

ST MARY'S CHURCH PURTON



6th Edition

Welcome to St Mary's Church

For over seven hundred years people in Purton have come together in this building to sing God's praises, to pray to Him, to encourage one another, and then have worked in the community as a witness to God's love and message of Good News.

As you walk round the building and the grave yard there is evidence everywhere of those who have gone before us. As God said through the writer to the Hebrews "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus..." [Hebrews Chapter 12 verses 1-2a NIV]

The continuity with those past "cloud of witnesses" is reflected in memorials and windows, stones and furniture. This is an example to spur us on today to put aside all that distracts, "hinders", and "entangles" us. And then to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us", to live out God's calling for us, the path He has prepared for us, as we "fix our eyes on Jesus".

This building, dedicated in memory of Jesus' mother Mary, is all about Christ. There are symbols of His cross all around it, our services all focus on Him. So it is my prayer that as you look round and appreciate the history and the architecture of this wonderful building, that you will also appreciate and learn from the faith of our predecessors, the "great cloud of witnesses". May we all learn from the past, live in the present, and look to the future with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Whether you live in Purton or are a visitor, I hope that you will find this guide useful and illuminating for your visit and for afterwards. May God bless you now and as you return to your home, may He inspire you to pursue His calling to live your life for His glory.

Rev. Ian Tweedie-Smith, Vicar of St Mary's
November 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The booklet was originally prepared in 1982 by Canon Roy Blake (Vicar of St Mary's: 1974-93). Nothing in the first edition would have told you that, for the author characteristically decided to let the work speak for itself, but it is right that his authorship should be proclaimed now, not least for the quality of the research and the readability of the material.

The essence of his work remains and the contents are still largely his. Such changes as have been made in this edition are either to amend where passage of time has rendered the wording out of date, or to add where subsequent events seem worthy of recording.

Thanks are due to Alan Hayward of Salisbury for permission to use the photograph on the front cover; to the late Leslie Holland, who kindly provided the drawings reproduced on pages 14, 16 and 17; to Malcolm Hobbs for his skill in laying out the text and illustrations; and to Rick Dixon for printing the booklets.

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FOREWORD

This booklet does not pretend to be anything more than a short and simple history of a Wiltshire village and its lovely parish Church. Architectural terms have been kept to a minimum and explained simply.

The plan is easy to follow -:

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Most comments on our little 'History and Guide' – even from professional historians – have been favourable.

Chapter One - A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE

"Vicar, how old is St. Mary's?" is the first question that almost every visitor to the church asks. We shall try to answer that question, but first let us set the church against the background of the village and its history, and begin with another question: "How old is the village?"

Purton is first mentioned in writing in Saxon times, but Ringsbury Camp, at the western edge of the village, was a fortified dwelling place long before the time of Christ. Later, the Romans were in Purton and their relics have been discovered in many parts of the village. A piece of Roman floor has been found at Pavenhill, and people digging their gardens there still occasionally turn up a Roman coin. A Roman pottery lamp was found in the churchyard in Victorian times. Most interesting of all, a Romano-British cemetery was discovered in late 1987, during redevelopment at Northview Hospital.

For four hundred years this island knew peace as the westernmost province of the Roman Empire, but in the year 410 the legions and officials went back to Italy. The heart of the Empire was itself being disturbed by the warring of rival emperors and attacked from outside by barbarians. Already for more than a hundred years Saxon pirates had raided the coasts of Britain. Now they began to bring their families across the North Sea to settle, finding their way to this part of the country by longboat along the Thames.

Before the Romanised Britons gave in to the invaders or were driven into Cornwall and Wales, Purton must have seen bloody fighting. It lay close to the natural frontiers of the rivers Ray and Thames, and within a few miles of the great hill forts of the Ridgeway. Barbury is only eight miles away and it was there, in or about the year 556, that one of the last great battles between Britons and Saxons took place.

The Anglo-Saxons worshipped the gods of the Nordic peoples, still commemorated in some of the days of the week. They sacked the Britons' churches and slaughtered their priests. But in 597 St. Augustine was sent from Rome by Pope Gregory to convert the Saxons. Landing in Kent, he came to the court of King Ethelbert, whose wife, Bertha, was a Christian. Augustine set up his cathedral on the ruins of an old Roman church in Canterbury and is said to have baptised 10,000 new converts on Christmas Day. At much the same time Irish and Scottish monks were coming down from the north. Slowly the two streams of missionaries won over the Anglo-Saxons.

The great abbey at Malmesbury was founded by St. Aldhelm in 677. By now the Saxon king of this part of Wessex was a Christian named Chedwalla. It is recorded in the charters of Malmesbury Abbey that Chedwalla endowed the monks with land at Purton. This is the first time that Purton is mentioned in writing. The Saxons called the village 'Piriton', 'Periton', 'Puriton', or 'Pirton', all of them various ways of spelling the 'Peartree Village'.

Four hundred years later Purton is mentioned in the Domesday Book. Since the coming of the Anglo-Saxons there had been two further invasions by northern peoples. First the Danes, when once again Purton, on the borders of Alfred's Wessex, may well have been the scene of a battle still commemorated in the names 'Battlewell' and 'Battle Lake', and next the Normans or 'northmen'. William I, the Norman King, ordered a survey of the whole country to make it easier to raise taxes. The historian G.M. Trevelyan quotes a Saxon writer who complains: "*So narrowly did he cause the survey to be made that there was not one single hide or rood of land, nor was there an ox, or cow, or swine that was not set down in writ.*" In 1086, the year that the Domesday survey was made, there were at Purton a mill, a wood three miles square, sixty acres of meadow and many acres of ploughland, which suggests a large village and population.

Chapter Two - HOW THE CHURCH GREW

Was there a church here in Saxon times? Probably, though no trace of it remains, unless it is a small section of stonework on the chancel arch. During the restoration of 1872 bones were found all over the interior, some of them beneath one of the pillars supporting the steeple, showing that the site was used for burials before the building of the present church.

Some architects claim to find traces of Saxon work in the chancel, but it is generally thought that the earliest part of the present church is the nave, rebuilt in the 13th century. The church would have been quite low, the

pillars not much more than eight or nine feet high. A little later the chancel was added. The original 13th century Early English lancet windows can still be traced on the north and south sides of the chancel, though that on the north is completely filled in and that on the south partly built up.



*Medieval Annunciation
(see ref in Chap4)*

In late 14th century what is now the Lady Chapel was added to the south of the chancel, and the central tower, spire, and north and south transepts too.

The villagers, or the monks of Malmesbury, who still held the living and provided the village with its priests, set about a major rebuilding of the church in the 15th century. The upper parts of the walls and arches of the nave were taken down and three feet added to the height of the nave pillars, though the original capitals (heads of the pillars) were retained. As the nave was raised the north and south aisles were rebuilt and the south porch, with its priest's room above, was added. On some of the pillars are masons' marks which would identify who should be paid for the work.

The church was now a typical cruciform or cross-shape. But later in the same century the west tower was erected, making St. Mary's unique among English churches in having two towers, one at the crossing, the other at the west end.

Two other churches are similar, one in nearby Wanborough, the other at Ormskirk in Lancashire. But in both the central spire is smaller and subordinate to the west tower. At Purton both tower and steeple are perfect in themselves.

As at Ormskirk, village tradition has it that the church was the gift of two sisters. One wanted a tower, the other a steeple. But as there are at least 150 years between the steeple and tower there can be no truth in the legend.

The last part of the church to be built was the north chapel, now used as the sacristy.

