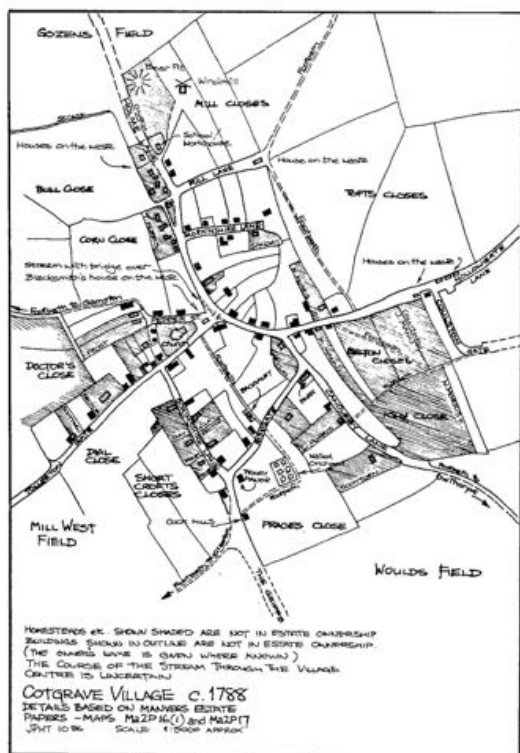


A History of All Saints Church

Early History



As was commonplace in most mediaeval English villages, the early Church occupied a position at the centre of village life, both geographically and culturally. Cotgrave is clearly no exception, as is apparent from the map of the village at the time of Enclosure (1791). Similarly, the close juxtaposition of Church and Pub is also typical – it takes roughly two minutes to walk from Church porch to the Manvers Arms and a further three to reach the Rose and Crown! However, while there is definite evidence for the Church being present as early as the year 1200, it would be pure speculation to think that the pubs might have accompanied it – in fact, we do know that the Manvers Arms only became a pub round about 1822 (it had been a farm prior to that). The Rose and Crown may be much older but we have no definite evidence as to when it began life. There is, of course, plenty of evidence for the existence of ale houses in mediaeval English villages - however, this article is concerned with the history of All Saints Church.

Returning to the Church, we know from the Domesday record that, in 1086, Cotgrave possessed ‘half a church’. Just what that rather odd claim might mean is explained in Thoroton’s ‘History of Nottinghamshire’ – one half being the responsibility of Ralph de Buron (ancestor of the rather better-known Lord Byron), the other half the responsibility of Roger de Poitou of Swineshead, Lincolnshire. Thoroton also records that in 1144 Hugh de Buron gave his half of the church to Lenton Priory while, somewhat later the other half was presented to Swineshead Abbey. This division of responsibility between the two religious establishments resulted in there being two Rectors in Cotgrave, each with his own Rectory. In other words, the Church was divided into two Medieties, an arrangement which persisted until the Restoration – in 1662 Thomas Berkley being inducted as the first Rector of a Consolidated Rectory.

The Domesday reference makes clear that there was a church in Cotgrave prior to the Norman conquest and there is archaeological evidence in support. Following the disastrous fire of 1996, opportunity was taken to explore beneath the nave floor, resulting in the discovery of what were probably foundation stones from the Church’s Anglo-Saxon predecessor, which was almost certainly of wood. There was also evidence of an earlier tower, though of what date is far from clear. The existence of a Saxon church is not difficult to understand when one remembers that in 1984 Anglo-Saxon graves were discovered at the top of Mill Hill. As there was apparently a thriving colony of Anglo-Saxons living near Cotgrave, it should not surprise us to learn of the existence of a Church from the same archaeological period.



