

Joint Benefice of Clifton and Southill
St Alban's Diocese

Church Guide

All Saints' Church

Clifton, Bedfordshire



All Saints Church, Clifton, Beds

This Guide is published by
Clifton Parochial Church Council &
Friends of All Saints' Church

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Foreword

All Saints' Clifton is about 700 years old and much of the original structure remains. It contains many features that are interesting plus some that are of national importance. We are looking forward to celebrating our 700th anniversary 2020.

The first guide was researched and written in 1927 by A A Laporte Payne, brother of the then Rector of the same name, as part of the 600th anniversary celebrations. Canon Peter Pavey carried out a considerable amount of excellent research that filled in lots of information gaps when he produced the first modern guide in 1990 which was revised in 2009.

This 2015 significantly revised edition is produced jointly by The Friends of All Saints' Church and the Parochial Church Council and includes additional information discovered by the NADFAS Church Recorders during 2008-2011.

This edition continues to benefit from the line-drawings done by Sheila Ashton specifically for the 1990 guide and we hope that they will enhance your enjoyment of our special church.

Barry Livesey, Local Historian

Introduction

On looking round, one can catch a sense of a simple mediaeval church built around 1320.



The south side, the porch and the tower, as we see them today, were built in the fourteenth century. The original building would have had a much lower, flatter-pitched roof and would have been slightly smaller but 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 north aisle was added in the 15th century but in the following years the condition of the church deteriorated until the arrival of Revd Henry Hugh Miles in 1858. Revd Miles carried out a continual process of restoration during his thirty-two years as Rector. On arrival he opened up the churchyard so that the church could be seen to good advantage from Church Street. In 1863 he rebuilt and extended the north aisle and the north chapel. He later added a vestry. In 1874 he beautified the chancel. He had the bells restored, in memory of his father and provided a clock, carillon and organ.

A Tour of the Church

On entering the church the beautiful east window draws the eye with its modern stained glass but take a moment to explore the features of **the nave** before hurrying down to the chancel.

Please see the plan in the centre of this booklet (pp 8 & 9) to help you with your tour; the annotation in the text corresponds to annotation on the plan.

We hope you enjoy looking round our lovely church,
Kathy Blackmore, Editor

The Nave (A)

The nave is evidence of the fourteenth century church. The south wall and the window opening¹ in the centre of the wall date from c1326. The nave is divided from the north aisle by an arcade² of three bays with moulded arches of good fifteenth century work. The church still retains its Victorian pews and these were restored and cleaned of the Victorian varnish in the early 2000's by a craftsman from our sister parish. The pews contribute to the traditional feel of the church although the appeal of more flexible seating cannot be denied and the relative merits of pews and chairs is periodically discussed by PCC.

The charnel house³. A trap doorway hidden under pews by the south wall 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 and is opened on special occasions such as flower festivals to enable people to explore. Disappointingly, for some visitors, the charnel house does not now contain human relics.

On the south wall there is a brass memorial plaque to honour Henry Palmer who was Lord of the Manor from 1848 until his death. The crest and motto are registered for a Palmer family in Norfolk.

The brass lectern⁴ is Victorian and its design probably influenced the work of the highly regarded architect Pugin.

The Victorian pulpit⁵, 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 pulpit is integrated into a limestone chancel screen which is also inlaid with a geometric design of coloured marble. Modern handrails were added to the chancel screen in 2011 to provide support for parishioners taking communion. They were made by a local craftsman from the parish and funded by donation.

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"⁶. 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 \AA and \Omega , the beginning and the end. The reigning Christ also receives the same title \AA and \Omega .

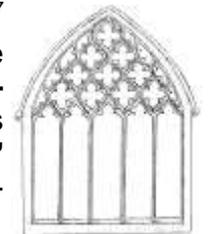


The Chancel & Sanctuary (B)



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 floor 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, $\text{IX}\Theta\text{Y}\Sigma$, "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."

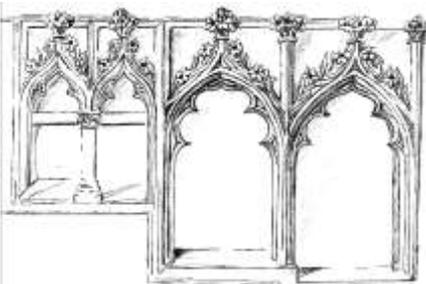
The glory of the chancel is the east window⁷ enhanced as it is by the modern stained glass. The stonework is fourteenth century. In 1951 the Farrar-Bell glass was added. The striking design depicts "The Ascension." A bell surmounted by "R.F." makes a very apposite trade-mark for the designer-craftsman of the window, Reginald Farrar-Bell.



The window openings on the side walls date from the fourteenth century. The larger stained glass⁸ 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 church-worker. 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”⁹ is by John Hardman, 1863.

