All Saints Turvey

Church Guide

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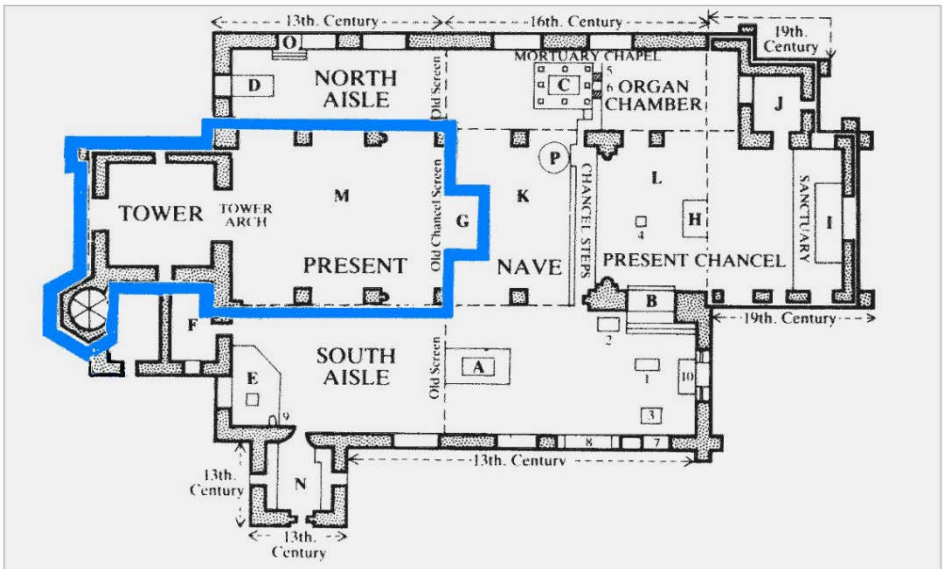
All Saints
Turvey's Parish Church

The village of Turvey, on the east bank of the river Great Ouse forming Bedfordshire's boundary with Buckinghamshire, has one of the finest and oldest churches in the Diocese of St. Albans.

The oldest parts of the present structure are Saxon. All Saints has been constantly developed across the centuries to become the largest parish church in the Deanery of Sharnbrook (established in 1970). All Saints was in the Diocese of Lincoln until it was transferred, together with the rest of the Archdeaconry of Bedford, to the Diocese of Ely in 1837. In 1877 the Diocese of St. Albans was created around St. Albans Abbey in the Roman city now of the same name, and in 1914 Turvey again changed to a new Diocese during the radical redistribution of country parishes. Some believe that Turvey and its church may, like St. Albans, have Roman origins, the Romans having settled on the site of an earlier river settlement established by the Beaker People at a convenient fording place as long ago as 1800 – 1600 BC.

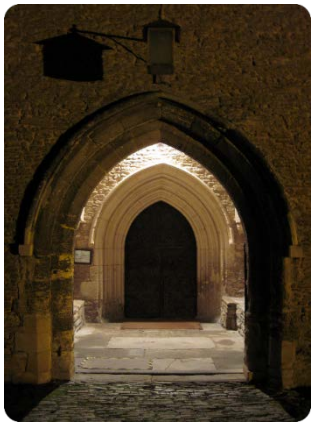
Whatever its origins may be, the people of Turvey are fortunate indeed to enjoy this legacy, handed down over the centuries, of a very beautiful, and at the same time very friendly parish church. We hope this guide will help you to share with us some of its interesting history.