Chapter Three - CHANGE, DECAY AND RENEWAL

An old church has an air of permanence. It seems to have grown out of the ground. Its interior has an atmosphere of timelessness, as if it had never changed. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Everything changes. The village of Purton, which must once have been clustered around its parish church and Manor, is now in some parts more than a mile away. At some period (perhaps it was destroyed by fire or abandoned during a plague) the village moved away and was rebuilt along the old Oxford - Bristol coach road.

To the car driver, tempted by the long, straight High Street to go more quickly than he should, the village may seem unpretentious or even uninteresting. But the walker finds much of interest. There are Tudor cottages, honest red brick council houses of the 1920s, the early Victorian workhouse, later Northview Hospital, now converted into flats but retaining the original façade, and several charming houses from the best period of English domestic architecture, the 18th and 19th centuries, with names like 'The Court', 'The Close', and 'The Sissells', as well as the lovely 17th century College Farm House, once the home of Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, about whom there is much more later.

Purton was always a large village. Both the Saxon charter of Malmesbury Abbey and Domesday suggest that, and in the first census of Napoleonic War times it had a population of over 2,000. Then came the founding of Swindon's New Town around Brunel's Great Western Railway works, in which the men of the village worked for generations. The red brick houses of Station Road witness to the extension of the village in Victorian times.

Today the great railway workshops are closed, but a number of the buildings have been converted to new uses, including the National Monuments Records Centre, the Outlet Village retail centre and Steam – the railway museum. With the coming of new factories, warehouses and offices to Swindon in post-war years Purton has continued to grow. Old names have been revived again for small new estates like Peartree Close or Waitemeads. The present population is estimated at between four and four and a half thousand. The church, too, has changed and will no doubt change again.

A later section on one of the glories of our church, the late 14th and 15th century wall paintings, will describe how colourful St. Mary's must have been in medieval days, with its stained glass and painted plaster. In what other ways would it have been different from today? The priests and monks who served the church, and probably lived in a monastery where Purton House is today, would have said their offices in the choir. (The

offices were the short services of Prime, Terce, Sext, Vespers, Compline etc. from which the Prayer Book's Morning and Evening Prayer are derived). The nave was the people's part of the church. It would have had few pews, and those few around the walls. The villagers' altar was probably at the crossing, where the choir stalls are today so it is very appropriate that for some services nowadays the focus of much of the worship is at the crossing.

At the Reformation Malmesbury Abbey was dissolved. Sir Edmund Bridges, later Lord Chandos, acquired the monastic lands at Purton. The monks were pensioned off. Perhaps one of the priests stayed on as Vicar of St. Mary's. The walls of the church were limewashed. Black letter texts of the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer replaced the lives and legends of the saints. Images were destroyed or removed. The altar was moved and placed between the choir stalls. The new, reformed priest celebrated Holy Communion at its north side, using the newfangled English Book of Common Prayer, which his conservative parishioners disliked like their successors 400 years later, when that same Prayer Book has been supplemented first by the Alternative Service Book and now by Common Worship, saying that the new service was like a '*Christmas game*'.

History gives us some small insight into what happened in Purton in those days. The Abbot of Malmesbury had leased the Manor House to a family named Pulley. They had a little daughter named Isabel. The Star Chamber proceedings record that when she was a little girl of two or three she charmed the Abbot of Malmesbury when he came with his monks to receive the dues. Some years later, Isabel, now a married woman, was still living at the Manor House when one of the newly-appointed Church Wardens "*repeired to the Church with diverse of his neighbours and there pulled down all Images and Idolls within the said Church, according to the Commandments and as it became true subjects to doe, which after they soe did, they did shutt and put all the same Images in a corner of the Church, appointing them to be sold. Then the Church Warden and others departed*".

Isabel was overheard by her servants to say that "*much lyking the Image (of St. George) (she) wished she had the same at home in her house*" and "*that it was a pity to deface the same.*" Her servants then "*stole the Image from the Church and carried it to the Wool House belonging to the Mansion.*" But the servants of Sir Edmund Bridges came with a '*pyked staff*' and broke open the door and carried the image to the church again.

In that little story we feel for ourselves the resentment that some at least of the parishioners must have experienced at the changes the Reformation brought to their church.

Early in the 17th century Archbishop Laud, wanting to emphasise that the Church of England was Catholic as well as reformed, ordered that the Lord's table should go back to its earlier place against the east wall, and be fenced in with an altar rail - not for communicants to lean on but to keep out "*dogs and curs*". (At Edington Priory in Wiltshire the original "Laudian" altar rail with spikes can still be seen).

Then came the Civil War, Cromwell and the Commonwealth. Out went the Vicar, if he was loyal to the King, and out went the Prayer Book. In came an Independent minister with the new Directory of Worship. Such vestiges of the old religion as had survived the Reformation a hundred years before, or been restored under Archbishop Laud, were now vandalised by the Roundheads. John Aubrey, the Wiltshire historian, 1626 - 1697, writing after a visit to Purton in the mid - 17th century, says: "*In this church have been very fine paynted glasse, but now so broken and mangled, that there is little to be recovered.*" (Fortunately, some of the old glass was recovered, kept in a wooden box in the priest's room until better days should come, and replaced in the windows earlier last century).

With the return from exile of Charles II the Church of England, its Bishops and Prayer Book came back into their own. Those ministers who refused to accept the Bishops and Prayer Book were driven out. For a while there was the brief flowering of the Caroline Divines. Colourful Laudian drapes were brought out of store to cover the bare wooden altar tables. Candles and crosses were set upon them. Copes appeared again.

At Purton the black letter Ten Commandments were repainted as an elaborate "cartouche" supported at one end by Moses and the other by Aaron.

In the 18th century the Church of England seems to have fallen into a long sleep, from which John Wesley (who twice visited Purton) tried unsuccessfully to wake it. He would surely have been much encouraged to know that the Methodists and Anglicans in Purton came together in 1999 to form a local ecumenical partnership, just in time for the beginning of the third millennium.

Later in the century came the Evangelical Revival and one wonders what effect it had on John Prower, who was Vicar from 1771 to 1827. We know that he was alive enough to the new spirit of the times to introduce a

Sunday School in 1786 only 6 years after Robert Raikes had founded his first Sunday School at Gloucester in 1780.

There seem to have been two such schools in the village and another was founded in Purton Stoke in 1788. The Sunday Schools in the village were in Purton Street, presumably the High Street, and Pavenhill. At Pavenhill there was one teacher, Edward Snow, who was paid three pounds fifteen shillings (£3.75), and at Purton Street Mrs. Godwin was "Mistress of the Girls" while Mr. Robert Tilling was "Master of Boys". Both received the same three pounds fifteen shillings. Books purchased in the first year included 18 prayer books at 1s. 3d. (6p) each, 21 Testaments at 7½d (3p) each, and Alphabet Cards and Spelling Books, a reminder that the first Sunday Schools not only taught religion but also reading and writing.

A church is not a museum, but a home for God's family and his worship, and there are fashions in church furnishings just as there are fashions in home furnishings. Despite its air of timelessness, changes in society, in belief and worship have been reflected in St. Mary's and its furnishings and can still be traced today.

Three periods in particular have left their mark on St. Mary's. Two we have already mentioned. The first was the 15th century, the time of the great rebuilding and extension of the Church, the raising of the nave roof, the adding of the south porch and west tower. It was then that the church assumed its present outward form.

The second period was the Reformation. Outwardly the church remained the same. Nothing was added or taken away from the structure, but inwardly the church went through a complete transformation. It lost its images and altars and medieval colour and took on a more simple and austere appearance.

The third and last event to change St. Mary's was the Restoration of 1872. It was this that gave us the church we see today.

