A Guide to

The Parish Church of Saint Mary the Virgin

Charlbury

Oxfordshire

‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples’
Isaiah 56:7

‘How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul has a desire and longing to enter the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.
Blessed are they who dwell in your house:
they will always be praising you.’ *Psalm 84:1,3*

Thank you, Father, for this ancient place of prayer;
for the faith that has blossomed here,
and for the worship in all seasons offered here;
for the lives that have been touched here,
and commitment stirred into life here.

As we tread in the footsteps of those who have gone before us in the faith, bless us and all who come here,
and speak to us with the whisper of your love,
for you are a God of renewal and of steadfastness, now and for ever. Amen.

Angela Ashwin

Father, as we turn aside from the busy world
with its clamour and distractions,
quieten our hearts in your presence,
that we may be still and know
that you are God, our God,
now and forever,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen *Frank Colquhoun*

There is no charge for this church guide. If you should wish to leave a donation, please leave it in the collecting box in the wall near the door. Thank you.

Welcome to St. Mary's Church, Charlbury!

This Church, dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, has been a place of welcome and spiritual refreshment for over 900 years. Visitors to Charlbury, those walking on the Oxfordshire Way, local residents and others are all welcome here, not only to enjoy the building but to take time to reflect in the peace and stillness of this place.

Holy spaces and places matter to us. They soak up prayer, grief, celebration, worship and joy over the years, and in turn give a space and a place where we can encounter the sense of God's presence. Here we are reminded of a God who shared this human life with us, with all its joys, challenges and sorrows, and discover hope, healing and the promise of life. This Church building stands here as a sign of God's love and of Christ's presence in the world.

We hope you enjoy your visit to Charlbury and find something of God's peace and love here. If your visit coincides with a service of worship please join in if you wish to or simply sit quietly until it is over.

You may like to sit quietly now for a few minutes to absorb the atmosphere and offer up your own prayer to God. There are some prayer cards available on the table by the main door for you to use and take away if you wish.

May God's blessing and peace be with you.

A Tour of the Church

On Entering the Church
(from the South door)

On the outside the building is traditional, but on entering, the visitor finds a modern setting. Your first impression once inside could be that the congregation would appear to be facing 'the wrong way'. The Parochial Church Council (PCC) took advantage of the major restoration that was needed in the early 1990s to make, what was at that time, a revolutionary change.

The reason behind this was to enable as many people as possible to see and hear what was happening during services. The present arrangement allows for great flexibility: services take place in the Chancel, in the Memorial Chapel, and facing the west end of the church. The chairs, unlike the old pews, are moved around as necessary to allow for different needs in addition to services, e.g. Taizé services, exhibitions, concerts, conferences. The restoration and reordering of the Church was completed in 1995.

The entrance doors are in memory of Dr Henry Croly, a much loved General Practitioner in the town for many years. The glass doors were added in 2008 and have been given in memory of David Fowler by his parents.

Parts of the present building date from the 12th century, though a Saxon church may have existed here. This is supported by a list made in about 1015 of the burial places of saints in England, which says that St. Diuma, a 7th century bishop of the Middle Angles and Mercians, 'rests in the place that is called Ceorlingburh'.

The Rectors and Vicars of Charlbury

Before you go round the church, look to the left of the door at the list of rectors and vicars of Charlbury, made by Edwin Glasgow in 1949 in memory of his wife.

From 1094 until the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII, all appointments to the living of Charlbury were made by the Abbey of Eynsham. Unfortunately no names of Rectors are known until Walter de Sancto Edmundo (1234-1265). It is odd that two of the rectors named were sub-deacons and so not qualified to administer the sacraments. From 1296 the Abbey received the main tithes of corn and from then on appointed Vicars, who received the lesser tithes of hay and offerings made by the congregation.

Note that the vicar at the time of the Dissolution was Robert King who was appointed first Bishop of the newly created See of Oxford. He had also been Abbot of Bruerne, Thame and Osney Abbeys. The right of appointment to the living passed to St. John's College Oxford in 1590, and the President of the college, Dr. Ralph Hutchinson, was vicar from 1593 to 1606. He took part in the translation of the Authorized Version of the Bible, but died before it was finished.

The Shields on the list carry the arms of:

1. The See of Lincoln
   (Charlbury was in this diocese until 1542)
2. The Abbey of Osney
   (these were the arms of the See of Oxford until 1604)
3. The See of Oxford from 1604
4. St. John’s College, Oxford.

The Statuettes, each under a suitably styled canopy, represent:

1. A priest of the 13th or 14th century
2. Bishop Robert King
3. Dr Ralph Hutchinson
4. A 19th century clergyman.

The Font is of unknown date and stands at the entrance to the church, between the main door and the nave altar.