The Building

The present Church has grown from 'Early English' beginnings, the first building being completed towards the end of the twelfth century. According to the 'Yellow Book', money had been collected from as early as 1175 and the Prior of Lenton set his man, Nicholas to take charge of building works. The resulting stone Church must have consisted of a modest nave roughly coincident with the present nave, together with a chancel of unknown extent. The only remaining part of this original building is the present chancel arch which is supported by a pair of Early English half-pillars with characteristic 'water-leaf' capitals and it is significant that such decoration can be precisely dated to the period 1170 to 1190. This may be taken as evidence for a late twelfth century date for the original Church. (The authors of the 'Yellow Book' refer to a Dedication Service on All Hallows Day 1246 but this could not have been in celebration of the original opening.) As pointed out by Pevsner in his 'Buildings of England', the nave of this early Church must have been narrower than that of the present building, as indicated by the fact that the chancel arch is significantly shifted northwards from the axis of the present nave.

It is interesting to consider the floor area of the early nave in relation to village population. A rough estimate suggests a value of approximately 600-700 square feet and, assuming 2sq. ft. per person (congregations stood in those days – no seating was provided, other than a stone parapet along the outer wall – remember the phrase: 'the weak go to the wall') implies that the nave could accommodate, at most, something like three hundred worshipers. We have no definitive data as to Cotgrave's population in 1200 but, if we assume that it varied, between the years of 1200 and 1600 in the same manner as that of England as a whole, we can estimate it as being approximately two hundred and fifty. All this seems perfectly reasonable until we are faced with the challenge of providing seating. Again, we have no evidence for Cotgrave, but it is well authenticated that stone benches were introduced into many English churches during the thirteenth century so it became necessary to expand the floor area of the nave in order to accommodate them and this normally took the form of adding aisles either side of the original nave. In the middle ages there was a feeling of antipathy against the north side of the church (it was said to be the property of the Devil), so the south aisle was usually added first. In the case of All Saints a south aisle was added at the end of the thirteenth century, as indicated by the Early English arcade (a line of slender pillars supporting four pointed arches) and the single lancet window at the west end of the aisle. In the south wall is a small ogee-shaped piscina (a shallow basin for washing the communion vessels) which suggests that the aisle was also used for communion services – there presumably being an altar at its east end. In the extension process, the central nave was obviously widened, leaving the chancel arch off-centre, as we noted above. It was inevitable, of course, that, in replacing the south wall of the nave with this arcade, that the original south wall had to be removed so there is no relic of this in the present Church. Similar remarks apply to the building of a north aisle, perhaps some tens of years later (though the two arcades look very similar, the pillars differ slightly, suggesting that they were not exact contemporaries). A final point of interest in respect of the arcades is the presence of a pair of carved heads where the east-most arches butt onto the chancel, (possibly) a male figure on the north and a female on the south side. Who they represent is something of a mystery.





The present tower was built round about the end of the fourteenth century, followed soon afterwards by that of the octagonal spire. On the one hand, it must surely be recognised that these additions were made to the glory of God but they also serve to make the Church far more visible from miles around and, perhaps, show the world that Cotgrave was not going to be left behind!

However, returning to our original theme concerning the earlier Church building, it is clear that the introduction of the tower meant the end of the west wall so now only the chancel arch remains from the original Church.

As was usual with village churches, the fifteenth century saw the building of a clerestory above both South and North aisles, each with three rectangular windows to let in much more light. The

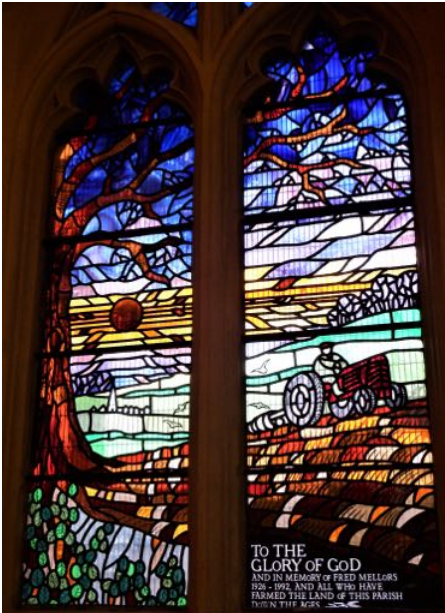
other notable change was the building of a completely new chancel at the end of the thirteenth

