

*The Parish Church  
of  
All Saints Clifton  
Bedfordshire*



Cover picture by Pauline Bryant



## **ALL SAINTS CHURCH**

The first guide to All Saints was published in 1927 to coincide with the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the present church. It is an invaluable source of information containing both history and description of the building. It was republished in 1963. Mr Chris Pickford, the County Archivist, has written two authoritative articles on *The Clifton Bells* and on *The Church Clock and Carillon*. He always encourages interest in and research on the church.

The present guide has the advantage of many line drawings specially prepared for it by Mrs Sheila Ashton.

We have been glad to use part of a legacy from Mrs Florence West, who lived at "Floral" in Stanford Lane, to produce this guide.

Canon Peter Pavey, Rector, Easter 1990

We are grateful to Mrs Pam Isted for the time she has given to creating this second edition of the 1990 guide.  
June 2009

### **Introduction to the Church**

On looking round, one can catch a sense of a simple mediaeval church. The mediaeval church would have had a much lower roof and would have been slightly smaller but, with the careful Victorian restoration, enough of its basic shape and character remain. It is also possible to sense the concern of the congregation for Clifton church today. For the church is not simply a museum. The congregation continues its worship to the glory of God, aware of its heritage of 700 years or more and gladly continues the task of adding to the beauty of the church.

## ***A Sense of Continuity***

About the same time as the Bishop of Ely was creating the first Cambridge College, the present church in Clifton was built. We can trace its evolution from a fine village church in the fourteenth century (c. 1326), much of which is preserved. We have development in the fifteenth century, with the completion of the tower and the arcade which separates the nave from the north aisle. In the Victorian restoration Henry Miles had the north aisle and chapel rebuilt, later adding a vestry. The chief alteration in the external appearance is the addition of the north side which now runs the length of the church and the lofty roof. The choice of Edward Haycock, Jnr, F.R.I.B.A., as the architect of the Victorian restoration was wise. He was responsible for a Gothic style in many west country churches, where he did most of his work. It was a style eminently suitable for restoring and enlarging the church in Clifton.

## ***The Rectors***

Rectors of Clifton have been recorded since 1202. The advowson, the right of presenting Rectors to the living, was annexed to Clifton manor from 1340 to 1667. Over the years the continuity of the parish was strengthened by a number of distinguished, long serving and resident Rectors. Isaac Bedford (1622-1661) was a “watchful and faithful pastor, a father of the poor,” who survived the upheaval of the Commonwealth. There was the learned Dr Osborn (1738-1790). He was followed by the Oliviers; first Daniel Stephen and then his son, Daniel Josias. They were successively Rectors (1790-1858). The late Lord Olivier, the actor, is a descendant of the family. Henry Miles was presented as Rector (1858-1891) by his father. He was typical of many clergymen of his day; serious in his calling, compassionate and wealthy, determined to make his church and its worship worthy of God. He saw his ministry at Clifton as his life’s work. With the help of money from his father, he was responsible for the notable restoration. Four respected hard-working Rectors held office over a period of one hundred and fifty years. The advowson or patronage, as it is called, came to the Bishop of St Albans from the Miles family in 1952.



All Saints Church, Clifton, Beds.

## A TOUR OF THE CHURCH

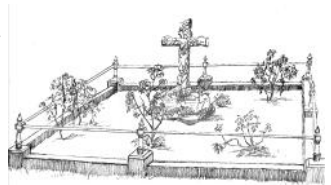
(A plan of the Church will be found in the centre of this guide)

**THE CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS, CLIFTON** is a characteristic mid-Bedfordshire building: small, dignified and compact. The mediaeval walls show clear dependence on local materials. They are of rubble masonry with dressed stone at the corners. The nineteenth century walls are made of ashlar blocks of red sandstone.

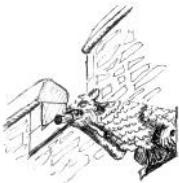
The whole of the fourteenth century south side of the church and the fifteenth century tower can be viewed from Church Street.

