

MURESLAI or MUSELAI, with the hamlet of Salden, is mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086). Until this century, it consisted of one long, broad street and was a thriving market town, lying on the principal road from Buckingham, via Dunstable to London.

A weekly market and a yearly Charter Fair to last the 3 days of the Vigil, Feast and Morrow of the Nativity of the Virgin, (Sept. 7, 8 and 9) were granted to Mursley by King Henry III in the year 1242. The Charter Fair is still held on special occasions to this day.

THE CHURCH

A C15th tower gleams white above the C14th church, which is built of limestone.

Dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, the church was originally granted by Richard Fitzniel to the Prioress of Nuneaton before the year 1166. Confirmation of this grant was later made by the Lords of the Manor of Mursley and Salden, Warren Fitzgerald and his wife Agnes. The church was held by Nuneaton Priory until the Dissolution. The chancel, the arcades of the nave and the two side aisles were built in the C14th in the Decorated style. The W. tower was added in the C15th. The clerestory and S. porch were added when the church was restored by Charles Buckeridge of Oxford between 1865-70. He gave it new buttresses and renewed many windows (some retain fragments of the original Decorated tracery), the furnishings and floorings. (E. Godwin's tiles).

Outside, the lych gate is C20th. Burials no longer take place in the original churchyard; they now take place in the beautifully maintained extension, to the south of the church.

Of particular interest are the fine Fortescue monuments of the C16th and C17th, a Jacobean carved oak pulpit and two C14th piscinae.

Windows: All are C19th and of clear glass except for that in the tower W. wall, which depicts Noah, Moses, Simeon and St John the Baptist. There are lancet windows in the N. and E. walls and quatrefoil windows in the clerestory.

Bells: There are six in all, 5 made by John Briant of Hertford in 1814 and the sixth by Deverell and Bradbury, all recast in the C19th.

Font: C19th stone, with an octagonal bowl, set on a plain, square plinth. IHS (Jesus) is carved in a roundel. The cover is oak.

Pulpit: Of Jacobean oak, richly carved, of three sections and a fourth panel is set against the N. wall. The original sounding board has long since disappeared (as has also the Royal Coat of Arms, which hung at the west end of the nave).

Lectern: C19th oak, the gable ends pierced with trefoil-headed arch and spandrels, with a scalloped, pierced brass cresting.

Corbels: Note the four carved heads, all different, on each side of the nave. These are probably part of the original fabric of the early C 14th church. The four corbels each side of the chancel are presumed to be C 19th.

Piscinae: Two, on the N and S walls in the aisles, both with cinquefoil sub-cusped ogee arches; probably C14th.

There is one similar in the sanctuary but with a credence shelf and hexagonal lobed basin with a drain hole.

Sedilia: On the chancel s. wall: two seats on different levels.

Altar: C 19th oak, with a three-stepped Calvary altar cross.

Reredos: C19th of variegated marble; an open arcade of 3 cinquefoil sub-cusped, pointed arches, supported by 4 colonnettes with foliated capitals. There are said to be concealed murals here.

Graffiti: Note, on chancel S. wall 'WB 1695' and 'IA 1706'.

Organ: The one in the Chancel was built in the early 1900s by Thomas Casson (The Positive Organ Company). It is a good example of the range of small single manual instruments produced by this Company

and sold from their catalogue. It features pneumatic devices such as a melodic bass and treble (which automatically played the highest and lowest notes) and thereby compensated for the lack of a pedal board and second manual and enabled organists of limited ability to provide a full accompaniment to hymns. The facility to transpose by lifting and moving the keyboard to the left or right made it easy for the organist to adapt to the range which the congregation could sing! This instrument was restored in memory of Peter Nuttall and is regularly used for more contemplative services such as Evening Prayer.

Note: During the Flower Festival 2011 I ran a slide show of photos of old Mursley in the church. A former church organist Gerald Roads introduced himself. He told me that he had scratched G Roads Organist 1960 - 19... inside the lid of the Thomas Casson organ which he played from 1960 -1993. After his departure someone had completed his graffiti by adding 93.

Gerald recalled there was an active choir when he was organist whose members included Leslie and Jacqueline Herbert, Stafford and Doreen Bull, Aubrey, Connie and Mabel Coleman and Randolph Weale. Gerald used to cycle from Newton Longville to play two services, Matins and Evensong, every Sunday.

The organ at the west end of the Nave is a two manual electronic instrument with pedals. It is of relatively modern construction and was donated by Swanbourne House School, its more comprehensive range of facilities and tonal quality makes it an appropriate instrument for use in family worship.