Whatever influence the Evangelical Revival had on St. Mary's - and the patron of the living was the great Lord Shaftesbury, inspirer of the Factory Acts and other good works to alleviate the conditions of children and other factory workers, and a leading Victorian Evangelical - the restoration can be seen as an effect of the opposite tendency in Church life, the Oxford Movement.

In 1833 John Keble preached his famous Assize Sermon at Oxford and began the new Movement which, like Archbishop Laud 200 years before, sought to remind the Church of its Catholic heritage. Hated and persecuted as Ritualists and Romanists, the men of the Oxford Movement very quickly had an influence that spread into the remotest and most Evangelical of parishes and changed the outward face of the Church of England. To them we owe not only vestments and incense where they are used, as vestments are at Purton today, but also things as commonly accepted as robed choirs, Hymns Ancient and Modern, altars with embroidered frontals, clean linen and a cross and candles, the daily offices said by the Vicar in his stall, and an at least weekly celebration of the Holy Communion.

The men of the Oxford Movement also founded our first theological colleges. They were concerned that a priest should be a priest and not merely a kindly intentioned, classically educated gentleman. They were concerned, too, that a church should look like a church. Since the Reformation the saints had been driven out of the Church of England, their images smashed, their pictures painted over. Memorial tablets to the local nobility were scattered over the walls. The earthly squirearchy replaced the heavenly hierarchy. Some churches, in their lime-washed and oak-beamed simplicity, had come to resemble barns. In others, box-pewed, the squire's private box often complete with hat-stand and comfortable cushions, and sometimes a fire place, suggested an extension to the drawing room. The Tractarians (as the followers of the Oxford Movement came to be known, from their propagation of their ideas through tracts) wanted to do away with all this. The Church of England was the old, historic Catholic church of this land, and its churches should look like Catholic Churches: "*Let us get back beyond the Reformation,*" they said, "*and restore our churches to what they used to be.*"

Today we know that medieval churches assumed a variety of forms. There was no one, fixed pattern. But the architects of the Oxford Movement seem to have settled on one model of a pre-Reformation church. A church of three boxes, nave, chancel and sanctuary. The altar was placed firmly against the east wall, backed by a reredos, with a stained glass window above. In imitation of the cathedral a robed choir of men and boys replaced the old rustic choir in the west gallery. They sang the new hymns of John Keble and the Greek and Latin Hymns, freshly translated by John Mason Neale, from their blue Hymns Ancient and Modern, accompanied now by the organ that had taken the place of the village musicians with their flutes, viols and serpents.

Many will know John Betjeman's poem. Sing it to the tune of The Church's One Foundation. Here are two verses:-

The Church's Restoration

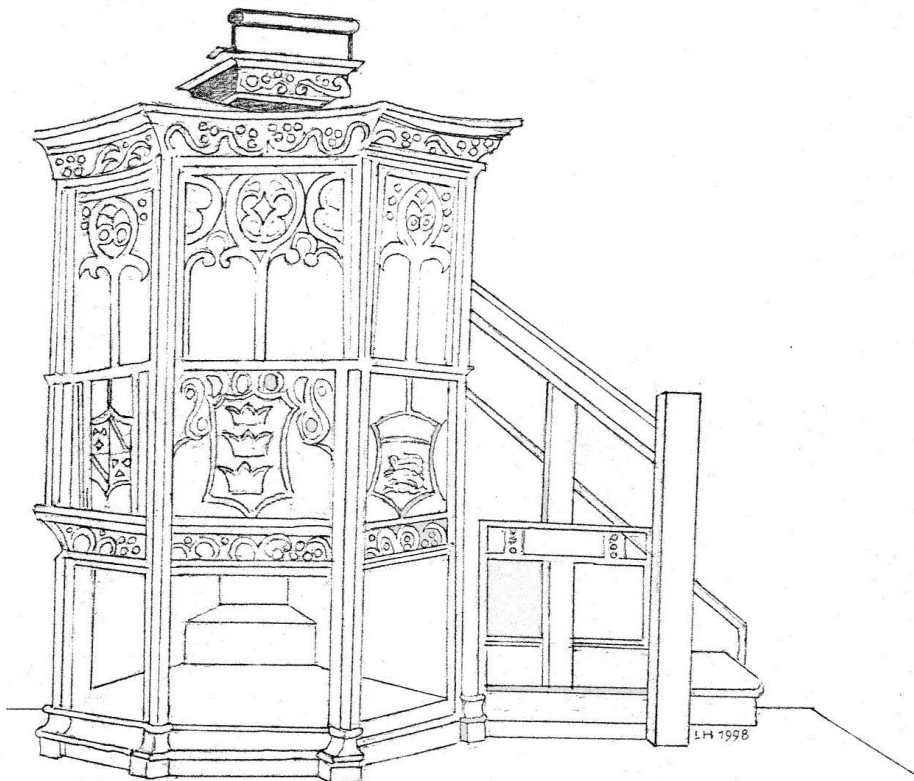
In eighteen-eighty-three
Has left for contemplation
Not what there used to be
How well the ancient woodwork
Looks round the Rect'ry hall,
Memorial of the good work
Of him who plann'd it all.

He who took down the pew ends.
And sold them anywhere
But kindly spared a few ends
Work'd up into a chair.
O worthy persecution
Of dust! O hue divine!
O cheerful substitution
Thou varnished pitch-pine!

At Purton the restoration came in 1872 and cost £2,500, funded by public subscription in the village . Out went the box pews and in came the "varnished pitch pine." The three decker pulpit, from which old Morgan Staley, the clerk, had issued his powerful Amens, was taken down from its position in the middle of the choir. The galleries went, too. The musicians had already been replaced by an organ in 1851, to the disgust of their friends in the choir. Major Prower, of whom there is more later, notes in his diary for Sunday, 20th July 1851 - "*Gallery choir ceased to sing, being in dudgeon at the organ being ordered.*"

And so it was that St. Mary's, like so many other Victorian churches, was restored, as the ideals of the Tractarians filtered down into the parishes. Today we have different ideas. Enthusiasts go searching remote parts of the country looking for unrestored churches, churches that still have their box pews and three decker pulpits.

At Purton we don't have far to go. All we have to do is to lift the roof of the 1839 model of the church to see St. Mary's as it was before the restoration.



The pulpit, dating from 1920

Today, too, we have our own liturgical fashions. Even their greatest admirers, would not say, as they would have done 50 years ago, that the men of the Oxford Movement did nothing but good in their attempt to return churches to their condition before the Reformation. Today we find their three-box pattern limiting. There has been a new Reformation, in which Rome itself has played its part. We all now believe in participation. Worship is too important to leave to a priest far away at the east end of the church, facing out beyond the east window, and cut off from the congregation by a choir. All must play their part. In any case, we believe God is not beyond the east window, but in the midst of his people. In Common Worship, brought into use in 2001, we say: "The Lord is here. His Spirit is with us." So altars are brought down, or moved away from the east wall, and priests face their people across them. Who knows, perhaps by the time another guide to St. Mary's is written, there will be an altar at the crossing, under the spire, in its old place in medieval times?

If this did happen it would only be another stage in a continuous pattern of change. For although the church may have a feeling of changelessness, as if nothing has happened for centuries, we have seen that this is not true.

One fine example - the pulpit at St. Mary's has only been in its present place from the end of the 1914-18 War. Before that, it was in the opening to the south transept. But it had only been there for 40 years. Lift the roof of the model and the pulpit is somewhere else again. It had three different positions in fifty years.

And so the church lives, and because it lives it changes. For, as we have said, a church is not a museum, but the House of God where the living worship him and will continue to do so, surrounded by the dead who once did the same.

