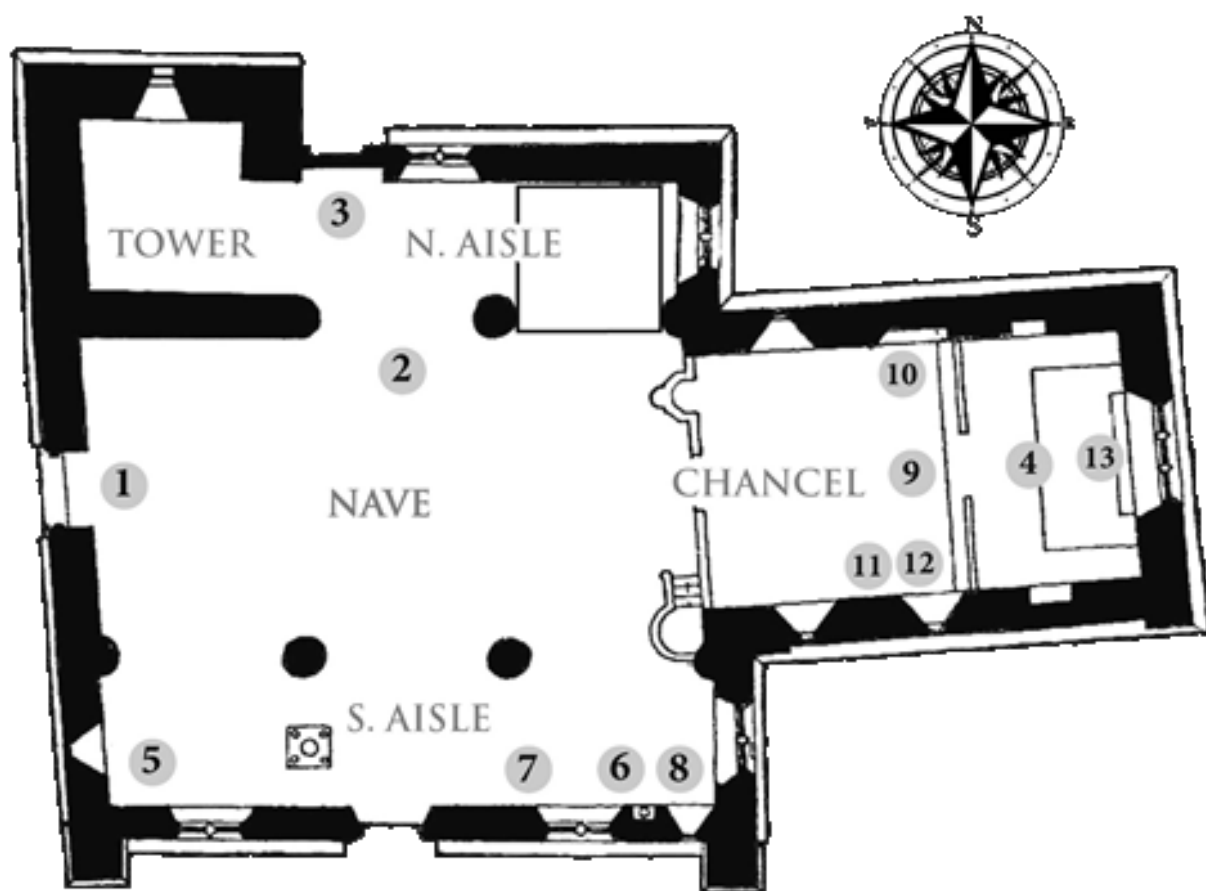


Guide to St Mary the Virgin Church, Clapham



The numbers on the plan above relate to a description of each feature of the church.

The Church

There is reference in a Title Deed to the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Clapham as far back as 1405 and the list of Rectors is continuous from 1257. The 12th century nave has 13th century aisles and a tower, whilst the restored chancel originated then. There were further alterations in the 15th century and 16th century and a well documented restoration by Sir George G Scott with some good fittings and decoration.



The Exterior

Externally, the appearance of the church has probably changed little since the replacement of the earlier Norman building about the end of the 12th century. Its plan consists of chancel, nave, with north and south aisles, and a tower at the western end of the north aisle. The tower, now covered by a modern roof of low pitch, had formerly a shingled spire which was removed about 1790.

The West End

The first thing noticed on entering the west door is that the chancel is not in a straight line with the nave, but faces considerably to the northward (see plan). This is not uncommon and it has been suggested that this was done deliberately to represent the angle of Our Lord's head on the Cross. There seems to be no authority for this theory and it may well be



that the divergence was unintentional.

The three lancet windows on the western wall of the nave (1, right) are largely the work of Sir Gilbert Scott, who carried out an extensive restoration of the church in 1873-74. In the process he filled in a large and comparatively modern window lighting a gallery, which had been inserted in the early 19th century and which he removed. While doing so he found the inner arches of a triplet in a mutilated state; this gave the authority for the present windows.

The lancets are filled with modern stained glass, a memorial to Sir Percy Burrell, Bart, who married a daughter of Admiral Sir George Brooke Pechell of Castle Goring. The west door appears to have been an insertion of the 15th century.