The church is approached through the nineteenth century *lychgate* and the cosy churchyard with its yew trees and the flower beds on either side of the main path. The uncluttered graves provide an apt reminder of its past. Two former rectors are clearly marked, as is an occupant of the manor and other parishioners; they represent many thousands of others.

***The grave of Henry Miles*** who was rector at All Saints from 1858 to 1891. He was buried in March 1910. He carried out a notable restoration of the church and at times “a quarter of the population was maintained by him.”

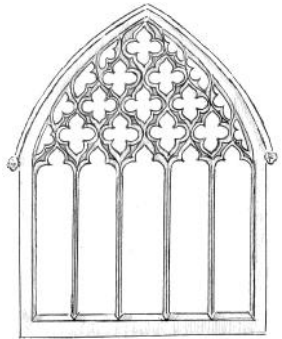


One becomes aware of the substantial tower rising to a height of 60 feet. Protruding from the roof are two **grotesque gargoyles**, of the fifteenth century, “yelling their soundless blasphemies and derisions to the wind.” In the days before lead pipes, rainwater was thrown clear of the church walls by means of a projecting spout. The gargoyles were said to represent human vices and sins, and were looked upon as a warning to all who entered the church to leave their evil thoughts outside and so to come into the church in a fit frame of mind to worship God.



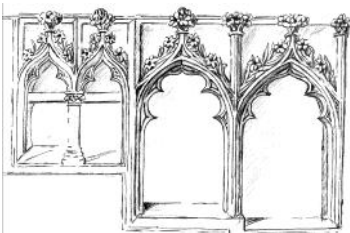
## The Chancel

The glory of the chancel is **the east window** enhanced as it is by the modern stained glass. The stonework is fourteenth century. It has been heavily restored but the design of the main features of the early work can be seen. In 1951 **the Farrar-Bell glass** was added. The striking design depicts "The Ascension.". **A bell surmounted by "R.F."** makes a very apposite trademark for the designer-craftsman of the window, Reginald Farrar-Bell.



**The windows in the chancel.** The north wall window opening dates from the fourteenth century as do the window openings on the south side. The larger **stained glass** depicts figures of St Nicholas, patron saint of children and John Colet, Dean of St Paul's, who also founded St Paul's School, Westminster. They are by Michael, son of Reginald Farrar-Bell, 1951 and are subjects suitable to the memory of William Abbott Norris, a distinguished headmaster and churchworker. Also on the south side there are two low-side windows which may have helped disperse the heavy fumes that arose from candles and tapers. **The stained glass** depicting "The Annunciation" is by John Hardman, 1863.

Beneath the south-east window are the fourteenth century **piscina and sedilia**. The piscina is a drain in a niche in the wall for the celebrant to wash his hands during the Mass. The second piscina was used for rinsing the communion vessels. Sedilia are seats, nearly always of stone. They are invariably found to the south of the altar and were used by the celebrant and his assistants. The sedilia and piscina rise to the same level and make a continuous design and the carved decorations around both the piscina and the sedilia are beautifully worked. The Victorian architect took care to recreate this stonework in a way that makes the new almost indistinguishable from the old work.

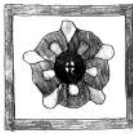


**The priest's doorway** is also six hundred years old. This allowed the priest direct access to the sanctuary.

A Victorian restoration often resulted in the chancel becoming more elaborate near the altar. In our church **the sanctuary** has a rich design of Maw tiles, 1874. The mosaic of the Lamb with its Banner of Victory has the words “Agnus Dei”, “the Lamb of God”, a title given to Christ in the New Testament. On the front of the marble platform of the altar is, in Greek characters, ΙΧΘΥΣ, “Ichthus”, a fish. This was a Christian sign used in the first century. Its letters make up the initials of the Greek words meaning “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour.”



The substantial **reredos**, 1874, behind the altar, from the workshops of Thomas Earp is of Caen stone. The centre consists of a raised panel, carved in high relief, representing the Crucifixion and the women standing by, with the Apostles Peter and Paul on either side, the whole surmounted by a canopy. Marble shafts separate the panels.



