

## The St Wilfrid's Church Records North Muskham



Photograph by Jim Wishart

Until 1534 churches were part of the Roman Catholic Church under the authority of the Pope. Henry VIII transferred English churches to the authority of the monarch, when they became the Church of England. An order for churches to maintain records of baptisms, marriages and burials was made in 1538, although some churches started their record-keeping after the official date. Many old records are now lost and there are significant gaps in the remaining records caused mainly by the upheaval of the English civil war (1642 to 1660) plus loss from fire and flood damage over the centuries. Before 1538, there was no clear standard for keeping records, so some old records may include additional information – for example the date of birth may be shown in a burial or baptism record. Unofficial records exist for some churches prior to 1538 but this is rare. Literacy was not common in the Middle Ages and the actual spelling of names in baptism, marriage and burial registers could vary. Also, early records will show date of baptism and burial but not necessarily date of birth or death.

### Background to St Wilfrid's Church, North Muskham (NM)

St Wilfrid's is a church that is under the authority of the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham (DS & N). St Wilfrid's also operates in a sub-group called 'the Riverside Parishes' which consists of the four churches of North Muskham, South Muskham, Kelham and Averham. Note that the church at South Muskham is also called St Wilfrid's. In fact a number of churches in the Trent valley are named after St Wilfrid, as he is believed to have baptised Christians in the River Trent, although firm evidence of this is not strong.



Church Entrance by Dave Saxton

### St Wilfrid's Church Records (NM)

#### General Information

The existing building of St Wilfrid's was constructed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century but there may have been a Saxon church preceding it on the same site. There is no continuous set of records from 1538 to the present day but copies of all known records can be viewed on microfiche at Newark library. As with all CofE churches, completed record books are required to be sent to the Diocese for safe keeping. In addition, parish records are copied and made available in public records offices and certain 'local history' libraries. It is not normally possible to handle original documents. To see copies of NM records and to establish which periods of time do and do not exist, visit Newark library and request assistance from the librarian.

Copies of records are also held at the Nottingham Records Office.

## Records kept in the Church



Photograph by Dave Saxton

In most cases, only the current records are kept. Completed record books are then sent to the Diocese. As things stand, there are current registers for burials, marriages, and baptisms. There is also a register that records any church services that celebrated burials, marriages, and baptisms. This is held in the church and completed by a NM minister when services are held at a crematorium. There is also a Marriage Banns register and the Banns are read out at three different church services prior to the wedding.

Information regarding cremations may be recorded (mainly in the burials register), but there is no official church register for cremations or cremation services.

From 1837 a formal and standardised system was introduced by **The Registry Office** to record all births, deaths, and marriages in England. These are Civil Records and run in parallel to the CofE records. They are maintained in a formal manner as part of a managed legal process and now exist on-line. They form a complete record from 1837 onwards. Thus, it is usually simpler and faster to find information from 1837 to the present, than it is to find information prior to 1837, due to the systematic and digital storage of Civil Records.

## Registers currently in Church

*Note: this information is correct as of March 2021 but will change over time as new registers will replace completed old registers that are then sent to the diocese.*

## Church Service Register

The current register dates from 1983 and probably has the capacity to last until about 2035. It records regular church services such as Sunday services, special (often non-Sunday) services such as All Souls Day, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. These may be burials, interment of ashes, or services related to cremations or memorials.

It shows:

- Date of service;
- Day of service;
- Name (such as Holy Communion);
- Officiant (usually a Vicar or lay reader\* but Canons and Bishops may well be referenced as they also preach);
- Communicants (number of people taking communion – if a communion service);
- Attendance (which in modern times has included the Organist and minister);
- Preacher;
- Collection (if relevant, as some services do not include a collection);
- Notes (such as initials of the person who acted as sacristan or counted the collection).

It is the duty of the sacristan to set up before the service and to clear up afterwards; this includes preparing the wine and wafers for the communion service and other duties.

\* A *lay reader* is a person trained and qualified to assist the Vicar and perform certain duties such as to conduct a non-communion or a funeral service in church in the absence of an ordained minister.

