

A Tour Guide to the Church of

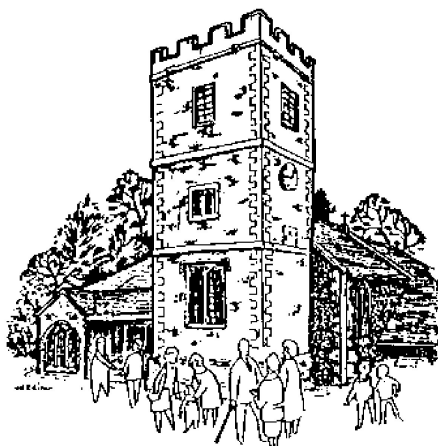
Saint Mary the Virgin

Purley on Thames
Berkshire

Diocese of Oxford

By
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A Plan of the Church

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EAST

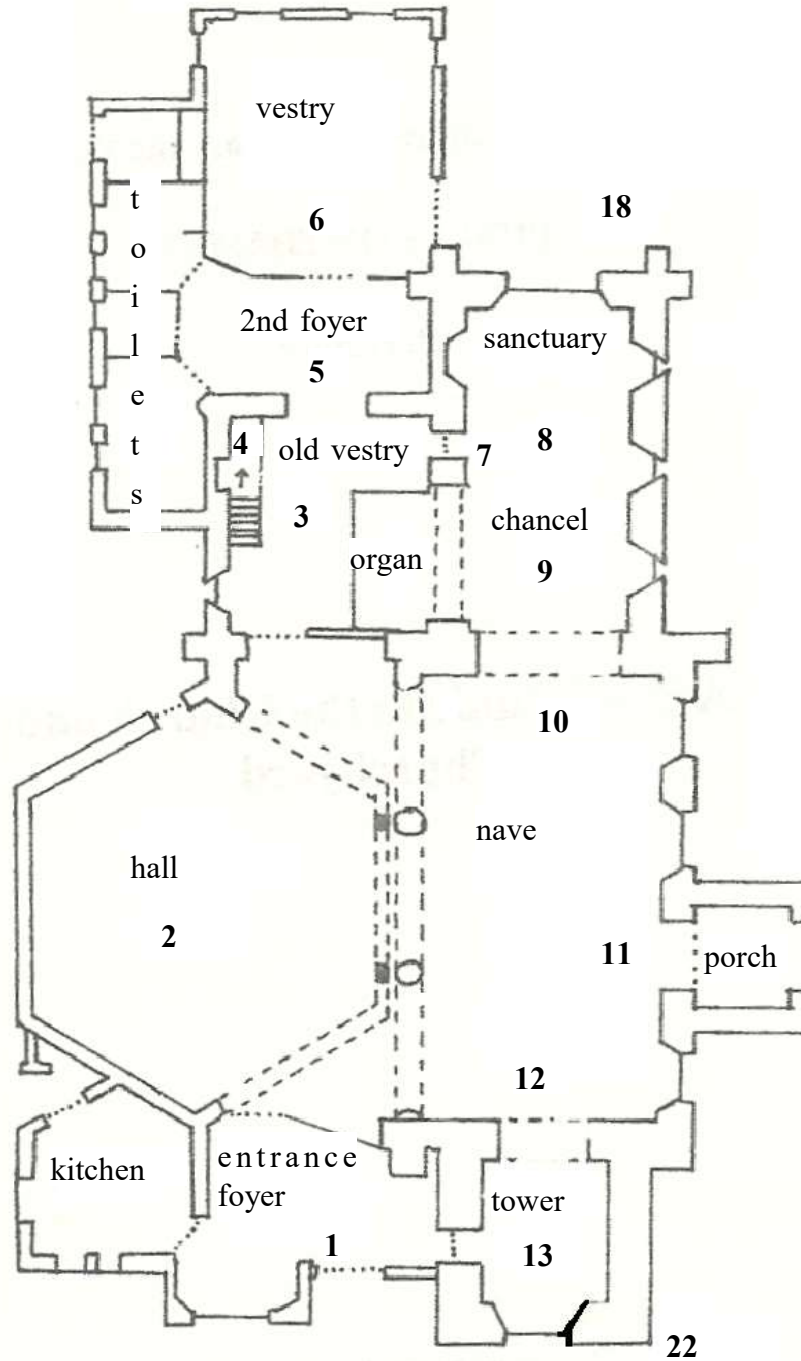
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NORTH