The present **organ**, a “Father Willis”, was built by Mr Henry Willis, the first generation of the well-known organ builders, in 1886. It has a mechanical action. There are 56 notes on each of the two manuals and a concave and radiating pedal board of 30 notes. It has ten stops, three couplers and 510 pipes. It remains unaltered from the time it was installed and so is a significant part of the country’s artistic heritage.

**The Victorian pulpit**, 1863, on the north side is a handsome stone structure, the top being carved alabaster inlaid with marble, having a carved eagle desk also in alabaster, the eagle’s beak holding a scroll inscribed with the words, “Faith cometh by hearing.”

**The chancel arch**, fourteenth century, is particularly interesting being of wider span than the chancel itself. This architectural arrangement is managed skilfully. On the nave side of the chancel arch there is **a mosaic**, the work of Maw, 1874, entitled “**A Majesty**”. The deity is robed and reigns as sovereign. It has attached to it alpha and omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In the New Testament, God the Father is called **Α** and **Ω**, the beginning and the end. The reigning Christ also receives the same title **Α** and **Ω**.



# ALL SAINTS CHURCH, CLIFTON

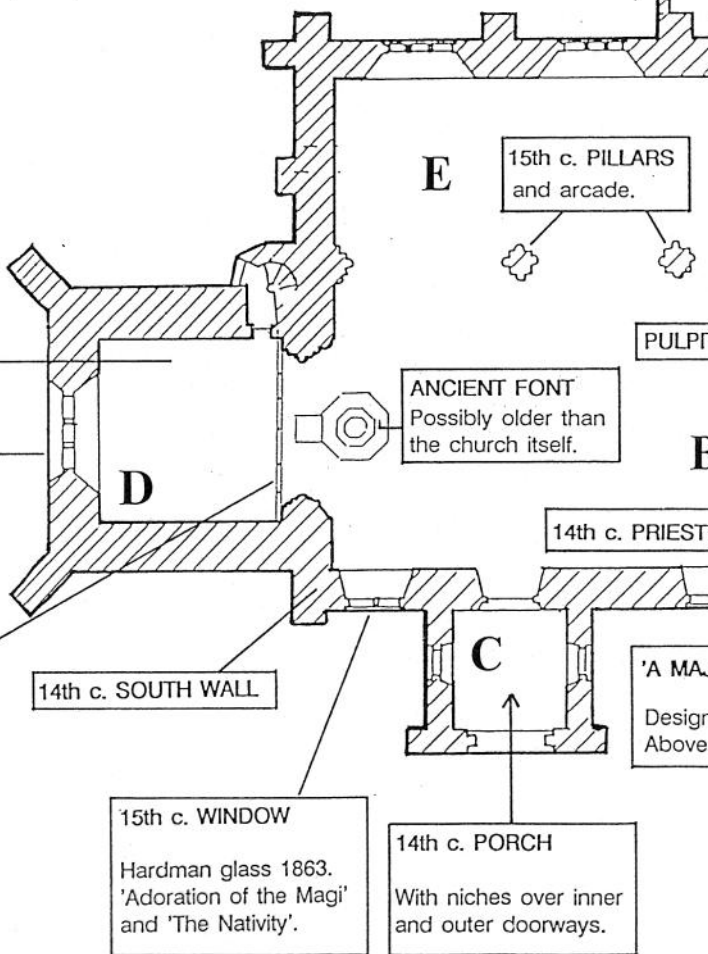


UTILITIES  
Added in 1975.

**14th & 15th c. TOWER**  
8 ringing bells, three oldest 1590. Retuned and rehung in 1953. Clock 1863; chimes 1867; carillon machine 1879 chimes at 8 am, noon, 4 pm and 8 pm. Restored 1986.

