

A GUIDE TO St JAMES CHURCH TAUNTON

By Mike Gillingham

INTRODUCTION

If you are a visitor to the church then you are welcome and It Is the hope of the Church that this guide will help you to understand what you see around you. The building is very much what it always has been, a place in which to worship god and in which to learn more about Him. We hope we may be able to welcome you to our services,

The St. James who gave his name to this church is the brother of John, St. James the Greater, the first of the apostles to be martyred at the hand of Herrod In Jerusalem In AD. 44 (Acts 12 vs. 1-2), After the execution, his body is said to have been taken to Spain, eventually to rest at Santiago de Compostela. Although this is highly unlikely, the legend arising only in the seventh century, St. James became the patron saint of Spain, and Compostela, an important centre of pilgrimage. Those who made the journey successfully, as people did from all over Europe, were given a shell as a memento. The canons of Taunton Priory would have been encouraged to make the pilgrimage, and that is why the pilgrims' symbol of a scallop shell occurs frequently in the building. A staff with a gourd is St. James' symbol, and both the East and West windows show him.



THE NORTH AISLE

The North Aisle of the church building is a good place to start a tour because it contains the oldest, and the most recent, parts of the building. The West wall has against it the concealed sink unit which is used to serve coffee at the end of the services to encourage the congregation to stay and talk to each other. The Church (the people) are obviously more Important then the church (the building). This unit was added at the same time as other alterations in 1981. The new oak may be lighter, but in another few hundred years it will have darkened to the same shade as the rest. In the meantime it gives a good idea of the colour of the rest of the wood originally, and shows how well this fitted In with the Ham Stone. The whole of this area has been much restored in the 1902-1907 works.

The wall nearest the Western end is thought to contain fragments of the earlier, 1308, building. Some of the stained glass windows near the West end have fragments of fifteenth century glass in them. The royal coat of arms above the door into the churchyard is there as a result of an Act of Parliament at the time of the restoration

The window nearest the font is the most recent in the church having been donated by John end Jessie Spiller In grateful thanks for the return of eleven nephews from the Second World War. The two were sitting in the church with Rose Richards, a member until her death, and discussed their plan with her. She, having even then served a long time in Brownies, Guides

and the Sunday School, suggested the theme of the children. It is most appropriate that the font shown on It is now in the same corner. The children's figures include the uniformed organizations, while others recall the old chorus; "Jesus died for all the children". The window at the East end of the North Aisle has not been functional since 1884 when the vestries were added. It is a fine, tall window, unusual in having no cross pieces considering its height. When the alterations were made, in 1884, a hagioscope or squint was found. This enables you to see where the communion table was before the chancel was extended, and hence where the East wall used to be.

THE CHURCHYARD

The churchyard is now closed, and, being ancient contains a number of unmarked graves. One mound, near the door from the North Aisle, is said to contain the remains of the unfortunates who were condemned by Colonel Kirke under marshal law after the Monmouth rebellion, but it is perhaps more likely that this is a mass grave for plaque victims. Three wooden crosses (Now gone) marked the graves of three German airmen shot down during the last war.



If you stand and look back towards the North wall, you will see two flying buttresses which were added during the restoration of 1902-1907. Before this time there were steps leading from the doorway to a gallery. The position of the doorway into one of the galleries can still be made out. The galleries were removed in 1884, at the same time as the East end of the church was extended.

THE HALL

During 1983-1984 the new link building was built. This provides a covered way to the school building which once again belongs to St. James' Church, having finished its service as a school, and having been purchased from the Diocesan board of Education. The classrooms were demolished to make way for the new health center, but the oldest parts of the building remain. The main hall has been renovated, together with the kitchen, and now forms a useful, and much used, space. The building also provides an office for the vicar, which is very useful now the vicarage is so far away, and toilets.

THE FONT

The font is one of the major features of the church, and is now given its rightful place. It has stood in many parts of the building, under the tower, to the East of the tower, near the communion table, near the organ, in the South West corner and even where it was found by Dr. Cottle, half buried in the West wall. This was probably



when he widened the South Aisle between 1839 and 1841. The niche where it was originally hidden can still be seen. The font was moved to its present place in 1981 to make it more easily visible during the baptism services, so that the congregation can join in more easily, and welcome the new members.

