

# History and Guide



**The Lych Gate**, built around 1845, was the gift of James Francis Hatfield Harter J.P. You will learn more about this important Cranfield family as you continue your tour. The name comes from lic, an Old English word for corpse. Its purpose was to act as a shelter for coffins and pallbearers before they came into the church for a funeral. The priest presiding over the funeral would come out of the church to meet the coffin. There was a legal reason for this, in that the cleric needed to receive the legal certificate for burial from the dead person's relatives outside the church. Over time this came to be seen as a mark of respect for the deceased.

**The walls** were built and the churchyard was enlarged at the same time (1845).

As you pass through the gate you enter the consecrated ground of the churchyard. In medieval times a criminal or person seeking sanctuary would be safe once they entered the church boundary. An avenue of lime trees leads to the church.

The building of coarse limestone that you see was built mainly in the 13th century.

This style of architecture is known as Early English.

## **Here is a little bit of its history.**

There may have been a simple wood and thatch building here in Saxon times. There was certainly a village then. The first known mention of Cranfield was in 918, when Ailwyn Niger gave the Manor of Cranfieldinga to the monks of Ramsey Abbey in Huntingdonshire. The village people in the early days worked for the Abbot, in return for the land they themselves held in the village. The Saxon word "field" or "feld" means "a clearing in the forest". So Cranfield is a forest clearing occupied by cranes. There is evidence of the ancient forests at Marston Thrift, Hulcote Wood and Salford Wood. It is interesting that cranes are being reintroduced to Norfolk and may even be seen again in Cranfield.





**In the Norman period**, in the time of Abbot Walter (1133-60), Geoffrey or Godfrey was granted the church. During this time a stone church was built, towards the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th century. This would have consisted of a nave and chancel only.

**By the middle of the 13th century**, the village had grown so much that the church had to be enlarged. This may in some part have been due to the Holy Well.

During the Middle Ages someone with a sharp commercial sense announced that the water in one of the wells was holy and good for treating people with sore eyes. This was no doubt done to attract commerce to the village, but there are no records to show whether the water was effective.

To avoid interrupting worship, the extension was done by building the side aisles, and then knocking down parts of the old outer walls and building the piers and arches of the nave. The north doorway was moved and put outside in the north aisle wall. This can be seen as you approach the church, to the left of the tower. This is only visible from the outside as the interior is now bricked off. This Norman door is, therefore, older than the wall into which it is set. It is dated to around 1180 and is in the so-called Transitional style of architecture.

**The upper part of the church was added in the 15th century.** You will see this more clearly from inside.

**The original Bell Tower**, built in the **13th century**, was added to in the 15th century. In 1865-6 the tower was restored, at a cost of £161, as part of the restoration at the time of **Rev. George Gardner Harter**. The architect in charge was Sir Gilbert Scott. Improvements were made to the west window and doorway. The tower was once surmounted by a lead spire. This fell into decay and was taken down, and replaced by a weather vane in the shape of a red rooster, in 1975.

#### **The Church Clock**

It is highly probable that there has been a clock in Cranfield since the early 17th century although the first reliable mention of it is in a church inventory of 1715. Various repairs and modifications were carried out over the years but, towards the end of the 19th century, it had become increasingly erratic. In 1895 a new clock was donated by James Goodman, benefactor of the Alms Houses and a native of Cranfield. Since 1895 it has chimed the quarters on the 4th and 5th bells and marked the hour on the tenor bell. It was moved to its current situation when the bells were overhauled in 2001 but kept irregular time. The weekly task of winding the clock fell to locals, one of whom was John Peat, now a bell ringer. The clock was converted to an electric winder during a major overhaul in 2007. The clock face was refurbished at the same time. The autowind system was never very good and was partly to blame for the clock's poor accuracy. A new auto wind system was installed by Smiths of Derby in 2015. In November 2018 an auto regulator was installed and the clock is now accurate for the first time in its history.







### The South Porch

Historically, porches were used for secular business. Some were even used for dispensing justice. This porch was rebuilt at some time after 1848.

