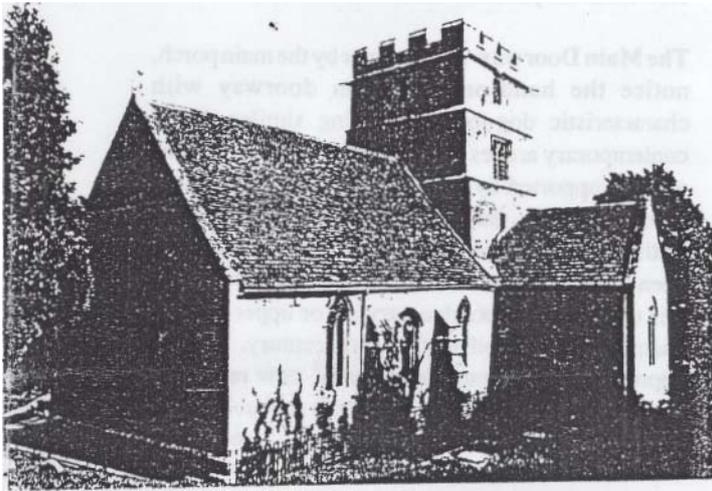


HISTORICAL NOTES AND GUIDE  
TO  
AVENING CHURCH GLOUCESTERSHIRE



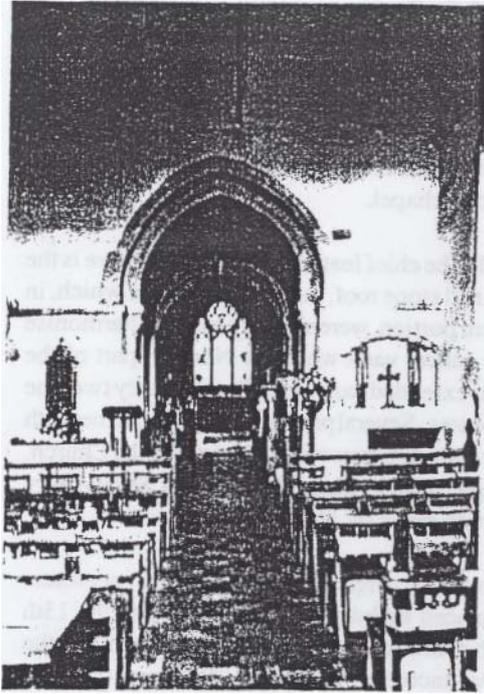
HISTORICAL NOTES

Ancient tombs with port-hole windows, unearthed in 1809 in a field called the Nom and removed to the Glebe field near the Old Quarries entrance, show that Avening was inhabited 3,000 years before Christ.

Coins and broken pottery found from time to time in fields and gardens testify to the Roman occupation of this Parish.

The old stone coffin outside the porch is evidence of an extensive burial ground before the Conquest, and that being so, perhaps there was a Saxon Church, of which the carved stones in the wall near the font, said to bear Saxon designs, may be the sole surviving remains.

In Norman times Avening was a favourite resort of royalty, for the manor came into the hands of William I and the story leading up to the building of the Church is closely linked with a royal romance.



The Domesday book tells of a hawk-mews at Averting Court, which belonged, before the Conquest, to Brittric. This young man, Lord of Gloucester who also held an estate at Tewkesbury, was sent by Edward the Confessor on an embassy to Baldwin, Count of Flanders, where he met Matilda, who was later to become the wife of the Conqueror.

Matilda fell in love with him, but to her great disappointment he rejected her approaches and William, Duke of Normandy, eventually won her hand.

Shortly after their accession she revengefully caused the King to dispossess Brittric of the manor of Averting and other estates and throw him into prison in Worcester, where he died. It is said that in her remorse for the persecution of Brittric she entirely rebuilt Avening Church, that Masses might be said for his soul. While in residence at Averung Court the king and queen superintended the building operations. At the consecration on Holy Cross Day, September 14th 1080 (some say it was as early as 1070), the queen gave a feast to the builders, of boar's head, shot in the forest, and the Averting Feast is still celebrated on "Pig Face Day."

A charter records that in 1082 "William and Matilda endowed the Abbey of Holy Trinity, Caen, with the manors of Avening, Nailsworth and other lands, for the good of their souls." They had already built and endowed two religious communities at Caen, and of the one, the "Abbey aux Dames," Matilda's daughter was the first nun and second abbess.

Caen retained the Avening endowments for 333 years, during which time the Church was served by French priests sent here from Caen. The Church is dedicated to the Holy Rood, or Cross, St. Mary the Virgin being the patron saint.

The Registers date from 1557. A list of Rectors dating from 1291 is in the Church. Many of them were famous; one afterwards became Bishop of St. David's, and another was Bishop of Gloucester. Another point of interest is that the present priest in charge, The Reverend Celia Carter, was one of the first group of ordained women to be priested in the Church of England in May 1994 in Gloucester Cathedral and was the first non-stipendiary woman priest to be given the cure of souls of a parish. The parishes of Averting and Cherington were united in one benefice in 1975.

