

THE CHURCH OF ST MARY, SLINDON

A Short History

Welcome to this church, which has been used for worship for nearly nine hundred years. It is hoped that this brief guide will help you to make the most of your visit.

The present church has its origins in a small building consisting of a chancel and nave, built in 1106, possibly on the site of one mentioned in Domesday in 1087, and there may have been an earlier building attached to Slindon Manor but of insufficient importance to warrant remark. The Manor and lands were a gift to St Wilfrid by Caedwalla, King of the West Saxons, in 685.

Wilfrid donated the gift to the See of Canterbury in the person of Archbishop Theodore, and the estate was in the possession of the See until Archbishop Cranmer exchanged it with Henry VIII for other lands, except for one brief interlude after the Norman Conquest when it was granted by the Conqueror to his nephew, Earl Roger de Montgomery. Throughout eight centuries Slindon was associated with many eminent clerics.

St Anselm, to whom the building of the church is attributed, stayed at the Manor, and Archbishop Stephen Langton died there in 1228. A plaque commemorating his death, given by a descendant of his family, can be seen on a pillar by the north door.

In 1154 Archbishop Theobald dedicated, rebuilt and enlarged the Church of Blessed Mary and made a grant of land for its endowment.

In 1160-70 the south wall of the nave was taken down, an arcade of two arches built and the south aisle added. A few years later a transceptal chapel was constructed out to the north and dedicated to St Thomas a Becket. The arch by the pulpit, once the entrance to the chapel, is all that now remains. Gone, too, is the interesting fresco work executed at the same time.

The font is 11th century, probably Norman or late Saxon. Early in the 13th century the chancel was altered, rebuilt and extended eastward.

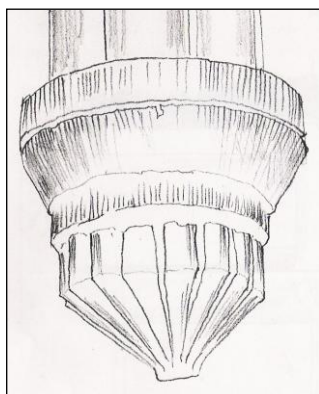
In the 15th century, an arch was made in the wall of the nave and the north aisle added; a further addition of one bay brought the church to its present size, and a small tower was built.

The church is built of flint rubble with ashlar dressing. The material used in the interior during the transition period was Caen stone and chalk. The 13th century work was of Pulborough stone, also used in the little Norman window which is the only remaining feature of the original nave. Traces of another Norman window can be seen in the north wall. Both were splayed and had no glass.

Restoration carried out in 1866 during the incumbency of the Rev William Chantler Izard included rebuilding the aisle walls and the construction of a new chancel arch, the former being narrow and flanked by arched recesses. The east window of five lancets was installed, together with the mosaic tile reredos, the centre panel of which depicts Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The floor was laid with encaustic tiling, the entire roof renewed and the old wooden tower replaced by a shingled one with a stone belfry. This work revealed the inner jamb and sill of a Perpendicular west window where the present tower now stands. It also disclosed the blocked outline of a doorway into the 15th century tower. Pre-16th century, this door was once the main west entrance into the church. A south door was built and a new south window. The present north doorway uses the original mediaeval door. Bath stone was used throughout during the restoration.

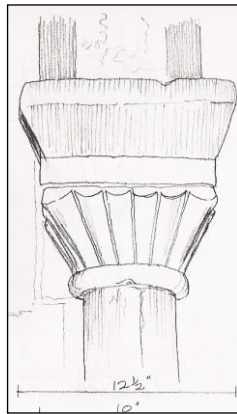
According to a local diarist, there was no choir when the Rev Izard came to Slindon and the organ was housed in a large oak gallery approached by a stairway close to the bells. Copyholders of Slindon worshipped in their own enclosed pews. After the church restoration, a choir was organised by the Rector and all the pews made open. In 1895, a hand-blown mechanical organ by Forster and Andrews of Hull was installed, later to be improved in the early 1900s with pneumatic pedals and the fitting of an electric blower.