On the west wall is a plan of the church showing the dates of construction.

Standing against the wall is the old parish chest, which, because of its plain style, must have been made in the 16th century or earlier.

The Nave is entered via the 13th century arches on the south side. The chairs that have replaced the old Victorian pews, have in many cases been sponsored by members of the parish and other residents.

The kneelers were made by parishioners and they represent religious themes, organisations in the town and particular interests. Their blue and gold colours and the diamond pattern round the edge were chosen to fit in with the single lancet window at the west end behind the altar and they also reflect the muted colours of the east window.

The Sanctuary and Tower now form the focus for the main Sunday services. The modern altar and lectern are dedicated to the memory of Betty Butler, who was churchwarden and sacristan for 19 years until her death in 1997.

The fine 17th century spiral staircase, which has been brought into greater prominence by the re-ordering, leads to the ringing chamber.

The Bells

Since 1716 St. Mary's has had a peal of six bells, all cast by Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester. The inscriptions are as follows:

1. Peace and Good Neighbourhood A.R. 1716
2. Prosperity to this Town and Parish A.R. 1716
3. God preserve the Church of England A.R. 1716
4. Abr. Rudhall of Gloucester cast us all 1716
5. Prosperity to all our Benefactors A.R. 1716
6. Wm Ryman, Tho Cooke, Jn Rogers, Edwd Brain, Churchwardens 1716.

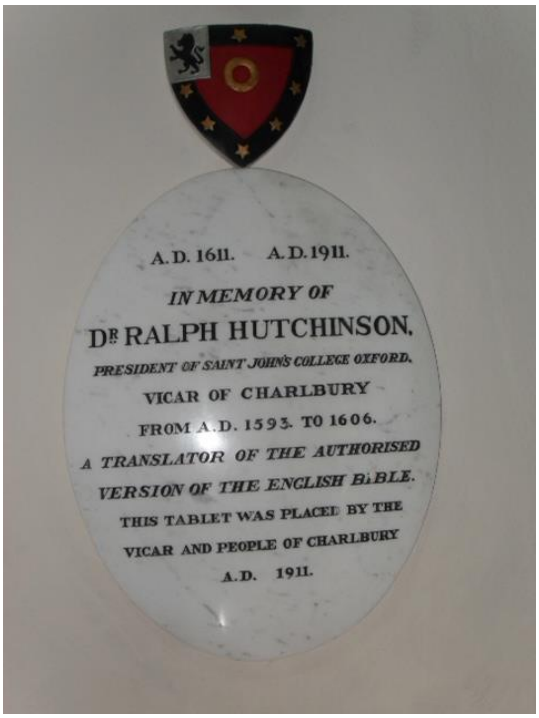
The quarter chimes of the church clock strike bells 1,2,3 and 6. There is an older sanctus bell, previously known as the “Yorkshire Pudding Bell”. It used to chime at noon at the end of Matins, and those housewives who were not at church knew it was time to cook their puddings.

The North Aisle

The rounded Norman arches in the north side of the nave were built in the 12th century, the oldest being possibly that with the square pillar nearest the Chancel. The organ console and choir area are situated here. There is a small blocked up doorway behind the organ, and above it a narrow lancet window, possibly the oldest window in the church. The vestry, kitchen and upper room, developed in the space occupied by the old pipe organ as part of the re-ordering and restoration of the church, are at the east end of this aisle.

The Chancel

The Chancel was restored in 1874-75 by the then Duke of Marlborough, but the pulpit was renewed in the previous restoration of 1856-57. The blocked in door that once led to the roof loft in the chancel arch is still visible.



By the pulpit is a tablet in memory of Dr Hutchinson, President of St. John's College and Vicar of Charlbury. This was erected by the parish in 1911 on the 300th anniversary of the publication of the Authorised Version of the Bible, to which he had contributed.

Beyond this are the wrought iron gates, given in memory of Aubrey Lloyd, secretary to the Parochial Church Council, Chorister and Bell-ringer, who died in 1973. They originally stood in the Tower arch but were moved here during the most recent restoration. They carry shields with copies of the four sets of arms that are on the list of rectors and vicars.

Next on your left is the memorial to Elizabeth, Viscountess Dowager of Hereford, who died in 1742, and to her great-grandson who died at Blandford Park in 1794, aged six weeks. Cornbury Park was known by this name for a time in the 18th century.

Then comes a sad little memorial on the same wall in memory of the young son of an early 19th century vicar, the Revd John Cobb. The inscription in Greek by his sorrowing parents reads, 'Rejoice in hope: patient in tribulation'.