**15th c. WEST WINDOW**  
Hardman glass 1863 'The Last Judgement'.

**MEDIAEVAL SCREEN**  
Remains of 1390 rood screen. Separated the chancel from nave and carried a crucifix.



**E** 15th c. PILLARS and arcade.

**ANCIENT FONT**  
Possibly older than the church itself.

PULPIT

14th c. PRIEST

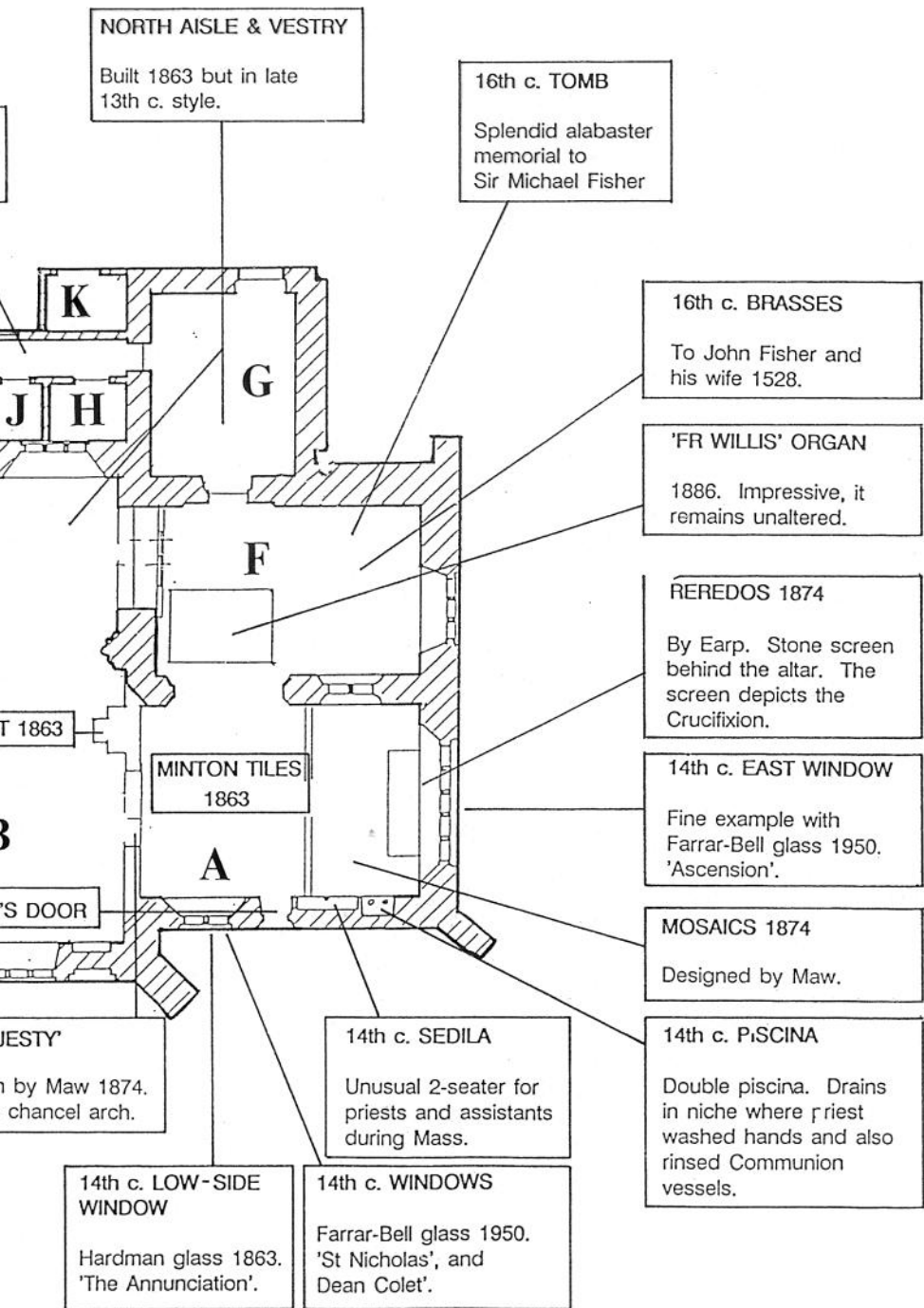
'A MA...  
Design Above

14th c. SOUTH WALL

**15th c. WINDOW**  
Hardman glass 1863. 'Adoration of the Magi' and 'The Nativity'.

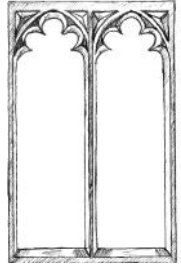
**14th c. PORCH**  
With niches over inner and outer doorways.





