

St. PETER and St. PAUL



Medmenham

WELCOME to this House of God where generations have worshipped. May its peace and beauty speak to us of the unchanging love of God.

This leaflet is arranged in chronological order showing the effect of the major architectural periods on our church.

EARLY HISTORY

It is likely that the first church at Medmenham was built of timber, sited here because the Thames was a principal highway of Saxon times. Probably founded about 640 AD by St Birinus, a missionary Bishop sent by the Pope to convert the Saxons of Mercia, it was rebuilt in stone about 500 years later under the patronage of Hugh de Bolebec II (1100-1165). This energetic man joined the 2nd Crusade; visited Pope Alexander III; endowed Woburn Abbey; and founded Medmenham Abbey, where he died as a monk.

Norman times were a prolific church building era. Characteristic of many Chiltern churches, the *Norman nave walls* are of chalk blocks mixed with flint rubble.

In medieval times the **porch** was likely to have been larger than it is now. It would have been a village meeting place with benches along the side walls, a place for the signing of documents, and where parts of the marriage and baptism ceremonies were carried out. The porch standing today was built in the mid-19th century and restored in 1934.



South Doorway

Inside the porch is the **south door**, the other original *Norman* feature. A north doorway (now filled by the war memorial) was the priest's exit, possibly via a sacristy, when the vicarage was part of Church Cottages. Nearby stood a church house, where ales were brewed to raise income for the church, later converted to an inn, the "Dog and Badger."

As parishioners entered the door they would dip their fingers in the holy water of the stoup (niche on right), built in the *Perpendicular Period* (partly restored).

On Sundays the whole village would be found in Church. Rushes covered the floor and stone ledges along the walls were the only seats. The *Norman* church would have been very dark and cold with unglazed slits for windows.

A **piscina** (niche containing a shallow basin for disposing of the holy water used by priests) survives beside the lectern. This would have been near the original place of the *Norman* altar before the chancel was added. Fixed above would have been a sanctus bell, rung during mass.

The Beer stone **archway** opening into the **Lady Chapel** illustrates the *Early English Period*. This was originally a chantry chapel, built about 1240 under the patronage of Isabel de Bolebec II, when the friars were preaching that prayers were necessary for the welfare of the departed. The chantry priest seems to have been a Guilleman (hermit) and his dwelling stood within the precincts of Bolebec Castle (sited on the hill north east of the church). Demolished in 1720, the chapel was rebuilt in 1924 using some of the original stones. An *Early English* window from the original chantry chapel was incorporated into its west wall.



Interior of the church (as in 1927 with the organ in its previous position) showing all the main architectural styles: *Norman* main wall; *Early English* archway, *Perpendicular* cambered tie beam; *17th century* ceiling; *19th century* nave seats and chancel door; *Gothic Revival* choir stalls, transept (now a Lady Chapel with an altar), pulpit and panelling.

MAIN EXPANSION

This occurred in the *Perpendicular Period*, about 1400-50, and came on a crest of religious revival after the Black Death. The major work was probably planned by Sir Reginald Bray KG. A patron of architecture, his later works include Henry VII's Chapel, Westminster, and St. George's Chapel, Windsor. The **roof** of the nave was renewed, the **tower** and **chancel** added and the narrow *Norman windows* enlarged and filled with stained glass, bringing the Bible to life for villagers who could not read.

Some of the work is credited to Geoffrey Pole, a descendent of the Kings of Wales granted lands here by Henry VII. His son Richard finished the *Perpendicular* work with the window nearest the chapel arch. He was married to Margaret Plantagenet and father to Reginald, Archbishop of Canterbury under Mary I.



Tower Buttress

The **tower** is of three stages with an embattled parapet and a projecting stair turret, but is not open to visitors. It has recently (1987) been resurfaced with a lime-based traditional facing. Outside the tower used to be a sun dial which served as a village clock. There are three bells, cast by Knight of Reading, dated 1691 (28½in.), 1624 (31¼in.) and undated (34¾in.). They weigh 4¾, 6 and 7½ cwt. respectively.

There was an old tradition, recorded in 1717, that in the *Norman* church at Medmenham there were four bells and one was sold to help pay the ransom of Richard I when taken prisoner on his return from the Holy Land. There is still staging for a fourth bell.

In place of the chancel arch is a **cambered tie beam**, where the Figures of the Rood were fastened (removed on the orders of Edward VI (1547-53) in the post-reformation period as superstitious emblems).

17th and 18th CENTURIES

In the 17th century the first box pews were installed, facing the south wall, where there was a finely carved *Jacobean* triple-decker **pulpit**, installed in 1608.

The Borlase family held the manor of Medmenham for nearly two centuries, from 1560. John Borlase III, as a royalist, lost his estates during the Civil War (1642-48) afterwards paying to redeem them. His wife, Lady Borlase, gave to the church at her marriage, a silver gilt **chalice** and **paten** (1637), still in use early this century, and a pewter **flagon** (1663), celebrating her daughter's wedding.

