



Saint Matthew's, Worthington, A Short Guide  
By the Rev. H A Dane (Vicar 1949 - 1971)

Revised 2017 Christina Walmsley (née Dane) & Tim Phillips

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The old Ecclesiastical Parish of Worthington lies in the triangle formed by the B587, the A512 and the A447 so that you are more likely to pass by it than go through it. It embraces the hamlets of Worthington, Newbold, Griffydam and Gelsmoor, with an estimated population of 1500.

The "plain edifice of stone" which serves the Church here as a place of Worship is a Norman Church, but the name Worthington is Saxon - the "tun" or settlement of the family of Werden, so that there was a village here in Saxon times, and tradition has it that there was a Saxon Church to meet their needs. This would have been of wood and wattle, not likely to endure. There is no trace of it today, nor is there mention of it in the Domesday Survey of 1068 where we learn that Henry, Earl de Ferrers, held 4 carucates of land with 5 ploughs. There were 4 freemen with 6 villagers and 2 smallholders with 3 ploughs indicating a population of around 50. In a later survey we read that Henry de Ferrers had 12 carucates of land.

Worthington was then part of Breedon parish, so we look two miles north to Breedon on the Hill where in 1114 the Church was re-built and occupied by 5 monks as a cell or outpost of the Augustinian priory of St Oswald Nostell in Yorkshire, who around 1175 built a church here, of stone, allegedly for the benefit of the coal-miners of Gelsmoor. If there had been a Saxon church here then this would obviously have been the place to build it. In any case it would have been conveniently halfway between Coleorton and Breedon, with a short trip by the monks, and a similar journey for the miners. In the time of Hugh of Wells, 1210 - 1230, we read that the Chapel of Worthington was served by a chaplain from "the mother Church of Breedon."

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### Description of the Church

It is of simple shoe-box shape, a "plain edifice of stone", a rectangle with no distinctive separation of chancel from nave, though a later wooden screen performs this duty.

The Church has three doors. There is first the one by which you came in. The present brick porch bears a date 1781 (now nearly indecipherable) but the upper part appears to be of more recent date than the lower part where the brick are narrow, and the joints between them wider. At the base are stones which may well have been the footings of a much earlier porch. In the Lincoln archives is an entry under the date 1518 that the porch of Worthington chapel was "ruinous." Inside are bench seats where of old parish business would be transacted. At the side of the door the stone is deeply marked with scores which are said to have been made by archers as they sharpened their arrows over four hundred years ago, when in the reign of Henry VIII the crude sport of football was banned and men had to practice their archery. Two similar stones are found in the north wall of Muggington Church in Derbyshire. Just inside the door are two corresponding recesses into which a baulk of timber might be placed to act as a barricade.

You entered by the south door. There is a north door, which may have led to a burial ground (if there ever was one). This is now open. From the field side you can see the rounded head. Behind the choir is another door, which, if it were opened, would send you headlong into the road. This is the Priest's door, but you can only see what I am going to tell you from the outside. If you look carefully at the window, you can see the remains of iron bars, one bar down the centre and two bars across. Clearly at one time this formed an open grille, but the

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purpose of it is disputed - one explanation being that it was used for the Priest inside to hear confessions.

As you enter by the south door you see the font which at one time stood near the north door. It is of 14th century, is made of sandstone and is octagonal in shape, on each face of which is a plain shield with a four foil, and other shields on the upper part of the basin. The oak cover was presented to the Church by Holy Trinity Church, Ashby in 1958.

The nave is said to be the oldest part of the Church. The small lancet and deeply spayed windows, and the semi-circular head of the south door, coupled with the fact of the walls being thick without original buttresses lead to the conclusion that this portion was built in the latter part of the 12th century or early 13th century, that is to say 1175 - 1225. This is the Transitional period between Norman and lancet.

The chancel is described as 14th century, showing characteristics of this in the south and east windows, angle and buttresses and doorway. There does not appear to be any structural indication of this (i.e. you can't see a join)) so I suggest another explanation. Worthington has the distinction of being the area where coal-mining started in Leicestershire, at Gelsmoor in about 1275. This would provide an industrial boom with some local prosperity so some modernisation might have been done to the existing walls of a 12th century chancel, e.g. re-windowing in 14th century style.

A noticeable and interesting feature of the Church is the inclination of the walls. The north side is 5 inches out of the perpendicular at the ends increasing to 10 inches at the centre, and the south side is similarly out of true. Two explanations are given. One of these is that

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the walls have slumped into this state which explains the buttressing. The other is that the Church was built with sloping walls to resemble a ship. This is plausible when we remember that the word "nave" means "ship", while we have reference to the "ark of Christ's Church" in the Baptismal Service.