Chapter Four - THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

Seen across the fields the church of St. Mary's stands out for its two towers. Closer too, the church forms part of a picturesque group of buildings, the great tithe barn, the Tudor Manor House, and the small thatched cottages. Inside, the church has a feeling of being alive and used. This has been less to do with books for spiritual growth (of adults and children alike), noticeboards, visitors' book and so on than the age of the church and the sense of being in a place where prayer has been offered for centuries. Even with the doors shut there is a presence.

The South Porch

This is the entrance used for most church services. Porches were usually built on the south side of the church as this was the side that caught the sun. Here in medieval times, both religious and secular business was done. Chaucer's Wife of Bath had been five times married at the church door, and we can imagine an earlier counterpart of our present parish council meeting in the porch, the members sitting on the stone benches as they talked over the affairs of the village.

There are traces of early paintings in the porch. See especially the beautiful niche now occupied by a small statue of the Virgin Mary, given by the Earl and Countess of Shaftesbury as a thank-offering for the ministry of a former Vicar. There are also "graffiti", masons' marks and crosses which may represent thank offerings for safe return after pilgrimage or record bargains struck. In addition there is a compass rose intended to ward off evil and keep the devil at bay.

Above the porch is a priest's room. This has a fireplace and outside the door is a sink.

The Nave and Aisles

The nave and aisles date from early 13th century, but as we see them today they are the result of the extensive restoration and rebuilding of the 15th century. It was then that three feet was added to the nave pillars (look carefully and you will see that the top three feet of masonry is different from the rest below), though the original capitals were re-used. Those on the north side are carved with foliage, those on the south side simply moulded.

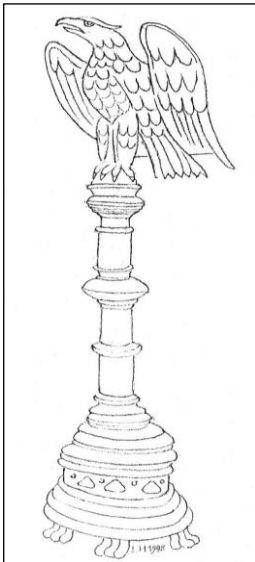
There were galleries until the restoration of 1872. At the west end there was a gallery for musicians and choir, and on the south side a gallery entered from the outside, through one of the windows. There was also a gallery in the north transept. The musicians were replaced by an organ in the west gallery in 1851. The organ was moved to the north transept in 1872 and the galleries taken down.

The painting around the arches of part of the nave goes back to the 1872 restoration, though it is said that it is a repainting of earlier work.

The fine wooden model of the church, kept in a glass case, was made by a travelling model maker named Lloyd in 1839. It shows the interior of the church before the 1872 restoration. The church is filled with box pews and a three-decker pulpit stands almost in the middle of the nave. Close by the model is a photograph of Archbishop Robert Runcie looking at it. This was taken at an exhibition in London in 1980.

As well as the wall painting of the "Christ of the Trades" and St. Peter and the Heavenly Jerusalem, it will be noticed that many of the pillars still retain traces of their ancient colour.

Now look at the chancel arch. On the right, or south side, you will see that the capital of the square, half pillar that carries one side of the arch, what an architect would call the "south west respond", is different in character from the capitals of the nave pillars.



Victorian Lectern

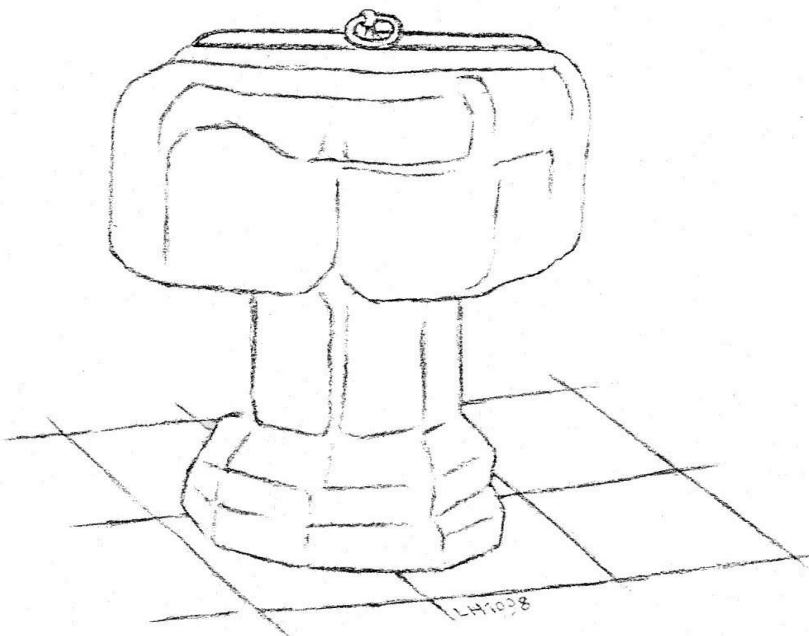
It is thought to have come from an earlier church than the nave pillars, perhaps from an earlier church on the same site. The rather blurred carving let into the south west respond is thought to be a representation of the Annunciation (see etching on Chapter 2). It was previously outside the church, which is why it is so weathered, and was placed where it is in 1872.

The brass eagle lectern was given in 1897 to commemorate the 60th year of Queen Victoria's reign. The pulpit was given in 1920 in memory of John Veysey, Vicar from 1878 - 1916.

In the north west corner of the nave, on the west wall, is a group of memorial tablets brought here from Braydon, when the little Victorian church there was made redundant and sold in 1979. The sale of the church helped to set up a much-needed Fabric Fund for St. Mary's which, to commemorate the little church, is called The Braydon Fund.

The stained glass of the aisles is modern, except for the top lights on the north side, which incorporate fragments of pre-Reformation glass.

During the Reformation, among other statues taken out of the church was one of St. George. Exactly 379 years later, to the day, the present figure of St. George, carved in Florence, was placed in its niche as part of the war memorial, on January 29th 1926.



The medieval font, situated near the south door

The font was rescued from a paddock where it had been used as a horse trough and installed here on a new base in 1907. It is 13th century.

The Chancel

The chancel assumed its present form at the 1872 restoration. In medieval times there was probably an altar at the crossing under the spire. Butterfield, the architect of the 1872 restoration, put the clergy and choir stalls here. The stalls are modern, but a small section of an ancient chair is let into the back of the Vicar's Stall.

On the north side of the sanctuary can be seen the original 13th century door to the churchyard, now the door to the sacristy, and the blocked-up window of the same period. Nearby is the glass case which contained a sword found during the 1872

restoration, referred to in the notes on "The Body in the Wall". Sadly, it was stolen in 2001. On the south side of the chancel another partly blocked-up window of the 13th century can be seen.

The east wall was rebuilt in 1872. The fine niches, with statues of St. Nicholas and St. Aldhelm installed in the

1920s, seem to be of 15th century work, contemporary with the very similar niche on the outside of the west tower, which holds a statue of Our Lady. The altar piece is a painting of the Last Supper given to the church in 1782 by the Dowager Countess of Shaftesbury, and was attributed to Jacob Jordaens, a Flemish contemporary of Rubens. However, after cleaning at Bristol Art Gallery in 1982, it was said to be by an unknown Flemish painter of the same period. As described in A Story Of The “Last Supper” on page 30 the painting was stolen in 1994 but returned to the parish in a badly damaged state in 2001. During its absence the reredos was filled by a pastiche of a medieval painting of the Last Supper, painted by a Purton artist, Leslie Holland, in his 92nd year – a remarkable achievement. It now hangs on the west wall.

On the south side of the Sanctuary is a well-preserved piscina, a kind of sink in the wall for washing the sacred vessels, and a sedilia, a stone seat for the ministers at High Mass. The present windows of the sanctuary, two on the north side and one on the south, seem to have been inserted together with the east window in the 15th century.

