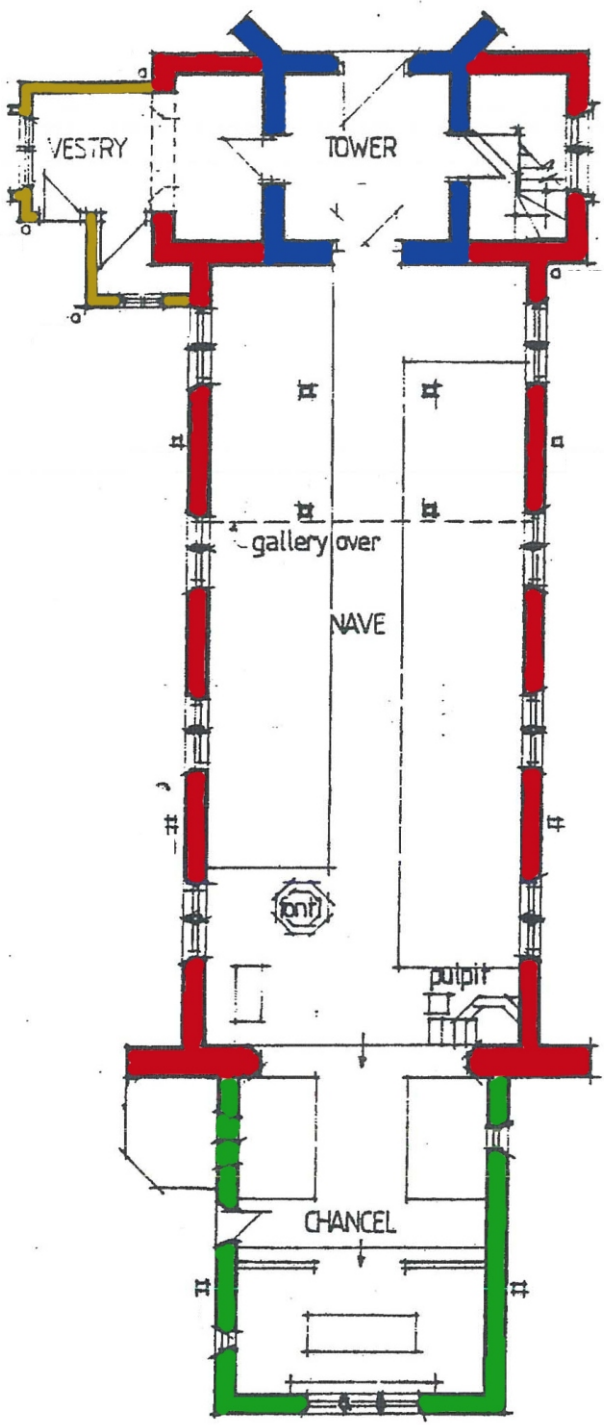


A Walk Around St. Giles Church Whittington



Produced by Whittington History Society 2013
www.whittingtonhistorysociety.org.uk



- G3
- 1761 additions
- 20th century
- 1881 additions

WELCOME!

We hope this booklet will help you to enjoy discovering the history of Whittington's church a Grade II listed building and its churchyard. It has been written and published by members of Whittington History Society.

ST GILES?

Well yes, that has been its name over many centuries. Somewhere between 1870 & 1872 it became known as Saint Matthews' and then changed back again between 1892 & 1896. We have not yet been able to find out why!

THE CHURCH BUILDING

It is believed that the church was originally built in the 13th century of red sandstone quarried in Hopwas Woods. The nave was rebuilt in 1761 following a fire, with the chancel being added in 1880/1881.

Sir Nicholas Pevsner, one of the most learned writers on architecture in the 20th century wrote: *“The tower, largely medieval, the spire no doubt later, the nave of brick & the ashlar bays embracing the tower of 1761. Looking at the spire; it is easy to see that it has parts of different ages. The guttering bears the date of the 1880 restoration.”*

By 1912, the church seems to have been in a sad state of repair. A letter from the Reverend Dumeresq Cohu claims:

“The tower, which is the oldest part of the church, is perishing.