Clock: Mechanism housed in wooden casing with half-glazed doors. Made by John Smith & Sons, Midland Clock Works, Derby, Ltd. Restored C20th.

Glazed Oak Screen at W. End: Erected late C20th.

Monuments

Sir John Fortescue, a famous classical scholar, was cousin and tutor to Queen Elizabeth 1, who valued his services highly, making him Chancellor of the Exchequer (1589-1603), and bestowing lands and money upon him. He built a large, fine mansion at Salden (about a mile 1 from here), costing £33,000 in 1590. The front was 175 feet in width and it had terraced gardens, a bowling green and fishponds. Queen Elizabeth and, later, James 1 are said to have visited him there. Sir John was known for his kindness and generosity and every day he had broken victuals served to the poor in a field, to this day called 'Beggars' Mead', next to Warren Hill. A path still exists which connects Salden to Mursley.

The later Fortescues reverted to the Catholic faith and in 1729 the direct male line came to an end; thus the title became extinct and the properties divided and sold.

1. Sir John Fortescue (Chancel N. wall)

Sir John, in costume of red, blue and gold, kneels.

His second wife, Dame Alice, is with him, wearing a richly brocaded gown and a blue cloak. Below them is an altar tomb, with a brass portrait of his first wife, Lady Cecily, who is richly robed.

2. Sir Francis Fortescue, son of Sir John, and his wife, Grace, nee Manners, who came from Haddon, Derbyshire. (Chancel S. wall)

They kneel at a desk with open books and below them are their children: on one side, 6 boys in red; on the other side, 4 girls in blue. Three of the children carry skulls to show they had died in childhood. On top of the monument are a little peacock and a small, brown bear. Two rosy faced cherubs adorn the sides.

3. War Memorial 1939-45 (S. Wall nave)

To M. Kirby, C.A.H. Wigley, G. V. Wigley

4. J.R. Causten and sister, Elizabeth Knight. (N. Wall nave)

5. J. Dauncey and wife, Lucy, nee Thursby. (N. wall nave)

6. Diana Weale (Church heating, given by Randolph Weale, in her memory). (N. aisle)

7. John Lewis Day, Churchwarden 1975-76. (W. end of N. aisle.)

8. M.E. Selby-Lowndes. (E. wall nave) 9. W. Pitkin. (under W. window)

10. Herbert and Jessie Stanton. (S. aisle nave)

Inscriptions on Wall Monuments (Chancel North Wall)

HIC IACET JOHANES FORTESCUE MILES MAGISTER MAGNAE GUARDEROBAE CANCELLARIUS ET SUBTHESAURARIUS SCACCARIJ ET DE PRIVATIS CONCILII REGINAE ELIZABETH: POSTEA ANNO PRIMO REGIS IACOBI FACTUS EST CANCELLARIUS DUCATUS LANCASTRIAE VIXIT ANNOS 76 ET MORTUUS EST (TIO) DIE DECEMBRIS ANNO DMI 1607 RELIQUIT FILIOS SUPERSTITES FRANCISCUM PRENOBILIS ORDINIS BALNEI MILITEM ET GULIELMUM MILIT QUI IN MEMORIAM PATRIS DEFUNCTI HOC POSUERE.

HERE LIES SIR JOHN FORTESCUE, MASTER OF THE GREAT WARDROBE, CHANCELLOR AND UNDERTREASURER OF THE EXCHEQUER AND A MEMBER OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL OF QUEEN ELIZABETH; LATER, IN THE FIRST YEAR OF KING JAMES'S REIGN HE BECAME CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER.

HE LIVED FOR 76 YEARS AND DIED ON THE 23RD DECEMBER IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1607. HE WAS SURVIVED BY HIS SONS FRANCIS, KNIGHT OF THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE BATH, AND WILLIAM, KNIGHT: WHO PLACED THIS MEMORIAL IN MEMORY OF THEIR DEAD FATHER.

(Our word Exchequer is derived from the Latin word 'scaccarium' meaning a chess-board. Accounts were often kept on a chequered tablecloth.)

TRIA CUM HABEBAT MAXIMA CECILIA SANCTISS ANIMAM CONSTANTISS FIDEM ET CASTISS CORPUS ALTERUM AD DEUM OPT: MAX: ALTERUM IN CHARITATE CONIUGIS PECTUS MIGRAVIT QUOD TERTIUM ERAT HOC TUMULO QUIESCIT VIXIT ANN: 29 MENS 3 RELIQUIT EX NOVEM LIBERIS SUPERSTITES ROBERTUM FRANCISCUM GULIELMUM THOMAM ELIZABETH ET ELIANORAM OBIIT 7 FEBRUARII 1570.