A small **hatchment** on the wall opposite the south door, above the war memorial, is an early example of a custom which originated in the ornate funerals of the 17th to 19th centuries. This shows the rank of the person when living and was fixed outside their house for a year before being removed to the church. In memory of Ann Danvers (daughter of Sir William Borlase, founder of the grammar school in Marlow), it shows a skull and cross-bones in the border, a symbol of mourning (1677).



Hatchment

A **gallery** was built across the west of the nave in 1638 for the choir and musicians, but was removed in 1845. The *Classical Era*, of the late 17th and early 18th centuries, is illustrated by the plastered **ceiling** of the nave (1704), and four **tombstones** outside against the east wall are typical of its decorative art (one dated 1726).

A stone **memorial** in the floor of the chancel commemorates Francis Duffield (1758), founder of the infamous Hell Fire Club held at Medmenham Abbey. The Duffield family held the lands of the Abbey and the patronage of the church for several generations.

VICTORIAN RESTORATION

In the 1830s the Jacobean **pulpit** was moved from the south wall to the chancel and the first of the present pews were installed, replacing the 17th century box pews which were often a screen for talking or sleeping during the sermon!

In 1837 Charles Robert Scott Murray of Danesfield inherited the newly reunited Medmenham estates. Inspired by the awakening of a Catholic spirit in the Church of England together with a *Gothic Revival* he embarked on the restoration of Medmenham Church. He was a patron of Augustus Welby Pugin (1812-52) and may have engaged him to undertake the work. Two doorways were formed in the chancel for the 'Quality', the **east window** was refurbished, two *gothic revival* windows added and the **chancel ceiling** was panelled with ribs and bosses.



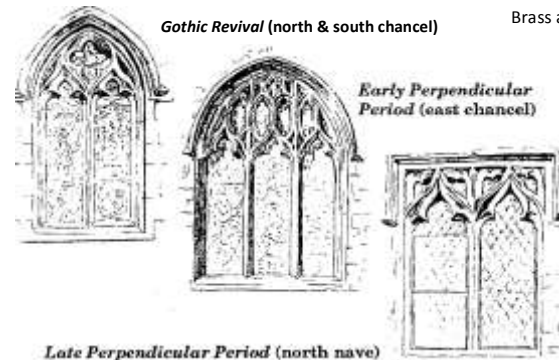
Aumbry

The *Norman font* was replaced by the present carved octagonal one sited near the door to symbolise admission to the church by baptism. A **new altar, reredos** and **aumbry** (oblong opening in which the altar plate was kept) was built in the style of the *Decorated Period*. A local landowner, Joseph Townsend took action in the courts against the style of the altar and it was destroyed on the orders of the Archdeacon of Buckingham in 1846, only a year after its installation.

The Scott Murray family vault is under the chancel not far from the **brass** commemorating Eliza Eleanor Murray (1837) on the north wall. Her brother, Charles Scott Murray, is commemorated by a large elaborate **hatchment** (1837) above the south door, and a mural tablet in the chancel.



Brass angel



Late Perpendicular Period (north nave)

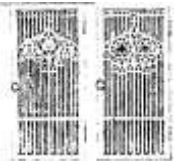
The external stonework of some of the **windows** was replaced around 1839. In the north nave window are four medallions of 16th century workmanship and continental origin, presented in 1839. One of the south nave windows shows the Feeding of the Five Thousand (1874); and one was presented by Lady Dawson (then resident at the Abbey) showing her brother, Colonel Pirie, as a crusader before Jerusalem (1917). The Victorian glass in the east window was splintered by a bomb in World War II, and its replacement by Christopher Powell (whose other work is in Christ Church, Oxford and Liverpool Cathedral) depicts Christ with two modern children flanked by the Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul to whom this church is dedicated. The north chancel window depicts St. Michael and St. George, while the founders of this church are shown in the south window.

RECENT ADDITIONS



Carved end of Abbey pew

These include the oak **choir stalls, panelling, altar** and **pulpit**. The final seating to be completed was west of the font (1876), replacing the loose benches for "the poor". The last pew north west of the nave has a carved end showing the sign of the former Cistercian Abbey (Virgin and Child). On the pew opposite is a **plaque** showing the arms of



Book cupboard

Hugh de Bolebec II. The **book cupboard** by the font, built in 1925, has carved doors whose design was suggested by a medieval French cupboard in the Arts Museum in Paris.

The **memorials** opposite the south door commemorate those who were killed in the two world wars.

On the wall by the font is a **list of incumbents** since 1190 (as far as is known).

A **plaque** in the Lady Chapel (1959) is in memory of the Rev. Arthur Plaisted, scholar and Vicar of this parish for forty years, whose writings form the basis for this leaflet.

The village **sign** churchyard as a pioneers who 550 AD, to who built our (c.640 AD), and down the years enriched it. It is us what we are future.



stands in the memorial to the settled here about their descendants first village church their successors who enlarged and the past that make as we create the