*These notes, written by Canon Cooper, a former Rector, who loved this church dearly, were revised by his successors, Canon Richards and the Rev'd R.F. Glead. They were further amended in 2008. Exhibits from the Museum are now displayed in the museum in Cirencester.*

## GUIDE TO THE CHURCH

Holy Cross Church, Avening is one of the most interesting and best preserved of the ancient Churches on the Cotswolds. It has great attraction for archaeologists and is much admired by visitors from all parts.

Dedicated to the Holy Rood, or Cross, in 1080, it has had additions and alterations made in the following centuries in successive architectural styles, as can be seen from the plan and models in the church.

### The Main Doorway

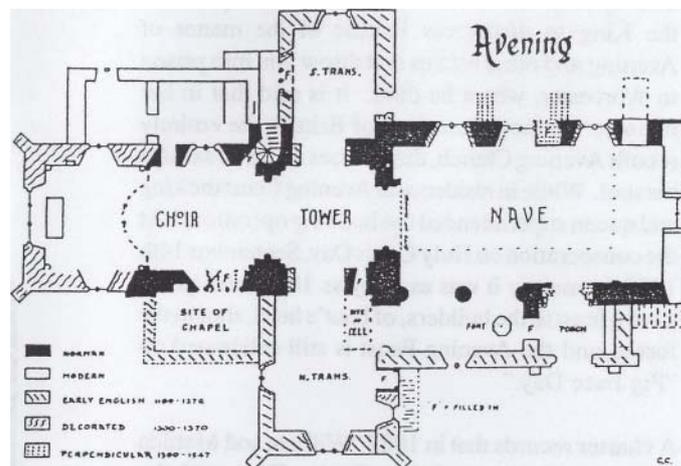
As you enter by the main porch, notice the handsome Norman doorway with characteristic dog-tooth moulding similar to the contemporary arches in Gloucester Cathedral. This arch is supported by two twisted pillars of unusual Norman design, but similar to those in Durham Cathedral. A handsome perpendicular doorway has been skilfully blended with this Norman work. To this early English porch a parvise, or upper priest's chamber was added in the 15th century. It was approached by an outside stairway, now removed, and another doorway (now blocked) probably led to the Rood loft. The floor was recently removed to expose the Norman arch.

### The Nave

As you enter you stand in the original Norman Church consisting of nave, tower, and half the present chancel. On the north side is a small Norman aisle, the roof of which once gave access from an outside staircase to the Rood loft, and later to a gallery running along the north and west of the nave but removed in 1902. The timber roof dates from the 14th century. Evidence of the existence of a Rood can be seen on the east wall of the nave. The figures were removed at the Reformation, and the loft in 1829.

### Altars

On the east wall of the nave are to be seen two small chevron arches. One, on the left; is incomplete. But here once stood two parish altars. On the right an oak Commonwealth table, formerly used in the chancel, bears the date 1657. The handsome gilt cross is a memorial to a pious parishioner, a giltframed account of whom stands in the piscina.



### Tower

The massive tower is an example of pure Norman work except for the top storey, which was added late in the 14th century. The two high splayed windows are interesting and were once, of course, outer windows. There is a similar one blocked up in the north of the choir. There are six bells in the tower. In the north-west pier of the tower a doorway is seen which gave access to an Anchorite cell of which little is known.

## **Transepts**

The north and south walls of the tower were pierced when the two Early English transepts were added to the Church. That in the north is known as the Bridges' aisle, after Henry Bridges, whose effigy is seen on his monument. He was an interesting character, having been a pirate, smuggler and highwayman, but on being pardoned by James I, he settled down in Averring. The south transept, or Driver's aisle, so called from the elaborate monuments, is now used as an organ chamber.

## **Chapel**

In the outside angle, between the north aisle and the choir, there once stood a Lady Chapel. The door opening into it from the choir is now blocked up. The eastern foundations and the piscina are still to be seen outside. Pieces of molten metal from the site are probably evidence of its destruction by fire. It is thought that the extension of the chancel was made to replace this chapel.

## **Chancel**

The chief feature to be admired there is the fine groined stone roof, the vaulting ribs of which, in the eastern portion, were skilfully made to harmonise with the earlier vault when the Norman part of the choir was extended eastward. The ribs carry two fine carved bosses. Several past Rectors lie buried beneath the floor and numerous vaults exist under the Church. The pulpit, which originally stood in Shrewsbury Abbey, was given by Mr. Pollock.

## **Windows**

The original windows have everywhere been replaced by later stonework between the 13th and 16th centuries. All the glass is modern and the somewhat uncommon subjects and treatment deserve attention.

## **Fonts**

The present font is modern and replaced an earlier one now in the museum; but, built into the wall by the door, are two fragments considered to be part of the original Norman font. The six figures may represent the Apostles, as these are commonly used for decoration at this time. The smaller fragment was thought by Fosbury to be Adam and Eve, often associated with original sin and baptism.