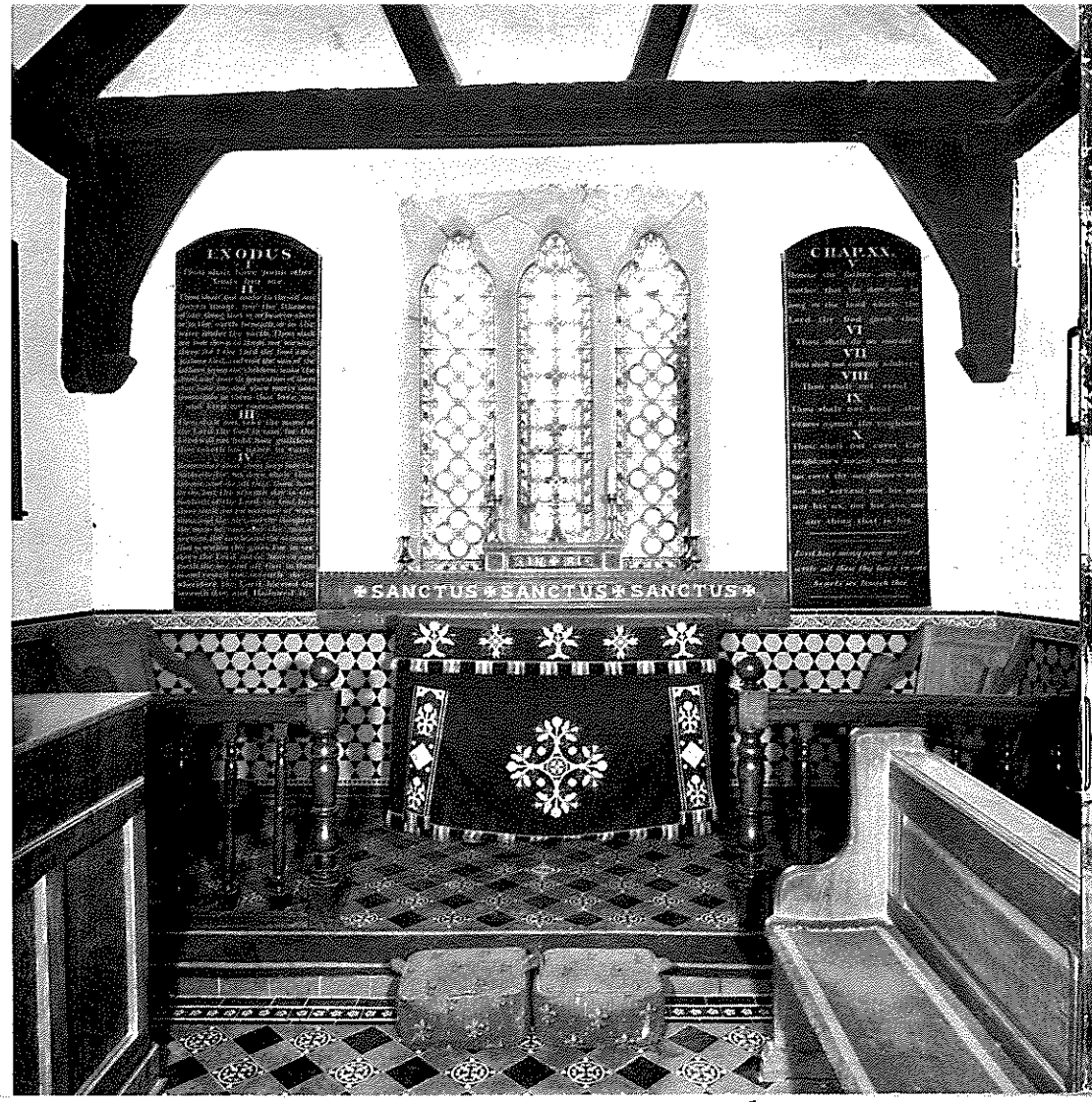




REDUNDANT CHURCHES FUND

THE CHURCH AT MORETON JEFFRIES

30 pence



Arthur Mee, a popular and prolific chronicler of the history and antiquities of Britain, referred to Moreton Jeffries in 1938 as being at the end of a 'lane to nowhere'. The comment is apt enough since, as well as being geographically out of the way, the place is also historically evasive. Almost nothing survives of the early story of the church itself, and little more about the settlement. The name Moreton means a homestead or settlement in a marshy place, and presumably it was an excess of primordial bogginess that caused the early, probably Saxon, pioneers to by-pass it. Even to-day, even for muddy Herefordshire, it has perhaps more than its fair share of damp, though the Little Lugg and its tiny tributaries do their best to drain it. The second part of the name comes from an early mediaeval owner of the estate and first appears as Jeffery in 1273. To add to its aura of near-oblivion the church is almost overshadowed by the three large buildings nearby: Court Farm to the south; Moreton House to the west; and to the east another farm which, like the church, has no name. Until we reach the 19th century we have to depend on expert opinion and circumstantial evidence for architectural dates.