## Attendances at Services

Attendances at regular church services have varied greatly over the years. For example, the midweek communion in the 1980's sometimes attracted 2 people,



whereas the 1983 Christmas Day service had 170 attending; however, only 12 attended the following year at the Christmas Day service! The 1983 Christmas Service may be the largest attendance in the book for a regular adult service, but the 2013 village **school** carol service recorded 207 (although mainly children) attendees.

Typical attendance for Sunday services was 20 to 35 up until the mid-1990s. After this, attendances increased slightly to 30 to 40 until the mid-2000s. Attendances, generally, declined in the first 2 decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most services are now held jointly with South Muskham and occasionally with the Methodist Church or Averham and Kelham CofE churches. The attendance count for North Muskham 'folk' only is not shown in the register.

The purpose of the relatively recent practice of holding joint services is to reduce demands on the Vicar. The pattern up until 2019 was for 2 joint services to be held each Sunday; one for the Muskhams and one for Averham and Kelham. The alternative practice was for 4 services—one at each church. From about 2019 the procedure was modified to a single, joint Sunday service for all 4 churches.

When the current coronavirus pandemic 'arrived', church services were suspended in favour of on-line, virtual services. Access to these services has been dependent on individuals having the necessary technology at home, as well as the skills to link in. The single joint Sunday service is still in operation at the time of writing.

## **Baptism Register**

In the same way that marriages have declined, the institution of baptism is no longer universal. The church register dates from 1928 and eventually it could accommodate almost 100 years of records, depending on the future popularity of baptisms.

Many well-known villagers are in the register and some are the subject of separate articles as part of the capturing memories project. For example, Sybil Davenport local schoolteacher and C of E Minister was baptised October 1936.

The Baptism Register records:

- Alleged\* date of birth;
- Date baptised;
- Child's Christian name;
- Parent names;
- Abode;
- Quality Trade of Profession;
- God Parent's names;
- By whom the ceremony was performed.

\***Alleged** seems a strange word but has no sinister connotation!

## **Confirmations Register**

This records those who underwent a Confirmation course and a confirmation ceremony. Once confirmed, people can receive Communion (wine and wafer) at the altar. The number of children (and some adults) confirmed at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century at St Wilfid's may initially seem high, but not when compared to national averages.

The register books exist from 1903 when probably the majority of villagers were confirmed in their teens. In 1943, for example, 13 teenagers were confirmed.

## **Marriage Banns Register**

Anyone wishing to be married in church must have a notification of their marriage announced on three regular Sunday services prior to the date of the wedding. This is called 'the reading of the banns'. The book starts from 2005. Marriage, however, is no longer a universal practice and many couples co-habit. Consequently, the number of marriages per year is now modest: banns were read for 40 couples between 2004 and the end of 2019.

## **Marriages Register**

A couple are normally married in the parish of the bride, although there has been a growing trend for couples to marry at another church or venue, in which case they must meet certain 'qualification criteria' set by that venue. Therefore, the marriage of a NM female villager will not always appear in the NM register, as it may have taken place at the place of the bridegroom or elsewhere.



Current registers run from 2007 and records are duplicated in 2 separate identical books. They contain:

- When Married;
- Name/Surname (of both parties);
- Ages;
- Condition (single, previous marriage dissolved);
- Rank or Profession;
- Residence at time of marriage;
- Fathers Surname (of both parties);
- Rank or Profession of Father.

As an indication of frequency, in more recent times there are 20 marriages recorded between March 2007 and Sept 2018 – an average of slightly less than 2 per year.

Side note: changing attitudes to the format of the marriage service has certainly stretched church organists who are now requested to play less conventional tunes at weddings – Star Wars theme, Jurassic Park etc – as well as traditional hymns! I am reliably informed by a church organist that these tunes can be challenging, and some are near-impossible to play on a church organ with restricted key mobility!

## Renewal of wedding vows

Some villagers hold services to renew their vows after being married for some years. These may be recorded in the Church Service Register, as mentioned earlier.