century. For whatever reason, it is slightly misaligned with respect to the axis of the nave and, being stuccoed on the outside, it looks, unfortunately, rather like an afterthought. There is a small 'Priest's Door' in the south wall and a number of memorial tablets to village worthies. The East Window, like all the remaining stained-glass windows, is a nineteenth century reconstruction, the glass serving as a memorial to those



who gave their lives in the First World

War. There is also a charming 'Farm Window' in the south wall, a late twentieth century gift from a local family. The other noteworthy stained-glass window, in the north aisle, commemorates the life of the coal mine which so changed the size and nature of the village during the twentieth century. It is accompanied by a miner's lamp and the shiny spade used by Princess Margaret when she turned the first sod of the mine in 1954. A memorial of a rather different kind is the so-called 'plague stone' (which is nowadays used to hold holy water) near the south entrance to the Church. This dates from the year 1637, when plague arrived in Cotgrave and ninety-three villagers lost their lives between April and September. The story is that two men isolated themselves inside the Church, where there was kept a supply of food and when villagers



needed food they would place money in the plague stone (containing vinegar as antiseptic) which was situated in the churchyard wall.



An unusual feature of the Church concerns the porch, which is a nineteenth century addition. It is not that the present porch is in any way special, rather the implication that the early Church may have lacked any such structure. In mediaeval times, the porch was an important centre of village life. Marriages, for example, took place there (witness Chaucer's Wife of Bath who is quoted as saying: "Husbands at the Church Door have I had five"), while many other legal and commercial exchanges were 'solemnised' there. No doubt it was possible to perform such exchanges outside the Church door but preferable, one would surmise, to have a roof over one's head in case of a typically English downpour. Finally, we note that there is a mediaeval door in the north aisle directly opposite the south entrance and we may reasonably suppose that there was a similar door in the earlier Church. It is an interesting question whether this was purely for access or an example of the Devil's Door. In mediaeval times it was widely believed that the Devil was driven out of a child when he or she was baptised and, as the font was generally situated in the north-west corner of the church, the north door was provided as a means of allowing him to escape. The present font was introduced in 1878 and is now located at the east end of the south aisle.

Rectors



There is a complete list of Cotgrave Rectors on a board in the north aisle of the Church and this is reproduced in the printed Church guide. In one or two cases precise dates have not been recorded but the list comprises a remarkable summary, consisting of twenty-one Rectors of the First Mediety, thirty-six of the Second Mediety and twenty-two of the Consolidated Mediety, the first entry being dated 1239 and the first Rector of the Consolidated Mediety being inducted in 1662. While the earlier Rectors were nominated by Lenton Abbey and Swineshead Priory, Sir George Pierrepont acquired the Swineshead estate in 1541 and the Lenton estate in 1546 so, from then onwards, the Pierrepont family owned the advowson and could appoint their own nominees to the Rectorships. They were, therefore, usually either members of the family or close friends and careful to maintain close relationship with their benefactors. We might also note that many of these appointees were simultaneously Rectors of other churches where the Pierreponts held the advowson, such as Sneinton, St Marys in Nottingham and

Holme Pierrepont. This arrangement continued until 1942 when the patronage was transferred to the Southwell Diocesan Board of Finance, closely following the 1941 sale of all the Manvers property in Cotgrave.