## The Nave

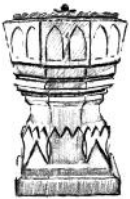
**The nave** is further evidence of the fourteenth century church. **The south wall and the window opening** in the centre of the wall date from c. 1326. The nave is divided from the north aisle by an **arcade** of three bays with moulded arches of good fifteenth century work.



Between the tower and the south door, **a window** under a square head, was inserted in the fifteenth century. **The Hardman glass**, "The Nativity" and "The Adoration of the Magi," was installed in 1863.

**The charnel house.** A trap doorway gives access to an interesting charnel house, a safe and reverent deposit of bones from the churchyard. This is something of a rarity for a small village church.

## The Font



**The font** is sometimes the oldest object in a church and village because the "right to baptise" was highly prized by early communities and parishioners. Only the bowl of this font is mediaeval. It may be thirteenth century. It stands on a modern freestone base with modern cover.

## The South Porch

The proliferation of notices in the **porch** is a reminder of the important part it has played in the life of the Church and the community. The porch provided shelter and protected the door from the weather. From the earliest times the Church porch was the usual place for the transaction of much of the civil business of the parish. It was also important liturgically. Parts of the baptism service, the marriage, the churcing of women and the absolution of penitents took place here.

Much of our porch is original fourteenth century work; the doorway is a particularly good example of this period. **The modern dripstones** represent a bishop and a queen. Over the doorway is **a niche** which contains a modern crucifix. Above the outer arch there is another beautiful **niche**. The figure of the Good Shepherd with a landscape of trees and sheep is of much later date than the niche.



## The Rood Screen



At the entrance to the tower there are the remains of a **rood screen** with sixteen painted figures upon it. This is attributed to the end of the fourteenth century. It was placed in its present position in 1971. The restoration of the painted figures on the screen commenced in 1989. The figures have survived the Reformation in remarkably good condition, protected by a limewash. The mediaeval framework has been reassembled in Victorian woodwork. Among the figures that can be seen are St Mary Magdalen with her pot of ointment, her sister St Martha of Antioch with the lion-headed dragon, St Peter with his keys and St Paul with his sword. All the figures are noteworthy for the considerable individuality of the faces. The poses of no two figures are alike and the drapery shows great swagger and panache in the way in which it is disposed. It forms, from a distance, a pleasing and varied pattern in darks and lights. The figures are comparable to some of the figures in the painted ceiling at St Helen's, Abingdon, which can be accurately dated as 1391.

## The Tower

Compared with the rest of the building, the **tower** is massive. It seems it was started in the fourteenth century. The stone work of the **window** which has been added later, is fifteenth century.



The **Hardman glass**, "The Last Judgement" contains brilliant colours but the features of some of the faces have lost their detail. This judgement scene seems to follow familiar mediaeval wall-painting designs. The figure of Christ Triumphant has heaven and hell on either side of him and below is St Michael with the scales.

A **stone spiral staircase** from the **choir vestry** gives access to the **bell-ringers chamber**, 1972, **the clock room** and **the roof**. **The glass screen** which encloses the bell-ringers chamber, 1989, was designed by John Burnett, our present architect, and made by a local craftsman. The tower is surmounted with **an embattled parapet and castellated turret** at the north-east angle.

## The North Aisle

In 1862-3 the present impressive **north aisle** and **organ chamber** were built. **The north vestry** was added before 1874. The new aisle was given a high-pitched roof, equal to the new height of the nave roof.



**The walls** are ashlar blocks of red sandstone and **the windows** are thirteenth century style. The style fits in well with the mediaeval parts of the building. Edward Haycock, the restoration architect, designed the north aisle and the organ chamber in thirteenth century style and so ensured an empathy with the rest of the building.

The entrance to the organ chamber from the main body of the church is through the fine **oak doors** with the filigree work of the vine scroll of Mediterranean origin, 1962.

On the west wall there are memorials to those who died in two wars and also tributes to members of the Home Guard and the Civil Defence.

