



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

89 Fleet Street · London EC4Y 1DH

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.00



ST JAMES'S
CHURCH

CHARFIELD
GLOUCESTERSHIRE





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST JAMES'S CHURCH
CHARFIELD, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 320 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH (Registered Charity No. 258612).

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and be encouraged to see our other churches. Some are in towns; some in remote country districts. Some are easy and others hard to find but all are worth the effort.

Nearby are the Trust churches of:

OLDBURY-ON-THE-HILL, ST ARILD **TETBURY, ST SAVIOUR**
1 mile N of Didmarton off A433 *New Church Street, town centre*

OZLEWORTH, ST NICHOLAS OF MYRA
2 miles E of Wotton-under-Edge

ST JAMES'S CHURCH

CHARFIELD, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

by J H BETTEY

THE PARISH

Charfield (meaning the field in a chart or rough common) is situated under the western escarpment of the Cotswolds, along the valley of the Little Avon river which forms the north-east boundary of the parish. The original centre of settlement was on the higher ground around the ancient parish church, and for centuries many of the parishioners depended for their livelihood on the manufacture of woollen cloth as well as upon dairy and livestock farming. There was a mill on the Little Avon at the time of the Domesday Survey 1086, and later the river provided power for numerous fulling mills which were used to 'felt' or thicken the cloth and for long remained the only mechanical part of the cloth-making process.

During the 18th century the cloth industry expanded greatly, several large mills were built along the course of the river, and a new centre of population gradually developed in the valley close to the mills. In 1844 the Bristol to Gloucester railway line was built along the valley, with a station at Charfield, and this provided an additional reason for people to move away from the old settlement by the parish church. The result was that the church of St James was left isolated except for a few houses and cottages. Between 1801 and 1871 the population of Charfield increased from 247 to 634, and in 1881–82 a new church, designed by W W Bethell and dedicated to St John, was built in the valley to serve the larger community, and the old church became largely unused although burials continued in the churchyard. In 1974 the church of St James was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund, now The Churches Conservation Trust.

When the church was first vested in The Churches Conservation Trust, a considerable repair programme was carried out under the supervision of Mr D Stratton Davis, FRIBA, of Gloucester. The roofs were re-covered and the glazing renewed. There had been a serious outbreak of dry rot and the decayed pews and pew platforms had to be removed. The west window of the aisle was unblocked and the interior redecorated. Subsequent repairs, under the supervision of Mr Andrew Townsend, architect, of Faringdon,

have included re-rendering and limewashing of the tower and renewal of the drainage system around the church.

THE SITUATION

St James's church occupies a prominent position overlooking the valley of the Little Avon, with a fine view from the churchyard to the Cotswold edge, and across the valley to Wotton-under-Edge and the site of the former important Cistercian abbey at Kingswood. From the churchyard can also be seen the prominent Tyndale Monument, a stone tower erected on the Cotswold escarpment at North Nibley in 1866 to commemorate William Tyndale, the translator of the Bible into English. The Tyndales were an important local family. During the 1520s William Tyndale was a tutor in the household of Sir John Walsh at Old Sodbury, and on Sundays preached there or in neighbouring parish churches. During the 18th century the Tyndale family were landowners and patrons of Charfield: three members of the family were successive rectors here from 1724 to 1763, and their memorials are to be seen both in the chancel and in the churchyard.

The churchyard also contains some interesting and finely-lettered tombstones of the 18th and 19th centuries to cloth workers and farmers of the parish, among them the Witts, Heaven, Pullin and Limbrick families. Around St James's church a few interesting old houses and farms survive including the house with a fine late mediaeval doorway opposite the church, but the surrounding fields contain considerable evidence of former house sites confirming that this was the original focus of settlement within the parish.

THE CHURCH BUILDING

St James's church is an elegant and well-proportioned building, consisting of a chancel, nave and south aisle of four bays, western tower and north porch, all with stone-slatted roofs. The earliest visible remains date from the 13th century; these include the base of the tower and, inside the church, the piscina or drain in the chancel at which the priest would have washed the communion vessels. The tall narrow proportions of the nave and chancel, the rubble-stone walls of which are only 2 ft 3 in (0.69 m) thick, contrast with the walls of the aisle and tower which are more than 3 ft (1 m) thick. This suggests that the church is based on the foundations of a previous, perhaps 11th or 12th century, building.

It seems likely that there were two periods of work during the mid- or late-15th century; the first reconstructed the nave, chancel and tower, while the second added the south aisle. Later still came the north porch. The fine



North Porch

(ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND)

north door with its remarkable wrought-iron handle, tracery panelling and good furnishings dates from the 14th century. Everything else was replaced when this church, like so many others in the district, was rebuilt during the 15th century, a time of great prosperity in the woollen-cloth trade when money was available for such an ambitious and costly project. Apart from the addition of buttresses and battlements to the tower, there have been few major alterations to the church since the 15th century reconstruction, and it was little affected by Victorian restoration.

