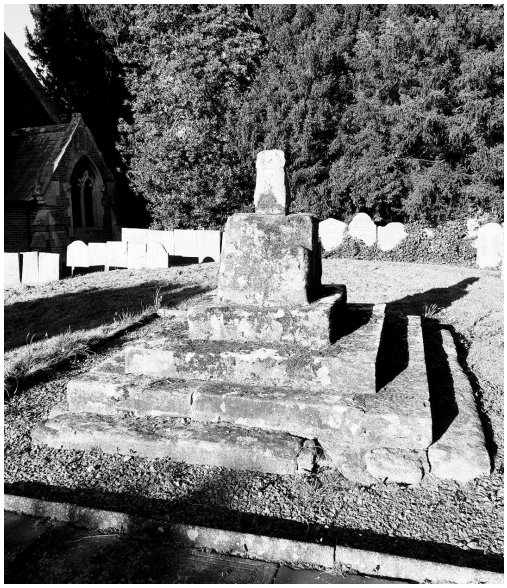
A short history of St Mary's Church, Walton on the Wolds

Louise Jackson

St Mary's Church is a Grade II listed building situated on New Lane, Walton on the Wolds. It is built of red brick and consists of a west tower, nave, chancel and vestry with stone dressings and a slate roof.

The earliest sign of Christianity in Walton on the Wolds are the remains of a medieval preaching cross in the churchyard. It is reputed to be around 900 years old and it is likely it was used by travelling priests and possibly the first Rector, Hugh Dispenser, in the thirteenth century (1221–1238).



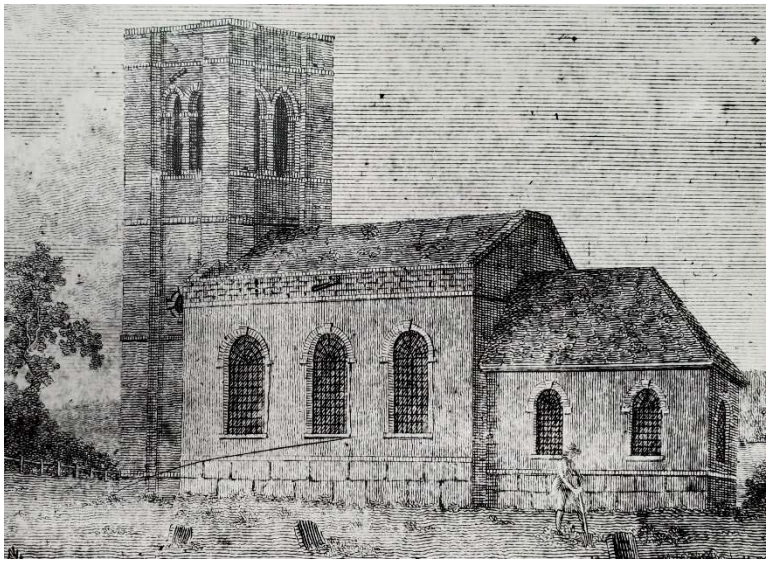
The medieval preaching cross today

The first church was probably built on this site around 1220–1 during the reign of Henry III (1216–72). Walton church was dedicated to St Bartholomew and this 'Gothic edifice' was once known to be one of the most beautiful churches in the county.

However, by 1736 according to John Nichols, the church had become

> … so ruinous and decayed, by the general decay of the timber, and the bulging out and mouldering away of the walls thereof, that the said church was in such danger of falling, that the parishioners could not assemble therein for the public worship of Almighty God, without manifest hazard of their lives.

It was pulled down in the same year by the church wardens.



Nichols' illustration *circa* 1800

The new church building (see above) was completed in 1739 at an estimated cost of £13,000. At this point the church became known as St Mary's. An inscription can be found in the lead of the roof tower:

> *This church was rebuilt in the year 1739 by Elir Porte, plumber and William Jackson, mason. The chancel was built in the same year by Rev. John Bainbrigge, the rector of this parish.*

During the construction of the new building the Bishop of Lincoln gave permission for services to be held in the Rectory.

The chancel, which was reputedly 'ugly and bare', was rebuilt 1856 in Gothic style with a projecting vestry on the south side by the Rector, Rev Augustus Packe, at his own expense. On the north side of the chancel a priest's door provided convenient access to the rectory. A plaque below the vestry window records that the Rev Augustus Packe was buried below the vestry floor in 1861. The 'new' chancel has three stained glass windows; the altar window, a triplet with stained glass representing the crucifixion whilst the stained glass side windows are dedicated to Augustus Packe and his wife Frances Henrietta Packe.

