

St Michael's Church, Tilehurst, Reading

Some notes for the Visitor



There has been a Christian church, dedicated to St Michael, on this site since 1189, about 70 years after Reading Abbey was founded. It was served by the monks of Reading Abbey until the Dissolution. In 1542 it transferred from Salisbury Diocese to Oxford. The first church here was probably made of wood and no trace remains of it. Several other buildings may have followed.

The oldest part of the present church is the south aisle, now the **LADY CHAPEL**, built round about 1300. You can see signs of local chalk used in the arches (arcading).

Beside the lady chapel altar is one of the oldest brasses in Berkshire. It is of Gauwin More, his wife Isabella and their five children. He was one of the marshals of the court of King Henry VIII. A brass rubbing and translation of the inscription hangs on the wall (framed, with yellow background) clearly showing the brass of the period.

The elaborate tomb is of Sir Peter Vanlore, a Dutch merchant born in 1547, naturalised in 1607, and his wife Jacoba Thibault. He brought the manor of Tilehurst and lived at Calcot, probably on the site of Calcot House in the present golf course. Only two of his children were alive at his death. Their nine children who died in infancy are shown, as was the custom, with skulls in their hand at floor level.

There are many interesting memorials high up on the walls; some dating from the early Victorian period.



The east window of the lady chapel is an early design by William Morris, artist, designer and social reformer. The centenary of his death was marked in 1996 locally and nationally. This window shows Mary and baby Jesus surrounded by angels playing medieval instruments.

The windows on the north aisle are assumed to be designs by Clayton & Bell, much used in Victorian gothic revival architects, including Street. The window towards the back of the church shows the visit of the three wise men to the infant Jesus. The window near the icon shows St Peter, at the top with keys, to the left raising Tabitha from the dead and to the right an angel freeing Peter from chains in prison.

The statue of Madonna and Child was added to the lady chapel in memory of John Tilston, Rector, who died in office in 1984.



The main body of the church, the **NAVE**, today is as it was restored in 1855 and altered in



1955. By the mid 19th century the church was in disrepair. The architect, G.E. Street, was engaged for major restoration work and the north aisle was added. The cost, £3,000, was borne by the Routh family. (Martin, Joseph Routh and his nephew, John William Routh were Rectors, 1810-1855, 1855-1905).

A further major restoration project was concluded during the early part of 2012. In addition to major cleaning and repainting of the Church, a new lighting scheme and sound system were also installed.

The font (for holy water baptism), cupboard under the bell tower and pulpit (replacing one with three tiers) are all Street's design. Street's pews replacing the old box pews were, in turn, replaced in 1966.

The 17th century parish chest, originally used to store church documents, has a coin slot for alms for the poor of the parish. It is thought to have originally been a dowry chest.

The icon of St Michael defeating the devil was commissioned to mark the 800th anniversary of the church (in 1989).

The kneelers were made by members of the congregation in the late 1970's; no two are the same. The lady chapel kneelers were made by members of the Mothers' Union in 1997.

In the **SANCTUARY & CHANCEL** the choir stalls, by Street, are decorated with different leaf designs. The magnificent Reredos, restored in 2012, can be seen directly below the east window.



To the right of the Reredos is the Triptych called 'The Adoration of the Shepherds' which is a work on three wooden panels situated within the sedilia. As is customary in representations of this subject the central panel depicts the Nativity scene in modern dress. The side panels show 100 members of the congregation, who



volunteered to participate in the project, looking towards Christ, emphasizing the continuity of Christian worship from His birth until this day. Painted in many layers of oil paint using a glazing technique all aspects were overseen by the Oxford Diocesan Advisory committee. The panels were installed at Whitsuntide in 2006 and blessed by the Bishop of Reading. The triptych was painted by Jane Masson and donated to the Church in memory of her father.

During the restoration work in 2012, and whilst clearing the tiles in the chancel, the builder uncovered two tombs. These tombs have been covered by floor tiles since the 1855 restoration work and have therefore not been seen for over 150 years let alone photographed. The tombs belong to Henry Zinzan and his wife Jacoba (nee Vanlore) who died in 1676 and 1677 respectively and of Samuel Norris, a past Rector of St Michael's who died in 1710. The tomb of Samuel Norris was in poor condition so has been re-covered over.



The organ was put in its present position in 1955. An original organ built by Norman & Beard was replaced by an electronic organ in approximately 2002.

The East windows shows:

- Our Lord in Glory flanked by St Michael and St George
- The baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan; the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem; the Ascension of Our Lord; the burial of Jesus; the risen Jesus meets his disciples again.
- 12 old testament prophets and 12 apostles.
- Naaman washing in the river Jordan; the triumph of David after the slaughter of Goliath; our Lord's crucifixion; the lowering of Joseph into the pit; Joseph meets his brothers again.

The other windows show:

- The Song of Simeon/Presentation of Christ in the Temple; St Gregory, St Augustine, St Chrysostom.

The **TOWER** was built in the 1730s. The spire was added at the time of re-building in 1855 to Street's design. There were originally six bells (cast in 1723 by Henry Bagley of Wokingham) rung from the ground floor. Two trebles were then added in 1885 to make the current ring of eight bells. During 1906 an extra ringing floor and screen were erected. Some recasting of the bells was done in 1970 and 1978.

The **EXTENSION**, completed in 1993, comprises cloister, with enclosed garden, small meeting room, office, large meeting room and kitchen, sacristy, choir room, toilets and utility room. It was paid for entirely by donations and fund-raising events of parishioners.

Along the walls of the Cloister are photographs of the former Rectors and some pictures showing views, inside & outside, of the old Church prior to alterations.