John Aubrey, who visited the church in the mid-17th century, says that *“On the North side of the Altar in the wall, is an old marble tombe, but the Inscription with coates of arms being in brass, on purpose to perpetuate the memories of the dead, gave occasion to sacrilegious hands to teare them away”* The cavity in the north wall, that may have held the tomb Aubrey refers to, is still there, though others think that it may once have been an Easter Sepulchre, (a place to which the Blessed Sacrament was removed from Maundy Thursday to Easter Eve).

The Lady Chapel

This is a particularly beautiful part of the church, owing much of its charm to the fine panelling of the 1920s. The wooden screen cutting off the chapel from the choir dates from the same time. An aumbry in the south wall holds the Blessed Sacrament, reserved for the sick. Beside the aumbry is a good piscina.

On the south wall is a beautiful “Falling Asleep of the Blessed Virgin Mary”, referred to below in the notes on the wall paintings. This, like the chapel itself, dates from the 14th century. Our ancestors, who didn’t have that same respect for the works of the past that we have, cut a door through this wall and fixed a memorial tablet in the bottom part. The fine window on the same wall was remade from fragments of pre-Reformation glass in 1927. The altar, like the rest of the woodwork, is work of the 1920s, and on festive occasions is sometimes covered by a lovely old frontal of 17th century Italian work.

The Transepts

The north transept is now occupied by the organ. Notice the two medieval heads on each side of the door to the sacristy. Although there is no piscina (which usually indicates where an altar once stood) it seems likely that there was an altar in this transept. The sacristy may once have been the cell of an anchoress.

The south transept is now used as the Chapel of St. Nicholas, thought to be an earlier dedication of the church. Here again there is a good piscina let into the south wall, and an elaborate and interesting squint in the wall separating the transept from the Lady Chapel. Memorials to the Maskelyne family are fixed to the walls. The altar was brought here from the disused Braydon church in 1980.

Chapter Five - THE WALL PAINTINGS

Five hundred years ago the church of St. Mary would have looked very different from the church we see today. Both inside and, what is not often realised, outside the walls were plastered and limewashed. Here and there on the external walls there are still traces of limewash: look at the west face of the west tower and at some of the windows. Across the fields the church would have stood out in blazing whiteness.

Inside, the church would have been very colourful. Not only were the large, flat areas of plastered wall painted, but the stonework of windows and pillars. Like the stained glass windows the walls were decorated with scenes from the Bible, or lives of the saints, or with stories from popular legend. In an age when few people could read, windows and walls helped to spread and remind parishioners of the Church’s teachings.

When the wall paintings became shabby they were repainted, either with the same subjects or with new ones. Most churches therefore would have several layers of paintings, one on top of the other. Between the paintings there would be borders and decoration,

But then came the Reformation. The reformers ordered the destruction of images and the obliteration of wall

paintings. The paintings were not often destroyed, but were covered with whitewash, and then sometimes repainted with the Royal Arms, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and Biblical texts.

Three hundred years later came the Victorian restorers who, it seems to us, had a mania for getting back to the bare bones. Where limewash and plaster still remained on the exterior walls they were stripped off, and unwittingly caused problems by letting in the damp.

When the restorers stripped the interior plaster they often destroyed wall paintings hidden by layers of limewash since the Reformation. Sometimes windows and doors were let into walls, or monuments erected, which unknowingly broke into concealed paintings.

So iconoclasm, vandalism, neglect, damp, and the hand of the builder and restorer have left us with only a small reminder of the wall paintings that must have been the commonest of all the arts in medieval England. Those that remain are consequently all the more valuable and interesting.

St. Mary's church is very fortunate in still possessing some of its ancient wall paintings. Some were cleaned in the 1970s. Others await cleaning. More still probably lie under the plaster and await discovery.

In the Lady Chapel there is a 14th century painting of the Falling Asleep of the Blessed Virgin. This painting was known in Victorian times, when it was thought to be the Raising of Jairus' Daughter. It was cleaned by Professor Tristram in 1947. Unfortunately the methods then used involved the application of wax as a fixative. It was hoped that this would fix the paint firmly to its plaster backing and prevent it disintegrating. This approach has since been discovered to have disastrous results. Once the surface is sealed moisture in the wall is trapped. It builds up behind the surface and eventually breaks through taking the paintings with it. The wax also darkens with age.

In 1978 a team headed by Mrs. Eve Baker, a former pupil of Professor Tristram, visited the church to work on the wall paintings. They cleaned off the wax from the painting with solvents and consolidated the plaster with repeated applications of lime water, filling the cracks with new plaster made to the ancient formula, and gently chipping away limewash not removed by Professor Tristram.

The subject of the painting is the death of the Virgin. Mary lies on a bier. Behind her are the apostles and our Lord. The little figure, like a baby, represents the soul of the Virgin. (Holy Land pilgrims may remember a very similar modern picture in mosaic in the great abbey of the Dormition on Mount Zion.)

Over the arch leading into the Lady Chapel are two paintings still to be cleaned. It is probable that these too, are scenes from the life of our Lady.

The painting over the arch into the south transept, the St. Nicholas Chapel, was discovered by Mrs. Baker's team in 1978. First to be found was a band of angels. Work revealed that these were superimposed on an earlier painting. To the left, or north, is a kneeling Mary Magdalen and a standing Christ. This represents the scene in the garden on the first Easter morning. Mary reaches out her hands to the risen Lord who says: "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended".

On the south side are two standing figures. One is the Virgin Mary, and the other St. Michael the Archangel. St. Michael holds a balance. He is weighing souls to judge whether they are worthy of heaven. Mary reaches out a finger to "tip the balance" to help souls into heaven.

It seems that whoever painted the angels did not bother to make a fresh ground for his painting, but repainted directly on the painting underneath. Two standing angels playing instruments like a mandolin and a kneeling angel with a harp can be seen. Behind is the head and part of the figure of our Lord.

On the south wall, partly hidden by the large painted Royal Arms, is a post-Reformation Ten Commandments supported by Moses and Aaron at each side. To the west is a small square containing a painted head and hand. The section of wall between the door and the window was explored in 1978 and it was here that another discovery was made.

High on the wall the walls of heavenly Jerusalem were found, and a very well preserved figure of St. Peter, complete with triple crown and keys.

Below is an immense figure of the wounded Christ, surrounded by the tools of medieval tradesmen. This "Christ of the Trades" is a not unfamiliar subject of medieval wall paintings. There is another, probably by the same artist, at Oaksey Church, six miles away. The body of Christ has many streaming wounds. The "millwheel" is probably a medieval idea of a perpetual motion machine. Is the symbolism behind it the continued suffering of

Christ, caused by man's inhumanity to man? Another suggestion, based on a similar wall painting in Germany, which has by it a text, is that the painting represents the hurt caused to Christ by those who used their tools on Sunday. The wheel could also be seen as a wheel of life, continually turning, carrying men and women from the workaday world to heaven above. Just above the wheel and tools can be seen the bodies of men and women floating up to St. Peter and Jerusalem above.

The work on the wall paintings by the conservators in 1978 cost £3,000, of which half was found by the Council for Places of Worship. A separate wall paintings fund was set up then but was later subsumed into the main fabric fund to take account of changes in the administration of charity law. It is hoped that the restorers will one day be called back when money is available.

In past years when wall paintings were found they were often repainted by enthusiastic local amateurs. This has happened at Oaksey. Today this would be thought vandalism and the conservators would not permit it. They see their task as to discover, clean, and preserve the original artist's work, not to repaint it, add to it, nor to make guesses about it. So our paintings remain faded and sketchy, and only a shadow of their former glory. But apart from the wear of the years they are as they left the hand of the medieval painters and a precious remnant of English art history.