In 1936, a new south porch was built, retaining the original weathered tiles for its roof. The present tower houses four bells, three inscribed as follows:

- 1 *W.R.W.P. 1616 T.W.*
- 2 *Bryanus Eldridge, me ficit 1651*
- 3 *Bryanus Eldridge, me ficit 1657*

The 4th bell was installed by the Rev William Chandler Izard. It is interesting to note that both bells by Bryanus Eldridge were cast at the time of the Commonwealth, when Cromwell's stringent administration restricted such casting of bells.



St Mary's most notable possession is the effigy, carved in oak, of Anthony St Leger Esq of Binsted, who died in 1539 and who requested in his will that he be interred in Slindon Parish Church before the picture of Our Lady. The only existing example of a wooden effigy in Sussex, it represents a man in the plate armour of the Wars of the Roses. The head rests upon his helmet. The effigy was removed from its former site in the chancel when the organ chamber was relocated. The protective mort safe around the figure was added in 1990 to ensure security. The picture by which he was laid no longer exists and may well have been in stained glass or possibly a mural.

The Bishop's chair in the sanctuary is made of oak and is reproduction Queen Anne, made by Andrew Cossar (son of a former rector) in 1998, to replace one that was stolen. The piscine in the south wall is 13th century. The prayer desk came from the chapel in Slindon House when this was removed during alterations in 1914.

At the west end of the south aisle are some 15th century Poppyhead benches; in the vestry is a 17th century table and over the entrance door hangs a representation of the

Royal Arms of George III. It bears the letters "G.III" and the date 1783. A tablet on the west wall of the north aisle bears the names of the Rectors of Slindon from 1233 to the present day.

Until about 200 years ago, there were red crosses on the two inside bays on the north wall where the Bishop had placed his hands at the original consecration. A Lady Chapel that stood close to the gate inside the churchyard was demolished in 1524. A square, single room building with a lancet window, it was later used as a dwelling belonging to the Parish. The church registers date from 1558.

In 1979-80, a chapel for the purpose of private meditation, prayer and special services was created in the east end of the north aisle on the site of the early Thomas a Becket chapel. Donations and gifts of furnishing came from many individual donors. (Note the inscription on the side of the Communion Table.) Named St Mary's Chapel, it was dedicated on Trinity Sunday, 1st June, 1980 by the then-Archdeacon of Chichester, the Venerable R M S Eyre, later Dean of Exeter. In 1995, a memorial garden was created in the area of the War Memorial. The two seats, the trees and plants were donated by parishioners. There is also a plaque in the church commemorating those of the Parish who died in both World Wars.

The rose bushes in the churchyard were donated by parishioners in memory of deceased relatives. These are commemorated on a small tablet in the north porch.

To celebrate the new millennium, a young yew tree propagated from an ancient tree estimated to be at least 2,000 years old was planted on 7th October, 2001, near the path to the north door.

In the window facing south, just above the effigy of the effigy, is the etched window in memory of David Beaty, who worshipped in this church and lived at Manchester House in Church Hill, where he wrote several of his books. The window was presented to the church by his widow and family.

During the war, David Beaty flew from various Sussex airfields, having volunteered as a pilot whilst at Oxford. He completed four tours of operation in some of the fiercest arenas - the Siege of Malta, the Battle of the Atlantic, the Russian convoys and the D-Day landings. He was awarded the DFC and Bar. After the war, David became a senior captain with British Overseas Airways (now British Airways) and left to fulfil his ambition to write. His novels became international best-sellers and his books and articles on air safety are used by airlines, air forces and universities around the world. But it his love of the air and freedom, and his soaring, questing spirit, that the window by Simon Whistler commemorates. (There is a separate leaflet on the window for those who would like to have a fuller interpretation.)

Before you leave this church, please say a prayer for *God's* blessing and guidance for yourself and those you love, and also for those who worship here.