Beneath the south-east window are the fourteenth century **piscina and sedilia**¹⁰. 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. Piscina were installed in churches by order of the Pope Innocent III. 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. It is unusual for a small rural church to have double piscina and sedilia.



The priest’s doorway¹¹ is also six hundred years old and allowed the priest direct access to the sanctuary.

The substantial **reredos**¹², 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 **altar** has recently (2013) been adjusted to enable the priest to celebrate communion from behind the altar facing the congregation. The work has been carried out by a local craftsman from the village who also made the small oak gate between the north-east corner of the churchyard and Church Street. The altar frontals have been adjusted and re-worked by the dedicated team who look after all the vestments.

The Organ Chamber and Vestry (C & D)

In 1862-3 the present impressive **north aisle** and **organ chamber** were built. **The north vestry** was added before 1874. The **Organ Chamber** contains, besides the organ, two significant memorials.

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. It remains unaltered from the time it was

installed and so is a significant part of the country’s artistic heritage. This fine instrument is played regularly, for morning and evening services each Sunday, for choir practice and for organ practice for a number of local musicians.

Moving behind the organ one can enter the organ chamber which is used as a robing vestry. In addition to storage of altar frontals and robes and a desk for the church register, we can also find the memorials mentioned below.

The Altar Tomb

From the sixteenth century we have the fine **alabaster altar tomb**¹³ of a knight and his wife. It has been identified as that of Sir Thomas Lucy, who died in 1520 at Greyfriars. He was server to King Henry VIII and was part of the Lucy family from Northamptonshire. 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 although these have become eroded. As the tomb is joined to the wall, one side panel has been placed in the wall above the tomb. Luckily this panel is less eroded than the others and provided the all important heraldic clues to enable us to identify the figures.

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 Fysher Brasses

In front of the tomb on the floor are **brasses**¹⁴ 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 14th July 1528.”