The open-work parapet of the porch, and some of the windows, are decorated with finely-carved animal and human heads, and there are stone crosses on all the roof gables including the saddleback roof of the tower. There are also well-carved gargoyles on the porch, notably a scaly monster on the east wall. The north and south windows of the chancel are square-headed with double hollow-chamfered mullions and jambs and cinquefoil cusping, and like all the stone carving in the church are of high-quality, expensive workmanship.

Most of the church is built of local rubble stone which was not originally intended to be exposed, and until recently the exterior was covered in lime render; the remains of this can be seen all over the walls. A former door for the priest in the south wall of the chancel, a south doorway into the aisle, and formerly the west window of the aisle, have all been blocked. The tower is of four stages, with a saddleback roof enclosed within an embattled parapet. The diagonal buttresses are later additions, perhaps made necessary to secure the tower from slipping on the hillside position. There are square-headed two-light trefoil windows on each face of the tower at the belfry stage. The north porch is built of cut stone, and has a niche supported by a winged angel which was clearly intended to contain a statue. Across the whole north face of the porch below the parapet is the following inscription which, although weathered, can still be deciphered:

PRAY FOR NICHOLL SCHEPHERD AND EDYETHE HIS WIFE,
WHICH PAYDE FOR THE MASON WORKE.

INTERIOR

Many of the furnishings of the church, including the 15th century font, one of the bells, some of the seating and the communion plate of 1675, have been removed to the new St John's church, so that the interior of St James's is now stark and empty. It does, however, provide a good opportunity to study the proportions and the architectural features, and imaginatively to reconstruct the late mediaeval appearance of the church with colours, lights, stained glass, woodwork and carved statues.



Interior looking east to the chancel and south aisle

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

The octagonal pillars of the south aisle with floral decoration on the capitals are particularly fine examples of 15th century stone carving, as is also the chancel arch with its elegantly panelled soffit or underside. The pillars support pointed arches of two chamfered orders, the eastern bay being narrower than the others. The floor is well paved with flagstones.

The 15th century timbers of the barrel roof, with their carved bosses and cusped principals are also noteworthy, as is the tracery of the windows, providing further examples of the high-quality workmanship lavished upon this church during the later Middle Ages. A few of the windows retain fragments of mediaeval stained glass, e.g. the face of Christ in the east window, and the pelican in the north-east window of the nave. No doubt there was a great deal more stained glass, but this would have been smashed as idolatrous during the Reformation. Beneath the east window of the chan-



Interior looking north-east showing the arcade

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

cel is a shallow recess which was intended for a carved reredos behind the high altar, and on the walls on either side of the altar are the cut-back remains of niches which would have contained statues.

Cut right through the wall on the south side of the chancel arch, regardless of the way in which this must weaken the structure, is a squint which would have enabled a priest at the side altar in the aisle to see the progress of the service at the high altar. At the same place the thickness of the wall has also been used to contain the stairway which once led up to the loft above the rood-screen – the elaborate wooden screen, surmounted by the 'rood' or crucifix, which once divided the chancel from the nave. At Charfield, as in so many other parish churches, this screen with its elaborate carvings and statues was no doubt destroyed during the Reformation in the 16th century. The 15th century font, with an octagonal bowl decorated with shields and roses, is now in St John's church, as is the ancient parish chest.



Chancel looking east

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

The communion table comes from Coston in Norfolk, and the lectern, pew rails and bier from the Corinium Museum in Cirencester.

In the chancel are monuments to local landowners, clothiers and former rectors, notably the Hicks and Tyndale families. These include a monument of 1606 in the chancel to John, son of Arthur Hicks, which still retains some of its original gilding and colour; and a memorial on the south wall of the aisle to the Revd Josiah Bennet who was rector of Charfield and master of the Grammar School at Wickwar. On the north wall is a memorial to the Jones family; Richard Jones who died in 1816 was a rector of Charfield and Dodington, and for many years was a Deputy Lieutenant and an active magistrate for both Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. His eldest son Richard Prankerd Jones succeeded him as rector of Charfield from 1816 until his death in 1853. On the floor of the south aisle are several memorial stones, including one to William Roach who died in 1754 aged 54, and who

'behaved himself agreeably in all the relations of life, was a kind husband, a tender parent, a good master, and a faithful friend.'

There were originally three bells, but in 1722 two of them were recast into one by Abraham Rudhall, the noted bell-founder of Gloucester. The remaining mediaeval bell with the inscription

'SANCTE THOME ORA PRO NOBIS'

(Saint Thomas Pray for Us)

has been removed to St John's church, but the other bell remains at St James's church and as well as the name 'Abr. Rudhall, Bell Founder', and the date '1722', bears the inscription:

'THE LIVING I TO CHURCH DO CALL
AND TO THE GRAVE DO SUMMON ALL.'

Amongst the monuments in the churchyard is one to 12 people who died in a railway accident at Charfield Station in 1928. Those killed included two children who, sadly, were never identified. The memorial was erected by the London, Midland and Scottish Railway Company.

The parish registers date from 1586 and are deposited in the Gloucestershire Records Office, Gloucester.



Nave and south aisle, looking west

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

Front cover: Exterior from the south-west (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

Back cover: North door (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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