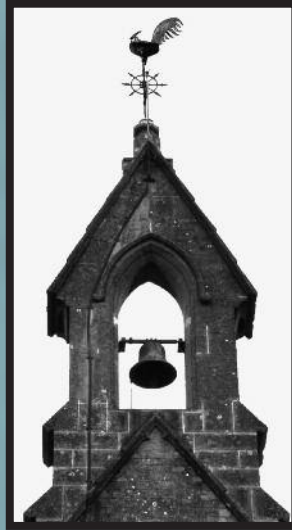




THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST



# CHURCH OF ST SAVIOUR

New Church Street,  
Tetbury,  
Gloucestershire



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*New Church Street, Tetbury, Gloucestershire*

# CHURCH OF ST SAVIOUR

*by Valerie Roseblade (local resident and long-serving keyholder for St Saviour)*

## INTRODUCTION

Tetbury is a small Cotswold market town situated between Cirencester and Malmesbury, close to the Roman Fosse Way. It can claim 1300 years recorded history since 681, when King Ethelred of Mercia gave a parcel of land 'near Tetta's monastery' to Abbot Adhelm of Malmesbury. Tetta was abbess of Wimborne and founded the abbey at Tetbury. The place name means 'Tetta's fortified site or manor'.

Towards the end of the 12th century the former village, then owned by William de Broase, had become established as a market town. With the growing importance of Cotswold wool in the 17th century, Tetbury became an important trading centre. The impressive Market House still dominates the centre of the town, and many of the handsome houses built by wealthy wool merchants remain. Little affected by the 19th-century Industrial Revolution, Tetbury today has a population of about 5000.

*Front cover: Interior from the chancel,  
looking west  
(© Crown copyright. NMR.)*

*Left: Interior looking east  
(Christopher Dalton)*

*Below: Exterior from the north (Kay Adkins)*

*Right: Exterior looking south-east (Kay Adkins)*

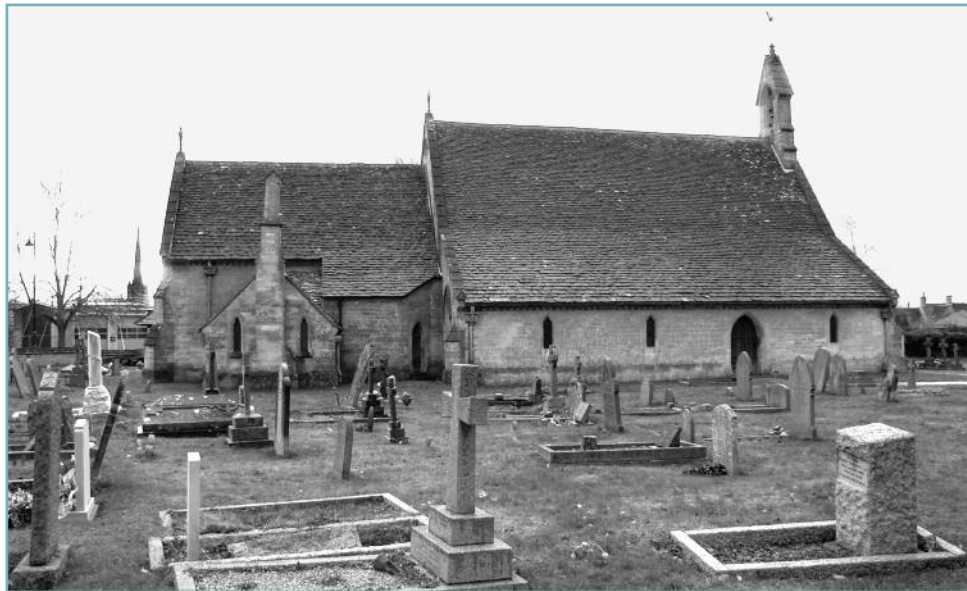
## HISTORY

The church of St Saviour, Tetbury, must have been one of the most splendid examples ever of 'a little church for the poor'. Every detail, from the alms box by the south door to the oak pegs in the vestry, is thoughtfully designed and beautifully crafted. It is now, perhaps, the only virtually unaltered Tractarian church remaining in England.

