

Walk around guide to St. Giles' Church

Welcome to St. Giles. This church is one of the gems of South Hertfordshire. It was built between 1136 and about 1525, and has been much altered over the centuries. Cromwell's troops



did a great deal of damage during the civil war (mid 17th century).

The church was then fitted with box pews, a flat plaster ceiling and galleries.

In 1877 the church was restored by G.E Street (architect of the Law Courts in the Strand, London).

In 1979, another major restoration was

begun, and the church today reflects the love of present as well as past generations.



Nave, looking east.

At the East (altar) end of the nave is a wooden screen with figures over it: our Lord on the cross, flanked by his Mother and St. John. To the left, on a bracket, is a large statue of the Virgin Mary, placed here in 1917 in thanksgiving for the deliverance from Zeppelin that passed over the church before landing at Cuffley. To the right are the remains of a medieval staircase to the loft that would have stood over the earlier screen. You can see the outline of a door in the wall behind the pulpit. In the stair arch is a small statue of our Lord showing his Sacred Heart. Around the walls are 14 pictures showing Jesus' journey to Calvary, the 'Stations of the Cross'.



Move forward to the screen

Before you lies the chancel. Under the choir stalls you can see a number of impressive burial slabs. The oldest is that in the middle, the grave of Henry Frowyke the Elder (13th century). The Frowykes were Mercers in the City of London, and the Lords of the manor of South Mymms for 300 years. On the chancel walls are several fine memorial tablets (late 17th to early 19th century). Note the fine processional cross on the right-hand side, said to be 18th century, Italian.



Move forward to the altar rail

Before you lies the sanctuary, the 'most holy place' where the high altar is situated. The gold frontal (when on the altar) is our newest frontal; it was commissioned at the end of the 1990's restoration work, and made by Watts & Co, London. In the centre you can see Christ in majesty. To the left and right are scenes from the life of St. Giles. (On the left, Giles is shot by an arrow while trying to protect a hind; on the right, he says mass for the king who shot him, whose sins were too horrible to confess.)

The East window contains stained glass made in Munich in the late 19th century. The 6 large candlesticks are early 19th century, Belgian. On your left is an Easter Sepulchre (empty tomb), once thought to be the resting place of Henry Frowyke, the last male member of the family (early 16th century). Sepulchres like this are found in churches in South Central England. On the tomb are 3 alms dishes (Flemish) of about the same period.

Turn left into the Lady Chapel

A chapel was built here between 1439 and 1447 as a private chantry for the Frowyke family. In 1526 it was rebuilt, together with the North Aisle (see below). The large stone tomb is that of Thomas Frowyke, who died in AD 1523. Turn right towards the altar. This is an interesting example of pre-Raphaelite decoration (1890's), though not of the first quality. The glass above the altar, however, is very fine, by Sir Ninian Comper (1939). The design is unusual: Mary



holds the child Jesus on her arm, and they both hold the Eucharistic host. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic are also shown, together with various instruments of our Lord's passion; nails, the scourge, the crown of thorns and the 30 pieces of silver. The wooden screen around the Lady Chapel is very fine and dates from about 1520. It may once have been coloured; there are many slight traces of colour throughout the church, indicating that it was once very brilliantly decorated. The roundels on either side of the entrances depict alternately leopards (the Frowyke symbol) and green men. The glass to the right of the tomb was once over the Lady Chapel altar, but moved to its present position in 1939. It did not quite fit, and you can see that Comper had to make 3 little angels to lengthen it for its new position. The glass to the left of the tomb, and westwards down the aisle, is the only old glass in the church (early 16th century). All the other old glass was smashed by Cromwell's troops. This presumably escaped because it represents, not religious subjects, but relatives of the departed. It was probably all originally in the Lady Chapel. In the south-west corner of the Chapel is the grave slab of Thomas Frowyke III who died in 1449, and who was responsible for building the church tower and (with others of the family) the Lady Chapel. It was originally in the tower and repositioned in 2011. Its brasses are of considerable importance, and are covered to preserve them.

Move west into the north aisle

Between 2 of the windows you will see a remarkable memorial that looks as if it might have got too near the fire and melted! On the sill of the middle window is what looks like a cannon ball, but is said to be a shot for 'putting'. Turn and look across the nave (south). There you will see an early 17th century memorial (with a skull). This once had an inscription, now faded, which read:

Younge and olde, look on, why turn away thyne eyne?

This is no stranger's face: the phesnamey is thyne.

The top right hand corner of this memorial is chopped away to make room for the large 18th century tablet above it. Such vandalism would not be allowed today!

Remain in the aisle and move west

The organ was made by Bevington of Soho in 1889 and has been altered several times. Bishop and Son, London rebuilt it in 1987. Also, in this corner is the Font, traditionally placed near the church door to show that baptism is the door into church membership. The stone font itself is very old, probably 12th century but the gilded cover is by Comper, 1939. Note the Dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, on the ceiling of the cover. Next to the font stands the Easter candle, lit to symbolize Christ's new life on the third day after his burial.

At the west end of the nave, just behind the pews, is a large wooden chest, thought to be early 13th century. It has belonged to this church since it was made and is immensely heavy! It retains its medieval locks (which work!).



The Tower Screen

This is the latest addition to St. Giles Church, enclosing an enlarged vestry with toilet and kitchen facilities. It was completed in 2011, and blessed by the Bishop of Hertford on St. Giles Day that year.

When you have finished your tour of the church, please spend a few moments in quiet reflection or prayer. What you have seen is the result of more than eight and a half centuries of love and care. Everything you see is intended to give glory to God, who has given us the grace to perceive beauty, and the skill and patience to create it.

Thank you for coming and looking round our Parish Church in South Mymms.

We wish you a safe journey home.