From mediaeval times until the date of the Cotgrave Inclosure Act (1791), the Rector's income was taken in the form of tythes, each member of the village being obliged to give a percentage of his income, often in the shape of produce (hence the need for a 'tythe barn' – there was one in Scrimshire Lane). However, at Enclosure, tythes were abolished and the Rector was awarded some five hundred and fifty acres of farmland as a replacement, making him second only to Earl Manvers in the size of his allotment. He could let this land to local farmers and thereby obtain an appreciable income, as is well illustrated by the size of the Rectory (at the bottom of Rectory lane) and the number of servants employed by nineteenth century Rectors. For example, in 1881 Alfred Hensley and his wife, Fanny employed a Governess and six servants (living in), together with a Groom, Footman, Housemaid, Cook, Sewing Maid and a Kitchen Maid. Hensley also enjoyed the assistance of a Curate, Harry Mercer. In 1922 the Rev. John Henry Hales described the Rectory as having three living rooms, fourteen bedrooms, a kitchen, offices and a servant hall. There could be little doubt that the incumbent's standard of living was, until relatively recently, one of considerable luxury! But contrast this with the 1939 Census, when Rev Alan Chaplin shared the Rectory with his wife, his daughter and a shorthand typist!

We know very little about the earlier Rectors – our information really starts with the seventeenth century (thanks to the efforts of the WEA Group who produced the 'Yellow Book'), a time when religious controversy was at its height. Following Henry VIII's break with Rome, the country struggled to come to terms with the conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism, which led Elizabeth I to try and establish a 'moderate' version of Anglicanism. However, many of her Bishops were inclined to favour a strongly Protestant Church, a trend not greatly to the liking of many parishioners who were more used to the Catholic form of worship – in particular there was controversy over the importance of the communion service – and this could lead to conflict between Clergy and Laity. An example in Cotgrave concerned the ringing of Church bells, which was felt by some to be a singularly Catholic activity. In December 1603 one of the Rectors, Thomas Hunt was charged with assaulting (with his walking stick) several of his parishioners who had taken the law into their own hands and rung the Church bells, against his express wish. He was summoned before the Archdeacon of Nottingham but no action was taken against him. The Archdeacon probably felt the same as he did about such matters!

Several 'Acts of Uniformity' were passed by Parliament in attempts to standardise church worship but the most significant was that of 1662, of considerable importance because, during the Commonwealth (1649-1660), much church ritual had been abandoned in favour of 'Non-Conformism' (no Cotgrave Rectors were listed between 1653 and 1659 and it was even possible that the position was held by a Baptist Minister!). The 1662 Act required that all church ceremonial should follow that set down in 'The Book of Common Prayer', a new, revised copy of which appeared only in 1662. At the time, few people had even seen it! It was, perhaps, inevitable that there would be conflict and Cotgrave was no exception. In 1659 John Clark was instituted as Rector but he was ejected in 1662 under the terms of the Act for "Preaching at unlawful non-conformist meetings in Nottingham". He retired to Basford where he continued to preach and where he died in 1669. Clark was only one of over two thousand clergy who refused to accept all the Church-of-England doctrines and who were removed from their benefices. Nor were lay persons exempt – William Riches was fined for "Keeping a Conventicle" at his house in 1668 – that is holding a non-conformist meeting.

In 1667 John Scrimshire became Rector, a member of the important Scrimshire family who acted as 'Lords of the Manor' between the years, roughly speaking, of 1560 to 1760 (when they sold all their land in Cotgrave and departed to the 'South'). John was not destined to hold the appointment for long – he died in 1669 at the young age of 29 and was buried here in Cotgrave. He was not, however, the first Scrimshire to act as Rector – there is mention of a Robert Scrymshire who held the office from 1498 to 1517. Several other members of the Scrimshire family acted as Churchwarden or Parish Clerk. Two Scrimshire ladies were also married to Cotgrave Rectors – in 1645 Robert Kinder took, as his second wife, Ursula Scrimshire, while c.1800 Nathan Haines also took a second wife by the name Scrimshire, though that was some time after the Scrimshires had left Cotgrave.

