

## St Mary's, Hasfield



While much of the visible fabric of the church you see today dates from the Victorian era, the bones of the building go back to the thirteenth century, with the first Parson we know of recorded in the 1220's.

There may well have been a place of worship on this spot long before then, when Hasfield or 'Hasleighe' was a cleared area in the extensive woodland between the river Severn and the Malvern hills. Before the Norman Conquest Hasfield belonged to the Priory of Deerhurst - which itself sits on a Roman site - but by the Domesday Book of 1086 'Thurston, son of Rolf' held 1 ½ hides of land at Hasfield from Westminster Abbey - 'hide' comes from the Anglo-Saxon word for 'family', and meant a land holding that was considered sufficient to support a family - around 30 acres or so, depending on the quality of the land.

The overlordship of the village remained with Westminster Abbey and in 1166 the manor of Hasfield was held by Humphrey & Eustace Pauncefoot - the family stayed for the next 400 years until 1598. The Pauncefoots are recorded as patrons of the living of St Mary's in 1311, and the incumbents referred to as rectors from 1317.

The church was originally dedicated to St Peter, and as a result rather unusually while the rest of the church is dedicated to St Mary, the tower is still dedicated to St Peter.

**ARCHITECTURE:** Very little of the original church is visible, but clues include the eight hour saxon sundial scratched into the lintel above the south door, now hidden from the sun by the porch, and the tub-shaped 12<sup>th</sup> Century font. The tower with its three levels, stair turret and corner buttresses dates from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, with a battlemented parapet and corner gargoyles added in the late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century. On the south side of the tower is a sundial with a stone inscribed 'HW 1719', standing for Howell and Wadley, churchwardens of that year, whose accounts include payments for building materials and for plastering the tower. The church is all built from the soft local blue lias limestone which unlike the harder Cotswold stone used for the window and door frames and corner quoins, is very vulnerable to frost and water, and needs constant maintenance.

Most of the church was restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the north aisle was added in 1850 by the prominent local architect, Thomas Fulljames, as a memorial to his uncle and namesake Thomas Fulljames (d.1847), from whom he inherited Hasfield Court. Fulljames demolished the north wall of the nave and replaced it with an arcade of four bays in the Decorated style with

octagonal pillars and decorated capitals with deeply chamfered arches. The memorial tablet to his uncle occupies the east wall of the aisle below a memorial window. The timber south porch of the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century was probably moved from a north doorway of the nave as part of these alterations. Some restoration work was carried out in 1879 and major work in 1895.

There are some old carved bench ends in the nave to be found amongst the Victorian pews inserted to match, and the carved wooden pulpit (restored in 1988) dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Over the chancel arch there is a Calvary with figures of the Virgin Mary and St. John on either side, put up in 1920 in memory of the fallen of the 1914-1918 War, and whose names are inscribed on the tablet on the north side on the chancel arch. On the south side there is a matching tablet to all from Hasfield who served in that war.

Two early 17<sup>th</sup> century bells and two of 1832 were replaced by six new bells in 1901, and the bell frame was restored in 2016.

**WINDOWS:** The small west window in the tower is of pre-reformation glass, one panel containing the Royal Standard and the other the keys of St Peter and three crowns. A window in the south wall near the pulpit has fragments of 14<sup>th</sup> century glass in the tracery. The East Window of the chancel over the altar was presented by James Sevier, Rector 1833-1880 and restored in memory of William Parker, Rector 1934-1957. It contains the figure of Jesus with St. Peter and St. Paul on either side. The windows on the north and south of the sanctuary are in memory of the wife and only daughter respectively of a former Rector of Ashleworth, Rev. Henry Atwood (1839-1880). The other window on the south side of the chancel is in memory of William Miller of Cheltenham, and his son Saunders William Miller who was Rector of Hasfield for over thirty years until his death in 1833.

The Reredos of carved and panelled oak was erected by Rev. F. Lillington, curate of Hasfield for fifteen years under Rev. James Sevier, in memory of his wife.

**THE PAUNCEFOOT FAMILY & LEGEND:** A legend of love and fidelity has become attached to the Pauncefoot family which concerns the voluntary surrender by a Pauncefoot lady of her right hand as a ransom demanded for the return of her husband who had been captured during one of the Crusades.