Note the carved stone heads on either side of the outer doorway, possibly representing a king and queen.

To the left, above the **arch of the inner doorway**, is a very old stone carving of a seated figure, possibly representing Christ, the Virgin and Child or one of the Saints, thought to have come from the walls of the ancient church. Its original position may have been above one of the doorways.

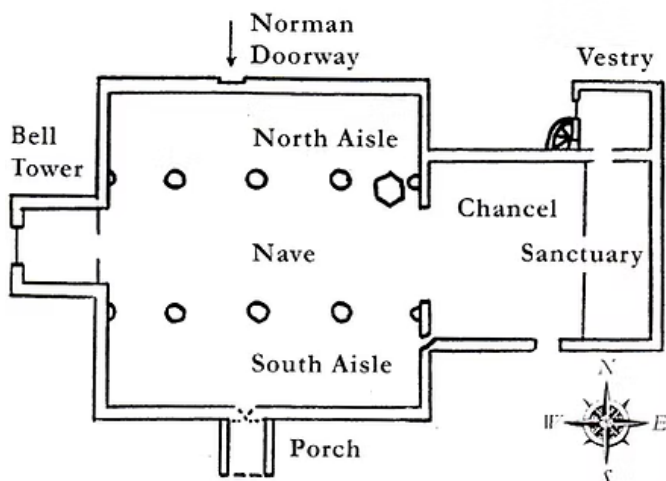
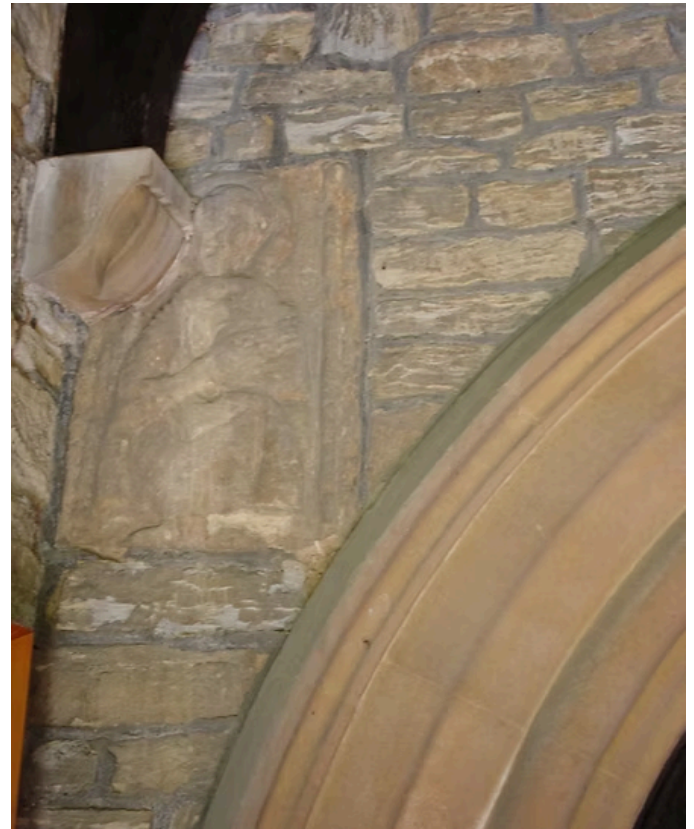
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In the porch are the **names of the Rectors** stretching back past the black death to Norman times.

It can be tempting to think of a church only in terms of its building and features. The list of names reminds us that we are joining a very rich heritage of Christian believers, spanning the centuries. Some are commemorated in the church and their memorials will be indicated and described as you continue.

The plague of the **Black Death** occurred when **Thomas de Neanby, (Neuby or Newby) 1349** was Rector, and he was one of the victims. The pestilence was so contagious that any who administered to someone affected would almost certainly succumb. There was high mortality among clergy during the plague. It has been estimated that about one-third of the population of Bedfordshire and Cranfield suffered severely.