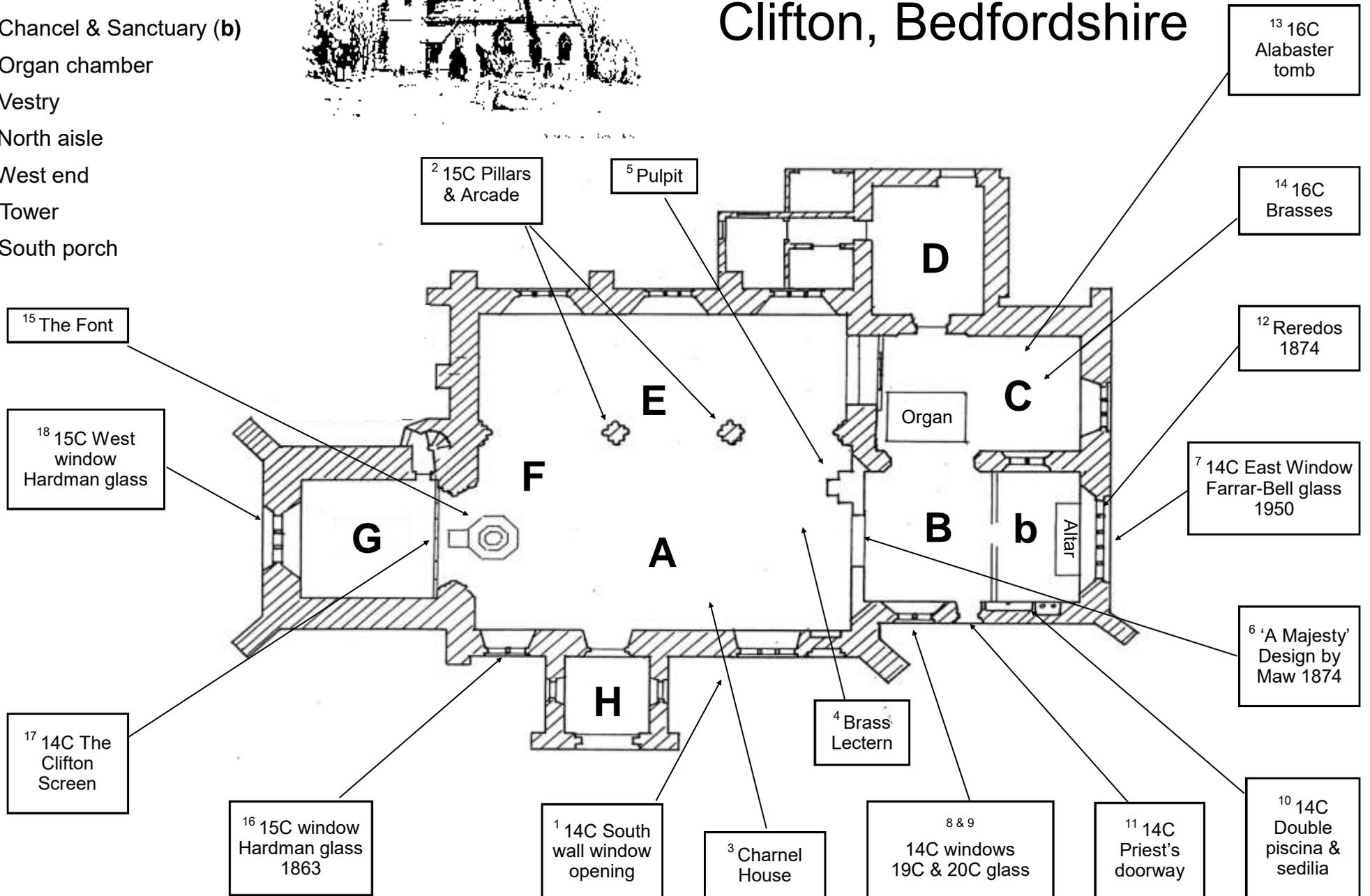


Legend

- A The Nave
- B Chancel & Sanctuary (b)
- C Organ chamber
- D Vestry
- E North aisle
- F West end
- G Tower
- H South porch



All Saints' Church Clifton, Bedfordshire



Beyond the robing vestry is the north vestry containing twentieth century utilities. The central heating boiler was replaced in 2012 and there is a toilet and minimal kitchen facilities for the all important tea and coffee after morning services as well as other occasions and events.

The North Aisle (E)

As stated the present impressive **north aisle** was build in 1862-3. 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 and son-in-law of Rector Miles, designed the north aisle and the organ chamber in thirteenth century style and so ensured an empathy with the rest of the building.

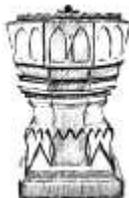


The north aisle is separated from the organ chamber by fine **oak doors** with the filigree work of the vine scroll of Mediterranean origin, 1962. Near the doors is an oak case containing the Book of Remembrance which records the funerals and memorial services conducted in the church. On the west wall there are memorials to those who died in two wars and also tributes to members of the Home Guard and the Civil Defence.

The West End (F)

The Font

The font¹⁵ 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. Baptisms continue be an important aspect of the church’s relationship with the local community.



Between the tower and the south door, **a window** under a square head, was inserted in the fifteenth century. **The Hardman glass**,¹⁶

“The Nativity” and “The Adoration of the Magi,” was installed in 1863. This window was sadly damaged during a break-in in 2018.

The Clifton Screen

At the entrance to the tower¹⁷ there are the remains of **a mediaeval screen** with sixteen painted figures upon it. This is attributed to the end of the fourteenth century and is one of the acknowledged treasures of our lovely church. The screen was placed here in 1972; prior to this it had been hung on the wall of the tower and its previous history is not clear. It is agreed however that it did not originate in All Saints’ Clifton and was probably originally designed as a parclose screen although it has also been described as a rood-screen. The figures have survived the Reformation in remarkably good condition, protected by a lime-wash, and the panels and Victorian surround were restored between 1989 and 1992; more information about the restoration of the screen and west window can be found in a commemorative book at the back of church. There are nine saints each with traditional symbols to denote who they are and seven prophets which are not identified. Details of the saints are below:

St John, the Evangelist holds the chalice with the viper. In tradition John accepts the challenge of a high priest of Diana at Ephesus to drink a poisoned cup. Before he takes the poison, he blesses the chalice. The poison, in the form of a black snake, is seen fleeing from the chalice and the drink does him no harm. His long curly white beard and grey hair reflect the tradition that he alone of the Apostles lived to an old age, preaching his last sermon at the age of 99, and died a natural death.

St Mary Magdalen (pictured right) holds the alabaster pot of ointment with which she anointed the feet of Christ. Mary is often clothed in the fashion of the day. This helps to establish a date for the painting.



St Martha carries the aspegillum which dispenses holy water. Beside her is a dragon with lion’s head and fish tail. Martha is said to have tamed an evil dragon with holy water and then bound him with her girdle, before leading him away to be killed.

St Peter holds the “keys of the kingdom of heaven.” The keys of the kingdom of heaven are a symbol of Peter’s authority as the leader of the church. They were promised to him by Christ at Caesarea Philippi.

St Paul carries a codex or book, which makes it clear he is the author of part of the New Testament. Tradition has it that Paul was beheaded with a sword.

St James “the Great” holds a scallop shell, the Compostela pilgrim badge. This became firmly associated with James through the pilgrimages to Santiago di Compostela from the 12th century.

St Matthew carries the halberd with which it is believed he was martyred.

St Bartholomew carries the flaying knife by which it is believed he met his death before the sentence of stoning by the Sanhedrin could be carried out. By association with this fate of being flayed alive, Bartholomew is regarded as the patron saint of tanners and all who work with skins.