In the 18th and 19th centuries a parish church gathered valuable income from the renting of pews to the wealthier members of the congregation. In some cases this meant that there were insufficient free seats for the poor.

In Tetbury, in 1842, 1,800 of the 3,000 parishioners were defined as 'poor' – living in accommodation rated at less than £4 per annum – and there were only 240 free places in the fine Gothic Revival parish church of St Mary.

It was eventually decided that a chapel-of-ease should be built 'by Cuckold's Knapp-side' – then at the edge of the town. The site was swiftly renamed 'New Church Street', and the church of St Saviour was consecrated with great ceremony by the Bishop of Gloucester, James Henry Monk, in August 1848.



The person most concerned with the building of the new church was the assistant curate of Tetbury, Charles Fuge Lowder (1820–80). He later became famous for his work in the East End of London as vicar of St Peter's, London Docks, during the 1866 cholera epidemic. He is the only priest who served in Tetbury to be commemorated in the Calendar of the Church.

Lowder was a member of the Oxford or Tractarian Movement, founded in 1833 to draw attention to the essentially Catholic nature of the Church of England and its roots in the Middle Ages in doctrine, worship and ceremonial. This affinity was later shown architecturally by an almost fanatical devotion to the Gothic style which was encouraged by members of the Ecclesiological Society. The style chosen for St Saviour's was 14th-century Decorated, and the church is an example of the expression of High Church principles in architectural form.

The architect was Samuel Whitfield Daukes (1811–80) of Cheltenham. He was a member of the Ecclesiological Society and had been responsible for a great variety of buildings in the

area, including the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester and the Friends' Meeting House in Gloucester. He later moved to London and went on to design many public buildings and churches.

Daukes used the expertise of the John Hardman Company of Birmingham, manufacturers of church furnishings, and Hardman's 'friend and collaborator', the celebrated Augustus Pugin. Pugin and Hardman had recently been responsible for much of the design work on Charles Barry's Houses of Parliament.

The builder was Francis Brown of Tetbury, who later built the pair of houses next to St Saviour's for the head teachers at the nearby National School (now private dwellings).

Within a generation, pew rents were abolished and, with the growth of various nonconformist groups in the town, there was plenty of free space in the parish church. St Saviour's was no longer needed and, without the pew-rent income, the parish could no longer afford to maintain two church buildings.

St Saviour's became known as 'Frampton's Folly', an uncharitable reference to John Frampton, the vicar at the time who had, in fact, personally made up a £2000 shortfall in the total cost of the building of £3400. The church was kept in use as a daughter church to St Mary's for occasional services, but gradually decayed to such an extent that, in 1891, the Bishop of Gloucester issued a notice under Section 12 of the Ecclesiastical Dilapidations Act, 1871, proposing to sequester the ecclesiastical goods of the vicar to the value of £1,096. The money was somehow found, and repairs were carried out, but the church was little used.

Children from the former National School held special services at St Saviour's until they moved into a new building in the early 1970s, and it was convenient for funeral services as the graveyard expanded, but in 1973 the church was formally declared redundant. Attempts to find another use for it failed and, after lightning badly damaged the roof and bell-cote, St Saviour's was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund (now The Churches Conservation Trust).

The Trust carried out a substantial programme of repairs under the supervision of Mr D Stratton Davis and the building is now structurally sound and well maintained under the guidance of Mr Andrew Townsend, architect, of Faringdon.