The Nave

The nave has arcading of different designs on opposite sides showing the evolution of Transitional Norman work into Early English.

The northern arcade (2, left) favours the former and has only two arches, the wall westward being the unperforated side of the tower. The south side is of the latter order and has three arches.

A remarkable feature in the north arcade is a fragment of the wall of the Norman church with the blocked up remains of the inner splayed arch of a round headed window. The Early English arches appear to have been inserted in the Norman wall without removing the upper part. The lower part was probably made to serve as centres for the construction of the arches instead of employing wooden centres.

During a restoration in 1910 a skull was found under the western pillar of the north arcade and was left in its resting place.

The North Aisle

The doorway in the north aisle, now walled up, is of the 15th century.

On the floor, in front of the former doorway, is a gravestone (3, right) bearing a cross

. 8in. long which is not later than 12th century, and may be earlier. This was formerly in the churchyard but was brought into the church in 1985 to protect it from weather, erosion, etc.

It is possible that the whole of the north wall was rebuilt during the 15th century. The tower communicates with the church by an arch in the eastern side opening into the aisle. Like many early towers, it has no staircase. In the belfry are three bells named respectively Jacobus, Catekina and Katerina Margarita.

It is thought that these were cast by Alan Rous, a son of Nicholas Le Rous who came to Arundel in the last decade of the 13th



century. If Alan did cast the bells, and was Nicholas' son, they were cast between 1350 and 1360. They are the earliest ring of three bells known in Great Britain.

The two-light eastern windows are a 15th century insertion but the bottom of the original lancet can still be seen in the eastern one.

5 The South Aisle



The present two light windows are an addition of the 15th century. Before Scott's repairs were begun there were no signs of the original windows but, as the works progressed, the window at the western end of the south aisle was found to be nearly complete in the inner jambs and arch but its external dressings had been removed. This window has now been restored.

At the eastern end of this aisle the lower part of a lancet can be seen below the existing 15th century window. At the top of the stone casing of the present window is a tide dial with a central hole in which the gnomon was fixed. This has only six graduations and was used as a sundial for determining the times of various Offices.

Near this window a piscina (6, below left) is let into the south wall, denoting the former presence of a side chapel altar.

It is to be hoped that this may some day be restored. Near this in the south wall is a small low window. This may be only the lower part of an original lancet but local tradition, which as well as being picturesque is very often founded on fact, has it that this is a leper window, that is to say, a window through which the priest, celebrating at the nearby altar, administered the Sacrament to lepers outside the church.

The original doorway was on the south side; no trace of this remains and the present door was inserted by Scott.

Near it is a memorial and several floor slabs to the yeoman family of Parsons

(7, right) who lived at Holt Farm for nearly two hundred years in the 17th and 18th centuries. Close to it, too, are examples of two earlier sets of pews formerly used in the church. The statue of The Blessed Virgin and Child (8, left) is by Philip Bentham, F.R.B.S., formerly a member of this Church.





The font was a gift from Richard Watt Walker of Michelgrove and the pulpit and brass screen are late Victorian additions.

The Chancel

The 13th century chancel arch was rebuilt by Scott. The side windows of the chancel are Scott's restoration of the original lancets. In removing large modern windows which had been inserted he found sufficient evidence for the completion of the ancient designs of the windows and strings. The

original eastern windows, probably three lancets, were entirely destroyed when the present windows were inserted in the 15th century.



There are various floor slabs and brasses in the church in memory of the de Michelgrove and Shelley families. The largest and most beautiful of these is let into the floor of the chancel in front of the altar rails (9, right). This consists of figures in brass of John Shelley and Elizabeth, his wife, daughter of John de Michelgrove, who by her marriage carried the estate into the Shelley family. He is in armour with a tabard of the Shelley arms. The lady's vest is covered with a robe with the arms of Shelley on the dexter side and of de Michelgrove or Falconer on the sinister. Above the figures is a

representation of the Trinity, with God the Father arrayed in a cope. Such symbols particularly infuriated the so-called reformers, and it is remarkable that this has survived. It is believed to have been buried and later dug up when the chancel was under repair. This beautiful brass is



dated 1526.

On the north side of the chancel wall is the recessed tomb (10, right) of Sir William Shelley, second son of the above John, and of his wife Alice, the daughter of Henry Belknap. Sir William was judge of the Court of Common Pleas and is shown habited as a judge with hood and coif. This is believed to be one of the earliest representations of this legal costume. Ranged behind the parents are their seven sons and seven daughters, one of the latter dressed like a nun, as a widow would be in that period.

Opposite, on the south side, are the figures in brass, dated 1550, of John Shelley, the judge's eldest son, and his wife, Mary Fitzwilliam, and their twelve children (11, left).

Another brass is the kneeling effigies of a man in armour and his wife, son and daughter (12). This was John Shelley, next in the line, and the son became the first baronet of the family. Behind the altar and on either side,



the wall is faced with beautiful tiles by William Morris (13, below). The central part features four archangels; the surrounding tiles having a vine and grapes pattern. This is reputedly one of three examples of such work by Morris still in its original position.