During drain renovations in 1972 a tomb containing Packe, his wife and two daughters was discovered along with a copy of the *Leicester Advertiser* dated 26th July 1856 with details of the reopening of the church on 18th July 1856.

In 1877 the church underwent further restoration at the expense of Rev John Bird (Rector 1873–94). Alterations including; a new open timbered stained pine roof, a stained glass window in the nave (dedicated to Mrs Charlotte Payne Edmunds of Peterborough), a carved stone pulpit and font and a lectern were installed at a total cost of £940 6s 11d. In 1891 a west door costing £46 10s was added. Rev John Bird's wife, Louisa Edmunds, was originally from Peterborough, the carved organ seat is reputedly a former choir stall from Peterborough Cathedral. New seats for the 'free use of

parishioners' were installed in 1875. Visitors to the church nowadays will find the church still retains a Victorian feel as very little has changed.

The interior about 1900

The lamps (now gone) were installed by Rev Montague Bird (Rector 1894–1942) to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.

Memorials

The earliest memorial is dated 1695 and commemorates Mary, wife of Thomas Pochin of Walton and later of Barkby. It bears the Pochin family arms and is situated high on the west wall above the font and is quite worn. The gravestones of their youngest son, George Pochin, and later members of the family are situated in the floor of the porch and tower.

A brass plaque above the pulpit states 'Rev. Augustus Packe died 1st February 1861 aged 55 years'.

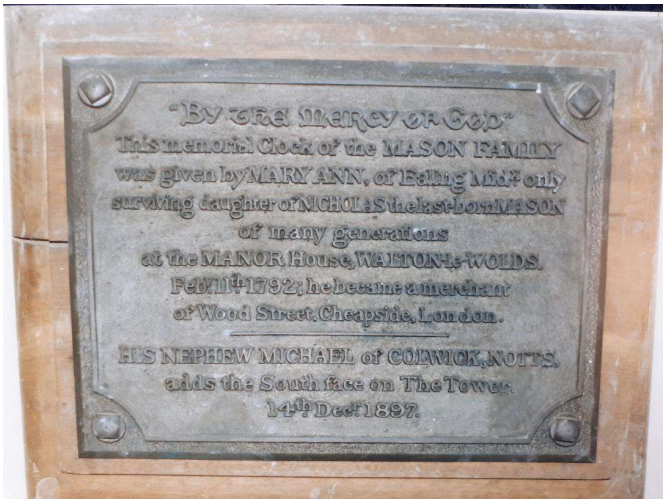
The Bainbrigge Memorial *circa* 1758

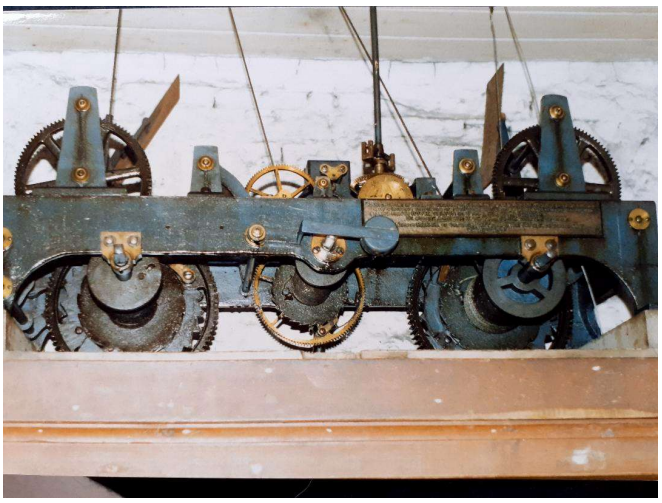
The Bainbrigge family memorial is on the south wall of the chancel and states that their bodies are interred in a vault nearby.

In the chancel there is a memorial to Mary, wife of Rev Augustus Hobart (Rector 1820–47). Hobart later became the 6th Earl of Buckingham. Augustus Charles Hobart-Hampden, their third son, was born in Walton Rectory in 1822, he was to become known as Hobart Pasha, Admiral of the Ottoman Fleet. A memorial to Mary's brother Rev. Charles Williams is on the west wall of the nave.

The Clock

The turret clock was made by Messrs Smith of Derby and cost £160. It was donated by Miss Mary Ann Mason of Ealing in memory of her father, Nicholas Mason, the last Mason born in Walton (1792). The Masons lived at the Manor House opposite the church and have many memorials in the graveyard dating from 1709 to 1956. The clock was dedicated at the evening service on 8th May 1898. In 2016 the clock was provided with an electric motor by the original makers at a cost of £6,500.