There is no record of when the first church existed on this site, and the present building is one of the small number with no specific dedication. The place is mentioned in Domesday Book (1086) as belonging to the canons of Hereford, and a close connection with the cathedral at Hereford has persisted ever since. For its size the hamlet was quite wealthy in the 11th century, as it owned a salt house in the ancient salt workings at Droitwich, 20 crow-flying miles away to the north east, and lay close to one of the trade routes from that town. The existing church was probably built in the

13th or early 14th century of the rough local sandstone. There is no source of first class stone in the vicinity, but the local stone outcrops at many places and could have been obtained at any time. The nave, with its trussed rafter roof, and the south doorway (but not the porch), both date from this time. At some unknown time the nave, with its small timbered bell tower, was extended westwards by 16 feet. The chancel roof is of early 17th century construction. The impressive carved pulpit is of this same Jacobean period, and much of the woodwork in the clerk's desk below the pulpit, in the pews, and in the panelling and west end of the nave was put in at the same time - though considerable reconstruction has happened since.

During the 18th and 19th centuries various alterations were made to the building, of which the most extensive were carried out under the aegis of John Morley, who died in 1869. The work was completed after his death, and Pevsner considers the church 'over-restored', though we have no idea of what it may have looked like inside before Morley got to work. The east window was installed at the same time, and is in memory of Thomas Hugh Bird, vicar from 1844 to 1868. The other windows date from the 18th and 19th centuries, while in the north wall of the nave there are vestiges of an early door and at least two narrow windows to be seen from the outside. The south porch is modern. The bell tower contains two bells: one cast by Abraham Rudhall in 1709, and the other of late 16th century manufacture. Their clappers are of mediaeval stirrup-topped type, and were presumably inherited from the present bells' predecessors.

Among the wall monuments the one in the chancel is to John Morley, the 'over-restorer', while the Westwoods, who are commemorated several times, were the local landowners in the late 18th to early 19th centuries. There are seats for 70, but even in its Victorian heyday the parish never numbered more than about 40 inhabitants. Since 1884 it has ceased to be an independent entity. It was administered in association with either Stoke Lacy or Much Cowarne until 1978, when all three were united with Ocle Pychard and Ullingswick in a single benefice. By 1980 the population had dwindled to 18 adults, and the church became redundant. It passed into the care of the Redundant Churches Fund in 1984; but it still inspires affection in a small group of local people and is unlikely to fall entirely out of use for a long time yet.

THE PELICAN IN HER PIETY

The emblem of the Redundant Churches Fund is the 'Pelican in her piety' in figurative form. It is based on the wooden carving over the altar of St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe where the Fund has its headquarters. The original Pelican, designed by Sir Christopher Wren when the church was built in 1685-1695, was destroyed during an air raid in December 1940. The present carving is by Arthur Ayres, 1961.

The 'Pelican in her piety' represents the legend that the parent Pelican feeds its children on its own blood. Thus, it is interpreted as symbolising Christ's sacrificial love for all mankind. In this sense, too, it symbolises the sacrament of the eucharist.

St Thomas Aquinas' devotional hymn 'Adoro te devote' translated by John Mason Neale translates the sixth stanza -

> Pelican of mercy, Jesus, Lord and God,
> Cleanse me, wretched sinner, in thy precious blood.

Psalm 102 verse 6 'I am become like a pelican in the wilderness' is also considered to be an allusion to Christ.

This emblem emphasises the truth that while the churches in the Fund are not in regular use they remain consecrated. They are Christian holy places.

REDUNDANT CHURCHES FUND

This body was set up by Parliament in 1969 to preserve churches of the Church of England no longer needed for regular worship but which are of historic or architectural interest. The Fund's main income is provided by Church and State but the constantly increasing number of churches entrusted to it (200 in February 1986) means that its resources are severely stretched. Contributions from members of the public are therefore gratefully received and if there is no money box in the church or the keyholder is not available please send any contributions you feel able to make to the Fund at the address shown.

The Fund is grateful to Mr Colin Flood Page for writing these notes.

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