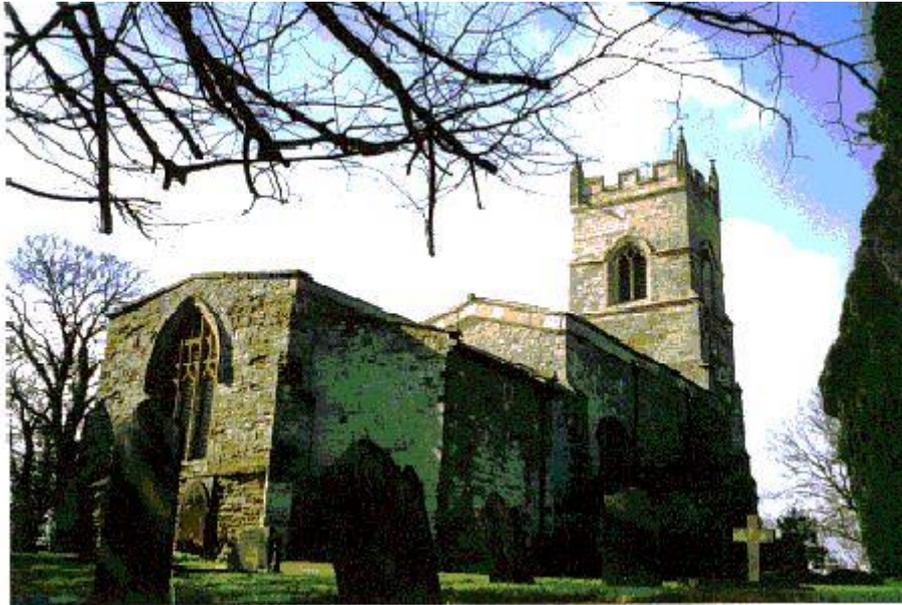
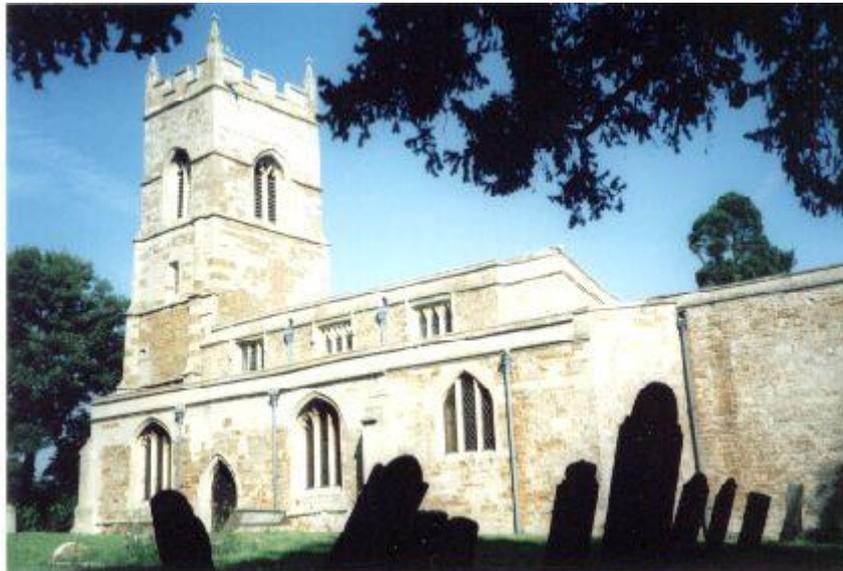


The Church

The church of St. John the Baptist is strikingly situated on the hilltop at the southern end of the village. It is visible from neighbouring parishes to the north and west. It is a Grade I listed building in an excellent state of repair, following a good deal of restoration work in recent years. There is a peal of six bells, one new and five recast in 1991.



St. John the Baptist's Church from the north-east



St. John the Baptist's Church from the south-east

There is no reference to a church here in Domesday Book, though this may not prove that there was no church, simply that if there was, it was not taxed. The first reference to a priest here occurs in 1233. A church in the Decorated style could have been built here towards 1300. The earliest parts of

the church are in that style. So perhaps there was a less permanent structure of wood at first and then a stone church was built around 1300. The patrons in those times were the Lords of Dingley. Could they have funded the building? Why would they do that?

The church of the early fourteenth century probably had a nave and chancel of the same floor area as today's church. It seems to have aisles, too, not only on the south, as today, but on the north as well. Then, later in the century, when the Perpendicular style had replaced the Decorated, the church was altered in several ways. The nave roof was raised and the clerestory inserted. Windows were remodelled in the new style, including the large east window. The south aisle was enlarged at this time or possibly later. The tower was topped off as at present, except that the pinnacles at the corners were added in 1911 to mark the coronation of George V, though they may have been replacements for decoration lost at some earlier time. The north aisle was demolished at some point, but it is not known when. A survey of 1631 describes it as being in a poor state and having a house attached to it

If you stand in the centre of the nave, you can see that although the chancel and tower are in line with each other, the nave is slightly offset. This lack of symmetry may be a result of rebuilding the north wall after the aisle was demolished, though other explanations have been suggested.



The interior of the church in about 1910, looking east. The church was lit by oil lamps.



The Church in 1910. The tower has no pinnacles yet and the view of the church is partly blocked by cottages which were demolished in about 1940. The view has been obscured for many years by numerous tall trees which have since grown in the area where the cottages were. However, in 2010 the trees were cleared and the church is now more visible

The Clergy

You can find fuller biographies of the clergy, John Eyre, Thomas Thomas, Alfred Wilson and James Nance by navigating to the articles from the main Church History page.

