

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, WOODLANDS, BERKSHIRE



February 1995
4th Series, No. 10

Price: 80p.



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WELCOMES YOU TO
ST. MARY'S CHURCH,
WOODLANDS.**

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of 291 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and be encouraged to see our other churches. Some are in towns; some in remote country districts. Some are easy and others hard to find but all are worth the effort.

Nearby are the Trust churches of:

EAST SHEFFORD, St. Thomas. Just south-east of Great Shefford, off A338;

LOWER BASILDON, St. Bartholomew. Between Pangbourne and Goring, just north of A329;

BERWICK BASSETT, St. Nicholas. 3 miles north of Avebury off A4361;

INGLESHAM, St. John the Baptist. 1 mile south of Lechlade off A361.

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, WOODLANDS, BERKSHIRE
by Geoff Brandwood

Ten miles north-west of Newbury, beside the old Roman road that now forms the B4000, and within ear-shot of the roaring M40, stands a perfect example of a small mid-19th century country church. St. Mary's was erected in 1852 to the designs of a London architect, T. Talbot Bury, and retains most of its original furnishings and fittings. It replaced a slightly earlier building which appears to have been decidedly jerry-built. Bury's church, however, flint-faced and with Bath stone dressings, has survived well but the problem of a declining population in rural areas led to its being declared redundant and it was vested in the (then) Redundant Churches Fund in July 1991.

The building of St. Mary's

Woodlands had no ancient church but, in order to provide a place of worship for the local populace, the Misses Alethea Marianne and Charlotte Seymour of Speen (near Newbury) gave enough money to pay for one. It was built in 1837 and seems to have been a simple structure measuring some 47 ft. x 26 ft.

Within a few years it appeared that all was not well. The appeal for a grant from the Incorporated Church Building Society to build the replacement church noted that the Misses Seymour 'were misled by their Architect who planned a roof so utterly devoid of proper construction and of strength . . . it began to sag and at last spread so as to thrust out the walls which were only of 14 inch brickwork . . . The builder also seems to have put in a very large number of almost unburnt bricks and the walls have become injured from top to bottom.' Not surprisingly, as soon as trouble was spotted the unknown architect and builder were hauled back to account for the problem. They confidently asserted that 'the mischief in the roof . . . was immaterial and that there was no chance of its increasing.' Such a specious assurance proved ill-founded since 'The walls,' the application added ruefully, 'had not then spread as they now have.'

Planning for a replacement building was certainly in hand in 1850. The unfortunate Misses Seymour offered £1,000 and funds were also donated by Lady Duckett of Regent's Park. These more than covered the cost of the new church as originally designed so a more ambitious scheme was drawn up and estimated to cost £1,590. The architect was Talbot Bury who was first named in April 1851. His design increased the accommodation from that in the old church by 73, made up entirely of free seating and space for children. The new church could accommodate up to 217 people in all. It is not clear exactly when building began but the church was complete in October 1852.

Architecture

If the earlier church had been a simple box, the new one was a picturesque medieval country church brought back to life. In the intervening fifteen years there had been a revolution in church design – a revolution which had established medieval Gothic models as the only proper inspiration for modern church building. Much of the credit for this transformation goes to A. W. N. Pugin for whom Talbot Bury worked occasionally as an artist.

The most distinctive feature is the north-west bell-turret which starts square, turns octagonal and is topped by a pretty ring of trefoiled arches beneath a stone spirelet. It contains one bell, supplied by the Whitechapel foundry and dating from the building

of the church. Then there is a three-bay nave, with a south porch and north aisle, plus a lower chancel to which is attached a vestry on the north-east. This plan characterises much of what Pugin and his followers recommended. The various parts are structurally distinct as was usual in a Gothic church, the vestry was made flush with the east wall (as was generally considered 'correct'), the chancel was narrower than the nave and the whole was covered by fairly steeply pitched roofs. The detail was, of course, Gothic of the 'best' period - early Decorated (of about 1300). The lively outline is enhanced by gable crosses and ornamented ridge tiles. Being a small church there is no provision for clerestory windows.

