

a building which had probably been a chapel. Nearby human bones were unearthed, possibly a burial ground from ancient times Also a head carved from stone was found and some other carved stones. We have no written record of this building. However the field names in the vicinity give clues to there being a chapel on this site. One field is called Chapel Yard and another is Chapel Yard Meadow, whilst another is Chapel Hill.

There was also a Methodist chapel built in 1838, principally but not solely at the expense of Miss Elizabeth Birch of Brereton, who had family links to Colton. This was in order “to bring light to the benighted of the village”; it was situated on the left hand side and halfway up High Street. It is now a private house.



References.

Colton and the DeWasteneys Family by Rev. F. Parker. Private publication. 1897.

Acknowledgements.

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Pictures.

Colton and the DeWasteneys Family by Rev. F. Parker. Private publication. 1897.

Colton History Society collection.

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The History of Christianity in Colton

The exact date of the coming of Christianity to Colton is not known, but two important facts lead us to conclude that this occurred before the Norman Conquest. It is well known that the early Christians sited their places of worship near flowing water. Here at Colton the Church is quite close to the Moreton Brook. Also when the Domesday Survey was compiled in 1086 a priest is recorded amongst those dwelling here.

Some parts of the present building, the tower and the original chancel, now the vestry, are built in local sandstone in the Early English style of architecture. Therefore these parts date from the end of the 12th Century or the beginning of the 13th Century.

In the vestry are three sedilia (seats recessed into the wall) and an ancient piscina (niche containing a stone bowl and drain on the wall

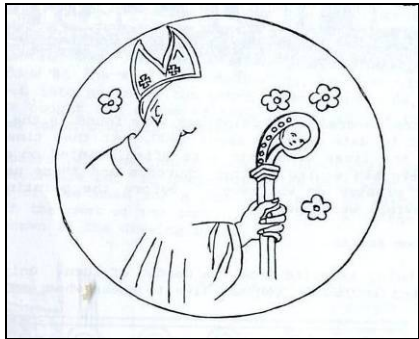
used by the priest to wash his hands and the sacred vessels after the sacrament, the contents draining to the consecrated land outside) are probably from this period. It should be noted that the floor is now at a higher level.



The piscina found in the present chancel.

The doorway into the vestry appears to be original and nearby is a ‘squint’ or ‘leper’ window. Possibly this is where the ‘unclean’ would have listened to the celebration of Mass and could have witnessed the elevation of the Host.

Late 14th Century frescoes were discovered beneath plaster when restoration work was being undertaken in the mid 19th Century. These were painted on the south wall of the original chancel, now the vestry. They depicted the story of St. Nicholas, the salutation of Elizabeth and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. It was not possible to save them at that time but drawings were made before they were removed. The bases of the pillars dividing the vestry from the present chancel are also thought to date back to the original building of the church.

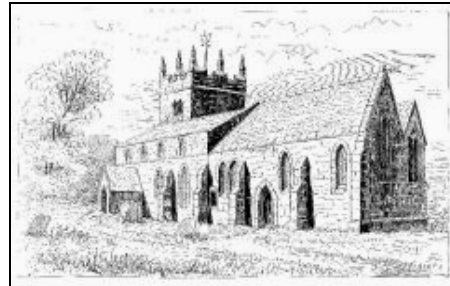


Line drawing of fresco.
From Colton and the DeWasteneys.

The Tower contains three lancet windows, one of which has three pieces of medieval glass still in situ. Colton was one of the last sites where glass was produced in Staffordshire in the 14th Century and it is possible that this glass was manufactured in the parish.

If you face the church on the south side you can see the ancient preaching cross between the tower and the porch.

The church has undergone various alterations throughout the centuries. Buttresses were added to the tower and the south wall. The north aisle was taken down and a gallery for singers was added. Also at the same time a clerestory was added as depicted in this line drawing, circa 1840.



Artist impression of St. Mary's before 1851. Colton and the DeWasteneys.

In 1849 the Rev. Abdiel Seaton became rector at a time when it was obvious the church was in need of a complete restoration. The Rector, his wife and Miss Ellen Oldham of Bellamour Lodge were the chief financiers of this major project.

Miss Ellen Oldham is remembered as Colton's greatest benefactress and as such 'bird gates' were erected in her memory in the church porch by the Parishioners.

They employed George Edmund Street, an eminent Victorian church architect, to undertake the work. The whole church was rebuilt with the exception of the tower and the south eastern section, which had until then been the chancel. A new chancel was created with Street designing the altar rails, the choir stalls, the stone screens with metal gates, the pulpit, the font and the communion vessels. The communion vessels are currently in The Victoria and Albert Museum, London. He used the Early English style of architecture for the pillars and the window openings. The whole of the chancel and sanctuary floors was tiled with Minton tiles of the period, those in the 'altar place' being donated by Herbert Minton.

At this time an organ was installed and the Rev. Seaton purchased three medieval Misericords, (tilting seats that a priest could use during the service) these were placed in the sanctuary. The carving on one of these is thought to be unique as it portrays the Roman god Janus. The majority of the windows in the church also date from this time.

Since 1851 the building has remained unchanged externally, although there have been a few changes within it. Many memorial

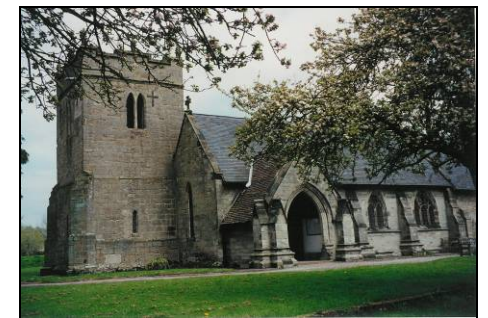
gifts have been donated through the years.



Looking from the Nave into the Chancel.

There is a peal of six bells hanging in the tower, the oldest one dating from 1704. The last two were donated at the millennium.

Colton is fortunate to have parish records going back to 1647 and these can be viewed on microfiche at the County Record Office in Stafford.



St. Mary's church Colton after restoration in 1851. Unchanged externally today.

When excavations for the building of Bellamour Lodge were made circa 1850, remains were found of