

## Take a Tour of St. Giles

**A**s you start your tour of St Giles remember that over the past 1000 years 40 generations of Christians have come to the site of St Giles Church to worship. For more information, please click on 'Floor plan' and 'Architectural Definitions.'



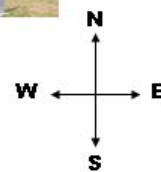
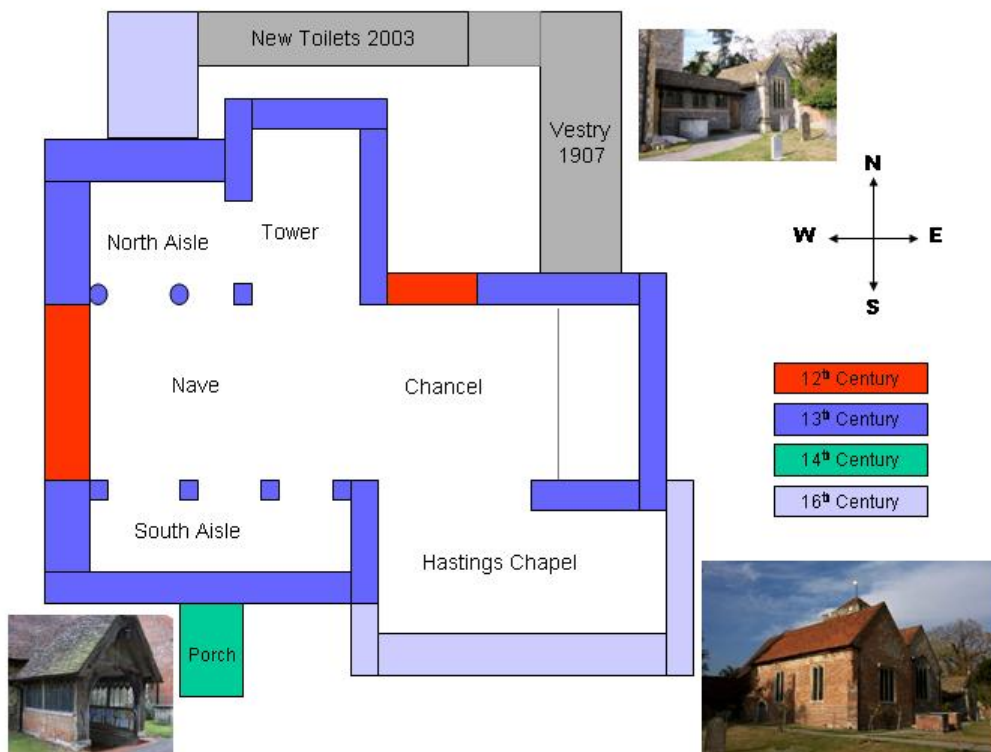
**The Porch** You will enter on the south side of the building through the wooden porch. The two great oak timbers in the front have stood since the early 14th Century. Conducting business transactions here was a sign of good faith up to the middle of the 16th Century. Until the middle of the 16th Century most marriage ceremonies were performed here.



**The Nave** When you step inside the Church notice the massive Norman columns which support the arches. In 1897, the Victorians did a great deal of work in the nave: stripping the plaster from the walls and removing a flat ceiling.



Notice also the location of the baptismal. Although not the original, the font has always stood opposite the entrance to symbolize that baptism gives admittance to the church.



**The Aisles** The double piscine and aumbry in the South Aisle were discovered when the plaster on the walls was stripped away. The materials of the walls are chalk and flint, occasionally arranged in a chequered pattern, but for the most part randomly intermixed. Look to your right in the south aisle and you will notice the double piscine and aumbry. They probably belonged to the [Chantry](#) founded in A.D. 1338 by the de Molyns family.



During the middle ages it was common for wealthy men in the parish to provide a chantry where the priest could say masses for the soul of the benefactor.

One of the two basins is for the ceremonial washing of the priest's hands, the other for washing the altar vessels. Few churches obeyed this order, hence the rarity of such a piscina. The position of its Chantry altar may be determined by the location of the double piscine and aumbry.

From the very rich to the very poor everyone was expected to attend church. During the 13<sup>th</sup> Century the only seats in the church were against the wall where the weak would be allowed to sit down. The North Aisle was added during that time to accommodate the growing number of people who attended services.

The current pews were added to the church at the end of the 19th Century.

**The Chancel** In the North wall of the Chancel is a restored 12th Century window. The Saxon architecture has a rounder arch and is much thicker and rougher than later windows in the church. The lack of skill and crude tools made construction more difficult.



**The Easter Sepulchre** The tomb within the left side of the Chancel wall is that of Sir John de Molyns. The tomb is in the form of an Easter Sepulchre, and was used in ancient times to represent the Burial and Resurrection of Christ.

It was probably used in the late Middle Ages to re-tell the story of Christ's Death and Resurrection. On Good Friday the Priest would take the cross from the altar, wrap it in black cloth and lay it on the



tomb. There it would remain throughout Good Friday and Holy Saturday as a sign that Jesus died and was buried. On Easter Day when the people came into the Church they found the tomb empty and the cross back on the altar surrounded by lighted candles. It was a sign that Christ is risen from the dead and a reminder to everybody that His way of life, the way of love, cannot be defeated.



The 15th Century doorway in the Chancel opens into a cloister, now connecting the Church with a vestry, built in 1907. When you go outside notice how well the addition matches the original building.