As an example of the multiple appointments typical of eighteenth century religious life, Samuel Beardmore (Rector from 1722 until 1742) was Rector of Holme Pierrepont as well as Cotgrave. He was also Prebend of Southwell Minster and of York Minster. (His Curate, William Harris probably took care of most of the ministerial duties in Cotgrave.) Pierrepont Crompton, Rector from 1756 to 1797, was simultaneously Rector of Holme Pierrepont. It was he who was granted 550 acres of Cotgrave farmland in lieu of tythes at the time of Enclosure. Nathan Haines was Rector of Cotgrave from 1797 to 1806 but was also Rector of St Mary's Nottingham, a Proctor of Oxford University, a Prebend of Southwell, Perpetual Curate of Sneinton and of Tong (Yorks) while also being 'First Domestic Chaplin' to Charles Pierrepont, First Earl Manvers. The Rev J H Browne, Rector 1811 – 1858, was also Archdeacon of Ely – what is significant is the considerable distance geographically between the various appointments, indicating just how little time was actually spent in any one of them. As mentioned earlier, it was important to remember that the advowson was owned by the Pierrepont family, meaning that Cotgrave Rectors were usually related to the family in some way. For example, William Saltren, Rector circa 1811, was only in office very briefly as a result of being drowned while skating on the lake at Thoresby, the later home of the Pierreponts. One feels that he must have been at least a close friend.

During the nineteenth century there were four relatively long-lived Rectors, John Henry Browne (1811-1858), Evelyn Hardolf, Harcourt Vernon (1858-1873), Alfred Hensley (1873-1897) and John Percy Hales (1897-1924) and, due to their efforts, the Church was much resuscitated. Eighteenth century laxness was responsible for a general decline in the physical state of a great many country churches and Cotgrave was not untypical. John Henry Browne, who was the longest serving of all Cotgrave's Rectors, began the process in 1818 with a major programme of restoration, followed by yet another in 1843. He is also on record as replying to the 1832 'Articles of Enquiry' (Archdeacon's enquiries into recent happenings in each particular Parish) with information concerning the seating capacity of All Saints – 350. Two services were held each Sunday. He, himself lived in the Glebe House and enjoyed an annual income of £709-7s-5d, almost all of which came from land rent. A record also exists to the effect that in 1851 All Saints' seating capacity amounted to 450, while actual attendances were 350 in the morning and 280 in the evening, though this information was gathered in the face of strenuous opposition from the Rector, who refused to give any information whatsoever! Allowing for the attendances at the two Methodist churches, the total number of people attending a religious service each Sunday may have been close on 600, while the population of Cotgrave at this time was probably about 850.

According to William Lewin, the Rev. Evelyn Hardolf Harcourt Vernon was very well connected and was something of a colourful character – he was a rich man and “was very generous in his benevolences. He was also picturesque, always wearing his Oxford cap and gown in the street.” He lived at Grove Hall (near Retford), became Rector of Grove both before and after his fifteen years at Cotgrave, spent time and money rebuilding the Grove church and succeeded to the Vernon Estate in 1879. He was also a Prebend of Lincoln.



The Rev Alfred Hensley was responsible for the greatest of all the restorations of the Victorian era at Cotgrave, which took place in 1877-78. The western gallery (where the Church musicians would have plied their trade) was stripped out and the box pews which filled both nave and aisles were replaced by ‘modern’ open benches. The roof over nave and aisles was also renovated, a new ‘decorated’ east window was installed, a new pulpit and font were added but, sadly, the ornamental inscription over the chancel arch was removed – William Lewin shares my disappointment. It read: “Behold I Bring You Good Tidings Of Great Joy”, a very unusual feature – I cannot remember seeing anything like it anywhere else. The whole venture cost some £1500, of which Earl Manvers provided £1000. Hensley is also noteworthy in that he sold all his Cotgrave land to the Earl, transferring the obligation for his income to the Church Commissioners.



Under the auspices of John Percy Hales an organ chamber was built on the north side of the Church and the tower and spire were much restored. Three of the bells were recast and a new one added. Later, in 1984 two further bells were added, to complete the octet and the Church has recently been favoured by an enthusiastic band of ringers who regularly practice each Friday evening and ring for services on Sunday and other special occasions – a much improved situation from that recorded in 1808, when a visitor to Cotgrave complained that the Church had a ring of five bells ‘not in tune’!

