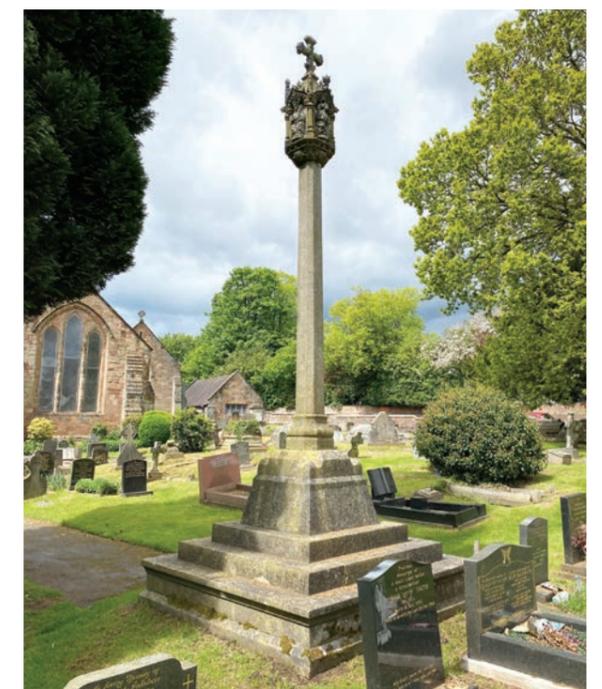


eighteenth century. Either side of the pathway to the north east of the chancel are a number of fine table tombs, some to Victorian benefactors.

Among them were: the Elkington families, pioneers of electro plated silver; John Fallows, noted architect and auctioneer; Thomas Shutt Stock, who sold land to George Cadbury to build his Bournville factory. The most notable memorial is that to Revd Henry Clarke, curate from 1829 to 1834 and then Rector until his death in 1880, fifty one years of service to the church in all. It was designed by the noted architect J.L. Pearson and was erected in 1884. On top of the column are the stonework statuettes of St Laurence, St Patrick, St Chad and St Thomas.



Table tomb of Thomas Shutt Stock, churchwarden and wealthy benefactor, 1824-1905.



Memorial to Revd Henry Clarke, 1804-1880, Rector of St Laurence, 1834-1880.

# Hidden Gems: "Seek and ye shall find"



Revd Henry Clarke memorial.

**Kempe Studio Motif**  
Charles Kempe added a trademark wheat sheaf to his glass. (North Aisle, St Augustine). After his death in 1907, his nephew, Walter Tower, took over and added a black tower. (North Aisle, St Aiden). Both motifs are bottom left by the stonework and above a black glazing bar.



South Aisle east window, much eroded. There are better preserved figures in the outer porch and on the tower arch.



One of two C12th yew trees flanking the entrance from Church Hill, now blocked.



St Lawrence was a Deacon in Rome. The Prefect demanded that Laurence should bring him the treasures of the church. Laurence gave away the wealth to the needy and returned with the poor, sick and homeless of the city. He declared that they were the real treasures of the Christian Church. He was martyred in AD258 by roasting on a gridiron, which became his saintly symbol. (North Aisle).



Priest's door to the chancel. Now blocked on the inside.



Above: Carved figures on a priest's chair: The baptism of Jesus. (Chancel Step). Right: Carved figure on the First World War Memorial. (North Aisle).



St Laurence Church and the Great Stone Inn, c1900.

## Acknowledgements and Further Reading

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- Shirley Evans: *The Windows of St Laurence Church, Northfield* (1995).
- Chris Rice: *Northfield Old Village A Brief History and Guide* (2022).

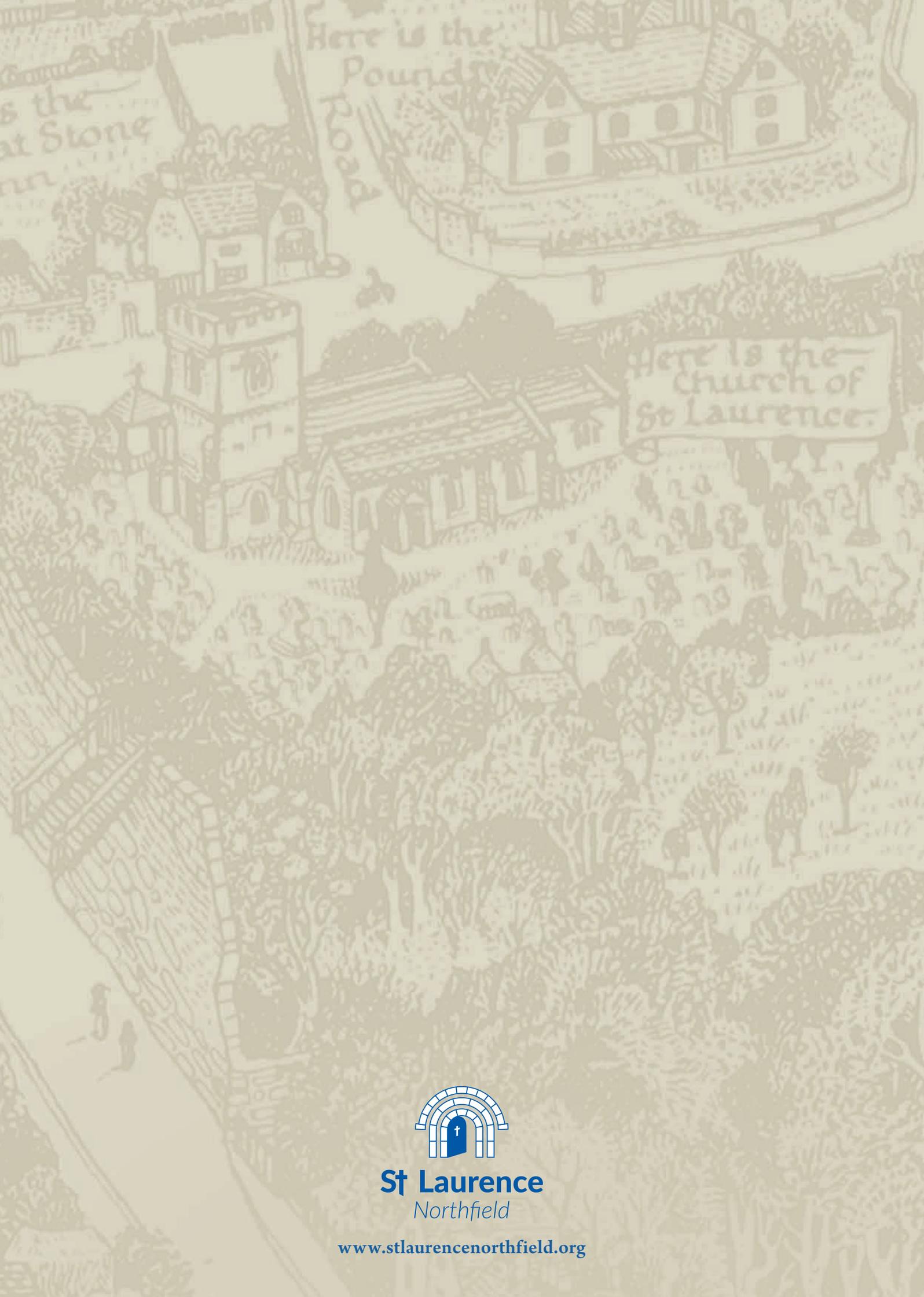
### Credits

Written by Stuart Andrew.  
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**St Laurence**  
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