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SOUTH

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WEST

INTRODUCTION

A warm welcome to St Mary's Church. For those who are visitors to the parish, whatever the occasion of your visit, be it joyful or sad, we hope you will leave with a sense of history. There has been a church on this site since Saxon times, probably for 1200 or more years. Those early worshippers who owed their faith to Bishop Birinus lived much closer to the time of Christ than to us today. The church has seen many changes, the Norman Conquest, the Reformation, the Civil War and Restoration and two World Wars have come and gone. All have left their mark somewhere and we hope you will enjoy your visit trying to spot the connections. For those who live in and around Purley we hope we will see you at one of our services before too long.

There are two tours which can be followed independently. Both start from the foyer, just inside the main west door, one takes in the interior of the church and the other takes you around the churchyard and looks at the exterior of the church. This guide will direct you to a series of stopping points from where the points of interest can be viewed.

At least five stages of building will be noted. There was the Norman church built around 1150 which replaced an earlier Saxon church dating possibly from the mid 800s. Then you will see signs of the early English style when the church was rebuilt around 1350. You can then see parts of the Jacobean church which was built around 1626. The majority of the church is Victorian as it was extensively rebuilt in 1870. Finally there is the new extension which was built in 1983

OPEN DAYS

For some events in the church the west door is closed off and the foyer used for refreshments. If this is the case we suggest you either start Tour 1 with a cup of tea or begin at point 11 (The south door) and go on to point 1 (foyer) after you have visited the tower (point 13)

DIRECTIONS

Just to orient you. The Altar is at the east end, the tower at the west end, The hall is on the north side and the nave on the south side.

Tour 1 - THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

Point 1 - In entrance foyer

Face the main door

You are standing by the west door which was built in 1983 for the new extension. The design of the doors is quite pleasing. Look particularly at the way the cross motif is used for the handle.

To the right of the door is an early English style window which is in at least its third position. At one time it formed the main south window of the nave and then in 1870 it was moved to the vestry when the church was rebuilt. It was moved to its present position in 1983.

To the left of the west door is the door to the tower. This is believed to have been part of the Early English church which was re-used in 1626.



The 1626 church

Turning to your right you can look into the modern kitchen.

Now go through the doors in the glass and wood screen and stand in the middle of the new hall.

Point 2 - In Centre of New Hall

This hall was designed by Richard Perkins and Partners and built in 1983. Look up and see the lovely timber work of the ceiling which was built by carpenters Ronald Herbert and his son Luke. It is a bit spoilt by the fluorescent lighting, but if you switch on the lights which shine upwards it really shows off the timberwork.

The cross on the north wall was made of timbers from the north aisle which was demolished in 1982.

If you look back to the doors which you have just come through and look to the wall on the right you will see the Millennium embroidery. This was made to commemorate the year 2000 by members of the several local organisations in the parish. The design was by a team from St Mary's led by Jackie Benstead.

Cross the hall and go through the wood and glass doors into the old vestry.

Point 3 - In the Old Vestry

Underneath the stairs, at the back of the broom cupboard, is the remainder of the original north door of the vestry. This has now been blocked off and the ladies toilets are the other side. This is of very ancient origin and is certainly Early English if not earlier.

To the left of the stairs you can see a lancet window facing north. This is the only remaining ancient lancet and probably dates from the thirteenth century. It used to have a pair which was in the north wall of the sanctuary but this has been blocked up now.

