

WELCOME TO  
**ST MARY'S**



A GUIDE TO  
**THE PARISH CHURCH  
OF OXTED**



# WELCOME TO **ST MARY'S**

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**This ancient building houses a living Christian community, which has been the spiritual heart of our town for nearly a thousand years.**

Parish churches have a unique role in the life of England: they are a focus for neighbourhood, storehouses of communal memory and signs of Christian hope in the midst of the world.

Today, St Mary's is a growing church with regular services and groups throughout the week and offers a home for some of life's most significant occasions - holding countless christenings, weddings and funerals for local people. Increasingly, St Mary's also hosts a wide variety of events for the parish community and provides a distinctive venue for the performing arts and live music, to the glory of God.

This guide will introduce to you some of the historic riches to be found within our walls: our prayer is that you may find St Mary's, Oxted to be a place of spiritual refreshment and welcome.



*As you view this ancient building, bear in mind that it is the product of a long process of evolution and restoration, of changing architectural styles and taste over 900 years. Even more important, it reflects the faith of nine centuries of local worshippers, so many of whom have left their tangible or spiritual imprint on it. Please remember those who have built and developed it and pray for those who worship here today, and for the future generations for whom it must be preserved.*

# THE PARISH

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Until relatively recently, Oxted was a small agricultural parish on the east-west road below the North Downs, with a scattering of manors and other big houses. Its population at the time of Domesday has been estimated at around 250. The 1801 census found 644 inhabitants, rising to 959 in 1831. It was only with the coming of the railway from London in 1887, tunnelling under the North Downs, that population growth really took off. At this time, a daughter church of St John's was established in Hurst Green, becoming independent when the ecclesiastical parish was divided in 1964. Today St Mary's church is part of a United Benefice with St Peter's Church, Tandridge. In 2014 we joined with St John's, Hurst Green and St George's, Crowhurst, to become a Team Ministry. The combined population in 2015 of Oxted, Hurst Green and Tandridge was 12,400.

The first recorded Rector, Adam de Stratton, died in 1294. At that time the benefice came under the deanery of Ewell in the archdeaconry of Surrey and the diocese of Winchester. In the 1870s, the parish was transferred to the Diocese of Rochester, changing to that of Southwark in 1905. During the middle ages the gift of the living passed through a number of distinguished hands, including the powerful Cobhams of Starborough Castle, a family closely associated with Lingfield. In 1587, the Manor and Advowson were bought by Charles Hoskins, "citizen and merchant of London", and for the next three centuries the church was very closely associated with his descendants at Barrow Green Court, as so many of the memorials both inside and outside the church testify. Since 1964 the Bishop of Southwark has been Patron of the Living.



## THE SITE

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It is not clear why the church was built more than half a mile away from the original village of Oxted. There is no obvious evidence to support the suggestion of an earlier settlement around the church, which was wiped out in the Black Death, as occurred in some parishes. It does however seem quite probable that the circular mound on which it stands is an old pagan burial ground and place of worship.

There is no doubt that the house known as Oxted Court, which stands opposite the lych gate immediately south of the church, is a place of considerable antiquity and importance. There is evidence that it was a manor house as long ago as Norman times, and was held by the Cobham family. Its Victorian exterior conceals structures that date back to the 14th and early 15th centuries. More recently it was the farmhouse to the associated Court Farm which dominated the approach to the church even after the railway had brought the population back to the neighbourhood - the cows wandering up Barrow Green Road are a vivid memory for many. In 1968 a new church hall was erected, shortly followed by the housing development in St Mary's Close. The church hall was demolished and replaced with the Oxted Community Hall in 2007.

## THE CHURCH

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The original building is lost in the mists of time. It has been claimed that an early inscription bore the date 1040 AD, but successive re-buildings have unfortunately removed almost all traces of the first Saxon structure. The only remaining signs appear to be at the base of the tower and in the nave. The Domesday Book simply stated, "At Ac-Stede [the Place of the Oaks] there is a Church", and on this evidence the parish, like so many others, celebrated its novo centenary in 1986.