Chapter Six - THE BELLS

For many years there was a ring of five bells, but in 1923 the then second was cracked and had to be recast. When the bells were re- hung a year later a treble was added to make a ring of six. At the same time a new steel frame was added to enable another two bells to be hung to complete the octave. The "Ringing World" of 1924 refers to the re-hanging of the bells and gives details of the first change ringing on "*these beautiful bells.*" It goes on to say that "*Purton now possesses one of the finest peals of six in Wiltshire - the only thing lacking is the other two bells to complete the octave, but it is hoped that these will be added at some future date.*" Sixty years later the two additional bells were added to make up the octave.

Details of the Bells

1. This bell was given by the parish council in 1989 and is inscribed Given by Purton Parish Council cast by John Taylor Loughborough.
Weight 5 cwts 3 qrs in C#
2. This bell was given by the village and in Memory of Pam James in 1989. Roy Blake Vicar. Roger Lawrence & Godfrey Fowler Churchwardens. Alan Woodward Tower Captain. cast by John Taylor Loughborough.
Weight 6 cwts 22 lbs in B#
3. Gillett & Johnson Croydon 1924
Weight 6 cwts 3 qrs in A#
4. Jno Grimes & W Packer C.H: Wardens Robert Wells Aldbourn Fect 1793
Weight 8 cwts 21 lbs in G#
5. ANNO DOMINI 1628 Recast by Gillett & Johnson Croydon 1923
Weight 14 cwts 2 qrs in F#
6. This Bell was made in the yeare of the Lord 1598 (Coat of arms of Chertsey Abbey)
Weight 15 cwts 2 qrs 22 lbs in E#
7. Edward Dean Humphrey Stanley Ch Wardens R 1750
Recast MCMXVI J Veysey Vicar
Captain A Richardson & F Kempster Churchwardens ET
In Pium (sic) Memoriam Mervyn Strong Richardson Captain I" Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers Killed in action at Fricourt France March 19th 1916 age 21 years
On rim DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI
Weight 18 cwts 2 qrs 13 lbs in D#
8. I am called the widdowe bell and when they die do ring their knell Revd R Glasse M.A. Vicar Stephen

Warman & John Jefferis Ch Wardens Rudhall 1738
Weight 20 cwts 14 lbs in C#

Sanctus bell Come away make no delay 1760

The 6th is the only bell in the country by Joseph Carter of Reading

Chapter Seven - SOME PURTON FAMILIES

The Earls of Shaftesbury

The lake at Purton House (perhaps once a monastic fishpond), the mill, the Milk House, the Manor and the tithe barn are reminders of the days before the Reformation when for more than 800 years the monks of Malmesbury were the landlords of Purton.

At the Reformation and dissolution of the monasteries the Manor passed into lay hands. In 1629 the Manor and the right to present a Vicar belonged to Sir John Cooper. Sir John married the heiress of Sir Anthony Ashley of Wimborne St. Giles and was father to the first Earl of Shaftesbury. The Earls of Shaftesbury, the Ashley Coopers, were to become one of the most influential families in the land. Although they had long moved away from the village, they retained their connection with Purton until the middle of the last century, and memorial tablets to the family can be seen in the church.

The Hydes

Another famous family with Purton connections is the Hydes. Edward Hyde, first Earl of Clarendon, after whom The Hyde in the village is named, was born at Dinton, in the south of the county, in 1608. His father bought the land and built the house in the High Street now known as College Farm House and it was here that Edward came as a boy of 17 to recover from an illness he had contracted as a student at the Middle Temple. His first marriage was to a local girl, Anne Ayliffe of Grittenham, in the neighbouring parish of Brinkworth. Anne died of smallpox in the first year of their marriage, aged only 20, and Edward married as his second wife a daughter of Sir Thomas Aylesbury.

He became Member of Parliament for Wootton Bassett in 1640, not long before the rebellion that was to lead into the Civil War. Hyde believed in a partnership between King and Parliament and Trevelyan calls him a "*constitutional Cavalier*". He worked together with future Roundheads like Pym and Hampden to overthrow Strafford and abolish the Star Chamber, but remained the loyal and trusted friend of the Stuart kings and followed the Prince of Wales into exile.

Returning from exile in 1660 with the Prince, soon to be crowned Charles II, "*Clarendon's wisdom and moderation, in harmony with the King's shrewdness and loose good nature, gave peace to the land, stayed the furies of revenge, and made it in the interest of all parties to live as loyal subjects of the restored monarchy.*"

Church history remembers Edward Hyde for the "Clarendon Code", a series of laws which hounded the Presbyterians, Independents and other Puritans who had held sway under the Commonwealth and refused to conform to the newly restored Established Church and its prayer book. The laws were harsher than Clarendon himself wanted. They were the Cavaliers' revenge for their long sufferings and lost lands.

College Farm House in the High Street where Edward Hyde lived in Purton is so called after Worcester College, to which it passed via a series of leases and sales and finally the will of Dr. George Clarke, a prominent figure in Oxford in the early years of the 18th century. The arched gateway facing the High Street is known locally as Queen Anne's Gate, after Edward Hyde's grand-daughter. His daughter Anne became the wife of Charles II's brother, James, Duke of York, later James II and VII. Anne Hyde died in 1671 without becoming Queen, but two of her daughters, Mary (of William and Mary) and Anne, were in turn Queens of Great Britain.

Clarendon's last days were spent in a second exile. The House of Commons impeached him for treason in 1667 and he went once again to France, where he wrote his "History of the Great Rebellion" and died in 1674. His body was brought home to Westminster Abbey and lies with others of his family in a vault at the foot of the steps leading to Henry VII's chapel.

Purtonians on a visit to London have at least two reminders of their home village. One is the Clarendon vault in Westminster Abbey. The second is the famous statue of Eros in Piccadilly Circus, given in memory of the

great philanthropist, Lord Shaftesbury, landlord of half Purton and patron of the living in Victorian times.

But there is no truth in the village legend that Hyde Park was given by and named after our Edward Hyde. It is, in fact, named after the Manor of Hyde, a possession of Westminster Abbey from the Conquest to the Dissolution.

The Maskelynes and the Prowers

Dr. Nevil Maskelyne was another famous man with old Purton connections. The family can be traced in the district at least as far back as one Robert Maskelyne, who was a freeholder of Lydiard Millicent in 1435. By the time of Charles I the Maskelynes were Lords of the Manor of Cricklade and held lands at Purton, too.

Born in London in 1732, Nevil Maskelyne became Astronomer Royal in 1765. Although only 33, he had already travelled to St. Helena to observe the transit of Venus, to Barbados for the trial of a new chronometer, and published the "British Mariner's Guide", but after his appointment he is said never to have left Greenwich Observatory except to attend the meetings of the Royal Society. He is buried in the churchyard, close to the south wall, and has a memorial in the south transept. More information about him is to be found in Dava Sobel's "Longitude." The family lived in the village until the 1960s.