Opposite the window is the organ chamber. The old pipe organ used to almost fill this vestry which had to be enlarged in 1877 to accommodate it but in 1982 this was given to St Peter's church Quarrendon, near Aylesbury and a computer organ was installed later. This is very compact and fits into the much smaller chamber, you can open the door and peep inside.

Above the entrance way ahead of you is where the Early English window was located from 1870 to 1982.

Go up the stairs to the upper chamber.

As you climb the stairs look out for the memorial to Thomas Storer (died 1793) on your left at the top. This is a slate tablet and it is written in Latin.

Point 4 - In room above vestry

The room is used as an office and storeroom

You can see a nice mix of architectural styles in the tops of the bricked in arches, although the ones on the south and west walls have been almost plastered over. On the south wall is a rounded Norman arch; you will see this better from the other side (point 9): on the west wall is a pointed reproduction gothic arch and on the east a much flatter early English Perpendicular style arch.

Above you are the timbers and plaster of the roof which was done in Tudor style, although built in 1870.

On the south wall is another memorial, this time to Anthony Morris Storer who was the son of Thomas Storer and a former lord of the Manor of Purley Magna.

Return down the stairs, turn left and go through a set of doors into the second foyer.

Point 5 Inside second Foyer

You may care to pause to inspect the toilets on the left which were one of the reasons for constructing the extension, though few will admit to that.

Note the painting by Ray Herring on the wall to the left of the toilets which shows people of Purley dressed in the costumes from earliest to modern times. See how many styles you can find. The font is shown in its original position over the patch in the floor.

Go on through the second set of doors into the vestry

Point 6 - Inside New Vestry

Note the door handles as you go through. These are very similar to those on the west door.

Also here are the portable furniture for when the church is re-oriented, an altar, two prayer desks, kneelers and a pulpit. They are fine examples of modern craftsmanship.

On the wall to your right is a drawing of the church made by Tomkins around 1805. Note the gabled window just below the tower. This window lit the gallery at the west end of the nave.

Return back into the old vestry, turn left and go up the steps and through the door into the chancel.

Point 7 - Inside Chancel by north Door.

The door you have just come from was designed by the architect G E Street who was responsible for the re-building of 1870. It is of early English style and reflects what was known as the Gothic revival. Note the nice carvings around the door lintels.

On the right of the door you will see a memorial to Hugh Evelyn Lister who was, most unusually, a combatant priest who won the Military Cross during the Second World War. He was a nephew of Lord Lister of antiseptic fame and he and his family used to live in the Old Rectory which stood

where we now have Lister Close. He won his MC for a particularly daring attack upon a German machine gun post.

Below this is a memorial to Nelson Cooper who was organist at the church for many years. Above that is a memorial to Charles Manesty, Purley's longest serving rector. Watch out for his grave later when you visit the churchyard

Can we now draw your attention to the floor tiles below you. These designs are reproductions of mid 14th century tiles made at Penn near Maidenhead. A fragment of original mediaeval tile was found during archaeological excavations with a similar design so we believe that Street reproduced the designs from the old church in newly made tiles from Godwyns factory in Hereford when he rebuilt the church in 1870.

Street used a particular method of laying tiles which you can see beautifully in Purley Church. Starting at the lowest floor level the pattern is very simple but as you go up each step to another level the designs and patterns become more and more elaborate. Watch out for this as you go down to the nave later.

Move now to the centre of the chancel and look towards the large east window.

Point 8 - Centre of Chancel before the Altar

The window is most interesting. It was given by Mrs Cecily Storer, wife of the Lord of the Manor, in 1870 in memory of her sister Agnes Willoughby. If you look hard you can read the inscription along the bottom of the window.

The east window is made up of three parts: there are three long narrow lights and a trefoil light on top of each. (a trefoil is a bit like a shamrock with three leaves) Reading from left to right the trefoils contain images of Saint Barbara, Christ and St Nicholas. Victorian window designers used a very complicated code for indicating who was who in a window. So St Barbara is depicted as a female figure, crowned and holding a cup and a sword, St Nicholas is a male figure holding an anchor.

