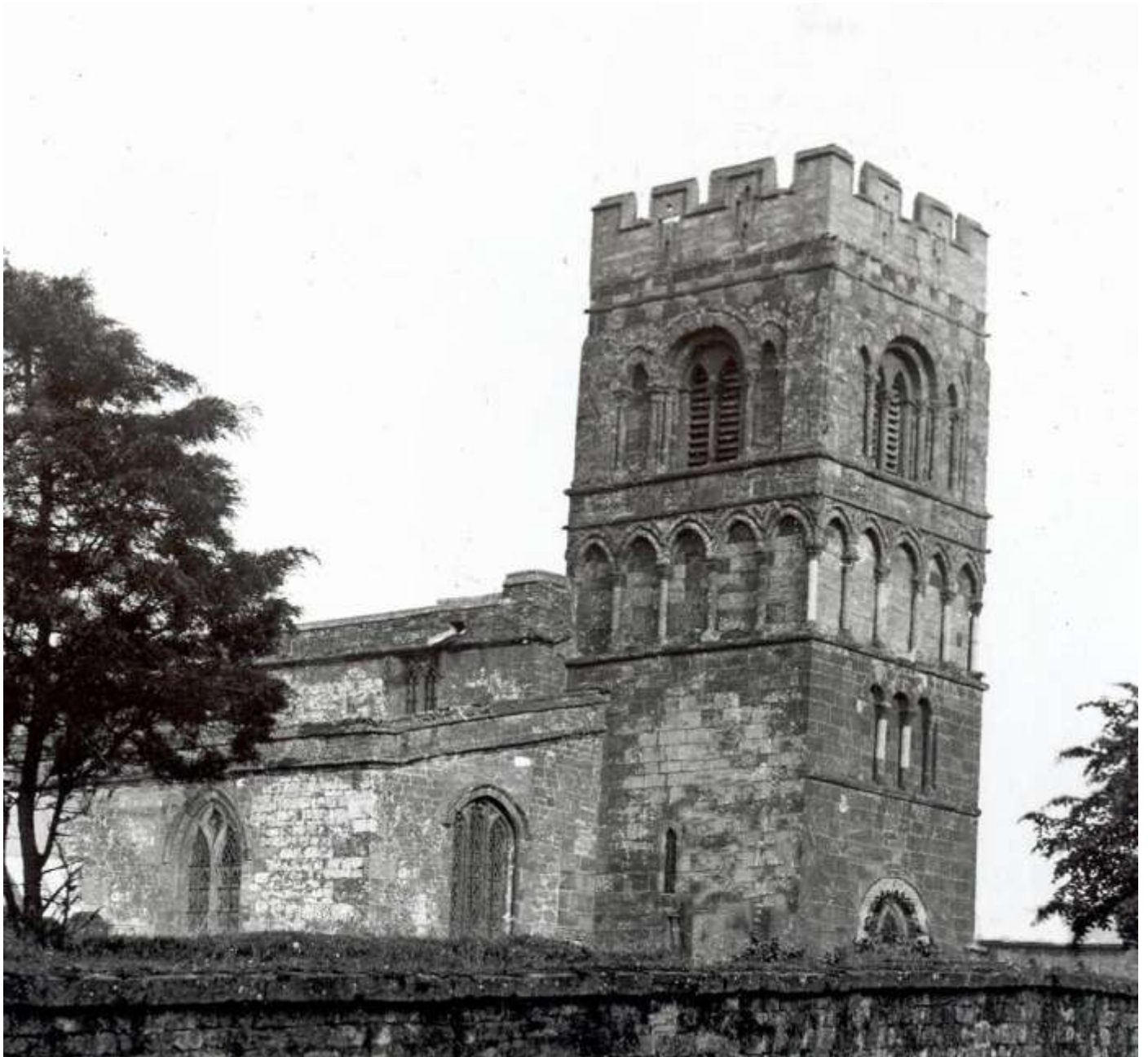


Spratton Church

Building history and its ‘treasures’

The Church in Spratton was probably there in Saxon times but it was enlarged and strengthened in 1120 in the days of Henry I. This simple Norman church consisted only of a nave, but a bell tower was built around 1195 and a north aisle added. The west end of the Church then would have looked something like:



Romanesque features

Romanesque architecture was an architectural style of Medieval Europe characterised by semi-circular arches, and these are very familiar to St. Andrew's Church, as shown below.