A mass grave or "**plague pit**" lies south of the bell tower, just beyond the lime trees.



### The church interior

The main entrance to the church is through the south porch.

The longitudinal axis of most churches is west-east. The altar is in the east. Facing eastwards for worship, in the direction of the rising sun, is probably pre-Christian. There are a number of Biblical references including Ezekial 43 v 2 and 4: "And behold the glory of the God of Israel Came from the way of the east." "And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is towards the east."



The main body of the church is the **nave**. This consists of a main aisle, flanked by pews. The word comes from that Latin *navis*, meaning ship, the root of the English word “navigation”. The association of the church with a ship, and the congregation as passengers of the ship, indicates the priest and people travelling together towards God. The nave is separated by a step from the **chancel**, containing the choir stalls.

**The sanctuary**, or holiest part of the church, is separated by a step and altar rail and contains the altar.

As far as is known, the nave, chancel and sanctuary were the extent of the original Norman building.

You can see the pillars or piers, joined by arches, separating the body of the church from the north and south aisles, which were added during the 13th century. The oldest part of the church is the masonry between the pillars and arches.

You can see where the Norman door in the north wall has been bricked in and plastered over so that it can only be seen from the outside.

As you stand inside the door and look behind you, to the wall on your right, you will see the **stoup**, a recessed bowl in the wall, used for holy water, reminding us that the church was under the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the building of the aisles and during the 15th century additions. The stoup is a descendent of Jewish customs of ritual washing of the hands, face, and sometimes feet.







During the **15th century**, the nave roof was raised and the “**clerestory**” windows put in and the aisle windows renewed. It was remodelled in the **Perpendicular** style of architecture. This was characterised by a prominence of vertical lines in stone window tracery, enlargement of windows to great proportions, and conversion of the interior stories into a single unified vertical expanse.

There is also a window above the **chancel arch** which is an unusual feature. The space may once have housed the sanctuary bell, rung to announce the celebration of the Mass.





It was during this time that the lovely **Angel Roof** was made. Each plaster Angel holds a shield bearing an emblem of Christ's Passion, beginning with the Crown of Thorns on the north side of the chancel arch and following an anticlockwise path to end with the Cross on the south side. Between the Angels are figures holding the letter "M". As you go round the church it is worth spending time to look at these. (But try not to get dizzy!)

The **aisle roofs** were renewed at the same time. There are small shields with the emblems of Saints on them, such as the grid-iron of St Laurence.

Additions to the tower were also made during that period.

At this time (medieval) there was a **carved oak rood screen** separating the main body of the church from the chancel and sanctuary. Just after the Second World War, this was found hidden under rubbish in the loft of the Rectory barn and was used to make doors in the tower arch and a prayer desk.

### The fonts

The Parish church in Cranfield is the only one in Bedfordshire with two fonts. However, if you had twins, they couldn't be baptised simultaneously as only the new font can be used under Ecclesiastical Law. The "new" font stands opposite the entrance door. This was given in Victorian times by James Francis Hatfield Harter, (born 6.6.1854) eldest son of George Gardner Harter, in memory of Douglas Loftus, Capt. Grenadier Guards who died in 1891, who was his father-in-law. (See Appendix II for Harter family details)







The **15th-century font** was removed and half-buried in the Churchyard near the tower. It has now been placed under the south-west arch of the nave, restored in 1938 by an American, John White, as three of his ancestors came from Cranfield, one of whom, another John White, was buried in Cranfield church in 1503. The font still has its original lining and the staple through which the bolt went to prevent witches from stealing the water which was used in charms and magical rituals.

In England, it became compulsory to cover a font in 1236. This was because the water was blessed on Easter Day and then left for later use. The water needed to be protected from dirt and dust as well as the above theft.