After being found, the font was restored by an Italian artist although Thomas Hugo described it as, "rather a destruction than a restoration". This restoration only involved 3 of the 8 faces (Including the crucifixion scene), the rest being in a fair state of preservation. It dates from the fifteenth century and bears carved panels on its eight sides. Eight is a symbolic number, being one more than the perfect seven; and being the day of the new creation by Christ, after the seven of the original. Two of the figures, those of St. Peter and St. Paul (or St. James) correspond with those on the original tower. The figures are, in clockwise order, starting with the West-facing panel:

<u>Saint</u>	<u>Emblem</u>
1. Christ on the cross with the two Mary's	
2. St. Augustine with two Canons of the order of the Priory (Augustinians)	Flaming heart
3. St. James the Great St. Peter St. Bartholomew	Staff and scrip Key Knife
4. St. John St. Matthew St. Thomas	Chalice (from which rises a Spirit) Axe Spear
5. St. Matthew St. Phillip St. James the less (Our Lord's brother)	Bag of money Cross Fuller's club
6. St. Jude St. Andrew St. Simon Zelotes	Halberd 2 fishes Saw
7. St. Paul St. Barnabas	Sword Scroll (perhaps the deeds of the land he donated Acts 4 vs. 36-39)
8. St. John the Baptist St. Michael St. Mary Magdalene	Rough garb Shield and wings

THE ORGAN

The organ was built in 1861 by Messrs. William Hill and Son. It was rebuilt and enlarged by Messrs. Minns of Taunton in 1903 and further renovated by Messrs. Osmond Brothers of Taunton in 1965. It has three manuals and thirty-one speaking stops.

THE EAST END

The Victorian chancel contains fine stained glass windows incorporating much of the blue glass which is often a mark of that age. The East window shows the crucifixion with the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene (marked by her long hair), and the other two Mary's to the left of the cross. To the right are St. John (with a staff), St. Joseph of Arimathea (with a Jar of spices), St. Peter and the Centurion. Also shown are the evangelists, Mark on the left and Luke on the right. Beneath are: St. James, St. Matthew (with a book), St. John (with a chalice) and St. James the less (the Lord's brother, with a fuller's club). Then there are St. Simon Zelotes (with a saw), St. Philip (with a cross), St. Jude (with a halberd), St. Peter (with a key), St. Paul (with a sword), St. Andrew (with a cross), St. Bartholomew (with a large knife) and St. Thomas (with a draughtsman's rule),

To the South of the Sanctuary are St. John the evangelist, St. Dionysius (with episcopal robes) and St. German (with the white robes of a monk).

On the North side of the chancel is a copy of a picture by Rubens. The original is in Antwerp museum. It is called "le Coup de Lance" and the copy was made in the eighteenth century by the Flemish artist R. Du Vany. There is a piscina on the South side of the East Wall. This was restored recently by Mr. and Mrs. Spiller and was rededicated on January 25th. 1948. The original bowl had been half hacked away. The reredos dates from 1963 when the old one, which blocked the lower lights of the window was replaced. The roof was repainted in 1963.

THE CHANCEL

The original chancel of the building was very short. During the 1839-1841 building works the chancel was considerably lengthened.

It is difficult to say now why this was done. In old churches the long chancel completed the cross shape of the building and so reminded worshippers of our Lord's death even in the ground plan. Our church is not such a shape, and indeed the side chapel added at the same time kept the rectangular shape. It may have been an attempt to make the shape more "traditional". It is possible that it resulted from a wish to remove the table from the, main body of the church to heighten the mystery. It is impossible to decide now. It may seem surprising, but the "dwarf wall" between the chancel and the nave, which was removed during the alterations of 1981, was only built in 1912.



"During recent years there has been considerable emphasis on the Communion being the main service of the Church. This was coupled with the emphasis that this is a gathering of the Body of Christ to remember His death, "until He comes". There was therefore, a strong wish

that at this service the communion should be visibly expressed. The value of the Westward position was also seen, since it reminds us of the Church gathering round the table. These factors led to the decision to bring the table back to the Chancel step for use during services although when not in use it is stored at the East end.

These changes which took place in 1981, involved removing the choir stalls and replacing them with chairs. During this operation it was discovered that the floor under the stalls was rotting away, having been laid directly onto the earth. So much for Victorian craftsmanship! The changes have thus robbed the congregation of the sight of the choir and clergy disappearing from view in a cloud of wood chippings. The new, level approach to the communion rails has made it easier for people who have difficulty in walking, and those in wheelchairs, to approach the rails rather than having to remain in the body of the church. There are now fewer occasions when communion has to be taken to people in the pews. An incidental benefit was to provide a large versatile area at the front for drama within services, and visiting choirs etc.. This area has been much used. The new table was designed by John Foster-Turner and made by John Parslow, at the time a members of the Church.