Romanesque arches

When the north aisle was added, these existing Romanesque arches were 'punched' through.

The Gothic architectural movement

This late 12th century extension came at a time of the start of the Gothic movement in architecture, being a style that flourished during the medieval period. It originated in Northern France, and one of its most characteristic features is the pointed arch.

It is in the great churches and cathedrals and in a number of civic buildings that the Gothic style was expressed most powerfully, with many of the larger churches being considered priceless works of art.

The great architectural significance of the Church in Spratton

This work to the tower, which was started towards the end of the 12th century appears to be one of the very earliest examples of Gothic influence on a smaller scale ecclesiastical building giving Spratton's parish church particular significance. It is thus put in the context of a very early experiment to see how this style would adapt to this smaller scale

At the lower level of the tower is the very distinctive west door opening. The light colour stone used in the ornamental mouldings, with their irregular chevron pattern (archivolt), contrast with the much darker stone of this lower storey of the tower.



West door – Light chevron contrast with darker stone

This Chevron pattern is found elsewhere in Northampton, the best example being in the Church of St. Peter's in the town.

The arcading

Above the west doorway is an isolated triplet arcade.



West elevation, the triplet arcade

This is typical of arcading for this period, as can be seen at St. Peter's



The experiment begins

Moving to the second storey of the tower, the plain masonry technique is suddenly abandoned. The outer face of this (south elevation shown) is carried on a continuous pointed or Gothic style arcade.



South elevation, part first and second storeys

“Let’s try mixing the arch styles”

The third and final storey varies again in that the general wall face continues as a buttress at each end of the cornerstones, with each face of the tower having old Roman and new Gothic arches. The intriguing use of colour contrast in the surface masonry is thought to have been introduced by French architect, William of Sens, who was involved in Canterbury cathedral in 1174-9.



The third storey showing mixed Gothic and Romanesque arches

John Goff, Northamptonshire County Architect from 1969-1974 wrote of Spratton’s church that “there can be few other buildings which so well illustrate the artistic freedom with which the English moved into the Gothic age”. He goes on to pose the question as to why this small Midland village should have been chosen as an early exercise in Gothic architecture. He finds a possible answer in the more precise handling of masonry possible from the long seam of easily workable sedentary rock, running diagonally across the country with Spratton at its centre. This readily available local material, known geologically as Northampton Sand, was soft enough to be easily dressed. But this stone, laid down in Jurassic times as the bed of a large inland sea, is found in many forms and the darker brown ‘ironstone’ is harder and was used in the lower part of the construction. The softer stone was used where features were required but, of course, being soft has eroded very severely as can be seen from the 20th century replacements.

The font

The 13th century font has probably seen many different locations in the Church.



13th century font

14th century south aisle

In the 14th century the south aisle was added. Why is one of the window arches in Romaesque style, the other Gothic, as shown in the photograph? This also shows the Churchyard Cross, erected at the same time. The base and upright are believed to be original and medieval, but the (missing) cross was probably destroyed during the Civil War – it is shown following its restoration in 2003.



The exterior of the south aisle with the two different window styles

Inside the openings into the south aisle were re-constructed with Gothic arches:



The two arch styles are seen in the photograph taken at the end of the nineteenth century:

The contrasting arches are shown in this photograph, used for the set of partridge postcards in 1926, but taken at the end of the 19th century before the stained glass window was put in.



The contrasting arch profiles

Outside the south door was mimicked in the same style as the west door:



The south door

The new Chancel

At the same time, a splendid new chancel was built and the use of the Gothic arch shows the later era of this. Whether Sir John Swinford, then Lord of the Manor, had a hand in this, we shall never know.



The new chancel

Sir John Swinford

Sir John Swinford died in 1371 and a tomb to commemorate him was erected in around 1385, with an alabaster effigy, as shown in the chancel photograph above and also below. This photograph shows the railings behind this tomb, which may be a very rare 14th century survival, but if not then 17th century.