The next tablet commemorates the Revd W Wellwood Stoddart, who died in Genoa after only three years in the living. He had not long in which to enjoy his new vicarage, now called the Old Rectory, opposite the west gate of the churchyard. It was he who initiated a major restoration of the church in the 1850s.

The Victorian brass lectern was given in memory of the Revd Samuel H Russell, vicar from 1857 to 1874.

The Whippy memorial window, also on the north wall is a representation of the Good Shepherd in memory of a prominent 19th century citizen of Charlbury, Benjamin Whippy.

The two stone memorials on either side of the altar commemorate members of the Jenkinson family who lived at Walcot, a vanished village, less than a mile away from Charlbury. The best known member of this family was Lord Liverpool, Prime Minister from 1812 to 1827. There are several Jenkinson tomb-stones in the floor of the Chancel, and around the altar are Milton tiles, so popular in 19th century church restorations.

The east window is in memory of the Rev'd Charles F.C. West, vicar from 1874 to 1897. Compare the Pre-Raphaelite style and colouring of the glass in the more formalised style and brighter colours of the War Memorial window in the glassed-in Memorial Chapel.

The Memorial Chapel is contained within the glass screens. The tracery of the window was restored in memory of the Rev'd Samuel H. Russell, and the window on the east wall was given in memory of the men who fell in the First World War. It shows the scene of Christ' Nativity and depicts on the left St. Edward the Confessor and on the right St. Louis of France, symbolising the alliance of England and France.

The War Memorial is placed in the north east corner of the chapel.

The Whinney memorial window on the right of the altar depicts St. Elizabeth with her son St. John the Baptist, St. Martin of Tours, the Visitation and St. Martin sharing his cloak with a beggar. The donor, Sir Arthur Whinney, lived at Lee Place in the 1920s.

On the south wall are three brass tablets. Two of these commemorate members of the family of the Canon Julius Delmege Payne, vicar from 1903 to 1940. The third (in a stone frame by the priest's door) is a copy of the brass in memory of Joanna Bridges who died in 1541. She was the wife of Sir Thomas Bridges who was keeper of Cornbury Park and Lieutenant of the Tower of London. As such, he was present at the executions of Lady Jane Grey and Archbishop Cranmer; he too, is buried in the church.

The chapel used to be called the Pudlicote Aisle because of the many Pudlicote people who are buried there under the floor. Pudlicote was once a village about four miles north-west of Charlbury. In 1303 a certain John of Pudlicote gained notoriety by his part in the theft of royal treasures from the Chapel of the Pyx in Westminster Abbey, for which he and two accomplices were hanged.

The South Aisle contains a small niche which once held a statue and a drawing of the church in 1852. In the south wall there is an opening which was almost certainly a piscina, so this part of the church was probably a side chapel before the Reformation. Above there are some interesting corbel heads, said to represent the Abbot of Eynsham, a wool merchant and other citizens.

The Exterior of the Church

As you go out of the porch, turn around to see the fine 13th century trefoil-headed archway of the south door. The porch was built in the 15th century and was restored in 1903 by the Rev'd A. C. Smith, vicar from 1898 to 1903.

The **Tower** was built in the **13th century**, but its west door (no longer used) was inserted at the end of the 15th century when the height of the tower was increased by one storey, as you can see by the change in masonry.

The **four-faced Clock** was installed in 1885 and paid for by public subscription.

As you walk back to Church Street, you will notice the sundial of 1776 on the south wall, and on your right, near the yew tree is the grave of Richard Coombs of Finstock who was killed at the age of 21 while working on the railway cutting in 1851. The poem on the tombstone is nearly worn away.

The Restoration of St Mary's 1990-1995

During these years the church experienced what is believed to be the most comprehensive restoration in its 900 year history. The aim was to combine essential repairs and renewals with adapting the church for contemporary needs. Work included installing an electric organ; transforming the empty organ chamber into a vestry, kitchen and toilet, with a meeting room above; adding a glass screen around the Memorial Chapel and installing a sound amplifying system.

Shorthampton Church

The Parish of Charlbury also includes the tiny church of All Saints at Shorthampton, about a mile away, off the Burford Road (follow signs to Chadlington: Shorthampton is down the small lane on the left). It is worth visiting for its remains of medieval wall paintings and 18th century pews and a tranquil location for peace and prayer.

Thank you for taking the time to visit our church. We hope you have enjoyed your time here. May God bless you as you go from here.

Visitors who wish to donate to the maintenance of St Mary's Church should put their donation in the collecting box near the door, or send them to the Treasurer, The Parish Office, c/o The Old Manor House, Church Street, Charlbury, Oxon. OX7 3PR. Cheques should be made out to Charlbury PCC.

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