

Jane Tugwell

THE HISTORIC PARISH CHURCHES OF LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND

By Leonard Cantor

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115 pages



I was amazed to find in the preface of this book that there are around 16,000 parish churches in England (13,000 of which are listed), with 350 in Leicestershire and Rutland.

The publication is divided into 3 sections. Firstly, the history of these local parish churches covering all the different architectural styles. Secondly, a gazetteer, which due to space, includes only examples that are interesting historically, architecturally or topographically. Finally, there is a very useful glossary of architectural and ecclesiastical terms.

I liked the inclusion of a diagram at the beginning of section one which shows the basic layout of a parish church. With nearly a hundred illustrations of local architectural features, this would make a useful style guide when visiting any English church.

In the gazetteer there is a map of the two counties which shows all the parish churches, the ones featured in the book are then highlighted so you know exactly what is covered. There are well over 100 further good illustrations in this section.

I was particularly interested to read the sections which referred to churches in the Harborough area. Church Langton, Hallaton, Kings Norton, Lubenham, Nevill Holt, Nosely, Wistow, Stockerston, Theddingworth, Tilton, and of course our very own St Dionysius all have significant mentions. Rutland is well covered, with a wealth of interesting architectural styles including fine examples of Saxon and Norman features.

There are also some remarkable facts that I picked up on. For example, I had not realised that nationally around 30 parish churches a year are converted to other uses, such as for the homeless, jobseekers or other Christian faiths.

I also had not realised that in pre-conquest Britain the church had played quite such a large part in local communities. It absorbed about half of the economic resources and manpower in creating the buildings themselves their furnishings, fittings and paintings.

I particularly liked the quote used from Clifton Taylor.

'In no other country in the world is the Parish Church so frequently the visual centrepiece, the dominant building of a town, or still more often a village as in England'

Currently only around 2% of the population attend Anglican churches regularly, the author emphasises the burden which rests on the Parochial Church Councils who are responsible for the upkeep of these precious buildings.

His final brief short section on 'Visiting Parish Churches' covers the best methods of gaining access to locked buildings, a necessity now that your appetite has been whetted to make your own visit!

The final message we are left with is the importance of our Parish Churches, what they represent and the treasure houses they are of art and architecture. This book opens your eyes to what is out there in a tidy, informative and uncomplicated way.