**The lancet window** The lancet window in the east of the Sanctuary is a fine example of modern stained-glass workmanship. The Sacristy was built in the 15th Century against the Chancel, where the ancient chapel formerly stood, the piscina and sedilia can still be seen on the outside of the north wall.



To the left of the altar under the carpet are three brass memorials from the period 1425-1575.

**The base of a 15<sup>th</sup> Century altar cross** An almost unique specimen of the



base of an altar cross can be seen in a case on the south wall of the Sanctuary. The cross has long since disappeared. It would originally have been removable for carrying in processions. Around the base is a band engraved with the inscription in Latin:

'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, Son of God, have mercy on me.'

Chancel is probably of earlier date - it is not certain what purpose this window served, probably it was for the purpose of observation of the altar by a priest in the Sacristy while waiting his turn for duty, or it may have been the window of a hermit's cell, giving a view of the altar.

**The small square window** The small square window which goes through to the north wall of the

The window as viewed from the outside shows the churches third piscina where a sacristy once stood.



**The Chancel Arch** The pointed Chancel Arch replaces the original Norman arch which would have been much narrower.



**The Bell Tower** Originally the bells were rung from the same level as the church. In 1800, Mr. John Penn constructed a Manor House pew and the bell ringers were moved upstairs into a newly constructed ringing chamber immediately above it. Since 1924, the bells have been rung from a higher storey in the tower, access to which is obtained by a new external stair.



## The Hastings Chapel (A.D. 1558)

The first visible part of the Church as you came up the path is constructed of red brick and stone with Tudor-style mullioned windows. It was built for the inmates of an Almshouse which then stood quite near the Church. (Lord Hastings of Loughborough, son of the first



Earl of Huntingdon, founded a Hospital, or Almshouse, here in 1557, and built the chapel to serve as its oratory, and also as a burial-place for himself and others of the Hastings family. The original Hospital which stood on the south side of the Church was pulled down in 1765 by Mr. Penn, who replaced it with another Almshouse for a Master and six inmates which stands about a quarter of a mile to the north of the Church.)

## Arms of Lord Hastings

The sculptured arms of Lord Hastings, a sleeve or "manche" upon a shield, surmounted by a helmet, and surrounded with the ribbon and motto of the Garter, are still seen over the outside door to the Chapel.



## 18<sup>th</sup> Century Mural



On the south wall of the Hastings Chapel is a curious mural monument from the early 18th Century. It is embellished with cherubs' heads above and skulls below, but with no inscription to tell whom it was intended to commemorate. Sir Thomas and Sir Walter Clarges and many of their family members were buried here from 1667 to 1728, the latter "in a coffin faced with velvet," the Register records. No memorial of their graves exists and this monument may have been intended for them.

In order to include the Chapel within the compass of the Church, the south Chancel wall was removed in the late 18th Century. In 1946, restoration work was commenced through the generosity of Colonel Wallace Devereux in memory of his son, Pilot Officer J. S. Devereux, R.A.F.

The new work consists of an Altar Table with a simple Reredos in the centre of which is the Holy Monogram surrounded by rays and the wording "Glory Be in His Holy Name" in gold on a black background.

The new central light in the window to the left is a Crucifixion in stained glass, while the side lights and also the windows on the south side are filled with 17th Century coats of arms. Over the east window is a Tester with a blue ceiling powdered with gold stars.



## Hatchments

There are 19 hatchments in the church. They are hung throughout the church and date back to the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century. At that time they were used as memorials to the deceased.



## Manor House Entrance

An interesting feature of the Church is the private entrance from the Manor House through the passage or "Cloister" opposite the porch. This cloister - paneled with oak and lit by four different painted windows - leads into a low hall, or vestibule, formerly the freehold of the owner of the Manor House.



The Manor House



## The Churchyard

Opposite the south-west door is the Yew Tree under which, tradition says, Thomas Gray wrote the Elegy.



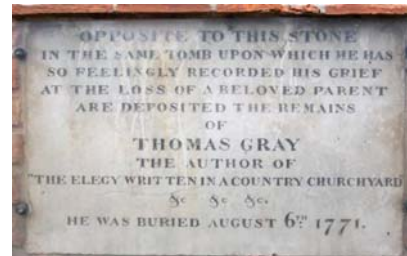
## Tomb of Thomas Gray

The first object outside the Church which will interest visitors is the tomb of Thomas Gray.

The "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," is perhaps the best known poem in the English language. Gray's final resting-place is immediately under the east window of the Hastings Chapel.

Gray's own name is not upon it, owing to lack of space, but a tablet in the wall opposite the tomb records his burial "in the same tomb - 1771 - Thomas Gray, Esq., was buried August 6th."

A monument designed by the architect Wyatt in honour of Thomas Gray was erected in 1799 adjacent to the church. Inscriptions on the monument celebrate his poem and commemorate his death on July 30<sup>th</sup> 1771. In 1921, the monument, with three acres of land, was bought by two local residents, Mr. W. A. Judd and Sir B. Oppenheimer, and presented to the National Trust. In 1924, the remaining ten acres of the field were purchased by public subscription to preserve for all time the rural surroundings of the "Country Churchyard."



*Stoke Poges Church, 1788*



For many generations the Tower was the "ivy-mantled tower" of the Elegy. Photographs as late as 1887 still show the ivy. It threatened the structure and was removed.

The church also had a spire from 1701 to 1924. The original spire was replaced in 1834 and finally had to be removed in 1924 when it became unsafe. When it was finally removed timbers from the spire were used to construct the two lych gates along the churchyard path. The churchyard was closed to burials in 1910.

*St Giles is open every day from 0930 to 1630, "Come and see".*