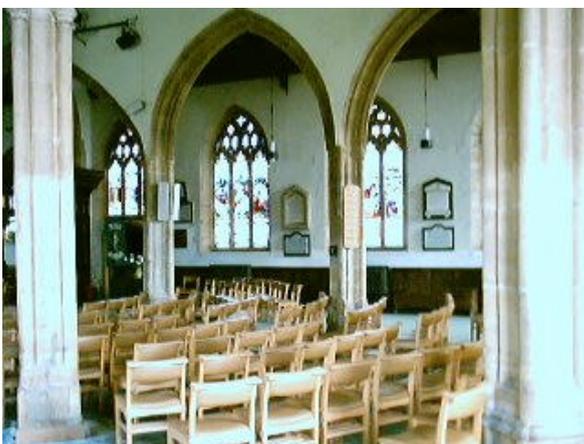
THE NAVE

The roof of the nave is a barrel roof without a clerestory, a feature more common in Devon than Somerset. The only church like it nearby is Curry Rivel. It is interesting that the stone arcades on the North side are taller than those on the South. The East arcades are wider and this suggests that there may have been a central tower. The new lighting was added in 1975 to replace older lighting which was failing. It provides a better light, while replacing a lot of dangling wires.

THE SIDE CHAPEL

The screen which separates the chapel and the chancel is of Burmese Coco wood and was originally exhibited at the Wembley exhibition of 1925. It is based on the old rood screen which is in the County Museum, and was removed in 1812. The present screen was designed by the local artist W.D. Caroe. The chapel is on the site of an old chantry which was removed in 1836-1837. The SouthEast door may have lead to this chantry.

The glass of this chapel needed attention in 1952 and opportunity was taken to add the two coats of arms on the South wall. The floor of the Sanctuary, the communion rails and the final form of the War Memorial date from 1951. The credence table was a gift in 1952. Before this time the chapel was filled with benches facing Northwards.



THE SOUTH AISLE

Again and again in the history of St. James' Church building we come across Dr. Cottle, and the South Aisle is no exception. In 1836 he began the work of doubling its width to its present size. At the same time he walled up clerestory windows on the South side of the Central Aisle and built galleries on both the North and South Aisles. The remains of the galleries can still be seen on the window surrounds of the westernmost window of the South Aisle. The galleries were removed in 1884 by Dr. Farrant.

When these alterations occurred, the pulpit was lowered and moved to the North side. In the foundation stone at the time there was a parchment deposited by Rev. W. Kingslake of West Monkton, written in Latin in fifteenth century characters, it is not known whether it is still there. It was described as being at a "dizzy height" so perhaps it is as well for our necks that it was moved! The pulpit was made in 1633 and is unusual in being decorated with a frieze of mermaids and suns, one on each of the seven sides. When the front of the church was altered in 1981 the pulpit was moved to its present site. There are several new pulpit falls designed and made by members of our congregation, as were several of the banners.

The stained glass windows on the South side mostly date from the time when the galleries were removed, being dated 1885 to 1891. They mostly have Biblical themes ranging from the Good Samaritan to the raising of the little girl. At the top of the westernmost window there are some fragments of very old glass.

Two, at least, of the memorials on the South wall are worthy of notice. One commemorates Cecil James Troake of the 10th. Devon Regiment, who was killed in Batoum, Russia, in 1919, presumably while fighting in support of the "White Russians" with the group that Churchill sent for that purpose. His name has been added to the war memorial in the Side Chapel.

The second memorial commemorates Lawrence Metford who died on his way to the "Caffre Wars" in South Africa. He was one of a very gallant group of soldiers on the Birkenhead. When the boat started to sink on 26th. February 1862, it was discovered that there was not enough room in the lifeboats. The officers made the decision that all the spaces would be given to the wives, children and other passengers. They drew the men up in rank on the deck and had the band play. As the boats left they could see the soldiers on the deck, and hear the band playing "Eternal Father, Strong to Save". All the soldiers were drowned. His memorial has on it the words of John 11 v 25, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live". It might also have added, "Greater love hath no man than this: that he gives up his life for a friend".

At the Westend of the church there can be seen the remains of a door under the stained glass window. Also positioned there, is an ancient chest dating from 1697. The carving on it is rather crude, but the names of Thomas Ford and Thomas Bray, the churchwardens, can be seen. Originally it was used for collections, and had three keys, one for each warden and one for the incumbent. All three had to be present for the chest to be opened.

THE TOWER

If you have ever stood by the entrance doors when the bells are being rung for the services, you will have noticed a creaking noise. This is caused by the tower rocking as the bells are swung. The British method of change ringing is unknown outside this country, and places a great strain on the tower. The bells are set in wheels which turn through 360° on each ring. The bells are extremely heavy and are laid in pairs at right angles to each other to relieve the effect of the swing. They are prevented from turning completely over by wooden stops.