The SS decoration round his neck denotes him as a follower of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster.



Effigy (part) of Sir John Swinford

In 1505, John Chambers (a direct descendant of Sir John Swinford) built the chantry chapel on the north side at the east end, this now houses the vestry and the organ.

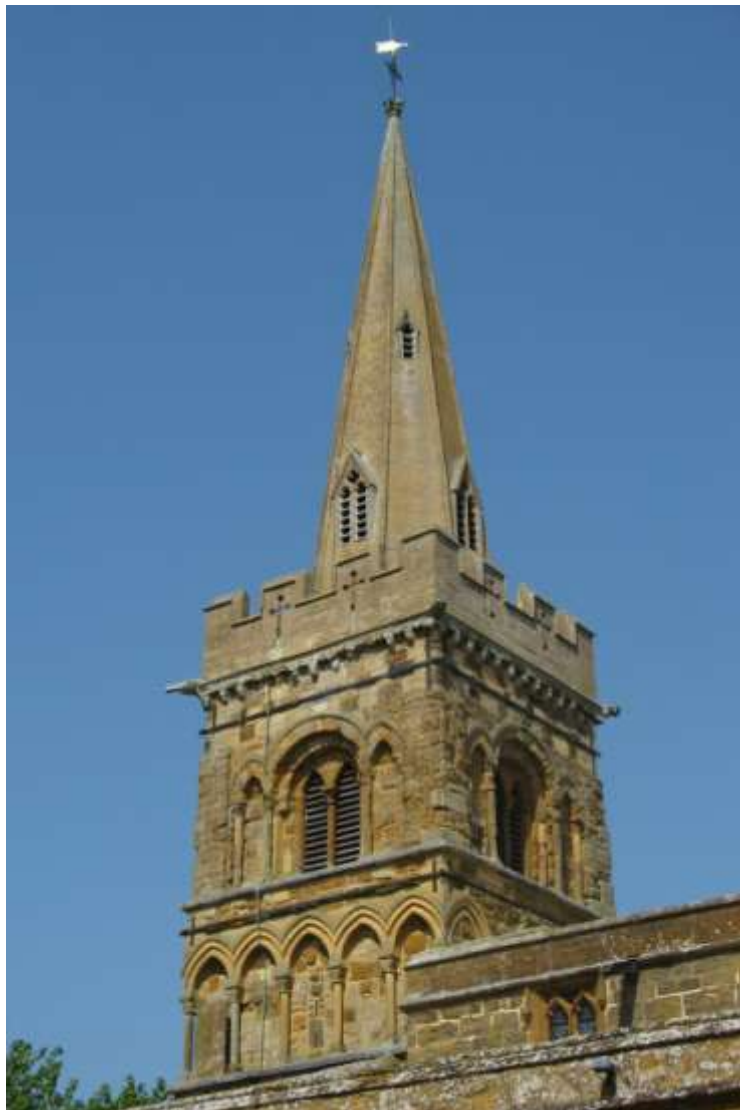
The spire is added

In the meantime, in the 15th century, the spire was added. This capped the final storey of the Gothic tower, with a 15th century parapet of the same stone material as the spire.

