

## **A Guide to the Parish Church of St Julian, Wellow**

Welcome to the parish church of Wellow. We hope that you enjoy your visit to our church and will take a few minutes to absorb the beauty and the peace of this lovely building.

### **St Julian the Hospitaller**

Only nine or ten churches in England are dedicated to a saint named Julian. There are several saints of that name, and, in most instances, it is not clear which is the patron. In the case of Wellow, however, it is thought that the church is dedicated to St Julian the Hospitaller.

Very little is known about St Julian the Hospitaller. Stories vary, but it seems that he was born a nobleman in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century. He had a passion for hunting and whilst pursuing that obsession one day, he was warned by a stag that he would kill his parents. This duly happened as a result of mistaken identity. As a penance, he and his wife devoted their lives to the poor, setting up an inn on a riverbank where they took in pilgrims and acting as ferrymen for those crossing the river. It is not known when or how Julian died.

### **History of the Church**

In 766, Cynewulf, the King of the West Saxons, granted land on the Welwe river to the monastery of St. Andrew at Wells. It is likely that there has been a church in Wellow from at least that period, but its antiquity was first noted in 1117, when Henry I established an order of Augustinian Canons at Cirencester and gave to them the “ancient churches of Froome and Wellow”. This gift was confirmed by a charter of Edward III in 1337. During the Black Death of the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, three parish priests died in the years 1349, 1350 and 1351.

In 1369, Sir Thomas Hungerford bought the villages of Farley and Wellow for 1100 marks. A follower of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in 1337 Hungerford became the first leader of the House of Commons to be called “The Speaker”. Although there is no proof, it is thought that he rebuilt the church, a new building being consecrated on the feast of St. Philip and St. James, May Day, 1372, by John Harewell, Bishop of Bath and Wells, with Thomas of Cirencester appointed vicar.

Around 1430, Sir Thomas’s son, Walter, Lord Hungerford, raised the roof, adding a clerestory. This roof is the one you see today, supported by arch-braced tie-beams. The lower portion of the rood screen and the pews date from this same period and were probably contemporary with these alterations.

In 1845, the church underwent partial restoration including rebuilding the chancel. Benjamin Ferrey, a well-known Gothic Revival architect, carried out the work. Ferrey had studied under Augustus Charles Pugin and was, at this date, Diocesan Architect to the Diocese of Bath and Wells.

Another restoration was carried out in 1889-90 by Bodley & Garner, architects who also specialised in the Gothic Revival style. They again completely rebuilt the chancel and added a vestry.

In 1936 it was discovered that the timber work had been attacked by death watch beetle, and after World War II, the Dean of Westminster and the Bishop of Bath and Wells jointly launched an appeal for repairs. W. Caroe & Partners carried out the subsequent restoration in 1952. The work included a new rood loft and rood.

### **The Interior of the Church**

**The Nave** is divided into four bays with columns in a Perpendicular style. Make sure you look up to the panelled 15<sup>th</sup> century roof. The tie beams are supported by carved stone corbels representing angels and the tie beam bosses are decorated with carved wooden angels, each one different. There are more carved wooden angels at each end of the intermediate roof beams.

The 15<sup>th</sup> century pews have fine poppy heads and simple panelled tracery on their ends. One unusual feature is the reservation of seats for parishioners from nearby parishes, such as Hinton Charterhouse and Southstoke, hand written on some of the pew backs. Based upon the style of writing, these inscriptions probably date from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and firmly segregate the congregation, with the seats for the men on the right side of the aisle and for the women on the left. Also dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century are the beautiful, trident candelabra, which are still used on special occasions. In 2009, thanks to a grant from The Pilgrim's Trust, the seats of many of the pew benches were made deeper and more comfortable by adding new oak tops, resting on the originals, and new cushions.