If the tower did not give, it would crack and fall down, and this was no doubt part of the problem with the



previous tower. The damage was noted and the present tower was built to replace it. The original tower also showed signs of bad workmanship in that the stone was laid at the wrong angle so that the bedding plane was vertical and the weather could peel layers off. The original tower was similar to the present one, except that limestone was used throughout, and not the present sandstone; and also the present spiral staircase has been extended to reach beyond the balustrades. It is possible that there was in the beginning a central tower, and this may be one of the reasons for the extra width of the East arches in the nave.

The foundation stone of the new tower was laid on 26th. July 1871, which was near St. James' Day, by the wife of William Gore-Langton, the MP. The same lady opened the tower on 9th. June 1875. The stone for the new tower is Williton red sandstone from the estate of Sir Alexander Acland Hood who made a present of it to the Church. Mr. J.H. Spencer, the architect who examined the old tower after it was demolished said, "Speaking generally, throughout the principle part of the structure, the mortar was found to be of an inferior character and the 'bond' or putting the stone together, was unsatisfactory," Let us hope that the present tower is better put together. The cost of the rebuilding was £3,072.

The bells; which may have caused the problems, were increased to a peal of eight. They are:

5 th .	1610 Inscribed	"Come when I call" recast in 1891	
6 th .	1626 Inscribed	"Soll Deo Detur Gloria"	
Tenor	1626 Inscribed	"Robert Gad. Osmond Wlther Churchwardens"	
		(This weighs an imperial ton)	
4 th .	1721 Inscribed	"Mr. J. Reed, Mr. John Strickland, Churchwardens"	
7 th .	1749 Inscribed	"William Hartnell Gent. John Perrian Esquire	Churchwardens"
3 rd .	1874 Inscribed	"R.H. Pearse, H.T. Penny Dennis Churchwardens"	
2 nd .	1897 Inscribed	"In commemoration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee	
		1897 Rev. G. Kingdon, Vicar. C. Loveday, C.E. Clemow, Churchwardens. Mears and Stainbank, founders"	
Treble	1897 inscribed	as the second	

They are hung in opposite directions so that the four in the middle swing North South and the two on each side swing East West. The last two bells were hung in time to be used for a peal on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, hence the inscription.

In the ringing chamber are various commemorations of previous triumphs of the bellringers. The first peal of Treble Bob rung West of Bristol was rung here on 2nd: July 1898.

We have also had peals of Bristol Surprise Major (1935), Grandsire Triples C1953) and many other methods with equally strange names. There is also a list of rules in the tower beginning with, "Every ringer shall regard his or her ringing as an act of praise to Almighty God". Another rule is that each session shall start with prayer. The

bells have needed rehangng at least twice, in 1891 and 1954. There is also a set of handbells in the tower.

On the top of the tower, 120 feet from the ground, there is a triple pointed lightning conductor. There is also a weather vane of glided copper, regilded in 1991. The cock's wings are engraved,

A native I am and my name is Tom,
A jolly, gay bird, but I have no song,
I watch the wind, I keep events,
Which always have been by Intents."

He certainly has the best view possible of the cricket pitch, and is it by accident that all the windows on the tower stairs, face that way? It is interesting that in the accounts for 1897 J.M. Chapman was paid £2 for keeping the churchyard in order and watching in the cricket season.

Despite its rebuilding some of the features of the tower seem to be original. The fan vaulting dates from 1440-1450, except for the central piece and the supporting angels at the sides, and is always worth a look up as you enter. The entrance door is also original, although much repaired. On either side of the door is a niche, both of which no doubt originally contained figures. The figures in the niches of the South side of the tower are those of St. James and St. Mary Magdalene. The old figures were donated to the museum. The screen with the cross in Perspex was a tribute to a former warden, and was designed by J. Foster-Turner, one of our Readers at the time. It was dedicated in 1970. The tower door was opened up to be used as our main entrance in 1980-1981. The canopies over the churchwardens' chairs date from 1946.

VICARS OF ST. JAMES'

1539 Thomas Dale
1626 Unknown
1631 Unknown
1640 John Godwyn
1646 Robert Turlyn
1654 John Glanville (Refused to submit to the Act of Uniformity in 1662)
1664 Thomas Babb
1674 Still Strode
1692 Unknown
1699 James Hays
1707 Patrick Macdonald
1714 George Attwood
1752 James Hurley
1784 James Hurley Junior
1788 Lawrence Head Luxton
1821 John Townsend
1824 H.P. Gale
1836 James Cottle
1840 D. Tucker
1841 Richard Shutte
1845 W.T. Redfern

1886 G. Kingdon
1900 F.W. Young
1911 H.T. Dixon
1915 P.J.J. Fear
1920 E. Ogden
1936 Walter Green
1946 Edwin Hirst
1962 Arthur Drowley
1974 David Saville
1981 Malcom Bole
1991 Peter Bannister
2006 Tim Jones

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