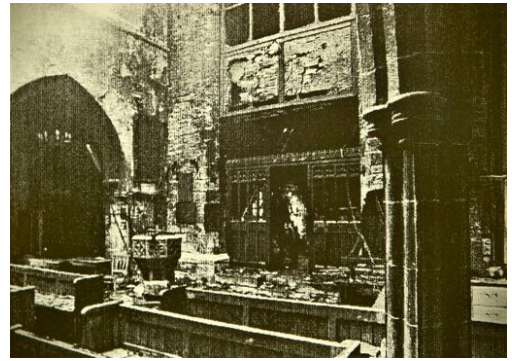


George Bryan Barrodale was a particularly active Rector (1976-2000), during a period which saw two major events in the village, firstly the miners’ strike of 1984/5, then the closing of the coal mine (1963-1993) and secondly the 1996 arson attack on All Saints itself. Barrodale made something of a name for himself during the miners’ strike when he could be seen at the picket lines, actively supporting his parishioners in their struggles on one side or the other of the battle between Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and National Union of Mineworkers leader Arthur Scargill. In the event, the arson attack proved to be a much more serious affair for All Saints. Considerable damage was done to the nave and tower roof structures and there was also serious water and smoke damage to other parts of the building.

The Church was obliged to close for eighteen months while restoration work was completed. However, looking at the event positively, one must recognise that excellent use was made of this opportunity to replace the Victorian furniture with high quality modern seating and to rearrange its setting in a much more ‘friendly’ manner.



There can be no doubt that the current interior of All Saints is a delight to the eye. Bryan Barrodale is certainly to be complimented on his efforts in this respect, also for his initiative in acquiring the magnificent ‘Christus’ which adorns the space above the chancel arch.



The Graveyard

No matter the many good things which characterised the Barrodale period, one very sad thing occurred – this concerns the removal of several Scrimshire memorial stones from the Church interior to an outside, horizontal resting place just to the south of the tower. Here they have become badly moss-covered and are now almost illegible - time can only make their condition worse. These stones represent an irreplaceable aspect of Cotgrave’s history and, as such, should certainly have been kept within the Church in the interest of their long-term preservation.

Fortunately, we have photographs of them but this is poor consolation.

There are numerous other gravestones within the Churchyard and in the 1859 extension cemetery along Plumtree Road (land given by Earl Manvers) which celebrate well-known Cotgrave names but how about this for an amazingly dolorous way to end one’s endeavours? It is quoted by William Lewin in his ‘A Short Story of Cotgrave’, written in 1944:



John Morley – Died 1789 aged 77

“Life is a labyrinth of woe
Which wretched man is doomed to struggle through.
Today he’s great, tomorrow he’s undone;
And thus in hope and fear he blunders on;
Till some disease, or else, perhaps old age,
Calls the poor mortal trembling from the stage.”

I prefer to believe that the majority of Cotgrave lives have been a good deal happier than this. Consider, for instance, one of George Hickling's poems:

“There is a joyful cry
Runs through the sky,
And echoes o'er creation's utmost bounds.
Hear it ye mortals! Gladsome are the sounds.
'Tis music from above!
Rolling for ever in full cadence clear,
Hark! Sweetly eddying on the enraptured ear
The chorus, God is love.”

He also wrote lovingly about All Saints Church – see our section on 'People'



All Saints Church – Present Day

John Orton

2020

Anyone familiar with the excellent Church brochure edited by John Severn will recognise that I am indebted to this for much of the content of this history. I should like to thank John for his considerable help in its compilation. I must also acknowledge the authors of the 'Yellow Book' 'Cotgrave, Aspects of Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', edited by Jocelyn Wood, also the Southwell and Nottingham Church History Project 'Cotgrave All Saints' and Nicholas Pevsner 'The Buildings of England, Nottinghamshire'. For several photographs, I acknowledge the Church brochure and William Grantham 'Cotgrave, Settlement, Village, Town'.