The weather has eaten into the soft stone of which it is built and the bells cannot be rung, as the beams

are unsafe. The plaster of the inside of the nave is falling off. A new heating apparatus must be put in and the whole of the interior of the church must be cleared and decorated.”



Guttering image

A major restoration did indeed take place and there are accounts listing donations and showing expenditure.

INSIDE ST.GILES CHURCH

THE PANELLING, FLOOR & CENTRAL HEATING

You will immediately notice that, unusually, the church is now wood-panelled. The panelling, floor & central heating were all given by residents of the Old Hall in Whittington and the same style of panelling, tiles and central heating can still be seen there. The panelling was given by Bassett Seckham and his wife, Dorothy, in memory of his father and mother, Samuel Lipscombe Seckham and Kinbarra Swene Seckham, and was installed in May 1912 by Frank Foster as part of the major restoration at that time.

The floor and central heating were gifts of Edmond Corn who bought the Old Hall in 1933 from the Seckham family and lived there until he died in 1945.

THE WINDOWS

The windows, of "Y" tracery, range in date from the 15th to the 21st centuries.

The finest painted glass is in the north and south walls of the chancel. This glass dates from the 15th century and is rare, beautiful and important. It is thought that the glass came from Burton which had a large Benedictine Abbey in the Middle Ages. Shown in the south window are St.Katherine, Christ in Majesty, and two Bishops, and in the north window the donor's wife and a monk, who may have had connections with Burton.

At the east end is a fine stained glass window showing the four gospel writers as well as the Annunciation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

On the north side of the nave is a 1927 stained glass window by George Hunt depicting the Nativity.

Opposite this is the window with the most colourful glass, the Millennium window. This was bought through public subscription and was installed in the early months of this Millennium. It is intended to depict a cross-section of Whittington life in the year 2000, with St Giles and the deer he rescued in the foreground. A Memorial Book listing the donors can be found nearby.

THE FONT

The Font, which is made of alabaster, was given in memory of Margaret Kennedy who died in 1878.

THE ORGAN

There is a reference in “*Sketches in and around Lichfield and Rugeley*” dated 1892, to an Estey organ containing 24 stops. Before that, earlier in the 19th century, we know that William Pass accompanied church services on his flute, which can still be seen in the glass case on the wall near the organ. It was common at this time for country church choirs to be accompanied by local instrumentalists.

The Estey organ, complete with pipes, was situated where the remote console now stands. A new organ was built here as a First World Memorial in about 1920, the money for which was raised by public subscription from the village. In May 1956 it was rebuilt and doubled in size with a second manual added. The pipes were moved to the gallery with the detached console being placed in the original position.

The names of the 16 Whittington men who lost their lives in the Great War are recorded on a brass plate made from a shell casing brought from the Mons Battlefield. This can be seen above the central organ pipes in the gallery.

Essential major restoration work on the organ has recently been completed.



Guttering image

THE GALLERY

In a document dated 7th January 1786, Churchwardens, William Spray and Joseph Harvey, asked permission to take down the dilapidated short gallery, extend it and add two new windows which would increase the number of seats available to the expanding village population. A document dated 17th January 1786 granted permission for the rebuilding. The expenses were to be partly defrayed by reselling the former seats and letting the new ones!

THE PULPIT

The pulpit is of dark oak, with sounding board suspended above, and has an interesting history.

Handwritten notes by Howard L Paget of Elford Hall tell us it is a Jacobean pulpit which was given to Lichfield Cathedral by the Revd Prebendary Bavon in 1671. It remained in the Cathedral for 118 years. It was purchased by Lady Andover and Revd W Sawrey in 1789 and erected near the west door in St Peter's Church, Elford, where it remained until 1848 when it was taken out of the church.