You will notice a small brass plaque on the wooden lid of the font, inscribed:

**FONT IN MEMORY OF JOHN WHITE ESQ OF HULCOTE BURIED BEFORE THE CHANCEL IN 1501**

**REV THOMAS WHITE D.D. CANON OF ST PAUL'S FOUNDER OF SION COLLEGE ETC 1624**

**Rt REV WILLIAM WHITE D.D. CONSECRATED BISHOP OF PENNSYLVANIA AT LAMBETH PALACE, FEBRUARY 4th 1787 RESTORED AND REPLACED BY WILLIAM WHITE ESQ OF PHILADELPHIA 1938**

The **two windows**, one on either side of the bell ringing chamber, at the end of the aisles represent the symbols of our two Patron **Saints, St. Peter and St. Paul**.

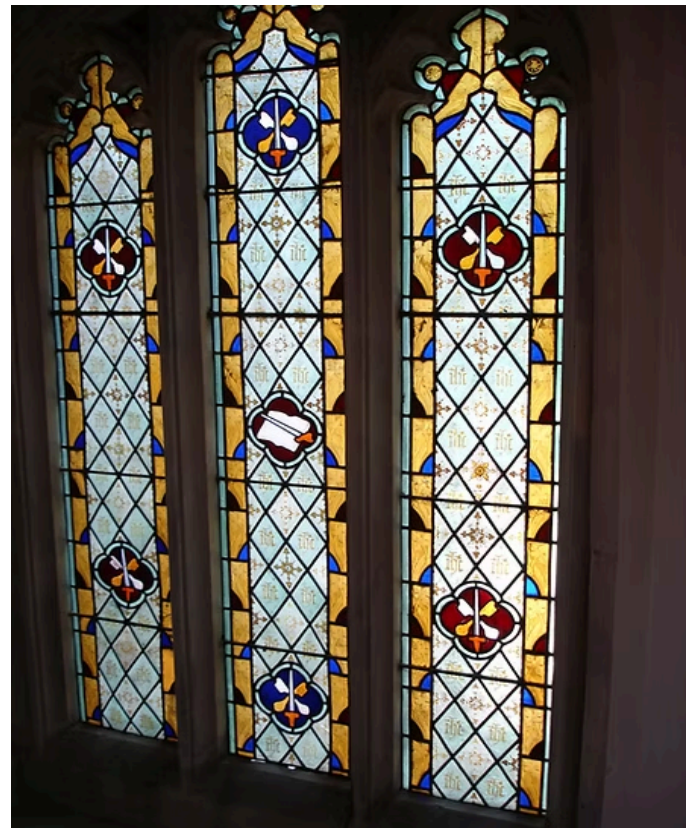
Their Feast day is 29th June. This is the Collect for the day:

Almighty God,  
whose blessed apostles Peter and Paul  
glorified thee in their death as in their life:  
grant that thy Church,  
inspired by their teaching and example,  
and made one by thy Spirit,  
may ever stand firm on the one foundation  
which is thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;  
who liveth and reigneth with thee,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

The symbol of Peter, the natural leader of the Twelve disciples of Jesus, is the "Cross Keys" because of Jesus' words to him: "You are Peter, and on this rock will I build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16 v 18.19).

St Paul, after his conversion on the Damascus road, used his energy and scholarship to spread the Good News of God's grace among the gentiles. His symbol is the sword representing the "Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6 v 17). Many churches have taken on the double name of St. Peter and St. Paul, emphasising their desire to be faithful to the teaching of the apostles and their desire to spread the knowledge of Jesus' love to those around them.

You will see that one of the windows is upside down.  
(The sword should be pointing downwards)





### The ringing chamber

The bells have a story to tell.

The old oak bellframe was probably designed to hold four bells. Some of its lower frame members date from the 15th century when the upper stages of the tower were built. It is known that there were four bells in 1552 and that the medieval tenor bell weighed about a ton. The frame was reconstructed in the 16th century re-using a substantial amount of the medieval woodwork. A further bell was added by 1663 if not earlier.

The Sanctus bell is known locally as the "Ting Tang". This would be rung every Sunday for the last five minutes before morning and evening service.