The main lights again have three parts, there is an upper figure in a circular frame, a middle picture in a rectangular frame and a lower figure in a square frame. All of these 'threes' are intended to depict the Trinity.

The left hand circular figure is of Saint Luke (scroll and pen) The rectangular picture has the Virgin Mary (patron of the church) (blue cloak and halo) and beside her is Saint Agnes the patron of children with a lamb. This was to remember Agnes Willoughby. At the bottom is another female figure holding a cross and a lily and wearing a crown. We do not know who this is supposed to represent but is probably one of the Saxon queens of England who were canonised.

The centre light has St Paul at the top, Christ on the cross in the middle and St Mark at the bottom.

The right hand light has St John at the top. St John and a Roman soldier in the middle (note the identical faces for St John) The lower figure has a male figure with a slipped crown. He is blindfolded and holds a scroll and olive branch in his hand. This is thought to be a representation of King Charles I who was being revived as a popular English martyr at the time the window was made.

Behind the altar you can see a reredos of alabaster and italian marble.

If you look up and towards your left you can see the second ancient lancet window now bricked up and somewhat obscured by a neon light.

Street was very careful to preserve designs wherever he could and the stone furniture of the sanctuary was probably copied from the older church. Note the credence table to your left and the sedilla (seat) to your right. Above the sedilla you can see the carved figure of a woman's head in

mediaeval style This is believed to represent the Virgin Mary.

If you look to your right you will see two memorials on the south wall. The upper one is to Richard Sherwood, a surgeon who was baptised here 8th May 1783 and the lower one to Edith Sophia Sherwood who was baptised at Purley 14th May 1854. She became a missionary in China and was murdered during the Boxer rebellion.

Now move down a step and stand in the centre of the chancel between the choir stalls.

Point 9 - Centre of Chancel

On the north side you can see the Norman arch which used to form the main chancel arch. Note the studded frieze at the top of the pillars on either side. The one to the right is a Victorian reproduction, but the one on the left contains some of the original Norman stonework and dates to around 1150.

In the south wall there are three lancet windows given in memory of Richard Sherwood. One depicts St John, one St Luke and the other the Good Samaritan.

Also on the south wall are plaques to the memory of of The Reverends Matthews and Powley, also to Allan Powley, Matthew's son who was killed in the First World War. The Rev John Dudley Matthews was a former headmaster of Leeds Grammar School and achieved notoriety for sacking the head mistress of Purley School for taking in her daughter after she had left her husband.

Now move down inside the nave and stand about six feet from the step.

Point 10 Just below the chancel steps

Look particularly to the fine gothic arcade to your right. This is made of Bath stone and replaced the old north wall in 1870. It used to lead to a small aisle but now leads to the hall.

On the wall behind you is a memorial to C E Hodgkin who as well as being Churchwarden, was managing Director of Sigmund Pulsometer Pumps (formerly on the site of the retail park, near the Norcot roundabout) and chairman of the parish council for many years.

As you turn around look back to the chancel and look up to see the roof. The carved bosses at the intersection of the timbers are particularly interesting. See how many different designs you can spot.

In the south wall is a second Good Samaritan window in memory of Captain R F Boyle who lived at Purley Lodge just before the Hodgkins. The window tells the story of the Good Samaritan and all the figures in the bible record can be easily identified.

To the right of this window is a memorial to Cecil Aldin. He was a noted artist and illustrated Kipling's Jungle Books. He was master of the South Berks Hunt and lived at what is now Bowling Green Farmhouse for many years. Above this is one to his son Dudley who was killed in the first world war when he was burrowing between bomb craters to take the trenches closer to the German lines.

Look also at the pulpit. Its three carved wooden panels have reproduction gothic windows topped by a trefoil, a quadrifoil and a cinqfoil similar to those which you will see at the tops of the windows of the south wall. Almost everywhere you look in the 1870 part of the church you will see features echoing the Holy Trinity.