The church proper was built in the mid-12th century. Only the ground stage of the tower and portions of the nave walls remain from that original building. Later in the 12th century the aisles and the upper stages of the tower were added, and the chancel was rebuilt in the mid-13th century. The next two centuries saw the aisles widened and their main walls raised; new windows throughout the chancel, new arcades and heightened walls in the nave. Subsequent changes came with the restorations after fire damage of 1637 and 1719 (the latter, and possibly both, due to lightning strikes), and the restoration and additions of the 1870s. The main materials are ironstone and sandstone. In 2018, with the help of a Heritage Lottery Fund grant and local benefactors, many of the external walls were hot lime rendered, as the previous render to the Chancel had broken down exposing the stone behind. The stone was checked and repointed prior to re-rendering.

## THE PORCH

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The 15th century porch has a sundial on the right of the entrance. The outer arch has small escutcheons with the arms of Cobham, and inside there is a broken holy water stoup. The heavy oak door is a notable example of 14th century woodwork: its six panels have foliated tops, four of them containing curved masks, recognisable as two of women wearing period head-dress and two of bearded men. The marks of a supposed consecration cross can still be seen on the right-hand jamb of the inner arch.

# THE NAVE AND AISLES

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**One's first impression of the interior is of good design and planning, especially of the nave and chancel. The dignified and balanced nave owes much to the fine proportions of its Gothic arches and clustered pillars. The original nave, like the tower, was Norman, and initially probably without aisles.**

The main aisle walls were raised in the 14th century, as can be clearly seen both externally in the change in the stonework about 12ft above ground level on the south side, and internally in the portions of 12/13th century arches embedded in the pillars on both sides of the nave near its east end, showing the transition from Norman to Early English. Almost certainly this was when the 14th century traceries were inserted which probably explains why the tower appears somewhat squat in relation to the church as a whole. Of special interest are the 15th century nave pillars and arches, the latter having the double ogee mouldings and deep recesses of the Perpendicular period. Only the roof and north transept are relatively modern.

At the east end of the nave, on its south side, is the steep winding staircase cut into a heavy pillar and apparently leading nowhere. A 15th century doorway, presumably above wooden access steps, formerly led into it. In fact the staircase led to a rood loft, a medieval bridge across the chancel entrance on which the crucifix would have stood and from where medieval preachers would have read or declaimed. The screen now standing there is a memorial to a Boer War casualty. Above it, on the edge of the chancel arch at either side, can be seen the last remnants of the medieval frescos that must once have made the church a blaze of colour.

The memorial to the dead of World War One stands at the head of the south aisle, in front of the organ. Below the memorial is an iron chest of peculiar interest, probably 15th century and of Flemish craftsmanship. Its locking mechanism covers the whole of the inside of the lid and consists of twelve bolts all operated by one turn of the key.

The pulpit, on the north side of the chancel arch, is Victorian; a dome-shaped canopy was removed early last century. One Victorian account describes a three-decker pulpit with a desk and clerk's seat on the ground, a reading desk just above, and the pulpit on top. Behind the pillar it stands against is another architectural feature in the curious curved passage leading from the head of the side Chapel in the north aisle through into the chancel. With no view of the high altar, the passage can hardly be an oblique viewpoint for the consecration. The side Chapel has a carved reredos and panels and an ancient piscina.

The font, originally placed in the 15th century on the tower pavement, was later moved alongside the south door and now stands in the baptistry at the west end of the north aisle. Its octagonal shape has been restored into clean-cut lines, which contrast with the decorative quatrefoils enclosing alternate shields and flowers. The seating throughout the church is for the most part 18th century.

The north transept was part of the 1877 extension. On the ground floor the pews formerly ran right to the back, but in 1974 a new clergy vestry was partitioned off. The gallery above it has its own external access door with steps leading up from the churchyard. It may have been for musicians but is more likely to have been reserved for the gentry. This corner of the church seems to have been the warm one - old drawings show a chimney rising from the SE corner of the transept roof, and before that from the NE corner of the side Chapel.





## THE CHANCEL

The chancel is 37 feet long and well proportioned, though slightly offset from the line of the nave. The choir stalls were added in 1903, at the same time as the screen, and apparently replaced pews that formerly extended up to the altar rail. Their panelling largely obscures a 13th century priest's doorway, which now leads into the organ chamber.

