

## ST MARY MAGDALENE CHURCH, BRAMPTON

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE



A Saxon church in Brampton was mentioned in the Domesday Survey, but when Henry I found this to be of wood he declared he would rebuild it, although it fell to his successor, Steven, to do this in 1135.

The chancel of the present building (12.9 by 5.6 metre) was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It has a five-light Jesse east window in stained glass by Kempe and Tower and blind arcades on both north and south walls. There are three stained

glass windows in the south wall and one, also by Kempe and Tower, in the north. The roof was restored after a fire in 1735. There is a 14<sup>th</sup> century piscina at the east end of the south wall. There is a three-seat oak stall of c1350 with deeply moulded divisions and internationally-known carved misericords, although they do not feature in the RCHM Huntingdonshire volume because they were absent at the time of their visit in the 1920s. The chancel flooring of white and grey marble crosses (intended as part of a war memorial) follows the design of Ypres Cathedral sanctuary flooring. The choir stalls were installed just before Victoria came to the throne. The high altar cross and candlesticks were designed by Ninian Comper and made by Frank Knight OBE. Two silver burnished tall wooden candle standards are also Comper designs. The rood screen (c.1370) under the chancel arch (c.1440) is the only complete specimen in the traditional county of Huntingdonshire. English Heritage consider the arcading, choir stalls, and misericords noteworthy, and the building was listed Grade I on 28 January 1958 for its special architectural and historic interest. This status protects the whole building, internally and externally.<sup>1</sup>

The nave (16.9 by 6.7 metre) is of the Perpendicular period (c.1440) having a five bay arcade on each side and a 15th century roof. In 1835 the paid and free box pews were removed and open back pine pews



<sup>1</sup> 'Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest; ... only 2.5% of listed buildings are Grade I.' [English Heritage]

installed. These in turn were replaced in 1948 by the current pews, designed by Comper, as a memorial.

The north aisle (19.1 by 4.4 metre) and south aisle (18.3 by 4.4 metre) are early 15th century. There are three stained glass windows in the north aisle, the centre one being the War Memorial installed in April 1919; all are by Kempe and Tower. The three-manual organ, reputedly one of the finest in the district, made by John Stringer of Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, was installed by 1890. Evidence of burial under the organ was found in 1978 when the rotten floor was replaced using volunteer labour; this gave credence to the idea this was the chapel referred to by a 16th century prebendary. The east window of the south aisle is also Kempe and Tower and one of the three in the south wall is by Lavers and Westlake. The font in the south aisle has an octagonal panelled bowl of c.1400 with a more modern cover. A parcloze screen in the south aisle, another Comper design, encloses the Lady Chapel installed as a memorial to the 9th Earl of Sandwich's mother. The long connection of the Montagu family with the church is noted in this chapel by the sequence of emblazonments displayed on the screen. A memorial in the south east corner, c1690, is an exceptionally fine example of 17th century sculpture by William Kidwell.



The tower at the west end replaced a 14th century tower in 1635; probably due to stresses caused by a new arrangement of the bells. The west end of the nave required rebuilding at this time also. The tower is recognised as one of the best examples of post-Reformation construction in the gothic style. There is a memorial to Samuel Pepys in the tower base and also a resited reredos reconfigured as a memorial to World War I Brampton men. There is a ring of six bells plus one described in 1552 as a 'littell bell'; three of the bells predate the tower rebuilding and one shortly afterwards. A fifth bell was added in the mid-18th century, and a sixth in 1962. A recent addition is a ring of eight simulator bells for training and practice. At the same time the worm-eaten floor and ceiling below the bells was replaced, the number three bell was rehung on a new steel headstock, and a steel brace was fitted to a weak section of the main bell frame. The little bell was at the same time refurbished and hung on ball bearings; it is now rung from the tower base.

The south porch was rebuilt in 1828 and again in 1877/8. A major restoration of the whole building was carried out in 1877/8 when the east window was restored in plain glass and a gallery at the west end was removed. The vestry was rebuilt before 1851 and extended in 1897.

Particular features of interest outside the church are the magnificent grotesques and gargoyles and the modern regal and bishop heads at the ends of the east window label. The shallow 15th century north porch is of unique design formed by enclosing the space between two buttresses.

Following a fire in 1994 extensive repairs were made to the south aisle roof and the south western corner of the interior, including a complete new column. The south porch was fitted with new internal and external doors and the windows glazed, and additional floodlighting was installed to overcome poor lighting levels in the body of the church.

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