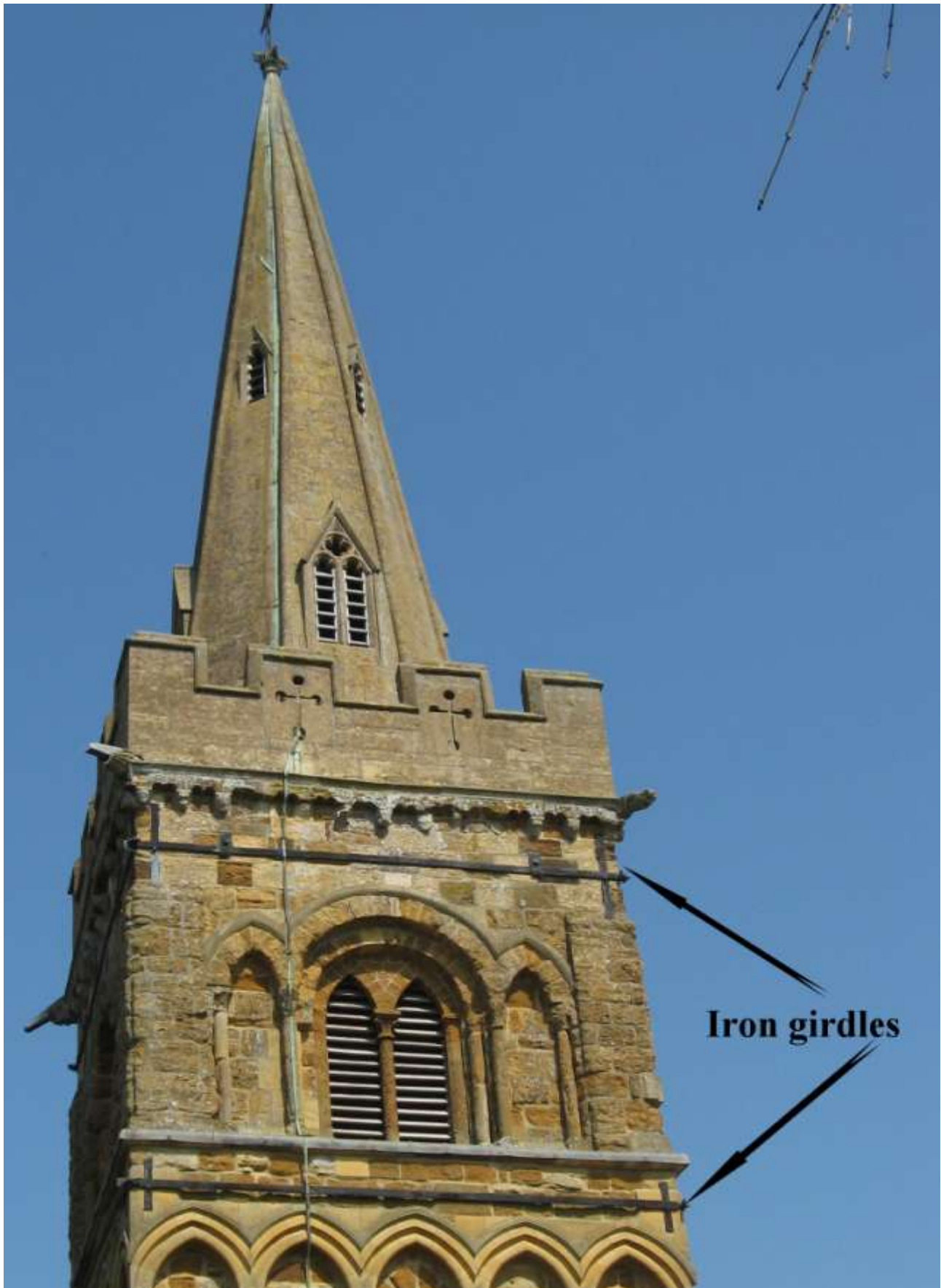


The 15th century parapet

This gives us the overall appearance of the Church today



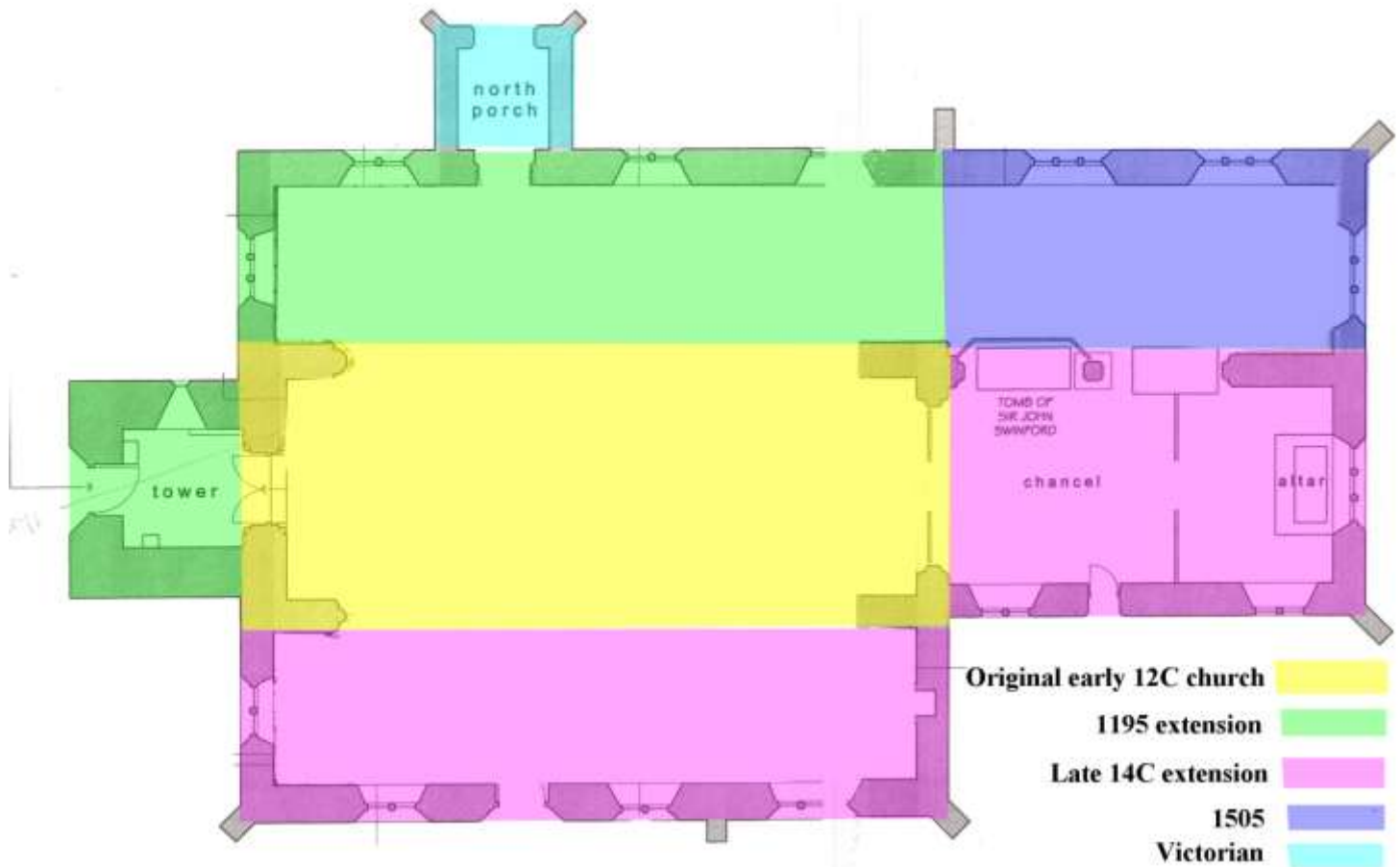
When the 15th century parapet and spire were constructed, it would have been noted that the softer stone had not worn well over its 200 year life, so the spire was constructed in a much harder and alien stone. But, it is unlikely that sufficient thought was given to the thrust that the spire would exert on a tower not constructed for that purpose. So, it has been necessary to put iron girdles around the tower so as to stop the spire literally punching its way through it.



Development by eras

The way in which the Church has developed is some of the coloured plan

This will be displayed landscape



Brasses

Two important brasses, at present underneath the organ, were installed in the floor in 1474. These Parnell husband and wife are probably related to Thomas Purnell, vicar of Spratton 1499-1511. Descriptions in the Record Office are shown below.



Robert Parnell



Johanna Purnell

Robert Parnell “There is very little of the man’s figure left, the head being in some ‘Church wardens box’. What there is shows the 15th century civilian costume with *Gyfriars* and Rosary. A long outer garment fastened (?) and open at the bottom turns back just sufficiently to show another loose robe underneath it. The feet are encased in large shoes partially pointed at the laces.”