John Prower was Vicar of Purton from 1771 to 1827 and was followed by his son, John Mervin Prower, Vicar from 1827 to 1869. So father and son were Vicars of Purton from 1771 to 1869, serving 98 years between them! John Prower left a memo book which has been handed down to succeeding Vicars of Purton and which contains some amusing notes about the Maskelynes. The Astronomer Royal's uncle, who was also named Nevil Maskelyne, died in 1774. He was buried in the south aisle of the church, which the family claimed as their own. But John Prower says: "*As to their Pretensions of right, I cannot pretend to decide; but that their claim was at that time forfeited, is most clear: for when the Church in the preceding year was new-roofed and ceiled, the Church Wardens waited upon old Mr Maskelyne to know whether he would repair his isle at the same time. Mr. N. answered in the Negative.*"

So the work had been done at the parish expense. John Prower then goes on: "*I therefore demanded a Fee for the Burial. Mr Deane who superintended the Funeral promised me paid; but upon application of Captain Maskelyne, Nephew and Heir of the Deceased, some Prevarication ensued, and before I could see the Captain he was seized with a Paralytic Stroke and in October 1775 died, and was buried in the same Isle.*"

The Vicar was away from his parish when the Captain died. Had he been in Purton he would not have allowed the Captain's funeral until he was sure of his fees for both funerals. But an unfortunate Curate, Mr. Francis, was in charge of the parish in the Vicar's absence and did nothing to stop the Captain's funeral.

One would like to have overheard what the Vicar said to his Curate on his return.

John Prower doesn't tell us, but continues in his memo book: "*Mr. Deane acknowledged to me on my return to the parish that he would pay the Fee, if I insisted upon it, tho' it must be out of his own pocket.*"

n.b. The Captain's Widow paid no debts."

In 1780 another Maskelyne died. This was Mr. James, brother of old Mr. Nevil. Nevil Maskelyne, the astronomer, wrote from Greenwich to the Vicar with directions about the burial in the family aisle.

The Vicar, still owed two lots of burial fees by the Maskelyne family, demanded his earlier fees before he would go ahead with the funeral. The Astronomer Royal's request was dropped. However, in 1799, twenty five years after the first Mr. Nevil died and was buried without the Vicar getting his fees, John Prower notes in his memo book: "*The Astronomer Royal voluntarily came forward and paid the Burial Fees.*" Another twenty years passed and a marriage united the two families. John Prower had a sister named Bridget. She married a Reverend William Storey. In 1819 their son, Anthony Storey, married Margaret, Nevil Maskelyne's only daughter.

Thus began the Stor(e)y Maskelynes, of whom Miss Story Maskelyne, who died at the age of 104, is remembered in the history of Purton as a lady of great character.

Chapter Eight - THE BODY IN THE WALL

The Prowers, father and son, John Prower and John Mervin Prower, were Vicars of Purton from 1771 to 1869. In 1870 the Prowers were followed by the Reverend Walter Mitchell, who immediately engaged the well-known

London architect, William Butterfield, and set about the restoration of the church. He was encouraged in this by Major J. Elton Prower, the only son of the Reverend John Mervin Prower, who lived at Purton House.

During the 1872 restoration a remarkable discovery was made. In the angle formed by the north transept and the chancel there was a room or chapel, long disused and its windows and entrances blocked up. Today this is the sacristy. Mrs. Prower, widow of Major Prower, writing in 1894, says, "*There was a window on the north side, filled with stones and almost hidden with ivy. A small staircase led up from the chapel to a tiny low room above, with just room perhaps for a pallet.*"

This chapel, with the small room above, was known to exist behind its sealed doors and windows, but had not been entered for generations. Twenty years before it had been suggested to Canon John Mervin Prower that it might be adapted as a robing room, but he rejected the proposal and insisted that the subject should never be raised again. He said that the history of the abandoned chapel bore some reference to a former Vicar and that a "*dark deed*" had been committed there.

In the course of restoration the workmen opened up the old chapel. They found that its east wall was hollow, about four feet above the ground. They broke into the wall and found a body lying at full length. The head and shoulders lay in a cavity cut into the chancel wall, the rest of the body in the wall of the chapel.

Whose was this body? Why was it there? What was the original purpose of the chapel with its little room above, and why had it been sealed up? We can only speculate.

The Victorians thought that they had discovered the cell of an anchoress, a female recluse. They may have been right. Male hermits or anchorites, and female anchoresses, were not uncommon in the pre-Reformation Church. They lived in a small cell, which was usually attached to a church. This would have one window through which the occupant could see the altar and take part in worship, and at least one other through which the recluse was fed and from which she offered spiritual advice to visitors. Mother Julian of Norwich is the best known of English anchoresses.

It seemed quite possible that our present sacristy might once have been the cell of an anchoress, but was it her body in the wall? Those who saw the body before it fell away into dust on exposure to the air said that it was a female figure, but why bury an anchoress in the wall? Surely, even if her life had been spent within the four walls of the cell, she would have been buried in the normal way in the churchyard? And what of Canon Prower's story of a previous incumbent's dark deed?

A romantic and anti-Catholic Victorian writer had an entirely different idea. In a poem it is claimed that the body was that of a pre-Reformation nun, who had erred in some way, and was walled up while still alive.

Take thy candle, hold the Cross,
Thou must die for mortal sin,
Better bear the body's loss
Than the loss of soul within.

Lady Abbess lead the way,
Sister, check thy rising tear;
Do not pity - rather pray,
She is lost to all but fear.

Press her body to the wall,
Leave unclosed a narrow space,
That she may hear our mercy call
From the priest in holy place.

Scanty food may pass her lips,
Lengthen thus her parting wail,
This may plead in life's eclipse
When no other plea avail.

Seal the tomb, the mass is said
Ere the well-spread mortar dry,
We declare our daughter dead
Though we hear a muffled cry.

The poem ends:

Four hundred years! her bones are white,
Mute witness of barbaric creed,
Where darkness brooded, till the night
Of Love Divine and fetters freed.

Added to the mystery it is said that various objects were found by or near the body, among them a dagger with a broken blade, sword and parchments.

However, the workmen seem to have taken away everything that they found and we have no account of the discovery from a reliable eye witness. Twenty years later, Mr. J. Elton Prower, son of Major Prower and grandson of the last Vicar Prower, tried to get at the truth and interviewed one of the workmen. But he says the man was drunk. He did however succeed in buying back the sword for ten shillings. For many years it rested in a glass case on the north wall of the chancel, close to the place where it was uncovered but unfortunately it was stolen in 2001. Historians of arms had said that the sword dated from the mid-17th century so it can have no connection with a pre- Reformation nun or anchoress. But was it connected with Canon Prower's story of a previous Vicar and his "*dark deed*"? It is, after all, only a century older than his father's arrival in the parish, and in the country memories live long. The mystery remains.

Chapter Nine - A STORY OF "THE LAST SUPPER"

"The Last Supper" came to St Mary's in 1782 as a gift from the Dowager Countess of Shaftesbury whose late husband had been patron with the right to choose the Vicar, a right which passed from the family to the Bishop of Bristol in 1960. The picture was stolen from St Mary's (along with two others not recovered) in 1994 and emerged in the U.S. in 1998 in the possession of a British art trafficker called Cawthorne.

Contacts between Scotland Yard and the FBI prompted the latter to organise a "sting" in the form of a negotiation to purchase the painting from Cawthorne and an associate called Lee, a Florida cab driver. Lee was "intoxicated" on the day and did not appear for the negotiations. Cawthorne agreed a sale price of \$57,500 with the purchaser, who then revealed himself as a federal agent!

In the subsequent court case, which involved plea bargaining American-style, valuations of the picture ranged from \$125,000 by a prosecution expert to £1000, offered by the defence as a sale figure discussed in the Gents in a London pub. The judge settled for \$57,500, the figure reached in the "sting".

Before the sentencing, arguments were heard on behalf of the defendants. Lee had no previous form and was put on probation for 5 years for receipt of stolen goods. Additionally he was ordered to make a restitution payment of \$25,000. Cawthorne was similarly charged but also with having entered the U.S. in violation of a previous deportation order. It turned out that on this occasion he entered the U.S. via Canada, having altered his name by deed poll to Carter, the name of his intended second wife. The defence produced a series of letters from Cawthorne's family, including his former wife, from which one might have deduced that he was a person of great probity and industry, albeit a touch gullible. The prosecution, however, drew attention to a previous conviction in the U.S., his unwillingness to reveal the whereabouts of a second painting stolen from St Mary's which he probably knew, breaches of deportation orders and the deviousness around his name change. The judge concluded he should go to prison for 21 months, then be deported, and also be required to pay restitution of \$25,000.