Supposed Area of Romano-Saxon Church shown by continuous blue line.
A. Monument of Sir John Mordaunt
B. Monument of John, 1st Lord Mordaunt
C. Monument of John, 2nd Lord Mordaunt
D. Monument of Lewis, 3rd Lord Mordaunt
E. Baptistry and Font (Norman)
F. West Vestry
G. Position of supposed Romano-Saxon Chancel
H. Position of Old Altar
I. Present Altar
J. Vestry
K. Space added to Nave from Old (Middle) Chancel
L. Space incorporated in New Chancel from the Old (Middle) Chancel
M. (Original) Nave. (M. & K. = Present Nave)
N. Porch
O. North Door
P. Pulpit
1–3. Lady Chapel Brasses
4. Grave of Legh Richmond (Rector)
5. Grave of Erasmus Middleton (Rector)
6. Grave of Richard Rands (Rector)
7. Sedilia and Piscina
8. Mural Recess and Fresco
9. Holy Water Stoup
10. Lady Chapel Altar

The South Porch

13th Century, heightened in the 15th Century



Probably designed with the frustrated idea of adding an upper room or loft at some later date, the porch contains on its west wall a simple memorial for the fallen of the first Word War. Before entering the Church, notice the list of charitable gifts and the benefactors painted on a board on the east wall.

The most interesting feature is undoubtedly the pair of massive oak doors overlaid with rich ornamental iron work. This is believed to be the work of the 13th Century metalworker "John of Leighton", whose most famous ironwork is the grille on Queen Eleanor's tomb in Westminster Abbey, London. Other examples of his richly foliated scroll-work are found at Eaton Bray and Leighton Buzzard. The doors are original. Notice, too, the deeply moulded arch of the inner doorway.

The Baptistery

13th Century

This is the area immediately to the left of the entrance. The Font is thought to be late Norman. The stone bowl is borne upon four volute capitals. There is a holy water stoop, dating back to the Roman Catholic origins of the pre-Reformation Church, just to the left of the entrance door. Some interesting small pictures beside it give an impression of the Church before the mid-nineteenth century reconstruction. The weathercock pierced with the date 1630 and now hung over the vestry door on the west wall formerly topped the tower until this was destroyed by lightning in 1858.

The Nave, South and North Aisles

10th, 13th and 15th Centuries

The majestic length of the Nave can be appreciated from the west end, which also provides the vantage point to view the two little rounded arches above the Nave arches to the south side. These mark the location of windows in the Saxon Church built around 980 AD, which extended only as far as the third pillars eastward. Further Saxon stonework can be seen in the tower wall at the west end of the Nave, and one can also observe the pitch of the original roofline marked by the "weather moulding" in the stonework. The blocked up door gave access to this roof.

The South aisle was added in the 13th Century. The North aisle was built in the 15th Century and about the same time the Nave walls were heightened to their present embattled form, and a new Nave roof was installed above the clerestory windows. The roof is very beautiful, divided into six bays with carved bosses at the intersections, and there are twelve splendid angels, two for each bay. The corbels are magnificently carved figures 2’ 6" (76cm) tall.

It was in 1852 than an extensive renovation and development programme was commenced under the supervision of that famous Victorian "improver" of Ancient Churches, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. His programme of work, which took two years, extended the length of the church eastward. Until this development the altar had stood, since the 12th Century, in the position of the present Chancel steps.

The eastern portion of the South Aisle forms the Lady Chapel. Of interest are the three early English trefoiled sedilia beneath the south-east window, providing accommodation for a priest, deacon and sub-deacon, with piscina, having a drip-stone continued over all, springing from three corbel heads and two masks. To the west of the sedilia is an alcove painting re-discover during the 19th Century renovations. The fresco dates from the 13th Century and shows the Crucifixion, with Our Lady and St. John. An article in The Times, published in 1933, which is framed in the alcove, describes the fresco as "the finest painting of its subject and time in the country".

Two gifts during the 1970s have beautified All Saints. In 1972 the late Miss Emily Osborn bequested to the Church the attractive West Screen and the matching Altar Rails in the Sanctuary with the sympathetically modern "Crown of Thorns" motif. Three years later Joscelyne and Henry Nash generously gave Turvey the Nave lights that blend so well into the general style of the Church.

The Chancel

19th Century

The Chancel, also including the two eastern bays of the Nave, the Chancel Arch and Vestry, were added between 1852 and 1854. The Chancel is a 19th Century imitation of the 14th Century style, with Purbeck marble arches. A sculptured war memorial over the old vestry door commemorates Charles Longuet Higgins, of Turvey Abbey, who caused the 19th Century restorations and developments to be undertaken. The Chancel lights, designed by Bernard West ARIBA, were a gift from Mrs. G. Allen in memory of her husband Rupert, formerly of Turvey Abbey.

