

The peace of All Saints' envelops you as you come through the gateway from a country lane: Welcome, pilgrim - this church has nestled for over nine hundred years in the mixed arable farmland that runs up the Evenlode valley.

As you make the descent into the nave, before you on the walls are a variety of 'Saints' involved in everyday activities from the last five centuries. In some cases only fragments remain intact, which make them all the more interesting.

A detailed description of the wall paintings, by the Revd Jeff West, can be found on the desk by the door and this leaflet may go some way to help you contemplate and reflect.

Almost the first thing you notice is the Norman "tub" font. How many baptisms must have been performed here over the centuries and still are today. How precious is the gift of water.

**We thank you, Almighty God,
for the gift of water to sustain,
refresh and cleanse all life.**

**In water your Son Jesus received the baptism of
John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the
Messiah, the Christ,
to lead us from the death of sin
to newness of life.**

**We thank you, Father,
for the water of baptism.** *Common Worship*

Just above the font is the earliest of the wall decorations: the 13th century round-headed window, 'lined-out' in red to give the impression of cut stonework. Between this and the blocked up north door, to its right (note coathooks) you can just make out **St Frideswide**, a Mercian Princess and nun. She was founder of what is now Christ Church, Oxford.

Further right, you can see an archbishop, possibly **St Edmund of Abingdon**, or **St Thomas a Becket**, teaching a child to read.

To the left of the window, an unidentified figure of a 14th century priest may be **St Leonard**, patron saint of Eynsham Abbey. This would make sense because the monks there were patrons of Shorthampton.

As you turn East towards the altar, it is worth noting that the fine 18th century pulpit and box pews around you for the squire and family, are a throw back to the feudal system.

Facing the Chancel Arch, it is possible to make out a "Doom" or Last Judgment with a Royal Arms accidentally (or on purpose?) painted over it. The masonry and scroll pattern to the left of the Arch itself are also part of the earlier work here. To the right, a 'squint' was made when the church was widened in the 15th century so that the priest celebrating Mass could be seen.

**Gracious God, lover of all, in the sacrament
We are one family in Christ your son,
one in the sharing of his body and blood
and one in the communion of his Spirit:
help us to grow in love for one another
and come to the full maturity
of the body of Christ.**

Within the 'squint' is the painting of the **Legend of the Clay Birds**, depicting the Virgin Mary holding the Christ child and St John. However, it has been suggested that this is more likely to be Christ the Infant and St John with a Goldfinch. Immediately to the right of this is the **Agony in the Garden** (Luke 22.44) or possibly Christ in Majesty with his arm raised in blessing. This is confusing as there are two periods of painting visible.

Stepping into the chancel, the view that you see through the East window has probably not changed much over the years – Spelsbury church being just visible in the distance.

**"The landscape we see is not a picture frozen
in time only to be cherished and protected.
Rather it is the continuing story of the earth
itself, where man, in concert with the hills
and other living things, shapes and reshapes
the ever changing picture which we now see.....
We must never forget that tomorrow it will
reflect with honesty, the vision, values and
endeavours of our own time,
to those who will follow us." Jim Unger**

Retracing your steps through the arch and looking to the left, it is possible to make out **St Sitha** in the 'reveal' of the south window; a small but forceful figure in a heavy green dress (mid-15th century) She devoted her life to prayer and good works and was popular in the middle ages, particularly with women. She is often depicted with keys and other household paraphernalia and it is said that she can help you to find things that have been mislaid.

Between this window and the door is almost a fresco 'cartoon' of **St Loy or Legend of St Eligius**, patron saint of metalworkers and blacksmiths, seen here appropriately shoeing a horse. He was a practical man, involved in many good works, building churches and working as a goldsmith in the early 7th century.

We thank you, O God, for the saints of all ages; for those who, in times of darkness kept the lamp of faith burning through the years.

Under Edward VI (1547-53) the Church of England gradually became Protestant. Changes were made and reflected in the decoration. In May 1548, all images were ordered to be destroyed, so wall-paintings were whitewashed and replaced with biblical texts: hence the creed above the main door and also King Solomon's prayer, high up on the West wall. (2 Chronicles 6:40) But it seems that Shorthampton did not altogether comply with this regulation and perhaps we are all the more fortunate for that.

Lower down on this same wall is one remaining fragment in the form of **St George and the Dragon** or the **Archangel Michael**, either way – it's a wing!

Often in the face of difficulty and especially that of the elements, architects through the years have taken care to retain the character of the church; the chancel, bell-cote and porch were rebuilt in the 1820's.

Lord, we remember now all those who have gone before us, giving thanks for all that they did to pass on their faith to us and to sustain and nurture our small rural churches, which we now so greatly enjoy.

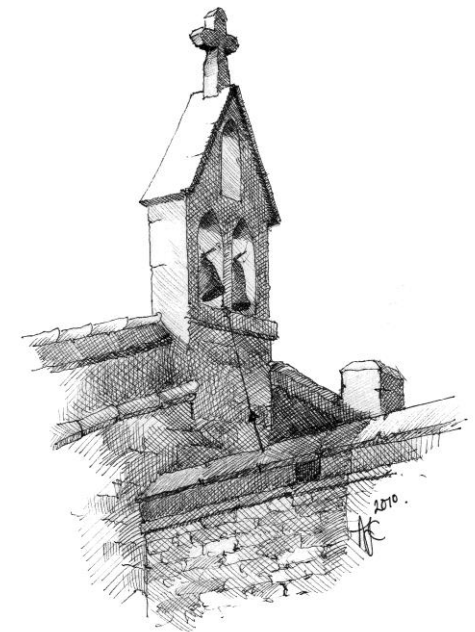
Before you leave, it is worth looking for a moment at the First World War memorial plaque to the right of the door: a surprising number of young men from a tiny community. Then take a stroll around the old churchyard, which may bring to mind your own memories.

O God, we thank you for this small church, in its beautiful setting among the fields, where people have prayed for centuries and been inspired and comforted. May we now find renewed strength from pausing here and take the peace of this special place with us wherever we are going next. Amen

Text and illustration by Amanda Cooper © 2010. Updated 2013.

THE CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS, SHORTHAMPTON

The Parish of Charlbury with Shorthampton



**"If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same....
...You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid." T.S. Eliot**