Until about fifty years ago the church bell was rung every week-day at one o'clock and again at two o'clock, to tell the men working in the fields when it was time for dinner and when to return to work. On Shrove Tuesday at 12 noon, the "Pan Bowl" bell would be rung to tell housewives that it was time to start making their pancakes!

In the Beds Times of 13th July, 1900, we learn: "On Sunday morning, as the ringers were getting ready for a peal, and when they were about three parts up, the clapper of the 4th bell, weighing 21lb., suddenly snapped off and came crashing down the clock-case, a distance of 50 ft., Breaking through two boards and burying itself some inches in the ground. Needless to say, the ringers, hearing the terrible crash overhead, lost no time in getting out of the way. Had the clapper fallen straight through the trap door, which was open, it must have killed somebody. It has been sent away for repair to Messrs. Day of Suffolk."

In 1904 John Taylor & Co, Bellfounders, reported that the bellframe was "very decayed, especially the lower timbers: so much indeed that it is doubtful whether it is safe to ring the bells."

It was not until 1937 that two steel girders were placed across the Tower to reinforce the base beams of the bellframe.

In 1978 it was recognised that the old bellframe would need to be replaced but the restoration of the main roof became a priority.

In 1994 the bellringers reported increasing difficulty in ringing the bells and recommended that they should be refurbished if they were to be rung for the Millennium.

In 1997 bellringing ceased on the grounds of safety and the following year all parties agreed that the old bellframe could not be repaired or restored. English heritage insisted that it remain in situ because of its historic interest. The more costly, complex option of a new two-tier frame inserted beneath the old had to be pursued. This involved moving the clock mechanism and major reordering of the tower.

By the summer of 2000 new floors had been completed and a new bellframe constructed. A new Treble Bell was cast to increase the peal to six. At the end of August, when floorboards were removed, the beams underneath were in poor condition and not in alignment with the bellframe above. It was not going to be possible to fit in the two upper bells satisfactorily without removing them. English Heritage advised against their removal and a legal battle ensued. In February 2001, after two tense Consistory Court Hearings held in the church, The Chancellor, His Honour the Worshipful and Revd. Canon Dr Robert D. H. Bursell, ruled in favour of allowing the work to proceed. He noted in his judgement the interest displayed in the project, The frustration of the parishioners and the need to account for the money already spent.

The central section of the disputed beams is now displayed in the clockchamber.

On Saturday 2nd June, 2001 the Archdeacon of Bedford dedicated the new Treble Bell, the new two-tier iron frame and the restored ring of bells. The service was well attended by villagers, bellringers, and many who had contributed their skills to the completed project. The current (2019) Tower Captain is Mary Hartley.



## Pews

At the west end of the church, to the right of the tower, are **"servants pews"**. They are Victorian and were designed to cram as many, possibly children into a small space.

The "re-pewing" was part of the restoration programme of 1846 at the cost of £2000, most of which was provided by the Rector's family. (George Gardner Harter).

Pews began to be installed in northern Europe after the reformation when an emphasis on sermons developed. The sermons were often very lengthy and the congregation needed to rest their legs. Previously the congregation would stand or even mill about. There were stone seats at the base of the columns for the infirm.



You will notice that the **"poppy heads"**, the ornamental carvings at the top end of each pew are all different. Two of them represent human heads.

When Guy R. Campbell was Rector (1904-1913) it is recorded in minutes that *"Dr Street, Mr Bedford and the Rector were present. The list of seatholders and their various sittings were considered, and the following suggestions were agreed upon. 1) That those who still require seats in Church be invited (through the Parish Magazine or other convenient way) to apply for the same in writing to the Churchwardens before the Easter Vestry, when their application will be considered. 2) That 6 pews situated in the centre aisle be let at a sum of £1 per annum. 3) That seats be reserved only in accordance with a scale of payment agreed on, except in circumstances approved by the Rector and Churchwardens."*



In the North aisle, we have the **memorial book** and a framed **Roll of Honour** to the soldiers killed in 1914- 1915 and 1939-1945. Above the names are the immortal words "At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them". The memorial table is flanked by the Standards of St. George and the British Legion. The book pages are turned weekly and lie open at the page of the current date of commemoration.