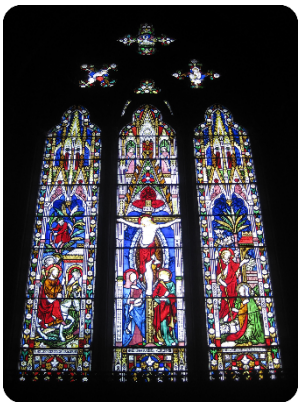
The Organ

1855

This was built by Hill & Sons and was presented to All Saints by Charles Longuet Higgins in 1855. Originally powered by hand-operated bellows, still to be seen at the east end of the North aisle beyond the memorial to the second Baron Mordaunt and his wives, the organ was converted to electric pumping in the 1930s. All Saints' organ has attracted considerable favourable attention and several famous organists have given recitals in All Saints. The organ with its four manuals and pedal board has a fine, full tone, and its richly decorated pipes look very beautiful in the Purbeck marble arch in which they are set. The organ is built over the former mortuary chapel of the North aisle.

The Stained Glass

1852-54



The stained glass in All Saints is Victorian. Most striking is the east window behind the altar. The decorative windows fall into three groups: the "picture windows" with canopy work above, seen in the Chancel; the "pattern windows" seen in the aisles and baptistery; and the "dayspring" grisaille-glass window above the altar in the Lady Chapel in the South aisle.

The Monuments

There are four monuments in the Church, all honouring members of the Mordaunt family.

The oldest, dated about 1506, is now located in the middle of the South aisle and honours Sir John Mordaunt and his wife Lady Edith (Latimer). Sir John was a contemporary of King Henry VII for whom he fought at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 and elsewhere.

Between the choir stalls and the Lady Chapel on the south side of the Chancel lies a monument to John, 1st Baron Mordaunt and his wife Elizabeth (Vere). King Henry VIII created the Barony in 1532; the tomb is dated 1562.

In 1571 the monument to John, 2nd Baron Mordaunt, and his two wives Eleanor (Fitz Lewis) and Joan (Farmer) was created. This is the large alabaster monument surrounded by eight Doric columns supporting a decorated tester at the East End of the North aisle.

The last monument, by the North door, differs from the others in bearing no figure. It was erected in 1601 to honour Lewis, 3rd Baron Mordaunt, and is in the form of an altar-tomb with a black-painted alabaster pall and black marble slab.

Later members of this noble family were made Earls of Peterborough, and were interred in a family vault beneath the former Mortuary Chapel now occupied by the organ chamber.

The Brasses in the Lady Chapel

There are three. One is of a member of the Mordaunt family and dates from about 1500; the second honours a priest vested about the same time. The third commemorates Alice Bernard, daughter of John Chubnall of Astwood, in Elizabethan dress, and is dated 1606.

The Pictures

Five religious paintings are displayed in All Saints, all of the Italian School and given to the Church by the Higgins family during the 19th Century.

To the left of the door is a beautiful representation of the Madonna and Child with St. Elizabeth and the young St. John, attributed to the school of Andrea del Sarta. The Italian giltwood cushion frame makes a handsome surround for a gracious picture.

To the right of the door is a painting by Cigoli of St. Francis of Assisi kneeling in prayer.

To the left on the west wall is a painting by Sassoferrata based on an incident recorded in St. John's gospel, Chapter 21, verse 21, when the risen Christ talks with Simon Peter and another disciple.

The central painting on the west wall is a Raphael copy. La Belle Jardiniere is an extensive landscape with the Madonna, the Child and St. John.

The right hand picture is also a Raphael copy and shows the Madonna of the Chair, with the infant Christ and St. John. This charming study is also in an Italian giltwood frame.

Though they are not pictures, the visitor may wish to examine two other items framed on the west wall. To the left of the monument to the 3rd Baron Mordaunt is a parchment list of the Rectors of Turvey since 1085. In the far right corner is an interesting map of the Parish; showing the ancient names of the enclosures, and the network of footpaths that provided the inter-village routes before the coming of the motor vehicle.