The Pauncefoots were a large family with several branches across the southwest and around Crickhowell in Wales, where the legend also persists. The legend is probably therefore rooted in a real event but there is confusion as to the particular lady involved. The most probable is Constance Pauncefoot of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, as described in the 'Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society' for 1952 as follows:-

"The manor of Hasfield was granted by Henry II in 1248-9 to Richard Pauncefoot from whom it passed to his son Grimbald, who took to wife Constance daughter of Sir John de Lingeye. She was the undaunted lady, so tradition asserts, whose tomb stood in Hasfield church for nearly 600 years before being swept away during some so-called restoration. Upon the tomb

lay a female figure without her right hand, illustrating the time-honoured story that Constance, having long sought in vain the release of her husband, a captive in the hands of infidels, was finally told that her request would not be granted unless she sent her right hand: whereupon with a singular courage, she ordered it to be cut off (*Burke Commoners III, IV*)”

Whatever the truth of the story Grimbald was certainly a man of action, as he played a leading part in the defence of Gloucester against Prince Edward in 1264, and later became an important figure in military affairs in Wales and the Marches and was Keeper of the Forest of Dean.

This family trait seems to have continued down the generations - Thomas Pouncefoot, lord of Hasfield in 1457 was involved in a riot against the Abbot of Gloucester, while his grandson John, lord in 1510, was murdered in 1516, apparently while carrying out his duties as a Justice of the Peace. John's heir was his son Richard, then aged 4, but Arthur Kemys, a creditor of John Pouncefoot, gained possession of the manor, and in 1529 granted it to a John Browne. Browne claimed that Richard had expelled him from the manor by force in 1531.

The raised table-tomb in the north-east corner of the chancel is the only Pouncefoot memorial remaining, and the partly obliterated inscription reads; 'Here lyeth Dorothy Pouncefoot late wydowe of Rychard ...foot'. Dorothy was the daughter of John Ashfield of Heythrop, Oxfordshire, and died in 1568, her husband Richard having died in 1559.

**THE MANOR:** After the Reformation the Pouncefoot family remained Catholics and as a result the family fortunes waned, Richard Pouncefoot's son John went into exile and the manor passed to the Tracy family of Stanway House in 1601 and then to John Parker of Northleach in 1654. William Parker, the last Abbot of Gloucester came from Hasfield, and retired here at the Dissolution in 1541 - John claimed descent from the Abbots father. The Parker family stayed for the next 150 years before selling the manor to John Stone in the late 1700's. Hasfield Court was then occupied by the Fulljames family from 1806 to 1863, when it was bought by William Baker, a cousin of the Stone family, and is still lived in by his descendants.

The advowson (patronage or right of presentation to the living - in other words the right to choose the rector) passed along with the manor to the Tracys, and then the Parkers who sold it in 1798 to William Miller, an entrepreneur from London who had bought the lease of the mineral well at Cheltenham and was responsible for turning it into a fashionable Spa. With his wealth he bought the living of Hasfield, and installed his son Rev Saunders William Miller - who was clearly less interested in business - as rector. William Miller also built the Coombe Hill canal to link Cheltenham to the River Severn. On the death of Rev. Saunders Miller in 1833 the living was bought by the Rev James Sevier for his own occupation. Sevier was a bachelor and evidently of independent means - he rebuilt the Rectory as you see it today at his own expense.

The advowson passed with the manor to the Baker family and the current Patron of the Living is Mr G. Meath Baker.

**PARISH LINKS WITH AMERICA:** Just east of the South Porch is a headstone to Richard Wall, who died in 1704. Richard was baptised at Hasfield on March 5<sup>th</sup> 1630, but evidently became a Quaker. He, his wife Rebecca, their daughter Sarah, their son Richard and his wife Rachel and Rachel's brother Toby Leech, all residents of Hasfield, sailed for America with William Penn in 1682 and with a group of other Quakers pooled their land purchases to form the township of Cheltenham, Pennsylvania. Richard Wall's house, built soon after is now a museum, and was, it is claimed, where the first Quaker Meeting in America was held.

Today St Mary's continues to serve the local community as it has for the last 1,000 years. Hasfield is joined with neighbouring parishes to form the West of Severn Benefice, with regular services held throughout the year.