

Brief Outline of the Historical and Architectural History of St Nicholas Arrington

St Nicholas Church Arrington:

Parish church. HIGH significance reflected in its Grade I listing (HE List Entry Number: 1128196)

The current building dates mostly from the mid-C13 and includes chancel, nave, and west tower. The Benedictine priory at Ickleton held the right of Presentation at this time and was probably instrumental in the rebuild. A South Porch was added in the early C19; a vestry was added to the northwest in the late C19.

An earlier church stood on the site and there is documentary evidence for Late Saxon estates being owned by the Bishop of London and Elmham. Earlier estates must also have helped define the territory of the parish which atypically breaks across Ermine Street and so predates the formation of the county and parish structures that largely follow this road. This estate may have been based on the later manor of Over Hall which seems to have been based on Old Church Farm situated to the east of the church.

Alterations:

Nave aisles were removed in the C17 (the evidence now suggests 1685) when the nave arcades were blocked in red brick and various other repairs were carried out on the chancel window cills, east end gable and buttresses and the tower. This was during the rectorship of Thomas Chicheley who started the rebuilding of nearby Wimpole Hall. The church experienced some 'restoration' and re-ordering in 1894 and has embarked on a programme of conservation from 1981.

Materials:

Materials are coursed clunch, fieldstone and clunch, with some later limestone dressings and small areas of re-used tile for the C13 walls. The roof was originally thatched but is now plain tile.

The porch is timber framed on gault brick footings and rendered; its roof is tiled. The vestry which was completed by 1898 is yellow gault brick under a tiled roof.

Tower:

The west tower is of three stages with an embattled parapet. A timber spire, lead covered is dated to 1750, and was re-leaded in 2017. The ground and first stages of the tower are C13, with two stage angle buttressing. West window of two lights, partly repaired, using a two centred arch with Y-tracery. These lower stages in coursed fieldstone with clunch dressings. Bell stage rebuilt probably in 1685 and not in the C18 as RCHM indicates. This upper stage is in red brick with stone quoins, string courses and dressings with brick segmental arches over each of the re-used Belfry stone two light windows (circa C17). On the east wall of the tower is the stone weather course of the original medieval nave roof. The bell was made by John Dier of Hitchin and is dated 1564. It was rehung in 2013 and is now rung at services and key events in the village.

Nave:

The Nave south and north walls still contain the nave arcades of three bays; once these were internal. These are clunch stone and have two centred arches of a single chamfered order visible on the interior, supported on octagonal columns with moulded capitals, much altered internally in 1894. The bays have been blocked with C17 red brick. The walls above the arcade are of fieldstone coursed rubble construction. Four reset C15 (c1400) windows and one other early C15 window of two trefoil light with reticulated tracery to one bay. The south doorway is reset C13 now opening outwards.

Chancel;

The chancel walls are now continuous with the outer walls of the nave. Coursed clunch on a coursed rubble fieldstone plinth. Two clunch C13 windows of two lights with Y-tracery to the north repeated on the south walls. The east wall has a clunch window of three lights in a two centred arch with intersecting tracery. Single stage C13 buttressing to east end of chancel. The south wall also has a C13 priest's door of four orders externally and now blocked in red brick and a square headed 'low' window also now blocked in red brick but with pins for an inward opening shutter on the west jamb.

Setting of the Church:

The church sits at the junction of Church Lane, Church End and Croydon Road and commands a high and prominent position in this ancient core of the village, with a small area of a 'green' to its east that appears to have been part of a gated area up until the C19. The church has been a significant feature in the local landscape since at least 1724 and especially from Wimpole Hall and its Parkland when a 'picturesque' view was attempted from the Hall to the church to match a similar view across Bridgeman's landscapes to Whaddon Church. There remains a significant view from some of the Avenues within Wimpole Park. Repton also found this important as relief from the Belts. The church therefore has significance for the development and meaning of the Grade I listed parkland some half a mile away. The church spire constructed in 1750 by a Wimpole carpenter involved in the development of the Hall may have been carried out to accentuate the church for the park and the various dwellings. The churchyard also still commands views across open farmland to the south and southeast despite the growth of tree cover in adjoining properties and people who visit often comment on these views.