## EXTERIOR

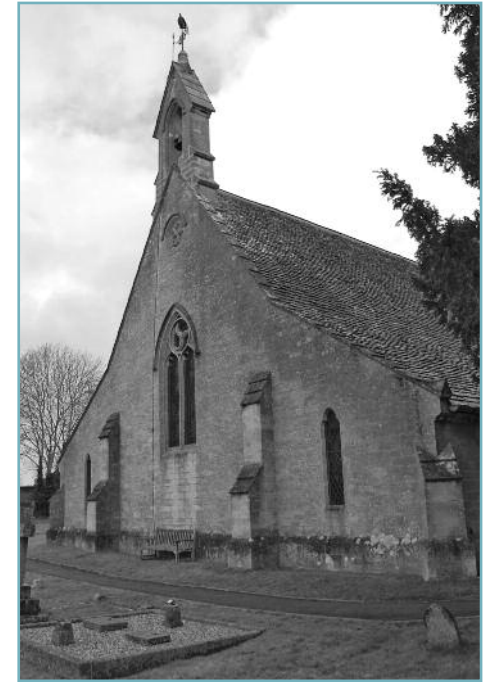
With its Cotswold stone-slated lychgate, yew tree by the south door, and wild flowers among haphazard gravestones, St Saviour's has the air of a solid country church. It stands at an angle to the line of New Church Street, ignoring passing traffic and the 1960s Fire Station opposite, and makes a pleasant group with the pair of former schoolteachers' houses to the south-west.

The recently-refurbished **war memorial** commemorates Tetbury men killed in both World Wars, many of them from Gloucestershire regiments.

The church consists of a nave, with north and south aisles, south porch and north door, and a chancel which is lower and narrower than the nave, with north organ chamber and vestry.

The stone-slated **roof** is particularly striking as it is continuous from the ridge to the wall-head of the aisle although the slope changes its angle at the level of the nave arcade. The **ballflower decoration** along the eaves of the outside walls is repeated inside the church, giving the appearance of tying the whole composition together.

The ballflower – a globular three-petalled flower enclosing a small ball – was a short-lived, labour-intensive feature of medieval English architecture, particularly in the West Midlands and Welsh Marches. Each of the 14th-century windows of Gloucester Cathedral carries 1,400 ballflowers carved into the stone blocks of the frames and tracery.



The **south porch** is an elaborate construction in dark oak with stone seats inside and open arcading in the side walls.

The **bell-cote**, which houses a small bell cast by T Hale & Co. of Bristol, is surmounted by a spiky cross and a very elegant weathercock. This was struck by lightning in July 1975, when the bell-cote and roof were badly damaged, and the cock crashed into the churchyard. A tradesman's card was found inside it:

*Will'm Sealy Made this Cock*

*The Wind that blew will make it work*

*The place where it is to stand*

*The Lord preserve it with His Hand.*

*June 26th 1848*

According to this card, William Sealy was a working smith in business in the Market Place, Tetbury, as an ironmonger, brazier and nail manufacturer.

*Below: The east window and reredos (Christopher Dalton)*

*Right: Interior looking east showing the screen and gasolier*

# INTERIOR

## NAVE AND AISLES

The use of fine local Painswick stone (unfortunately no longer quarried), especially the large paving slabs of the floors and the thin-jointed masonry of the walls, gives a strong impression of unity.

The four-bay **arcades**, separating the nave from the north and south aisles, have alternate round and octagonal piers supporting pointed arches with carved angel stops. The timbers of the striking high-pitched **roof** are carried on carved corbels. One of these corbels, the second from the west wall on the north side, has a carved face looking down into the nave, which may well be a portrait of Lowder, or of Vicar Frampton.

As noted, the **cornice** of ballflower decoration in the nave, aisles and chancel is similar to the decoration on the exterior walls.

The fine **stained glass** was designed and made by Michael O'Connor (1801–67), who was responsible for the glass in several churches in the Gloucester area before moving to London, where he worked with Daukes and Pugin.

The **nave west window** has two lights with panels set in an abstract design, the left showing the Virgin and Child and the right Christ the Saviour. O'Connor's monogram, with the date 1847, appears just below the figures.

O'Connor's **window behind the font**, appropriately showing the baptism of Christ, suffered 20th-century vandalism and has been

replaced with a 'recycled' panel of much older glass on the same theme.

'Town gas' arrived in Tetbury in 1836 and, although the parish church of St Mary still relied on candles, the new church was by lit by gas. Hardman's **corona lucis gasolier**, over the nave, has now lost its gilding and glass globes but must have been a splendid sight. The brackets and some of the globes of the wall lights, and the seemingly hazardous row of naked fishtail



jets along the top of the screen, remain, but gas was eventually displaced by electricity in the 1950s. The new lamp holders were designed and wrought by local craftsmen.