CECILIA HAD THREE GREAT GIFTS, A MOST HO SPIRIT, UNSWERVING LOYALTY AND THE PUREST OF BODIES. THE FIRST SHE DEVOTED TO ALMIGHTY GOD, THE SECOND TO THE HEART OF HER DEAR HUSBAND, AND THE THIRD LIES AT PEACE IN THIS TOMB.

SHE LIVED FOR 29 YEARS AND 3 MONTHS AND OF HER 9 CHILDREN WAS SURVIVED BY ROBERT; FRANCIS, WILLIAM; THOMAS, ELIZABETH AND ELEANOR. SHE DIED ON 7 FEBRUARY 1570.

CECILIA EDMONDI ASFIELD MILITIS FILIA JOANNIS FORTESCU DE SALDEN UXOR HIC SITU EST. OBIIT 7 FEB AO 1570.

CECILIA DAUGHTER OF SIR EDMOND ASHFIELD AND WIFE OF JOHN FORTESCUE OF SALDEN LIES HERE. SHE DIED ON 7TH FEBRUARY IN THE YEAR 1570.

WALL MONUMENT TO SIR FRANCIS FORTESCUE THE INSCRIPTION, ABOVE, READS:

Reader

For example know that this Monument was erected in pious memorie

Of Sr Francis Fortescue of Salden in the Countie of Buckm, Knt of the Bath, eldest Sonne of the Right Hoble Sr John Fortescue Knt, pryvie Counsellour to Queene Elizabeth & to King James, Chancellour to the Xchequer and dutchye, & Master of the Wardrobe, & of Sicilie daughter & Coheir of Sr Edmond Ashfield Knt.

Whose Pietie, vertue & religion made him beloved, whose prudent care and zeale of his countries good made him Honoured.

And of Grace daughter of Sr John Manners of Haddon in the Countie of Darbie Knt second Sonne of Thomas Earle of Rutland, and of Dorotheie his wife daughter and Coheire of Sr George Vemoune Knt. Who in conivgall love, maternall care, domesticke discipline, charitable workes & religion equalling th'auncient & best Christian matrons, was 34 years his loyfull wife, bare him 8 sonnes and 5 daughters & in testimonie of her everlasting loyalltie not onlie remained till death his sorrowfull widowe but alsoe in memorie of their mutuall love erected this monument at her owne proper cost and charges.

LIST OF INCUMBENTS

1239	John de Eston	1621	Robert Wallis
1242	Robert de St Dennis	1639	John Berton
1275	Thomas Irkenbury	1639	Thomas Kyffin
1276	William de Grafton	1644	John Gardner
1312	John de Bedbourne	1683	Robert Armistead
1370	Henry de Outby	1695	John Armistead
1371	Lawrence Allerthorpe	1714	Edward Gataker
1372	John Oussel	1727	Cornelius Crawford
1379	Wallier de Olson	1733	Benjamin Langley
1379	John de Blackfordsby	1789	Thomas Rivitt
1391	John Lewys	1790	George Wagner
1392	Roger Mason	1800	Thomas Pinnock
1394	Thomas Pike	1831	Charles Childers
1397	William Bacon	1833	Thomas Horne
1410	William Clethe	1851	Warren Harries
1413	John Willonshest	1860	John Cross
1417	William Symond	1885	Joseph Bradshaw
1434	Richard Cloughton	1889	Octavius Selby-Lowndes
1438	William Kirkby	1925	John Tredennick
1469	Thomas Grey	1938	George Oliver
1475	John Lumbrey	1956	Heber Wood
1489	John Clayton	1970	Peter van de Kastelee
1534	Alexander Hogston	1981	Stuart Wilmot
1556	Edmund Hodson	1992	John Kinchin-Smith
1580	William Smith	2007	Laurence Meering

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Arcades: A series of arches, open or closed.

Chancel: The choir or Eastern part of the church.

Cinquefoil: An ornamental window form of five arcs arranged circle.

Clerestory: A row of windows in the upper part of the wall that divides the nave from the aisle.

Corbel: A projecting stone bracket, usually carved, which supports a stone column above.

Credence: A small table or shelf near the altar, on which the bread and wine were placed before consecration.

Font: A stone basin containing consecrated water to be used in baptism.

Lectern: A stand on which the Bible is placed. Lessons are read from here.

Lych-gate: A roofed gate to a churchyard, formerly used during a funeral as a temporary shelter for the bier.

Nave: The central space in the church, often flanked by aisles.

Piscina: A stone basin, with a drain, where water used at the Eucharist is poured away.

Reredos: A wall or screen at the back of the altar.

Sedilia: Raised seats on the south wall of the sanctuary used by the priest(s) during the Eucharist.