

NOTES FOR VISITORS TO ST. MARY'S CHILTON FOLIAT

Outside the Church

The Lych gate and the rows of limes through which you enter are the parish's memorial to those who died in the war 1914 – 1918. The trees to the left of the limes, coming in, each represent a life lost from the parish in the war 1939 – 1945. There is also a second world war memorial window in the nave.

Age of the Church

The church seems to be a 13th century building [900 years old] although altered through the years, particularly by the Victorians from 1845 onwards.

The Oldest parts of the Church

1] The Tower The small windows to the ringing chamber and belfry are 13th century style, dating the tower to the 13th century. You can only see these windows from outside. Above the top windows [to the belfry] you can see a moulding called a 'billet' moulding which belongs to an earlier Norman style. The guess made is that an earlier Norman church on the site or nearby was demolished and some stone used in the building of the new 13th century St. Mary's. The tower battlements, pinnacles and buttresses are later work.

2] The Figure of a Knight in Armour. The effigy in the chancel is also probably 13th century and is said to represent Sir Samson Foliat who held land in the village in 1249. At a guess this knight, given such a notable monument, might have been the founder of the 13th century church. The cross-legged style of memorial came into favour about 1240 and lasted for about 100 years.

3] Medieval Tiles In the vestry, not available for viewing, are 25 medieval floor tiles dated by an expert 1225 to 1250. They were no doubt once in the church.

The Nave Roof This is 16th century. In 1523 Katharine of Aragon, the first wife of Henry VIII held land in Chilton. She wrote in that year from Greenwich ordering her steward at Chilton to cut down 3 oaks for the repair of the church roof. This wood still forms the nave roof, though the curved beams have been covered with a layer of more modern oak. The roof is described as a Waggon Roof with Carved Wall posts.

Chancel and South Aisle Roofs. Window surrounds. Arches

These appear to date from 1845 when the church was restored and a new wider south aisle built, though there is one window on the north side that may be 13th century. You may like to walk round the outside of the church and try and see the difference between the Victorian and earlier flintwork in the walls. The 1845 roofs from inside, have good painting and carving. The architect was Benjamin Ferreys who built St Stephen's Rochester Row.

Fittings of the Church

The Screen dividing chancel and nave is a puzzle. Much is Jacobean [17th century], but the tracery gothic or gothic revival. Perhaps it was assembled in 1845, from various parts.

The Pews The pew ends are from 1845, but the backs are from the original high 17th century box pews. If you look underneath you can see the old fixing place for the seats, now a few inches above the floor. The Littlecote House pew, front right, remained a box pew until 1860.

The Pulpit Probably 1845. It is peculiar in that it can only be entered from the vestry.

The Font Carved in 1850 by the Revd. Thomas Meyrich. He carved 6 bible scenes in the medieval manner. The Old testament scenes are 'Samson carrying the gates of Gaza', 'Moses in the bull rushes' and 'Noah receiving the dove in the ark'. A look round the church will show you an earlier site for the font.

The Organ

As the inscription says it came from Littlecote House in 1897 to replace an earlier organ which was also in the gallery.

Bells

There are five, the oldest dating from 1623. They are hung in a 16th century oak frame – made from the same oak as the nave roof.

Wooden Chests

The chest near the door is elm, perhaps 200 years old. The other is oak, 16th century, probably Spanish. It was given to St Mary's in 1934.

Hatchments

These big wooden coats of arms were hung outside large houses after a death, and afterwards laid up in church. The one on the left is the Cooper family, who lived at Chilton Lodge until 1836. The one on the right is the Popham arms. They lived at Littlecote 1589 – 1907. There are many memorials to Pophams in the church and two Pophams were Rectors. You will have noticed the carving of a baby, a Popham heir, who died aged 5 months in 1861. Another heir was born in 1862 and survived.

Benefaction Boards

There are three under the gallery. The fire engine mentioned is now in Swindon museum. The school is very much alive in a new building on Stag Hill. The silver sadly disappeared, presumably when the Revd. J.L. Popham gave new silver in 1862. The churchwarden's acre was sold for £10 in 1934. Roger and Elizabeth Spanswick, the school benefactors, have a memorial slab under the nave carpet.

Brass Memorial

There is a brass memorial to Robert Collard, Rector 1598 – 1648. It is just beneath the chancel step, under the blue carpet. He was rector during the civil war and buried one king's soldier and 5 parliamentary soldiers.

Twentieth century work.

Sanctuary and Altar Surrounds The panelling and riddle posts in the English Altar style date from 1929 and were given by Mrs Whitelaw Reid, widow of an American ambassador. Design was by W. A. Forsyth, who also designed the Lych Gate. The angels carrying candles were carved by J.C.Blair of Eton. The sanctuary paving is of the same date.

Modern Stained Glass Four windows on the north of the church are 20th century. The most modern design is the St Hubert window of 1966 showing the vision of Christ by St Hubert the huntsman. A 1976 window in the gallery shows St Cecilia, patron of church musicians.