Now move down the aisle to stand alongside the south door.

Point 11 - By South Door

To the left of the south door there are memorials to Alderman Farrer and Herbert Tidbury.

On the right is a memorial to Janet Fullerton who died in childbirth at Ware in Devon. The baby that was born is now a grown man and visited his mother's memorial a few years ago. The Fullertons were grandchildren of the last lord of the manor. The relief carving is said to come from Italy but we know nothing of it in detail.

The patch on the floor is where the font used to stand.

If you look carefully you can see where the central heating pipes referred to in the Farrar memorial used to emerge from the floor.

Now turn towards the tower

Point 12 - Facing Tower Wall in Nave

There used to be a gallery around the west end of the nave and there was a door from the nave into the ringing chamber which was located just above the arch. This has now been bricked in and plastered over.

On either side of the tower arch are the two World War memorials. They used to be located one above the other.

Above them are several other memorials which were moved here from other parts of the church when it was rebuilt in 1870.

Of particular interest is the one to John George Liebenrood of Purley Lodge. He was a merchant who came from Saxony and married a local heiress. The family later moved to Prospect Park and a road near there is named after them.

On the right is a memorial to Anthony Gilbert Storer. See if you can spot the mistake which had to be corrected later. Above it is a second memorial to Anthony Morris Storer, his uncle, which was designed by Joseph Nollekins who was a very famous Victorian sculptor.

The font dates from the middle of the 12th century and has a carving of interlaced arches with faces of Christ. The crack was recorded before 1800 so it wasn't caused by moving it in either 1870 or 1986.

Now move through the arch and into the base of the tower

Point 13 - Inside Tower

The base of the tower is now the ringing chamber. The six bells above you were cast variously between 1629 and 1786 and were taken out of use in the early 1900s. Details of the bells are in a notice on the south wall. The tower was strengthened and the bells rehung for the millennium.

Note how the tower is built of chalk. The outside and inside look very different

The oldest memorial in the church will be found on the south wall high up to your left. It is to Jane St John who was the link between the Huscarle family and the St John family. The Huscarles were lords of the manor from just after the conquest to 1369, then followed the Carews who gained the manor by marriage and then a sister Sanchea married Sir John Iwardby around 1480 and their daughter Jane married John St John. Their descendants carried on as Lords of the manor until 1786 when it was sold and eventually purchased by Anthony Morris Storer.

Alongside on the same wall is a memorial to Ann Hyde. She was the first wife of Sir Edward Hyde who went on to be Lord Clarendon and his daughter by his second wife became the Queen of King James II. If it had not been for her unfortunate death by smallpox our Ann could well have been mother to a future Queen.

There are many other memorials of note in the tower which contain a lot of historical information especially about people who used to live at Purley Hall.

The west window is typical of the late Tudor, early Stuart period. Note how flat the arch is and how the window fits into a rectangular frame which made them much easier to build than pointed windows.

At this stage the tour ends Go through the door on your right and you will be back in the foyer ready to start the tour of the churchyard.



The west window (exterior)

Tour 2 - EXTERIOR and CHURCHYARD

Go outside via the west door to the churchyard wall immediately facing you.

Point 14 - Outside West Door

The window to the left of the door dates from around 1350 and has been carefully restored at considerable expense. It has occupied several positions during its history. Note how its flattish rounded arch does not match the pointed gable above.

Of the two windows in the tower the upper is another reproduction of the Early English pattern and appears not to have been restored.

The lower one is from the Stuart period and appears to have been restored at some time, note the contrasts in the stone work.

Above them are the louvered 'windows' to let the sound out of the bell chamber.

Note how the church tower is clad in brick whereas from inside it looked as if it were built of chalk. We will return to the tower later but glance up and note the gargoyles just below the crenellations.

Move now northwards alongside the wall to where it changes height.

Point 15 - Opposite Memorial to Emma Hunt.