Johanna Parnell. “The woman wears a veiled and moderately head dress and a gown low on the bosom and with large open sleeves, it falls straight down to the feet which it covers with its folds, and it is edged at the neck and wrists with embroidery.”

There is another very important brass, hopefully waiting to be discovered when the organ is moved, to William Wilmer dated 1599 and including a coat of arms.

In the south aisle can be seen a brass inscribed to Edward Twigden and wife from 1614.

Pews

The pews were carved in the 16th century although some were heavily restored in the 19th century.

The carvings on the end of the choir stalls are very fine and obviously the work of a master craftsman.



The wings of the angel are particularly beautifully carved.



East window

The east window was installed in 1899 in memory of Rev. John Llewelyn Roberts, vicar from 1862-1897.



Historical re-enactment

In 2004, it was decided to put on a play entitled “If stone could talk” to re-enact the Church extensions of the Swinford/Chambers era. This was a very successful production and large numbers of people came from all around to see this. The Heritage weekend in May included a flower festival, open gardens and a barbecue and raised £3000.



Fund-raising

There have been a very considerable number of restoration initiatives and Church events over the last 25 years. A grant of £20,000 was obtained in 1986/7 for restoration of windows and surrounds. The sixth bell was installed in 1988



The Tower restoration (1987-90) was a very major undertaking costing £121,000 of which English Heritage paid 60% and the remaining £50,000 was raised from charitable bodies.



Friends of St. Andrew's

The Friends of St. Andrew's Church was formed in 1995, and has raised nearly £75,000 for the following projects

Year	Work required and funded	Events	Amount raised
1998	Repair and overhaul of rainwater disposal, renovation of porch, repair to masonry, re-leading of windows, interior timber treatment for death watch beetle	Casino Night (1997) Donations from requests to charities Sausage & Mash supper	£32,000 <i>including Heritage Lottery grant of £14,700</i>
1999	Reglazing of 5 windows	Edwardian Afternoon	£1,100 <i>plus donations from charities</i>
2000	Reglazing of 2 windows		£2,000 <i>incl donation from Barclays</i>
2001	Remedial building work	Burns Supper Gilbert & Sullivan evening	£2,300
2002		Mediaeval Banquet	£311.62
2003	Remedial building work Installation of kitchen		£4,000 <i>incl donations from charities</i> £500
2004	Restoration of churchyard cross, listed graves & churchyard in general	Churchyard Project including medieval pageant	LHI Grant £10,500
2005	Heating	Gilbert & Sullivan evening Christmas cards Art Exhibition	Payment to PCC £6,300
2006		Pudding evening Wine Tasting	£461
2007	Repairs to drainage system and soakaways	Concert Barn Dance and scarecrows	£2,506.51
2008		Barn Dance & Scarecrow Day Fashion Show	£1,168.69 £701.61
2009	Repointing of stonework, maintenance to 12 windows, glazing, roof repairs.	Barn Dance & Open Gardens Brass Band	£1,152.18 £800.43
2010	Quinquennial inspection repairs	Scarecrows Brass Band	£1,389.57 £706.94
2011		Barn Dance	£442

UNIQUE St Andrew's

Our church is unique in many ways; e.g. - its historically very notable 'transitional' tower, its connections with the 14th century Knight Sir John Swinford, and Amphillis Twigden, baptised at our font in 1602 and who was the great great grandmother of US President George Washington. The building and its treasures are part of our heritage and deserving of our care.

VISION for the FUTURE

Needless to say, we love this place, BUT not only do we want to continue to preserve and maintain it as a fantastic building, we also have the VISION and an OPPORTUNITY to once again make lasting improvements so that it continues to be at the heart of and serve the needs of our village community.

COMMUNITY PROJECT CONSULTATION

You can see what has been achieved both in the past and in more recent times – and we believe that now is a good time to move things forward again. So please help and support this new Community Project; share and develop your ideas for creating useful modern working spaces for ongoing beneficial community use within the building, both for us and for future generations.

If you are interested, want to join our team of volunteers, or wish to tender for and provide skills for carpentry and building work, please make sure our team has your contact details.

Bill Blowfield and David Bennett, joint Project Managers