



South east-view of Inglesham church



ST JOHN THE BAPTIST'S CHURCH

INGLESHAM
WILTSHIRE



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

LONDON

Registered Charity No. 258612

PRICE: £1.00



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST JOHN THE BAPTIST'S CHURCH
INGLESHAM, WILTSHIRE

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 325 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 until 30 September 2002. We will be moving to new offices in the autumn of 2002, so please look out for announcements in our churches or visit our website www.visitchurches.org.uk for details of our new address.

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:

LEIGH, ALL SAINTS OLD CHANCEL

3 miles west of Cricklade off B4040

LEIGH DELAMERE, ST MARGARET

2 miles west of exit 17 and north of M4

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST'S CHURCH

INGLESHAM, WILTSHIRE

by ANTHONY BARNES

THIS CHURCH has remained substantially unaltered, so far as its structure is concerned, since the early 16th century, although the exterior shows evidence of repairs over the past two centuries at least. Within, the essential arrangement of the fittings is probably as it was in Cromwell's time. It is, therefore, a most unusual survival. This was recognised by William Morris, among other things founder of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, who lived nearby at Kelmscott. Under J.T. Micklethwaite the SPAB paid for and controlled extensive repairs to the roofs between 1886 and 1900. This work saved the building and must be one of the first major practical expressions of the Society's views on repair. The scrupulous and exemplary quality of this work could not have been achieved without the almost daily supervision of the Reverend Basil Hawkins Birchall of Buscot, who acted virtually as clerk of works here for SPAB over all those years.



Carving of Mother and Child

The proportion and height of the nave, together with its relatively thin walls, suggest a late Saxon origin. The carving in the south wall of the Mother and Child, blessed by the hand of God, is certainly of this date. Its iconography is very unusual and it is clearly part of a frieze. Until 1910 it was on the outside of the south wall, used as a sundial, but its original position is unknown.

As they now stand, the nave and its two arcades appear to date from very early in the 13th century (King John gave the church to the monks of Beaulieu in 1205). The south arcade, with its round arches, is the earlier, the north arcade, which has pointed arches, being a fully fledged Gothic translation of it, dating from ten or twenty years later.

The chancel appears to have been reconstructed in the early 13th century too. On the north side three seats were placed – the semi-circular arches above them can still be seen. The slightly later lancet windows above were mutilated when the early 14th-century roof was constructed. In the space over the 15th-century boarded ceiling, parts of the apparatus for raising the pyx have been found. The east and south windows are also part of this phase. So is the bellcote which originally stood over the chancel arch, as at Kelmscott church.

At the east end of the chancel the remains of a rare painted 13th-century reredos have been reinstated. This was done during the restoration in 1934 by Percival Hartland Thomas and Professor E.W. Tristram.

The bells are by Abraham Rudhall I, of Gloucester, 1717, which is probably the date when the bellcote was rebuilt in its present position incorporating a sundial.

Late in the 14th century larger windows were provided at the east end of each aisle (that in the south aisle is now in the south wall of the aisle extension). Bigger windows were also added in the 15th century when the roofs of the aisles were raised and enclosed by parapets. In the 16th century the south side was extended, probably to form a pew for the squire.

The roofs have necessarily been repaired through the centuries but they are all ancient. The chancel roof was followed by those over the aisles in the late 15th century and the nave in the 16th century. The doors, too, are worth noting, particularly the early 14th-century north door with its foliate hinges.





The floors are old and uneven, with many ledger slabs with good lettering – and some less refined but moving in their simplicity – and a huge stone in the chancel with the matrix of a knight's brass.

Most of the walls are covered with paintings, often overpainted even seven layers thick. Ill-considered overpainting in the past has left a confused but fascinating superimposition of subjects including 15th-century censuring angels above the chancel arch, an early 14th-century doom on the east wall of the north aisle and 19th-century texts, Creed, Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments overlaying more. Every century from the early 13th to the early 19th is represented. Certainly the early masonry painting on the chancel walls and the figurative decoration of the remains of the reredos are unusual remnants.

The earliest timber fittings are the screens to the north and south aisles. They probably date from the final structural changes in the late 15th or early 16th century. The pulpit is Jacobean, as are the pews in the eastern bay of the nave. These have, however, been cut down but the original height can be seen at the back of the block. The chancel pews and communion table are possibly as late as the Restoration of Charles II. The communion rails are 18th century. The font is 15th century.

The Royal Arms are a curiosity, displaying the Hanoverian Arms pre-1801 but the initials and date of William IV, 1830.

In the churchyard are many well-carved headstones and a preaching cross. Some traces of the mediaeval village are to be seen in the fields. It declined with the passing of the wool trade, which had enriched so many churches in the neighbourhood. Further information on it can be obtained at the Corinium Museum in Cirencester.

Inglesham church was declared redundant in 1979 and vested in The Churches Conservation Trust. The main problem in caring for the church is to preserve what Mark Chatfield has called its 'studied informality' while arresting the damaging effects of age and weather. This has been the responsibility of John Schofield of Architecton of Bristol. Under his supervision the wall-paintings are gradually being stabilized and, where it is safe to do so, revealed by Jane Rutherford.

*Photographs by Christopher Dalton and
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England
Drawing – photograph by Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society
(WANHS) of a drawing by John Buckler, 1810.
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