Anyone who wants a name included in the memorial book needs to make a request to the Rector or Church Wardens. At the moment the only names are of people who have had a funeral in the Church but it is not limited to the congregation. A small donation is usually requested.

### Roll of Honour



The very elaborate **window on the north wall of the north aisle**. This was given in memory of Stephen John Hatfield Harter, the third son of George Gardner Harter. Inscribed in the glass is the dedication *"To the glory of God and in affectionate remembrance of Stephen John Hatfield Harter who died Feb 10, 1883 age 25. This window is placed by his four brothers."*

On closer inspection, you will notice that the wings of the angel on the left and the one at the bottom, in the centre, have peacock feathers at their outer borders. This was the "trademark" of the maker (Kempe - 1884).

The main figures represent St. Gabriel, St. Maria and St. Stephan (Stephanus). It is worth looking more closely at the two small scenes depicted on either side of the bottom of the window. We can only marvel at the craftsmanship.





The current **organ** replaces an imposing one, dating back to 1834, which dominated the west end of the church from an elevated position.

The “new” organ was given by Waterlow Methodist church in Dunstable and was dedicated in a service in 1999.

Sadly, the organ hides the oldest window in the church. This depicts the raising of Lazarus.

At the east end of each of the aisles there would have been an altar where services would have been held, before the Reformation. (See appendix 1) In the north wall, there is a late 13th century piscina, with a trefoiled head. A piscina was a stone basin with a drain for carrying away water used in ceremonial ablutions. Over the piscina is a corbel which probably held an image of St. Peter. A corbel is a bracket of stone, wood brick or other building material projecting from the face of a wall and generally used to support a cornice or arch.

Sadly these are mainly obscured by the organ and it's supporting woodwork.



The **pulpit** is an impressive sculpture in Caen stone and marble. It was given, after the death of their mother Elizabeth Jessie Harter, in 1878, and their father George Gardner Harter, who predeceased her in 1872, by their children. It was erected in 1891. Inscribed at the base “**In memory of GG & EJH by their children**”.

The patron Saints, St. Peter and St. Paul are featured; St. Paul holding a sword and St. Peter, keys.

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The **Nave Altar** allows the celebration of Holy Communion to take place closer to the congregation than in the more distant sanctuary. A beautiful decorative **altar frontal** usually hangs on the simple wooden table. It is based on an idea by Sheila Francis, a member of the congregation, who originally conceived the idea as a design for a window. This depicts cranes in a clearing: Cran- field. The scene is flanked by two pillars and an arch representing the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul. Strikingly made of coloured fabrics by Mary Ewen, sister of a member of our congregation, it features a variety of birds and animals which children enjoy discovering.

The **patron Saints**, St. Peter and St. Paul are featured; St. Paul holding a sword and St. Peter, keys.



The old door leads to the **vestry**, so named because this is where clergy put on the vestments. It probably dates to the 14th century. Over the vestry is a priest's room, reached by a narrow winding staircase.

The brass **altar rails** (left of picture) were given by Col. Arthur Peel in memory of his wife, Sophie, eldest child of George Gardner Harter and Elizabeth Jessy. She died in 1898



At either side of the altar are the **Ten Commandments** and the **Lord's Prayer**, beautifully inscribed on elaborate panels.



The beautiful oak altar and reredos were presented by James Francis Hatfield Harter in 1909.



Not everyone approved of the exquisite carving. Rev. T.G. Manley, Rector 1934-37, was of a "low church" persuasion. In the Bedfordshire Times of 3rd May, 1935, it is recorded that the figure of Christ had been covered with a cloth. His interpretation of the Commandment forbidding graven images extended to such representations of Christ. He pointed out that there were no "altars" in the Church of England and that, in the Prayer Book the altar is referred to as a "Holy Table". In the same issue he also hits the headlines over his disbanding of the local branch of the Mothers' Union as it was "disloyal to Holy Scripture and the Church of England". He believed that their banner, representing the Virgin and Child was subversive as the images had pagan origins. The banner was taken to St. Alban's Abbey by members of the Mothers' Union. It has happily been returned but is currently being repaired. There is no Mothers' Union currently in Cranfield.