Inside, the nave and aisle are separated by an arcade with low octagonal piers and double-chamfered arches. Now the walls are brightly whitened but originally they would have been darker. There is no evidence of wall decoration though some simple patterns may have existed. The roofs are arch-braced, that in the chancel being embellished by shallow cusps below scissor bracing.

Furnishings, fittings and decoration

Chancel. The treatment of the chancel roof typifies the way this part received the most lavish attention as the focus of the Victorian church. This is shown too in the fact that the east window is shafted internally (other windows are not) and the way the tiles in the sanctuary are patterned whereas the others are not. On the risers to the sanctuary steps are welcoming words set in tiles:
 first - COME UNTO ME ALL YE THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN
 AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST
 then - HE THAT EATETH MY FLESH AND DRINKETH MY BLOOD DWELLETH IN ME AND I IN HIM.

In the chancel the corbels beneath the roof principals are carved with various sacred emblems - a lily and a pelican at the west end, the IHS monogram and Alpha and Omega in the middle, and wheat and grapes at the east end.

The altar is of stone and resembles a tomb-chest with three square panels decorated by quatrefoils. The choice of stone is unusual especially in 1852. Stone altars had been declared illegal in 1845, following a court case, since they were not the 'communion tables' specified in the Prayer Book. They were widely considered to have connotations of Popery - a highly emotive subject about 1850 when 'Papal Aggression' was much feared.

The reredos forms a rich termination to St. Mary's. The central panel has a relief of the Woman touching the hem of Christ's robe (Matthew 9: 20-25). It is later than the building, having been carved by John Bacon in memory of his son, the Rev. John Bacon (d.1871), who was the first incumbent from 1837 to 1863. The side panels are narrower and have texts on the Passion and Deliverance set on scrolls. Beside and below the reredos the east wall is richly tiled.

The stalls, no doubt of 1852, are fitted with tall brass candleholders. The altar rails are later. The brass corona lucis dates from 1890 (there are two more coronae in the nave).

Nave. The pulpit is of stone but is now painted white. Its sides have traceried panels with a fleur-de-lis in the centre of the middle panel. The font too is painted white and is a plain octagonal design. The seats are plain also and have square-headed ends, typical of the simpler designs of the late Middle Ages. The organ is placed at the west end and is by Bevington & Sons of London. It is probably of c.1860 but its Churchwarden

Gothick design is curiously out of date. In the centre is the text 'Sing Ye Praises with Understanding'.

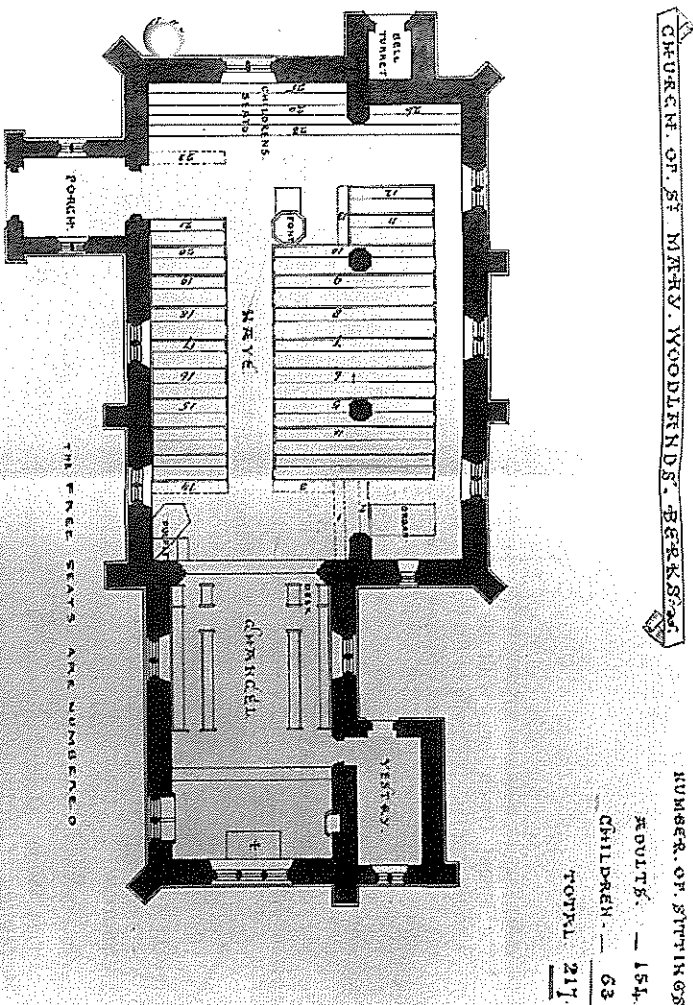
Stained glass. There is a good selection of glass, all of it later than the church itself and added window by window.