## Burials Register

The current register dates from June 1949. At one time, virtually all villagers were buried at the church so the register was easy to search. Today, many deaths result in a cremation and no burial. This means the church records are less effective in terms of finding information about the death of the villager. Also, there may not be a service held in the village church – for example some people have ‘humanist’ funerals elsewhere or a service is only conducted at a crematorium.

The information held is:

- Name;
- Abode (at the time of death);

- When Buried (date);
- Age;
- By whom the ceremony was performed.

Notable entries in the current register include the double funeral of Frank (42) and Keith (10) Speller who were tragically killed at Vicarage Lane Railway crossing by a train on 8 Jan 1962. The funeral took place only 5 days later – a very short time to elapse compared to the waiting intervals of 2021.

Fanny Charles of Reindeer Cottage died at age 95, which was a very advanced age for January 1971.

The oldest person in the current registers appears to be Ruby Crampton who died in 2016 age 98.

The register is half-full, which suggests it could eventually contain burials covering 100 years depending on the growth rate of the village in future years. At the time of writing, the demographics of the village are such that the older population represents a much higher-than-average percentage of the community. Sadly, there is likely to be a higher number of funerals than the national average during 2020-2021; at least, the next decade (2020 to 2030).

## Memorial book

This is a more recent record which was started around 2000. It is a specially bound book held in a glass presentation case mounted on a plinth and is on public display in the main body of the church. Typically, it is visited by descendants on the anniversary of the death of a friend or relative. It operates in the same manner as a commemoration book at crematoriums and has a page for each day of the year. It records:

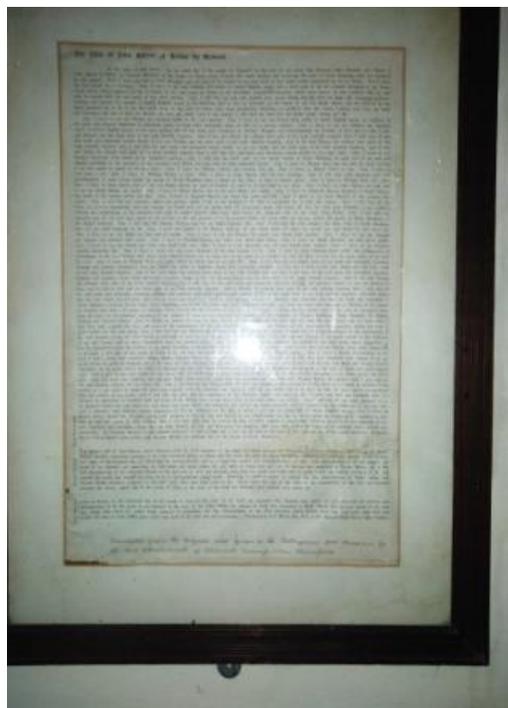
- Name of the person that died on that day;
- Date of death;
- Age at death.

The objective is to record the death of every person who was living in the village at the time of death, irrespective of whether a church service took place. This requires greater vigilance as, for example, humanist funerals have been held elsewhere for villagers who are not connected with the church and these also need to be entered.

It is not an official requirement to maintain this book, but it is worth noting that, as well as a comfort to the bereaved, it is a useful historical document.

## Other records

There is a translation (presumably from Latin) of the 1490 will of John Barton of Holme, which is framed and mounted on the wall at the tower end of the church. John Barton was a benefactor of the church and his history is well-documented elsewhere.



**John Barton's Will by Dave Saxton**

There is also a rather unusual form of will which is engraved on 4 sides of a stone at the chancel end of the church on the floor to the right of the high altar.

This is the 1581 will of John Smythe of Bathley. At the time of writing, a villager, David Mellors, is chair of the trustees of the will and small amounts of money are to this day dispensed to charitable causes at various times!

There is also a plaque listing of the vicars of the church and this is covered in a separate article.

Historical information about the vicars and church building is intended to be the subject of a separate document in the Capturing Memories articles



**The Smythe Will by Dave Saxton**

Dave Saxton

*March 2021*