The judge advised that it was common for restitution payments not to be fulfilled, but St Mary's received \$1730 over two years, almost certainly from Lee. The painting itself returned to the UK in 2001 in a seriously damaged condition. It had been cut from its frame at the time of the theft and subsequently rolled up inwards which had caused much of the paint to crack. The cost of restoration was estimated at £9,500. An appeal was launched which brought forth over £14,000 in gifts and grants. It was decided to use the surplus to install a CCTV system to protect the painting and the church more generally.

The restoration was undertaken by Elizabeth Holford, a Bristol conservator who had previously cleaned the painting in the 1980s. It was an arduous and difficult piece of work but it was finally, and brilliantly, completed in February 2004. The painting was rededicated by the Bishop of Swindon, Rt Revd Michael Doe, on Palm Sunday, 4th April 2004. In 2005 special lighting was installed which brings the picture to life magnificently, to the aid of worshippers and the pleasure of visitors alike.

Chapter Ten - THE EXTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

Writing of the church in the 17th century, John Aubrey says: *“This is a very faire Church, sometime doubtless a place of great devotion, as appears by those many niches in the walls within and without to sett images in...”*

At Aubrey’s time all the niches were empty, their statues having been destroyed or removed at the Reformation. In recent years the niches have all been filled again.

The statues on the west face of the west tower are the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. On the north face is St. John the Baptist and on the south St. Anne, Mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On the south face of the south transept is “Christ the Apprentice”, the boy Christ showing his mother a shepherd’s crook he has made, and, on the east face of the Lady Chapel, St. Francis of Assisi.

The statues of John the Baptist, St. Anne, St. Francis and Christ the Apprentice were all carved by Simon Verity, a Wiltshire Sculptor whose work may also be seen in the Baptistry of Clifton Roman Catholic Cathedral in Bristol.

There are two sundials - one on the south buttress of the west tower, and one on the gable of the south porch. There are also three scratch dials. These are on the south walls of the south transept and Lady Chapel. There are also various masons’ marks by the north and south transepts

Chapter Eleven - THE CHURCHYARD

Despite all efforts to keep it tidy - the grass is cut several times a year - the churchyard is very much an old fashioned, unreformed country churchyard. Here are no smooth urban lawns and rose gardens, but in spring primroses and daffodils, and in summer moon daisies among the long grass. Before the setting up, over delayed, of a village cemetery, earlier incumbents generously allowed burial after burial in an already over-crowded churchyard. Curb nestles against curb, with perhaps just a few inches in between. Lines of graves meander.

In the old part of the churchyard all are buried facing strictly east. As the years go by the lines wander and those buried in the 20th century face more south than east. But it all makes for an interesting churchyard, full of graves from various periods, from the elegant table tombs of the 18th century to the humble wooden and iron crosses of early 20th century. It is now closed for burials, other than for family members of those already interred, and responsibility for its care has passed to the Parish Council.

The churchyard contains the remains of an old Preaching-Cross, but only a few stones of each course are there, set in concrete. The tomb of Nevil Maskelyne, Astronomer Royal, is near the south wall, not far from his memorial in the St. Nicholas Chapel.

There is a touching memorial to William Andrews, gardener at Purton House:

Here sleepeth one who lived devoid of art,
Hasty in word, but very kind of heart,
Skilled in business, giving all their due,
Honest and just, to his kind master true,
Rejoicing in the Park, and Lake, and Shade,
Of woodland paths, he and his master made.
Wife, Children, neighbours, bless his Christian end
And mourn the loss of Husband, Father, Friend.

Died June 1st 1847 - born 1777

POSTSCRIPT

History never stops being created and now St Mary's finds itself in the third millennium (and perhaps its own second). It played its part in Purton's own millennium celebration in July 2000, notably by allowing a time capsule to be buried near the West door, containing a whole range of objects and papers which will tell some future Purtonians something of life in the village in 2000, and by holding a service of celebration and thanksgiving at the end of two weeks of events.

The entry into the new Millennium was marked by the bell-ringers ringing a quarter peal as the old one departed, by a watch night service and a party. And then St Mary's normal life of witness quietly resumed: the church remains open as much for the passing visitor as for the regular worshipper. In the words of welcome at an even older church than St Mary's – St Martin's Church at Chapaize, near Taizé in Burgundy:

You who come into this church to admire its beauty, remember that it is forever a place of refreshment, a place to meet in to celebrate the Eucharist. Look with your eyes and your heart at the loveliness of the work of man and seek out the presence of God. May you remember your visit as a moment of peace.

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Vicars of St Mary, Purton

Date of Institution	Name	How vacated	PATRON
1299	John de Hauteford		Abbot of Malmesbury
1313	John de Haydoy		"
1316	Richard de Bristol		"
1349	Robert de Luttleton		"
1349	Nicholas Wass	Exchanged	"
1384	John Bromflete		"
1389	Robert Denly		"
1389	John Smyth		"

Date of Institution	Name	How vacated	PATRON
1409	John Burnet	Died	"
1409	Henry Pyke	Resigned	"
1444	John Lyneham	Died	"
1478	John Grubbe	Died	"
1478	John Frankeleyn	Died	John, Abbot of Abingdon & Thos Hawkins
1515	William Fautleroy	Died	John Kyte, Chaplain, by grant of Abbot of Malmesbury
1535	David Walker	Died	Abbot of Malmesbury
1547	Richard Gabel	Resigned	Edmund Brydges, arm & Dorothy his wife
1555	Thomas Roberts		Sir Edmund Brydges
1570	John Prendergast	Resigned	Sir Edmund Brydges, Lord Chandos & Baron Sudley
1573	William Simons	Resigned	Dorothy, Lady Chandos, widow of Sir Edmund Brydges & Baron Sudley
1582	Robert Price	Resigned	Wm. Knowles, arm.
1601	James Hemerford	Died	Sir Wm. Knowles & Dorothy Chandos, his wife
1629	William Alford	Died	Sir John Cooper, Bart
1664	William Bathe	Died	Anthony, Lord Ashley & Baron Wimborne St Giles
1715	Richard Glass	Resigned	Maurice Ashley, arm.
1725	Richard Glass	Died	Maurice Ashley, arm.
1748	Nathaniel Sandford	Died	Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury
1762	Gregory Sharpe	Died	Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury
1771	John Prower	Died	The Bishop, by lapse
1828	John Mervyn Prower	Died	Cropley, Earl of Shaftesbury
1869	Walter Mitchell	Died	Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury
1874	James	Died	Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury

Date of Institution	Name	How vacated	PATRON
	Hewlett		
1878	John Veysey	Died	Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury
1917	Robert Birch Harrison	Resigned	Earl & Countess of Shaftesbury, Miss Warrender & others
1927	Norman Steward Willis	Resigned	Earl & Countess of Shaftesbury, Miss Warrender & others
1974	Roy Harold David Blake	Resigned	The Bishop of Bristol
1994	Brian Alan Fessey	Resigned	The Bishop of Bristol
2004	Jane Haslam	Resigned	The Bishop of Bristol
2012	John Robert Henry Railton	Resumed retirement	The Bishop of Bristol
2013	Ian David Tweedie- Smith		The Bishop of Bristol



S. MARY, PURTON, WILTS:
VIEW FROM SOUTH-WEST.

