

ST MARY THE BLESSED VIRGIN, HARTLEY WESPALL

History of the Church.

The date of the original building is unknown, but there is evidence of the existence of a timber-built Nave in the 13th century, possibly the oldest example in the South of England.

The first Rector was Edmund de Bedewyn. He was given charge of the Church on 2nd January, 1286 by Isabella de Cadurcis, Prioress of Hartford Priory (near Hartley Wintney), to which the Rectory of Hartley Wespall was annexed, and was instituted by the Bishop on 10th May in the same year.

John Drokensford, Bishop of Bath and Wells, one of the Bishops of whom Edward II wrote to the Pope, saying that he would no longer tolerate him in his kingdom, held the Manor of Hartley Wespall and exercised his patronage over the church in 1324.

Hartley Wespall has enjoyed the Patronage of the Dean and Canons of Windsor since 1482. The archivist at St George's Windsor has documents concerning the church from the early 1500's. In 1935 the church was joined with church of All Saints Stratfield Turgis to form one parish. In 1950, these churches were joined with St. Mary's Church Stratfield Saye, (in the gift of the Duke of Wellington), and were served by one incumbent. In 1973, the three churches were formally united to become one parish called Stratfield Saye with Hartley Wespall with Stratfield Turgis. In 1985 this parish was joined with the parish of St. Leonard's Church Sherfield-on-Loddon to form a United Benefice under one Rector.

The original parchment Register, opened in 1558, is still in possession of the Church. The Registers are complete since this date, although the Register of 1677 was lost for a long period, until it was found in an empty house in Pentonville in 1852 and returned to the Rector. The entry concerning the death of Lord Stawell had, for no known reason, been cut from the page. Since 1974, the ancient Parish Registers have been in the custody of the Diocesan Archivist at Winchester.

An extract from a record of Vestry Meetings in 1758 reads:

'And it was recommended to the consideration of all persons entitled to seats amicably to agree to such a distribution of the pews, as that a man and his wife and family be not separated during Divine Service as at present, the wives and all females being now unreasonably and unsuitably thrust down to the bottom of the Church into the most cold and disagreeable places!'

In 1868 the Church was fully restored under George Gilbert Scott, the son of Sir Gilbert Scott. The Bell-tower and Spire were removed from the west end, where they obscured the timbers of the west wall, and were replaced where they now stand. The stone flints which face the outer walls were taken from the Roman wall at Silchester.

The Building

You have entered the church through the north door which is the original 13th century door. Inside the church the most notable feature is the woodwork. The beams of the roof and the four moulded supporting pillars, and the woodwork of the doorways, is late 13th or early 14th century. The unique half-timbered construction of the west wall, seen from the exterior, has been dated by experts as 1320-1330. The massive beams are sometimes thought to be 'ship's timbers', but the craftsmanship and the cusping give reason to believe that they are of West Country origin; and this is thought to be so.

Turning left on entering the church the tour described goes in a clockwise direction. Immediately on the left of the door is the marble memorial on the North wall of the Nave which commemorates the Rt. Hon. Abigail, who, by the death of her five brothers, became the heiress of William Pitt of Hartley Wespall. She married Ralph, Baron Stawell of Somerton in Somerset, and died in 1692. Her memorial is a typical example of the classical style and workmanship of the 17th century.

The next window on the North side is the memorial to William Grant Broughton, Curate of this Parish in 1818. He became the first Bishop of Sydney, New South Wales, and later, the first Archbishop of Australasia.

The stone tablet immediately below the Sanctuary, on the floor of the Quire, has now only two portions of the original brasses. The inscription reads:

'John Waspail, sometime Patron of the Church, who went the way of all flesh on 20th November 1448, and Jane, his widow, relict of John Pakenham, who died 20th May 1452 are buried here, upon whose souls may GOD have mercy. Amen.'

The Crucifix hanging above the Screen is our village War Memorial. The names of the Fallen appear on the plaque on the North wall.

Beyond the screen the door on the left leads to the vestry under the bell tower. Two of the three bells have summoned parishioners to worship for over 500 years. They were cast by Robert Crowch of London, some time between 1439 and 1450. The Tenor bell (3 cwt.) is by Samuel Knight of Reading, 1688 and was recast by Mears and Stainbank in 1883. The bells can no longer be rung full circle, but are chimed by hammers operated from the vestry.

The stained glass windows in the church are all examples of the effect of the Pre-Raphaelite movement on church stained glass. The window above the altar was described in an article on the influence of William Morris on church windows as an outstanding example of the genre. Another very good example of Pre-Raphaelite art is the window on the right of the door through which you entered, all the windows are by Burlison and Grylls and date from 1872

On the South side of the Sanctuary stands the tomb of John Keate, D.D., Canon of Windsor. For 24 years he was the 'flogging' Headmaster of Eton College; and for the following 24 years Rector of this Parish. On his death in 1852, Old Etonians rebuilt the

Chancel as his memorial. His son, John Charles, succeeded him and held the Benefice for 45 years, and on his death in 1894 Richard Durnford, Esq., erected the Lychgate, and parishioners erected the alabaster Reredos to his memory. The Reredos is the work of Temple Moore, a pupil of George Gilbert Scott.

The cross and candlesticks were designed by John Loughborough Pearson, architect of Truro Cathedral.

The Pulpit is Jacobean. It was retained from the old Church on the rebuilding in 1868.

The font was installed in 1842. The earliest baptism in the Church, of which we have record, reads:

'Nota Mirabilis. Hartley Wespall.

John the sonne of John Stirt was christened the 25th day of October A.D. 1540. Joen, the daughter of the said John was christened the 29th day of October A.D. 1540.

John, another sonne of the said John Stirt was christened the 30th day of October A.D. 1540.

The organ is by Hedgeland, built in 1873, and the casing designed by George Gilbert Scott.

Leaving the church the porch stained glass windows were moved from the now deserted church of Stratfield Turgis when that church was closed. The Stratfield Turgis font of pre-Reformation date can be seen outside the South door, and their stone War Memorial tablets have been placed near the north door.

The oldest inscription in the Churchyard is on the gravestone of William Payee, who died in 1640. Gravestones of this age are uncommon. It lies at the East end, close by the wall.

The plane tree beside the lane North of the Lychgate was planted in 1977 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II,

Hartley Wespall derives its name from the Waspail family, one of whom, Nicholas, was Rector in 1349. He died six months later, probably a victim of the Black Death. John Pakenham, mentioned above, became Rector in 1454, after the death of Jane. In 1806, a Lady Catherine Pakenham, married Sir Arthur Wellesley, then Major-General, afterwards Field Marshal, the Duke of Wellington, K.G.