St Thomas carries the lance or spear with which it was believed he was martyred.

Each of the seven prophets has his own scroll. In some mediaeval paintings scrolls are filled with texts thus giving a clue to their identity.

The Tower (G)

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 **west window**,¹⁸ 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. The window was restored in 1992 by Chapel Studios in Hertfordshire and paid for by a local benefactor. More details of the west window and its restoration are included in the commemorative book in the back of the church.



A **stone spiral staircase** from the **choir vestry** gives access to the **bell-ringers chamber**, the **clock room** and the **roof**. The choir vestry was created in 1972 when a floor was installed for the bell-ringing

chamber. The **glass screen** which encloses the bell-ringers chamber was designed by John Burnett, the church architect, in 1989 and was made by specialist workshop in Hertfordshire. The tower is surmounted with an **embattled parapet and castellated turret** at the north-east angle.

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. The three chiming bells were recast during the restoration of 1952. There are now eleven bells, eight ringing bells and three chiming bells and they play a full part in the life and witness of the church, ringing for the main services, for regular practices and by visiting ringers.



The tour of the church continues outside the south door but ...

... before you go outside -

have you seen all our treasures in the church?

The NADFAS Church recorders' 'items most worthy of note':

- The oldest thing in the church, the bowl of the 13th century font
- The beautifully restored late 14th century mediaeval painted screen
- The early 16th century alabaster tomb chest
- The 19th century fine mosaic and tile-work
- The wonderful 19th century stained and painted glass windows of John Hardman
- The Father Willis pipe organ
- The 20th century east and south chancel windows by Reginald and Michael Farrar-Bell

The South Porch (H)

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 churching 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.



Over the last few years we have been discussing how we can make our church accessible for those with mobility problems. There have been lots of ideas some of them more ambitious than others but in 2012 we finally installed hand-holds at both the outer and inner doorways in the porch. This was agreed to be a practical and reversible solution which does not mar the appearance of the church

and was paid for by donation. We continue to make use of wooden ramps for wheelchair users and we do also have a loop system for the hard of hearing. A new path from the lychgate sloping gently to the cill of the south door was installed in 2018 to improve access for all.

The Tower (G)

Outside one immediately 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 Churchyard and Rectors

The Churchyard

The churchyard surrounding the church is closed for burials and we are lucky in having a new burial area along the yew walk at the west end of the churchyard which has plenty of space for burials for many years to come. The new churchyard also contains a Garden of Remembrance which was created in 2010 to provide space for the interment of cremated remains.

The churchyard is entered through a nineteenth century **lychgate** and is well maintained by a dedicated team of grass-cutters and gardeners. We are working hard to increase the bio-diversity in the churchyard and have subscribed to a Diocesan scheme 'The Living Churchyard'; in our case this means managing the cutting of different areas to encourage wild flowers and grasses to grow and seed to provide a richer habitat for insects and other species.



The Rectors

Rectors of Clifton have been recorded since 1202 and a list can be seen on the west wall. 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.

Two former rectors are clearly marked, (Revd Henry Miles and Revd Josiah Olivier) as is an occupant of Clifton Manor (Henry Palmer) and other parishioners; they represent many thousands of others.

Revd Miles was presented as Rector (1858-1891) by his father. He was typical of many clergyman 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 and at times “a quarter of the population was maintained by him.” **The grave of Henry Miles** can be seen by the south door; he was buried in 1910. The advowson or patronage, as it is called, came to the Bishop of St Albans from the Miles family in 1952.



More recently Canon Peter Pavey, Rector here 1984-1993 made a significant contribution to the fabric of the church and in particular the west end. He wrote the first modern guide to the church and was the main driving force in the major restorations of the Clifton Screen and west window; these works were set off by the modern glass screen to the bell-ringing chamber also installed during his tenure. Canon Pavey is buried in the churchyard at the back of the church.



All Saints' Clifton Today

You can find out more information about the life of All Saints' Clifton today:

- The **website** www.clifton-beds.co.uk contains information about services and activities, the Parish Council and local businesses
- The **Clifton Chronicles** the monthly village magazine contains information about all the activities in the village as well as details of services and contact details for local, clubs, societies and businesses. This is delivered to every home in the village and spare copies are usually in church.
- All our **historical church records** have been stored in the County Records Office and details of all **burials in the churchyard** can also be found on the website as above.
- The Rector for our Joint Benefice of All Saints' Clifton and Southill, lives in Clifton Rectory and contact details can be found in the Chronicles.
- The full report of the NADFAS recorders may be made available on request
- To maintain our lovely church we have the **Friends of All Saints Church** and if you want to find out more about them and how you can become involved in ensuring that our church remains at the heart of this community for generations to come, get in touch with:

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