Between the nave and the chancel is the magnificent rood screen, the lower portion dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the loft and rood dating to the 1952 restoration. The oak door at the right-hand side of the rood gives entry to the 15<sup>th</sup> century stair to the rood loft. The door was made and installed in 1978 by a Wellow craftsman, Peter Schweder, of Hassage Manor, with the hinges fashioned by another Wellow craftsman, Laurence Curran. There are two openings, or “squints”, on either side of the screen that would have given a view of the altar before the chancel was modified and rebuilt.

Above the loft are the organ pipes. They are around 100 years old, although the organ was constructed by The Deane Organ Builders of Taunton in 1990. The console was part of a 1952 Compton Electronic organ, modified and adapted for its present use.

The pulpit is mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, given at the time of the 1952 restoration by Major le G. G. W. Horton-Fawkes and the parishioners, to commemorate the late Rev. le G. G. Horton-Starkie's 60 years as Vicar. The newel post of the pulpit stairs is a statue of St Julian, carved by Wellow resident Peter Watts, a sculptor well known around the world for his religious carvings.

**The Chancel**, although built later, is well in keeping with the medieval church. There are twelve early 14<sup>th</sup> century heads of kings and bishops set in the south wall and either side of the east window. They were found during the 1952 restoration, though their origins are unknown. The stained glass windows date from the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**The South Aisle** probably dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century additions. At its east end is the Warrior Chapel of St Michael, with a memorial to the Wellow residents who lost their lives in World War I and a thanks offering for the safe return of all those from Wellow who served in World War II. On the east wall is an ornate rococo memorial to Thomas Scudamore, dated 1718. There is a 15<sup>th</sup> century piscine, used for washing the communion vessels, in the south wall. On the west wall is a plaque recording the 1952 restoration. The principle rafters of the timber roof, which is original, are supported on corbels carved with a series of male and female heads, both religious and secular.

**The North Aisle**, also part of the 1430s additions, has the same roof construction as the South Aisle, its rafters again springing from corbels carved with male and female heads.

At the east end of this aisle is a carved effigy of a priest vested for Mass, with a chalice incised on his breast, a cross cut in his forehead, and a lion beneath his feet. Probably dating from around 1400, it was unearthed when the chancel was being rebuilt in 1845.

**The Hungerford Chapel** is at the east end of the north aisle. Divided from the aisle by a painted screen, similar to the rood screen, it was added as part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century alterations. On the east wall is a 15<sup>th</sup> century painting of Christ and the twelve apostles, believed to be the only 15<sup>th</sup> century church wall painting surviving in England. Below the painting is an ornate tomb, with a carved and painted effigy of Dorothy Popham who died in 1614. Her connection to Wellow or the Hungerfords has not been established. There are brass memorials in the floor and on the walls to various members of the Hungerford family, including Giles, who died in 1638 and his wife, Jone, 1679; their second son, Giles, 1668; and their third son, John, 1653; Ursula Hungerford, 1645, and Suzanne, 1657. The chapel has a superb painted and gilt-embossed timber roof. It was re-gilded in 1951, but the paint is original. On the north wall is a shallow recess, possibly an Easter Sepulchre, with a quatrefoiled front below and a four-centred arch above. Referring to the building of the chapel, it is inscribed "For the love of Jesu and Mary's sake Pray for them that this lete make".

**The Font** is situated at the west end of the north aisle and is possibly of 13<sup>th</sup> century origin, although it has been heavily restored. The font cover is Jacobean and is dated 1623.

There are a number of memorial stones in the floor at the west end of the nave and in the south aisle. The majority are too worn to be legible, but there is one in the south aisle to John Hodson, Vicar of Wellow from 1674 to 1718.

**The Tower** at the west end of the church is divided from the nave by a Perpendicular arch and has a tierceron vault with a central bell-rope opening. To the south is a door to the circular stairs that lead to the ringing and bell chambers.