## The Registers

In front of the doors there is “**a dry well-painted iron chest**” to be kept in some dry and secure place.” This was purchased in 1813 for keeping the church registers. In the chest are two copies of the prayer book used in public services, dated 1817 and 1839 and a lectern bible of the King James version. The ancient **registers** for Clifton, with many other Clifton records, are kept at the Record Office in Bedford.



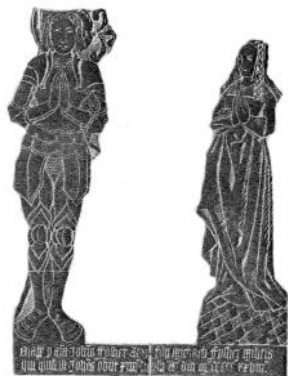
In 1538 Thomas, Lord Cromwell, Vicar-General to King Henry VIII, charged that each parish should be provided with a “**booke of register**” to record every baptism, wedding and funeral in that parish. Clifton has the distinction of possessing a register of that year.

A transcript of the registers from 1538 to 1812 was published by the Bedfordshire County Record Office in 1974. A copy of this transcript is in the chest. The first page of the earliest Clifton Register shows the name of **Adria Syngylton**, baptised 5<sup>th</sup> January 1538.

## *The Organ Chamber and Vestry*

The **Organ Chamber** contains, besides the organ, two significant memorials.

### *The Fysher Brasses*



In front of the tomb on the floor are **brasses** to John, son of Sir Michael Fysher, and his wife. The brasses are typical of early sixteenth century engravers in Bedford and Cambridge. The male is attired in armour with a plumed helmet. His wife wears a tight-fitting bodice and sleeves, with a flowing skirt. Unusually for this period she wears a decorative head-dress. Under the effigies is the following inscription in Latin – “Pray for the soul of John Fysher, esquire, son of Michael Fysher, knight, who died 14<sup>th</sup> July 1528.”

### *The Altar Tomb*

From the sixteenth century we have the fine **alabaster altar tomb** of a knight and his wife. It has been identified as that of Sir Thomas Lucy, who died in 1525. He was server to King Henry VIII. The recumbent effigies are of great beauty and of the highest quality alabaster work. The tomb is typical of designs of late fifteenth or early sixteenth century work. The dress also fits the same period. On the sides and ends of the tomb are rich panels with canopies enclosing the figures of angels holding shields with heraldic arms on them. These arms have now, sadly, become eroded. As the tomb is joined to the wall, one side panel has been taken off and placed in the wall above the tomb.

On the tomb are to be found examples of early vandalism. The name “H. Olivier 1807,” appears on the second shield from the west. Henry Olivier, the son of the Rector, would have been twelve years old in 1807.

H. OLIVIER

1807

## ***The Clock and Carillon***

**The clock** was installed in 1863. It was made by John Moore of Clerkenwell. It is of a type known as a cast iron four poster with three trains, deadbeat escapement and rack striking. In 1867 Henry Miles added the Cambridge Quarter Chimes. In 1879 **the carillon machine** was also commissioned from John Moore. It is still in use and is the only working carillon in Bedfordshire. It plays four tunes on eleven bells at 8 am, 12 noon, 4 pm and 8 pm.



## ***The Bells***

In 1590 a complete ring of five **bells** was cast and hung. Three of these remain and are fine specimens of the work done in that period by the Watts family. It is remarkable that these bells should remain in use today. They are among the earliest bells extant in Bedfordshire.



We are told that in 1883 the bells were rung before services, at funerals, at the commencement of gleaning and for the evening curfew. There are now eleven bells, eight ringing bells and three chiming bells. The three chiming bells were recast during the restoration of 1952. The bells were rededicated on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1953. They now play a full part in the life and witness of the church, ringing for the main services. Since 1953 sixty-four full peals have been rung.



The present sixth and seventh bells bear inscriptions in large ornate Gothic script. They evidently formed part of a rhyming sequence. The tenor names the founder.

6. "BUT THER CONSERT IN MEwSKI. 1590. wTwR. IS."

7. "DOTH PLEAS WELL OUR EARE. 1590. EC"

The third<sup>rd</sup> inscription on the tenor reads:

"wILLIAM wATES MADE US IN ANNO DOMENE."