The Tower

Like a layer-cake of history, the 70’ 10" (21.5 metres) tall tower reflects the development of Turvey’s Parish Church. The foundations to ground level are of Saxon stonework. The next three layers were all added at various dates during the 13th century, and further work can be dated in the 15th Century. The fifth and final development can be accurately dated 1864 when the embattled parapets and pyramided roof supporting the cross were added. These restored the damage caused by lightning in 1858.

The clock was a gift to the Church by Mr. George Sargent in memory of his parents. It was installed in 1893. Finally, visitors may notice the date 1593 above the door to the tower in its south wall.

The Belfry

The Belfry of All Saints houses a ring of eight bells, the oldest dated 1682. Their details are as follows:

1st (Treble)	1900	5 cwt
2nd	1900	6 cwt
3rd	1864	7 cwt
4th	1682	8 cwt
5th	1682	9 cwt
6th	1750 (recast 1954)	10 cwt
7th	1839	13 cwt
8th (Tenor)	1815 (recast 1906)	19 cwt

The Churchyard

Before you leave All Saints Turvey by the lych gate (erected in 1856 and restored in 1925 in memory of members of the Hyland family, lost in a tragic drowning accident off New Guinea in that year), pause a while to enjoy the tranquility of a typical, peaceful English churchyard. The lichen-covered headstones in the shade of a miscellany of mature trees and box hedges offer a serenity that is increasingly rare in today’s busy world.

The dominant feature in the churchyard is the Longuet Higgins family mausoleum. This large brick structure with stone dressing has been the burial place of the Lords of the Manor since the 19th century. There are several interesting epitaphs.

The Village

Although outside the scope of this brochure, visitors to Turvey may appreciate a brief word about the beautiful riverside village of Turvey, drawing attention to some of the points of interest. The Abbey (http://www.turveyabbey.org.uk/) is on the right hand of the road to Bedford at the far end of the village from the Church. The Jacobean house, which can be easily viewed from the road, was the home of the Longuet Higgins family so closely associated with this Church in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Although it was always called Turvey Abbey, the property had no formal religious connections until it was purchased in 1980 by a Roman Catholic Order of Benedictine monks and nuns.

Turvey House (http://www.turveyhouse.co.uk/) was built in 1792 and continues to be occupied by another branch of the Higgins family. This lovely house can be viewed from Turvey Bridge, the oldest crossing of the Great Ouse in Bedfordshire.

A bridge across the river at Turvey was first noted in a document dated 1140. The present structure, which was widened in 1935, crosses three branches of the river, one of which passes under Turvey Mill (now an attractive residential development) immediately up river from the bridge. Notice the two statues standing sentinel on the end of the Mill's island; 'Jonah' (to the left and over 10' (3 metres) tall) and his companion took up guardianship of Turvey in the 19th Century, having been brought from Ashridge House, Hertfordshire, by Charles Longuet Higgins in 1844. The Three Fyshes public house at the Turvey end of the bridge is dated 1622. It was at this point that one of Guy Fawkes' associates is said to have been captured by the King's soldiers in 1602, immediately after the arrest of his leader. He was probably returning to nearby Weston Underwood, where the Gunpowder Plot had been hatched.

The former Rectory (now a private dwelling), on the old High Street by the Carlton turn, has Tudor origins overlaid with a Victorian "improvement". Most interesting are the "matchstick-men" saints (complete with halos) and other picture figures cut into the Tudor brick panels above the front door on the east wall. Abbey Square set back on the left of the main road at the Bedford end of the village, is a lovely example of 17th Century agricultural workers' cottages, formerly belonging to Turvey Abbey Estate. The oldest cottage (No. 7) was once the Village School. The water splash in Jack's Lane, almost opposite Abbey Square, often looks very picturesque, especially in a winter hoarfrost. These are some of the highlights of the village. You will probably find your own favourites among the houses and cottages of our community if you stroll around.