Notice the windows. We have two windows of single lights, round-headed, plain pointed and foliated pointed, windows with two lights without foliation, and in the west window one of three lights with mullions crossing each other in the head. The window in the south wall is of very recent date, as you can see, but it is of some interest. In the drawing, done in 1811, which is on display, you will see that at this place is a lattice window with a smoke stack coming out. At some time, however, there must have been a window of considerable width. This we conclude from the two corbels which originally supported the drip-stone of such a window. You can see these corbels on the outside of the Church though they are badly weathered.

In the south wall is a piscina, which was a medieval wash-basin or sink in which the Priest washed his hands and the sacred vessels during and after Mass. It has a three-foil head. The word piscina is the Latin word for a fish-bowl. On the opposite side is the aumbry which, as you can see, was originally lined with wood, and formed a cupboard for the custody of the paten, chalice and wine. At the end of the 15th century we read of the Lords of the manor, the Wynters of Worthington. Their memorial stones are in Breedon Church - Henry Wynter, 1494, and Robert or George Wynter, 1545, but they held land in Worthington including a cottage and croft, "adjacent beside the Chapel of Worthington" for which they gave service of a pound of pepper at Michaelmas yearly. We have a silver chalice dated 1569, which may well have been given by one of the Wynter family. The

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paten is of electro-plate, and the other chalice and paten of pewter, as are the collection plates. There is a brass alms dish and a modern brass cross in memory of a Churchwarden, Frank Cox. Later chalices and patens given to the Church. One in memory of John Barnett Wheatley.

From the time of its building Worthington was served first by the monks, then by the clergy of Breedon, though in 1601 the curate was a Mr Taylcoat, who had a stipend of £12 per annum. I have the idea that by, say 1700, the Church was not merely disused, but derelict. However, towards the middle of the 18th century, that is to say 1740 or 1750, perhaps as a result of the Wesleyan Revival, the Church was restored, repaired and re-roofed. The evidence for this is that the upper part of the east wall is completed in brick, which suggests that this part of the wall was missing, and therefore there was no roof.

The Church began a new and active life as from June 30th 1755 when the Rev. John Dalby was admitted and licensed to the cure of the donative Chapel of Worthington. On his death the Rev. Francis Harris was licensed to the free Chapel or Curacy of Worthington on the nomination of John, Lord Scarsdale, and again on his death the Rev. James Dean was licensed to the perpetual Curacy of Worthington on the nomination of Nathaniel, Lord Scarsdale, so he was the first to be called Vicar. Note the progression : donative, free Chapel, perpetual Curacy. Since 1755 there has been a continuous ministry here. In 1978 Worthington was re-united with Breedon when the Vicar there became also the Vicar of Worthington.

### **List of Incumbents**

30th June 1755 John Dalby  
17th May 1781 Francis Harris  
5th August 1819 James Dean  
22nd January 1863 William Barnes  
9th January 1868 John Oatway Brook  
13th April 1887 Robert Arthur Parsons  
17th March 1892 Arthur Lee Sparkes  
28th August 1894 George William Bridges Dalrymple  
17th March 1912 Henry Barker Greene  
20th March 1919 Walter Raveley Guest  
17th July 1922 Henry Masters Moore  
17th September 1929 Henry Robert James Canham  
4th May 1939 William Cole  
11th July 1947 John Penrose  
17th October 1949 Henry Arthur Dane  
26th September 1972 Joseph Glynn Whittall  
1st June 1978 John Carr  
11th February 1980 David Victor Osborne  
16th May 1990 Kenneth Roy Watson  
22nd May 1994 Simon John Darby Foster  
20th January 1999 Martin Charles  
2002 John William Arthur Dawson  
12 September 2016 Tim Phillips

The Church was restored and refurbished in 1890 by Temple Moore at a cost of £1200 after a fire had burned the roof. It was at this time that a license was issued for Divine Worship to be conducted at Newbold School. This concession is still in force. In the Church the old box pews were taken away, the family pew for the Scarsdales being used

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as a reredos, and chairs were used for seating instead, similar to those in the Church now. At the Restoration in Queen Anne's time the space above the rood screen was filled in with plaster on which the arms of Queen Anne were painted, surrounded by the Garter and with a crowned lion on top. The walls of the Church too used to be plastered, but presumably this also was removed at the 1890 restoration.