The organ is a particularly fine instrument (though heavy to play) built in the late 19th century by Speechly of Dalston. Originally an all tracker-action instrument (though now electrified) it has three manuals, and 23 speaking stops including two 16ft pedal stops.

On the north side, by the high altar, there is an arched niche for a 13th century Easter sepulchre, and above the altar rail, an iron ring in the wall thought to have held the Lenten veil. On the south side is a piscina (a stone basin for washing the chalice) with a stone shelf or "credence".

The altar itself is a distinctive feature, enlarged in 1931 and enhanced by the addition of riddel posts surmounted by angels and lights. The reredos is a copy of Raphael's Last Supper by James Powell & Sons (also known as Whitefriars Glass Works) and dated 1886. An 1820's drawing by Hassell, a local watercolour artist, shows two panels with the Ten Commandments in that position.

# THE TOWER

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At the opposite end of the nave, the huge Norman tower is entered through a wide arch, that is filled with a second oak screen donated in 1931 by the Charrington family, who also gave the chancel screen.

The tower walls are five feet thick below ground, and rise in one stage to the heavy parapet. The crenellations seem to have been a 19th century addition, for Hassell shows an even parapet with two large spouts protruding on the north and south sides, and a large cupola on top for the bells. An earlier spire was destroyed in the fire of 1719, following which new bells were installed; three of these 1729 bells by Richard Phelps are still there, and two were recast in 1923 when a sixth (the treble) was added. One of the Phelps bells, the tenor, bears the inscription:

*“Good folks with one accord we call to  
hear God’s word, we honour to the king  
and joy to brides do ring, we triumphs  
loudly tell and ring your last farewell.”*

The heavy main supporting beams can be seen from the ringing chamber on the first floor, the redecorator of which has preserved some ancient graffiti including one which looks very like Kaiser Bill. The bells are hung in a sturdy modern steel frame. Rope collars in the first floor show how at one time the bells were rung from the ground floor.

The clock (by Gillett of Croydon) was installed in 1887, to commemorate Queen Victoria’s golden jubilee, and has faces to the north, west and south. The belfry windows, the 3-light window above the west door and the small trefoiled light in the ringing chamber are of 15th century origin. The widely splayed inner jambs of the small narrow lancets on the ground floor date the tower from the 12th century.

Inside, the base of the tower is currently a choir vestry, with two old wooden galleries on either side, their panelling bearing records of sundry benefactions since 1627. The purpose of these galleries, so far out of sight of the east end of the church, is a matter for conjecture, but one of Hassell’s sketches referred to earlier appears to show a gallery right across the west end of the nave, and they could be a relic of that. These galleries, and the small oak spiral staircase in the northwest angle of the tower, probably date from the restoration after the 1719 fire.



# STAINED GLASS



The most striking windows are the four large memorial windows on the north and south sides of the nave, crafted in the William Morris factory in the style of the pre-Raphaelite artist Sir Edward Burne-Jones, their Chief Designer. The glass is beautiful, and emulates some of the finest Burne-Jones windows, like that in Christ Church Chapel, Oxford.

The tracery of the main east window is 14th century, much restored; indeed Hassell sketched a window with six narrow lights instead of the present four, and none of the present top section. The date 1637, when the church was extensively restored, is inscribed above the window on the outside. The four central lights at the top depict the four Evangelistic signs from the Book of Revelation - a lion, a calf, a man and an eagle, with scrolls to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. At least three of these are reckoned to be 14th century glass, probably originally made for the side windows in the chancel. The four lower panels depict the Nativity and are attributed to Nathaniel Westlake FSA who was working in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

There are two other fine windows in the chancel, both by the firm of C E Kempe & Company Limited. The window on the north side commemorates a Hoskins death in 1892; whilst the window on the south side is dedicated to Sarah Sophia Hill from her children.

Over the altar of the side Chapel, a memorial window to two brothers who died in World War One depicts St Martin and St George.