In front of and slightly to the side of the altar are two round gaps between the tiles, filled with concrete. This is where gas lamps were placed. The gas was run from Cranfield Court which had its own gas supply.

Above the altar is the **East Window**.

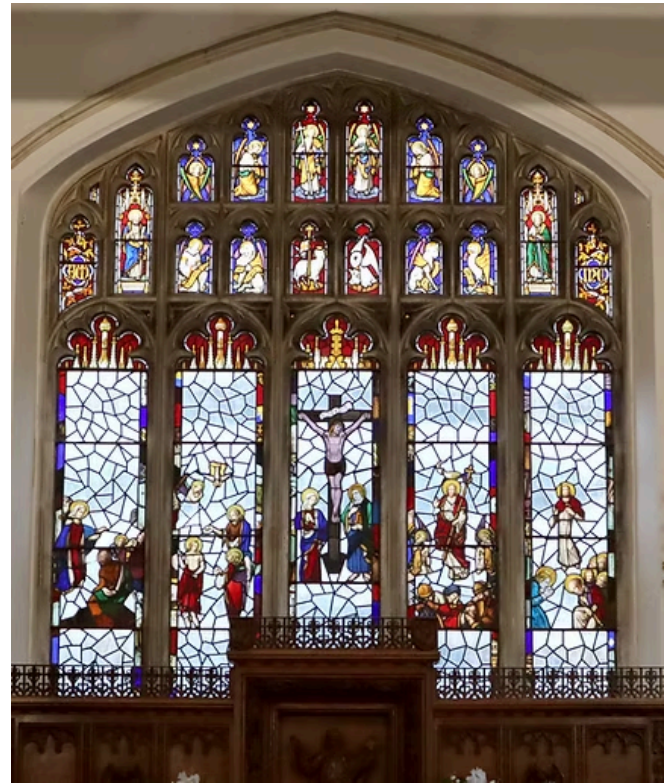
The original window was presented by James Collier Harter, father of George Gardner Harter, in **1851**.

This is described in the Bedfordshire Times of 28th June, 1851.

"A stained glass window has just been placed in the chancel of the parish church of Cranfield. The stone work is by Birtchell, of Woburn and the glass by Willement, of London. The window, which is in the Perpendicular style, consists of five lights with two series of compartments in the head, above the transom. The upper series contain figures of angels, and the lower one contains representations of SS. Peter and Paul (to whom the church is dedicated), emblems of the four Evangelists, an Agnus Dei, a Pelican and her young, and the monograms Alpha and Omega and I.H.S. The five principal lights contain subjects illustrative of the leading events of the life of Christ, viz: The Nativity, Baptism, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension, with an appropriate text of Scripture at the foot of each. The window is the gift of Mr J.C. Harter, of Manchester, who is father of the present rector of Cranfield and patron of the living."

The window was extensively damaged by a land mine in the 1940's but as much of the original glass as possible was used when a new window was fitted after the war.

A quotation of £180 was received from W.H. Constable & Co. of Cambridge: we are quoting you for the existing figures that remain in the five lights, to be leaded up with crazy background only figures that remain whole, with the exception of the centre light this being the only one where we are allowing for the repairing of the missing figure of our Lord on the Cross.



On the south wall of the chancel there is a stone piscina and three sedila set into the wall. Sedila are a set of three seats in the sanctuary of a church.

Tucked away above the piscina, the stone basin for ceremonial ablutions, is a small plaque inscribed; "**In memory of George Davies Clerk BD Parson and Rector of this Church died 15th August 1809 aged 61 yrs. In death lamented as in life beloved**"