The tower contains a ring of 6 bells which were rehung in 1949. The bells date from the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and all have inscriptions:

The treble bell is tuned to C and weighs 7 cwt. The inscription reads: "James Rossiter and Robert Smith: Churchwardens: James Wells Aldbourne fecit 1809."

No. 2: B flat; 8 cwt. “Mr Geiles Long and Mr Geiles Balm: Churchwardens: Thomas Bilbie fecit 1753.”

No. 3: A flat; 9 cwt. “George Gifford and John Parker; Churchwardens: Thomas Mears of London, Founder, 1835.”

No. 4: G; 12 cwt. “George Gibbs of Home House and Nich. Slad. Churchwardens: A.R. 1725.”

No. 5: F; 14 cwt. “James Rossiter and Robert Smith: Churchwardens: James Wells, Aldbourne, Wilts. Fecit 1809.”

Tenor: E flat; 21 cwt. “G. Gifford and E. Gibbs: Churchwardens: Thomas Mears London, Founder, recast ad 1838.”

The Aldbourne bell foundry, manufacturers of the treble and No. 5 bells, was started in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and was taken over by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in 1826. The Bilbie family, founder of No. 2, started casting bells in Chew Stoke near Bristol, in 1698. In 1746 they opened a second foundry in Cullompton, Devon, called the West of England Church Bellfoundry. The Chew Stoke foundry closed in 1811 and the Cullompton foundry in 1814.

Thomas Mears and his descendants owned the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London from 1781 to 1873. They cast No. 3 and the tenor. The Whitechapel Bell Foundry is the oldest bell foundry in Britain. It was started in 1570 and has been in business continuously since then. In 1904, it was taken over by the Hughes family, who still own it, and also has the distinction of being Britain’s oldest manufacturing company.

A.R. stands for Abraham Rudhall II, the owner of Rudhall of Gloucester, bell founders, who case No. 4. They were in business from 1684 to 1835.

In 1859, a set of rules were agreed for the bellringers, and a copy still hangs in the ringing chamber. The rules include one that states that “A fine of 3*d* to be imposed on any member of the Company of Ringers on every occasions that he is guilty of profane, unclean or quarrelsome language in the Church or Belfry; a similar penalty being attached to wearing a hat or cap in the house of God.”

### **The Exterior of the Church**

The church is 134 ft. (41 m) long, built generally in Early Perpendicular style. It is “embattled” with castellated parapets and crocketed pinnacles.

At the western end of the **South Aisle**, the angle buttress bears an unidentified mason's mark; at the east end, a similar buttress carries a type of sundial known as a mass clock or scratch dial. These were not intended to tell the time but, with the aid of a central peg or gnomon, the time of the various services. The rood stair turret, also castellated and built as part of the 1430s additions, projects from the corner where the outer walls of the south aisle and chancel meet.

**The Porch** is on the south side of the church. In the niche over the entrance doorway is a statue of St Julian, representing him as the Hospitaller with an oar in his hand. It was sculpted by Wellow resident, Gilbert Sumsion, as part of the 1952 restoration. Inside the porch, there are four carved stone angel corbels in each corner and two carved niches over the door. The statues that they must have contained are missing. The entrance to the church from the porch is through a 14<sup>th</sup> century oak door carved with blank tracery.

**The Tower** is 84 ft. (25 m) high, built in three stages, flanked by massive, square-set buttresses and surmounted with an embattled parapet and crocketed pinnacles. The stair turret is on the southeast corner. There are two windows, in the north and south tower walls, that illuminate the ringing chamber, and, above, louvered bell openings in each wall.

**The West Door** has a hood moulding which terminates in two corbel stones, installed in 1975 and also carved by Peter Watts. They are portraits of Edward Henderson, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and Major Horton-Fawkes, the patron of the living at that date.

*Text by Jane Rees © 2013*

*An illustrated version of this guide is available in the Church.*

*For further information about the church services, activities and events, please visit [www.stjsgroup.org](http://www.stjsgroup.org)*