The Staffordshire Village Book, compiled by the Staffordshire Federation of Women's Institutes, tells us that: *“During a restoration period at St Peter's, Elford, the pulpit was discarded in old stables on land belonging to Miss Mary Dyott's mother's family (the Pagets of Elford Hall). Here it lay in oblivion for 74 years until Miss Dyott's grandfather offered it to St Giles.”*

The pulpit therefore travelled once more to St Giles Church, on loan, in 1912 and was installed at the same time as the panelling by Frank Foster, who presented an invoice for £32 7s 0d for *“super altar, erection of pulpit and sundries”*. To make it fit into the church, it had to be sunk into a hole in the floor, where it still remains.

THE CHANCEL

Earliest pictures show the church without the chancel.



image one



image two

Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the William Salt Library, Stafford.

The current chancel is of stone and was designed by Ewan Christian and erected in 1881. There is a brass plaque on the north wall of the chancel marking the completion of the restoration work on the church at that time

by Rev., the Hon. George Barrington Legge, who was the brother of the Bishop of Lichfield and son of the Earl of Dartmouth.

The chair on the left of the Chancel, at the foot of the pulpit steps, is interesting as it was once a commode chair! You will find evidence of this if you look underneath. In 1912 there was a screen across the chancel step; it is not possible to see whether this a temporarily erected screen for some special occasion, or whether it may have been removed due to fire damage.

In 1929 the old oil lamps were replaced by electric lights, but the holes where the oil lamps were fastened to the choir stalls can still be seen.

THE SANCTUARY

The unusual carved wooden reredos behind the altar was dedicated by the Bishop of Lichfield on Sunday 4th September 1932, in memory of Col. B. Seckham of the Old Hall. It was carved by Bridgeman's of Lichfield. The oak altar rails and front choir stalls were given in memory of Edgar Percy Smith, who died in 1937.

Further evidence of the Dyott family's support of the church can be seen in the gifts of the brass altar cross, as well as the festive Altar Frontal depicting St Giles with the deer and of the steps outside the church, all items in memory of various family members.

THE MEMORIALS

For translations of the inscriptions on the various memorials on the church walls, please see the separate board available at the back of the church.

KNEELERS AND CUSHIONS

It was decided to replace the old kneelers in the church as a millennium project. All of the organisations and many individuals in the village donated the kneelers, often in memory of someone they wished to be remembered.

It was a popular project and most of the new kneelers were completed during the first year of the project, many of them by the donors and the rest by a group of willing volunteer 'stitchers'.

There are some blue seat cushions (one on the Vicar's seat near the organ) with an inscription "*In memory of Nurse Darby*". She was a much-loved village midwife for many years.

THE PORCH

In former times the church was heated by coal boiler, and in the roof of the porch can be seen a hook which was used to help manhandle the sacks of coal into the building and across to the foot of the tower staircase, where the largest lumps were smashed up. There is still evidence of this in the floor there!

THE BELLS

Three ancient bells which had survived the fire of 1761 were removed from the tower in November 1990 as the wooden frame had rotted so much that the bells could no longer be rung. A new ring of six (from St James, Islington and dating from 1875) were housed in an eight bell frame designed by Eayre and Smith of Melbourne, Derby and made locally by John Brosch. The new bells were first rung on Thursday 3rd October 1991. Two further bells were added in April 2008 to complete the ring of Eight.

THE CHURCHYARD

The church yard contains many interesting memorials to the inhabitants of the district during the past centuries, the most famous being Thomas Spencer (co-founder of Marks and Spencer) who was born in 1851 in the small Yorkshire town of Skipton. His grave can be found just to the right of the main path. In 1903, Thomas Spencer, with his wife, Agnes, retired & either leased or bought the farm on the left of Darnford Lane, just outside the village. Marks and Spencer gave generously to the building of the new church hall, hence its name, the Thomas Spencer Hall.



Bells image

In a tidy plot near the church are the Dyott family graves along with other well known village family headstones. Further along the main path can be found, on the left, a small group of graves which are cared for by the War Graves Commission.

We hope you have enjoyed exploring some of the history of our church. If you feel able to give a donation to help with the upkeep of this treasured building, you will find a donation slot in the wall near the door.

Thank you for your visit.