East window. A good window showing the Crucifixion in the centre with four Works of Mercy in the side lights; angels in the tracery. In memory of Richard Dickson (d.1867 - see Monuments below). Probably by Alexander Gibbs.

Chancel, south-east. Two miracles of healing and in memory of John Bacon and his wife Susannah. The window is signed by A. Gibbs. In the tracery is a shield and the motto 'proBA CONscientia'. Of the 1860s.

Chancel, south-west. This window contains a view of the church from the south-west (the present one, not its unfortunate predecessor!) and is to the memory of the Misses Seymour, 'the munificent founders of this church and benefice in the year 1837'. 1869.

CHURCH OF ST. MARY, WOODLINDS, BERKSHIRE



NUMBER OF SEATINGS	
ADULTS	154
CHILDREN	63
TOTAL	217

PL. 27. 11.

1866 Wood: Architect. - W.L. in Woodlinds, Berks.

Chancel, north. St. Anne and the Virgin. Inscription illegible now. c.1870.

Nave, south-east. Christ with Martha and Mary. In memory of Georgina Emma Mary Aldridge (d.1887). Perhaps by Burison & Grylls.

Nave, south-west. St. John on Patmos, with a small portrait of William of Wykeham in the border. Renaissance canopies. To the memory of John Aldridge (d.1893). Perhaps by Lavers, Barrard & Westlake.

Nave, west. Fleurs-de-lys and texts. Of c.1870.

North aisle, east. The Good Shepherd. Perhaps by Gibbs and of c.1870.

Brass tablets

North chancel. To Richard Dickson (d.1867). It states that the east window was erected to his memory by his son, William.

South chancel. William Richard John Dickson (d.1890) for 26 years vicar here. Another tablet to John Bacon (d.1871), the first vicar (1837-63).

The architect

Thomas Talbot Bury (1811-77) was born in Worcestershire. His mother was a descendant of the Talbots, Earls of Shrewsbury, hence his middle name. Articled to A. C. Pugin, father of A. W. N. Pugin, in 1824 he commenced practice in 1830. Bury was an accomplished watercolourist and was a frequent exhibitor at the Royal Academy. He helped Charles Barry with the designs for the decoration of the Houses of Parliament, Owen Jones with the finest plates in his *Alhambra*, and A. W. N. Pugin with illustrations for some of his books. He also contributed to the *Builder* and wrote two books on architecture. His most prolific period as an architect was after the mid-1840s, when the amount of work available increased greatly, building or restoring some 74 churches and erecting numerous schools, parsonages and other houses. His churches include Weymouth, Holy Trinity, 1834-36, Chipperfield (Herts.), 1837, Bovington (Herts.), 1845, Battersea, Christ Church, 1849 (with his partner from 1845 to 1849, Charles Lee), Welford (Berks.), 1852-55, and Cambridge, St. Barnabas, begun 1869.

He was an active member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (elected Vice-President in 1876), the Society of Antiquaries, and the Royal Archaeological Institute. His friend T. H. Wyatt remembered him as a warm, cheerful and sociable man. His grave is in Norwood Cemetery, South London.

Sources

Incorporated Church Building Society, Lambeth Palace, file no. 4354.

T. H. Wyatt, 'Memoir of the late T. Talbot Bury, F.S.A., Vice-President', *Trans. Royal Institute of British Architects* 27 (1876-77), 152-4.

Builder, 3 March 1877.

Notes by Donald Findlay for the Council for the Care of Churches.

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