You will be standing close to the old boundary of the churchyard before it was extended in the 1930s. This 'new' burial ground is now full and we have a brand new cemetery in Purley adjacent to the recreation ground on Goosecroft Lane which was opened in 1999.

Later you may care to look at some of the graves and their inscriptions.

Now move across the graveyard until you are about half way across and face the old vestry.

As you pass the kitchen door note the memorial to Thomas Barnes.

Point 16 - Midway across churchyard

Note the small retaining wall built by Doug Fossey in traditional Berkshire style. This emphasises how the 1870 church was set into the ground.

The shed does not enhance the view.

You can see the hexagonal shape of the new hall. Beneath it is an early mediaeval burial ground which was discovered during rebuilding.

If you look carefully to your right you may be able to see traces of the foundations of the old boundary wall close to the new retaining wall.

Now move to the north east corner of the churchyard. as far from the church as you can get.

Point 17 - North East Corner of Churchyard

From this vantage point you get a good view of the mixture of architectural styles and can see all the constituent parts of the church.

Note particularly the non-functional gargoyles on the tower and the carved stone crosses on the gable ends of the nave and chancel.

Move back alongside the wall and down the steps by the 1983 extension. Follow the path around to the south east corner of the church

Point 18 - South East corner of the church

The view here is marred somewhat by another wooden shed but they are needed for storage.

Note the doors into the new vestry of a similar style to the west door.

See if you can spot the 'butterfly' formed of two matching split flints on the east wall of the chancel.

In springtime the grass around this area is covered with snowdrops.

Move over now to the Garden of Remembrance in the South east corner of the churchyard

Point 19 - By Garden of Remembrance

The garden was created by a former churchwarden, Ernest Spong in memory of his wife. The area has become very cluttered of late as the cremation memorials have got rather out of hand.

From this point you get a nice view of the church which has been very popular with photographers.

Walk back slowly to the point where the path from the Lych Gate turns through a right angle and face the church.

Point 20 - Opposite Church Porch

On your right are a number of vaulted tombs to the Sherwood family. Several of them are classified by the Department of the Environment as 'Listed Buildings' The Sherwood family were very influential in the 18th and 19th centuries and at one time they farmed the whole parish as tenants of the Lords of the manors and held all the parish offices as well.

On your left are the graves of two former rectors and Frank Spenlove-Spenlove a noted artist. Beyond them is the oldest gravestone - to Sarah Barefoot dated 1720.

Behind you on your left are some more of the earliest gravestones in the churchyard dating from the 18th century. These have now been flattened to ease grass cutting.

The windows in the south wall of the church look quite different on the outside.

Note the coat of arms on the tower. It is of Lord Grandison who was the uncle of the Lord of the Manor in 1626 and it is believed he paid most of the cost of rebuilding at that time.

The clock was given in memory of the Fullertons in 1919 by their children.

Now move along the path to the Lych Gate.

Point 21 - By Lych Gate

See if you can spot the inscription to two of the Sherwoods inside the lych gate.

If you look up you can see clearly how peg tiles are hung.

This view of the church is another favourite for photographers, especially when they can get the yew on your left to provide a frame.

The pile of stones on your right are the remains of windows, paths and gravestones removed during rebuilding in 1983

Follow the path again to the corner of the tower.

On your left you will pass gravestones to three members of the Storer family which were moved in 1983. The actual graves are beneath the path.

On your right are two further memorials which were moved, to Janet Fullerton, whose memorial you have seen inside the church and to Thomas Canning. He is believed to be related to the prime minister George Canning who served in 1827

Just by the wall on your left is the memorial to Tony Edwards, father of noted yachtswoman Tracey Edwards.

Point 22 - By South West corner of tower

Look carefully at the limestone quoins on the corners of the tower. There are several old masons and other marks chiselled into the stone.

You should be able to spot three quite easily.

You have now completed the tour. We hope you have enjoyed your visit to Purley Church. If you are interested in more details, pick up a copy of the History of The Church in the rack in the foyer.