The **brass grilles** in the floor were part of a long-gone underfloor heating system. Later worshippers at St Saviour's remember that the church was always very cold.

By the main, south, entrance to the church, an **alms box** is built into the door jamb. An angel bears a banner with the inscription 'He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord'. Now, donations are fed through a slot into a small safe in the adjacent wall.

The carved stone **font**, which was paid for by Charles Lowder, is decorated with arched panels containing the symbols of the Evangelists, the Agnus Dei, the dove and the cross. The elaborate tapered cover has crockets and a lively finial. The counterweight for the cover is in the form of a dove hanging on a chain in front of the west window – a pleasing, and unusual, arrangement.

The podium on which the font stands is covered by yellow and red patterned **tiles** by Minton, characteristic of the period. Some of the tiles have a stylised design of doves, not easily recognisable.

The finials at the pew-ends are richly carved 'poppyheads' – from the Latin *puppis*, a ship's figurehead.

The stone **pulpit** is entered through a pointed arch in the chancel, behind the priest's stall. The passage within the wall is carved, with a ribbed vault and several low steps, ending in a pointed arch with a row of ballflowers above.

## CHANCEL

The **chancel arch** has carved heads as stops. A king and a queen face westwards and a bishop and an abbess eastwards.

The tracery of the upper part of the **screen** is based on circles, trefoils and daggers. The lower part is panelled, with low central gates.

The **roof**, by Pugin and Hardman, is panelled with ribs and bosses. The Hardman Decoration Daybook, August 26 1848, lists 'staining and varnishing chancel ceiling: gilding ribs, bosses and cornice'; staining prie-dieu and reading desk, seats in chancel and font cover. £18.13.10d.'

The **priest's stall** and the **choir stalls** have carved poppyhead finials.

The **floor** is paved with yellow and red tiles similar to those round the font. The royal coat of arms of Queen Victoria and the initials 'VR' appear at the front of the altar steps.



The **altar** is a thick slab of white marble supported on turned wooden legs.

The **reredos**, by Pugin and Hardman, has five equal bays in carved stone with crocketed canopies and flamboyant finials. A carved stone cross forms part of the design.

The **east window** has three stained glass lights representing The Crucifixion, the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist. In the flowing tracery above are figures of angels and the emblems of the four Evangelists with, at the apex, 'Christ on His Throne of Glory'.

There is a **piscina** on the south wall and a **credence** on the north, next to a recessed plaque commemorating the consecration of the church by the Bishop of Gloucester in 1848.

The organ was originally behind the pierced stone screen on the north of the chancel, but was eventually replaced by a small harmonium. The only **memorial plaques** in the church, below the west window, commemorate W F Rogers and his sister. Rogers was a solicitor in Tetbury who paid for the refurbishment of the organ just before he died in 1899.

The **vestry**, entered through a door in the north wall of the chancel, has an exterior door, an oak cupboard and two rows of oak clothes pegs, a small fireplace and a handbasin. There are also two wooden biers, one adult and one child size, which were used to carry a coffin to the grave.

The communion plate is now kept with that of the parish church. It was ordered in 1848 by Father Lowder from John Hardman and designed by Pugin. There is a photograph of the plate on the window sill by the pulpit.

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## THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the leading charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource.

Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that it is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

There are some 340 churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from charmingly simple buildings in lovely settings to others of great richness and splendour; some are hard to find, all are worth the effort.

Many of the churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; all are free. A notice regarding opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found near the door. Otherwise, such information can be obtained direct from the Trust during office hours or from the website [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk).

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

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1 mile N of Didmarton and 6 miles SW of Tetbury off A433

St Nicholas of Myra, Ozleworth  
2 miles E of Wotton-under-Edge off A 4135

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*Left: Detail of rood screen (© Crown copyright. NMR.)  
Back cover: The bell-cote (Kay Adkins)*