# MEMORIALS

These fall into three main groups. The first and finest are the many to the Hoskins family. Pride of place, on the north wall of the chancel, must go to a fine sculptured Jacobean monument representing the haberdasher John Aldersey, a merchant adventurer of London, with his wife (a Hoskins) and all seventeen of their children in an attitude of prayer. Among the floor tablets in the chancel is one dated 1651 to a Mrs Hoskins, described rather charmingly as a:

*"Patterne of Piety  
Mapp of misery  
Mirrour of Patience"*

Another, to Dame Ann Hoskins who died in 1702, is presumably that referred to in the adjacent wall tablet:

*"Let those in after ages know  
This Vertuous woman here below  
Was stable in religion pious in life  
A charitable creature an humble wife  
In her affliction dolorous and many  
Her patience scarcely paralleled by any  
Of perfect happiness she could not miss  
Led by such graces to Eternal bliss"*

On the south wall of the chancel is a brass to Thomas Hoskins, who died aged five in 1611, and "aboute a quarter of an houre before his departure did of himselfe without any instruction speake these wordes...and leade us not into temptation but deliver us from all evile...being ye last wordes he spake." For a detailed description of other brasses, going back to 1428, you may wish to look in the Victoria County History of Surrey. It is still possible to see where they were removed from the chancel floor.



The second significant class of tablets, mostly associated with particular works of restoration or improvement, commemorate the work of various 19th and 20th century clergy who worked here. Finally there are memorials to eminent parishioners, including a large one to William Finch, on the south wall of the chancel.



## CHURCH PLATE

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Most of the church plate was sold in 1973 to fund the purchase of a curate's house. The most important piece was a fine, heavy silver chalice and paten of 1634, the Cup of Oxstead. By the generosity of the Duke of Devonshire, whose ancestor the wife of the third Duke had been a Hoskins, it was repurchased and given back to the parish. It is kept in the bank for security but used for Communion at major feasts.

## CHURCHYARDS

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The oldest part is of course the church mound. A large and venerable yew tree, estimated to be 350-400 years old, dominates the path down from the south porch. The lych gate, the traditional resting place for coffins at funerals, celebrates the silver jubilee of George V in 1936. The oldest surviving tombstones are the two grave covers lying side by side at ground level adjoining the first buttress on the south side of the church. Each bears a carved cross, and traditionally they have been regarded as the graves of Crusaders. However, they are now dated as eleventh century, late Anglo-Saxon. They were discovered about four feet down in their present position, probably when the small extension which now houses the organ was being put up in the angle of the chancel and the south aisle. There are similar stones at Tandridge and Titsey churchyards.

Other graves can be identified from the early 18th century, but many of the inscriptions are now more or less illegible. There are three later sarcophagus graves outside the west door, and several tombs enclosed by railings near the east end; the 19th century Lashmar tomb belongs to the family that ran the Oxted brewery. Once again the Hoskins family (and retainers) are much in evidence, and they erected the memorial cross to the east of the church. There are three chest tombs near the east end, two of which are listed monuments, but sadly their condition is deteriorating with age.

The area to the north and northeast of the mound is presumably that referred to in a 19th century minute as the "new burial ground." North of the lane, stretching up to the railway embankment, there is an extension to the churchyard which was virtually filled between 1929 and 1969; it is now only available for interring ashes. An adjacent burial ground is currently open and is the responsibility of the civil parish.

The churchyards have few memorable epitaphs, but it is worth recording the parting admonition of William Willett, who died in 1891, aged 28:

*"Young men as you pass by  
Think on death, as you must die  
Repent in time make no delay  
For in my prime I was called away."*





## A WORD OF THANKS

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Thank you for visiting St Mary's Oxted.

Should you wish to know more about our life together, please visit the church website below, or make contact with one of the clergy.

St Mary's is committed, not only to preserving this remarkable building, but to renewing it, carefully and confidently, for many generations to come.

May the peace of Christ go with you.

Find us online: [www.stmarysoxted.uk](http://www.stmarysoxted.uk)

*Revised and updated in 2018 and 2003 based on the 1996 edition under the authorship of Norman Donaldson. The plan and much of the information was taken, with acknowledgement, from the Victoria County History of Surrey; other sources include "Oxted, Limpsfield & Neighbourhood" (edited by Lewis G Fry).*

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THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND



**LOTTERY FUNDED**