The patrons of the church have changed many times since the 14th century, when the Lords of Dingley held the advowson, the right to appoint the priest. The first Rector to leave a lasting impression was Daniel Halford (Rector 1588-1622). In his will he left money to the village which became the Halford Charity (see the Village Charities page of this website for further details).



Brass plaque in the church in memory of Daniel Halford

In 1645, when the Parliamentary side in the Civil War was gaining the ascendancy, there was a major clear-out of clergy who did not fit in with the new regime. Thomas Barrodell, who had been Rector since 1622 was removed from his position and replaced by Samuel Glover, who presumably subscribed to the same idea of worship as the Parliamentary authorities. After Glover's death in 1659, **John Eyre** was appointed. More is known of Rev. Eyre than of any previous incumbent. He happened to be a friend of the Isham family of Lamport Hall when, in 1671, 17-year-old Thomas Isham was made by his father to keep a diary in Latin. Rev. Eyre appears in it frequently as a strong personality with a quick temper.

The advowson or right to appoint the priest had changed hands several times. John Eyre had bought it and then sold it to Rev. William Bell, the Archdeacon of St. Albans. Rev. Bell had been a fellow of St. John's College, Oxford and 'in gratitude for his education therein' sold the advowson to his old college for a mere five shillings in early 1676. St. John's have been the patrons ever since and the Rectors up till recent times have been former fellows of the college.

Of later Rectors, some deserve a mention. Walter Saunders was Rector from 1734 to 1790, a period of 66 years. He was 93 when he died, still nominally Rector but relying on his curate, Rev. **Thomas Thomas**. William Brooks was Rector from 1797 to 1833, though he was also Rector of St. John's in Coventry and seems not to have lived here or fulfilled many clerical duties here. The curate Rev. Thomas carried out all the usual duties of the Rector, and the parish registers bear his signature. Some correspondence between Rev. Thomas and Rev. Brooks has survived, much of it relating to the building of a new rectory in 1800.

George Adams was only 33 when he came as Rector in 1838 and his wife Georgiana was 23. By 1851 they had six children, but Rev. Adams died in 1855, aged only 50. Later that century, **Alfred**

Wilson became Rector and during his incumbency (1872-94) undertook a very considerable programme of restoration. Most of it was done at his own expense. It appears that the church had been allowed to decline into a very poor state and it was Rev. Wilson who rescued it. He also built a house in the village with a reading room for village use, known as 'The Institute'. He instigated the building of a house attached to the school, for the teacher to live in.

James Nance was Rector from 1895 to 1905. He was in his 40s when he arrived. He and his wife had no children and threw themselves into village life with great energy. They were ardent supporters of Temperance, 'the evils of drink' being a key issue of the day. They set up a village branch of the Church of England Temperance Society and such was their zeal that over forty village people became members - nearly a fifth of the population. The Society branch did not survive their departure. After a spell in Essex, they moved on to Leicester. During their time there, Mrs. Nance died and was buried in East Farndon. This can only mean that the village must have meant a lot to them. Rev. Nance went on to hold a number of other positions and finished as a Canon of Peterborough Cathedral. He died at the age of 90 in 1942 and was buried alongside his wife in East Farndon.



Rev. James Nance and his wife Mary in the Rectory garden.

The photograph must date from the period 1895 to 1905 when he was Rector of East Farndon

Until recent times the Rector's income was mainly derived from the parish. The Rector had an estate within the village, known as the glebe. Most of the land was let out and the rent provided the income. Also, until the enclosure of the fields in 1780, the Rector received tithes, meaning a proportion, normally a tenth, of the crops and animals produced within the parish. In 1777 we read 'To the Rector are due Yearly the Tyths of Milk Wool Lambs Calves Pigs Foals Fruit and Eggs which may be taken in Kind or Compounded as the Rector and Parishioners can agree'. '2 Eggs for every Hen and 3 for every Cock, to be gathered on Good Friday'. 'The Windmill pays Three Shillings and four Pence per Annum'. Thus the village provided for its Rector.

During the twentieth century, the Church of England increasingly amalgamated parishes, appointing one Rector to look after two or more parishes. The church was no longer the centre of village life to the extent that it had been in earlier centuries. After 1951, East Farndon was put together with Marston Trussell and the Rector lived at Marston. So East Farndon Rectory was no longer needed and began to fall into disuse. In 1967 there was a further change. Farndon was separated from Marston Trussell and grouped with Great Oxendon, Arthingworth and Harrington. The Rector of this group of four parishes lived at Great Oxendon. In September 2001, three further parishes, Maidwell, Lamport and Draughton were added to the group. The Rector currently, therefore, has to look after seven parishes, making it a far different job from the period up to 1951. Up to 1894, the Rector of the day would also chair the Vestry, the body which was equivalent to the local council. The church and civil administration were separated in 1894 when Parish Councils were set up. However, villagers still

sometimes chose the Rector as the chairman of the Parish Council. Today's arrangements would make it very difficult for a Rector to devote time to civil government in any of his or her many parishes.

In former times, especially prior to the building of the village hall in 1924, the rectory was used for meetings and social events, though larger indoor gatherings used the schoolroom. The rectory served as a paper factory for a time in the 1970s and 1980s but was demolished in the early 1990s. A development of four houses, known as Rectory Court, was built on the site in 2001.

Alan Langley
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