The pulpit is about 150 years old, but it is not of any particular interest. The lectern carries a plate to tell that it was given by Sarah Nicklinson, who died 8th August 1899. On the walls are three memorials. There is the War Memorial bearing the names of those from the Parish who gave their lives in the two World Wars. Another plate commemorates Reuben Sissons, who was Schoolmaster at the C of E School at Newbold for 25 years, and organist and choirmaster at Church for 18 years. The third brass lists the three charities bequeathed to the Church - the Pilkington Charity, originally for six penny loaves each week to the poor, who are also provided for by the Bulstrode Charity, which also established a Clothing Club. There was also an educational charity but this has now been transferred to the Leicester Diocese. There is a wrought iron flower stand in memory of Mrs Phyllis Dane, wife of the Vicar here, 1949 - 71.

In 1552 the Commissioners reported that the Chapel here was built of Worthington stone and contained two bells in the 'steeple', which we understand was made of wood. There were still only two bells in the 1870s, but at some time a third was added. Nowadays these are merely chimed, not rung.

There is a wooden cross in memory of Ronald Carter

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There is a brass plate affixed to the organ housing in memory of Reginald Arthur Wardle.

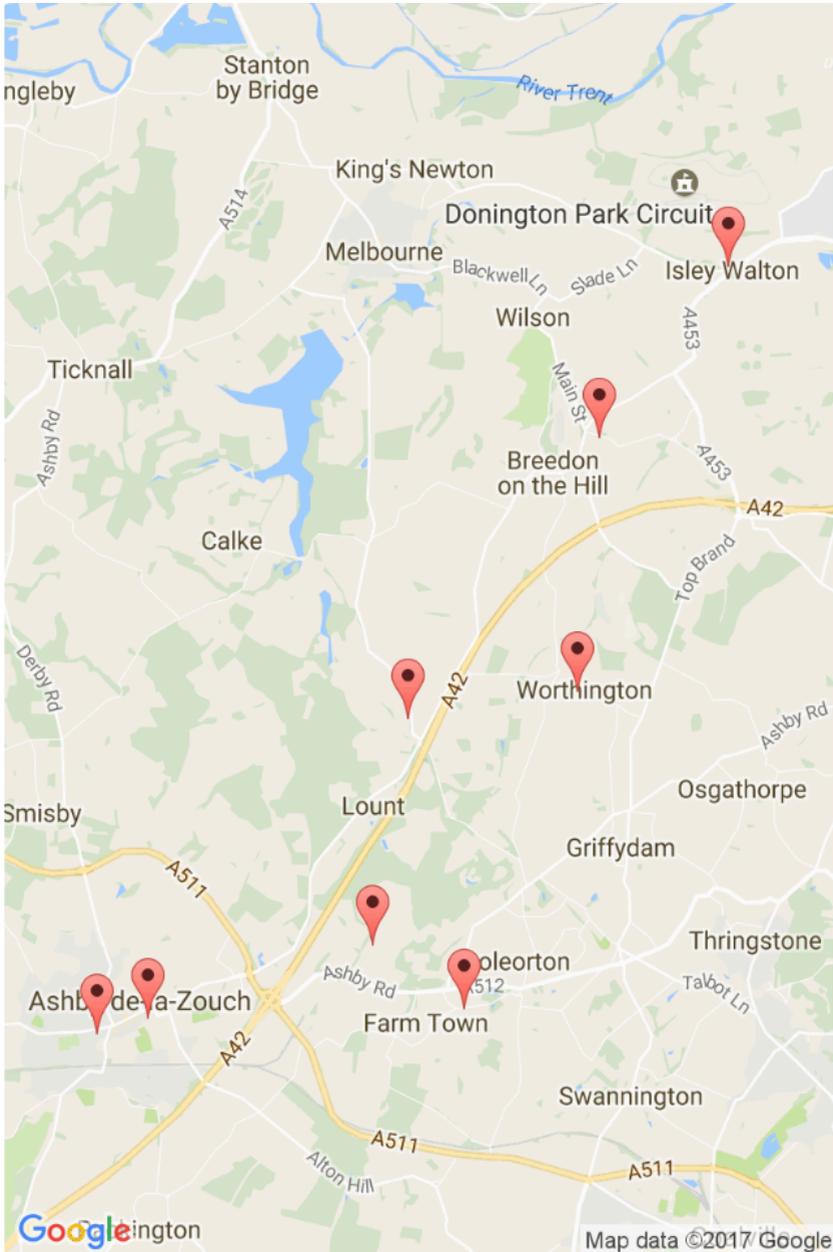
### **The Present Day**

Since 2005 St Matthew's Worthington has been served by the Ashby and Breedon Team ministry. In 2015 Rev Canon Mary Gregory became Team Rector, and in 2016 Rev Tim Phillips was given responsibility for the ministry in Worthington and Newbold.

See [stmatthewsworthington.net](http://stmatthewsworthington.net) for more information

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