The original clock mechanism

Bells

There are five bells in total all still in working order and rung occasionally by visiting ringers. The original bell frame was replaced in1896.

Date		diameter weight	Bellfounder	Inscription	Cost
1656		2 ft 4 in 3 cwt 3 qrs 23 lbs	George Oldfield, Bellfounder, Nottingham	'God save his church 1656. Robert Blunt. James Blunt.'	
1807			John Briant, Hertford	'John Briant Hertford founder, 1807 John Shuttlewood churchwarden, Rev. Phillip Story, rector, John Palmer churchwarden.'	£18 19s 6d
1853	This replaced an original third bell of 1659*	2 ft $6^{1}/_{8}$ ins 4 cwt 2 qrs	John Taylor Loughborough	'John Taylor and Sons of Loughborough Founders'	
1896	Treble	2 ft $3^{1}/_{8}$ ins 4 cwt 1 qr	John Taylor Loughborough	'A.M.D.G. the gift of the founder John Taylor A.D. 1896' (Ad majorem dei gloriam – to the greater glory of God)	£33
1896	Tenor	3 ft 2 1/8 ins 10 cwt 18 lbs	John Taylor Loughborough	'Audite et venite, venite et audite Montagu B. Bird B.A. Rector. William Daft, Churchwarden.' (Hear and come. Come and hear.)	£65

*The original third bell was cast by George Oldfield. It was broken on 5th November 1852 by an over-enthusiastic ringer, possibly because it was customary for ringers to receive a shilling on that date! The 1659 bell was inscribed with *'Exito lentos'* (I rouse up the sluggards); it was recast by John Taylor and Son, Loughborough.

An item from the Churchwarden book 26th September 1808 states:

> Paid for the great bell casting and putting up £18 19s 6d. The blacksmith's bill 13/6. For ale at the same time 14/-.

Graveyard

The church graveyard was officially closed in 1968 and burials now take place in the Burial Ground owned by the Parish Council on Loughborough Road, Walton on the Wolds. The church gravestones were relaid in 1972 for ease of maintenance which is currently undertaken by Charnwood Borough Council.

The original graveyard was surveyed by Rev Montague Bird in 1911. His comprehensive 'Register of Graves' records all the names, dates and original locations of graves in the churchyard. A survey of the repositioned memorials including inscriptions was made by Sylvia Tomlin in 1980. The oldest surviving gravestone is that of Nicholas Mason dated 1709.

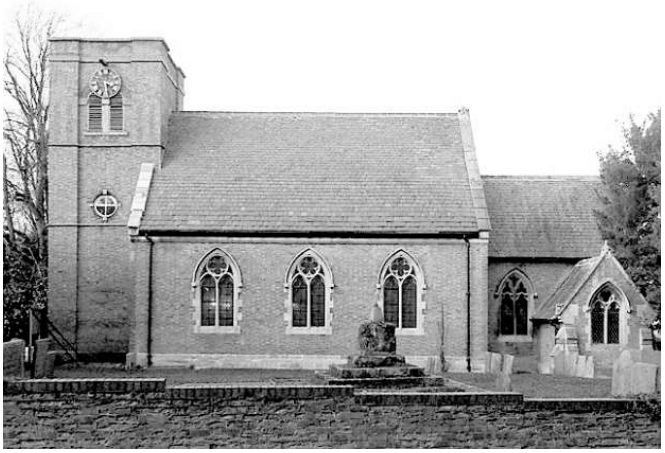
The Rectory (now known as The Old Rectory)

The church along with Walton's fine Georgian rectory provided the incumbent with an 'exceptionally good living' attracting many well educated and well connected men who were given the 'living' as a reward for their services or in recognition of their status. According to C. N. Wright's *Directory 1887–8* there were 289 acres of glebe providing £500 p.a.

The Rectory (*circa* 1739) originally had extensive lands, gardens, glass houses and a very large kitchen garden to the rear surrounded by a high brick wall. It was approached via a long private gravelled drive across a field, the Western Close, accessed from New Lane which was originally a private road. By the 1930s this drive had fallen out of use. Today a single, very overgrown, stone pillar is all that remains of the entrance gate. The rectory, its gardens and associated cottages were sold into private ownership in 1953.

Further information

The Parish Registers consist of eight volumes and date back to 1566. They are some of the most complete in Leicestershire. They are deposited at the Leicestershire Records Office in Wigston Magna, Leicester. The registers (1568–1837) were transcribed by the publisher W.P. Phillimore with the permission of Rev Montague Bird at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is now possible to view the Walton registers on the internet.

. 

St Mary's Church today

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