

A Guide
to the
Parish Church
of
St Julian the Hospitaller
Wellow, Somerset



*If aught thou has to give or lend,
This ancient Parish Church befriend,
If poor but still in spirit willing
Out with thy purse and give a shilling,
But if its depths should be profound
Think of God and give a pound.*

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 4th 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.



Statue of St Julian over the South Porch, sculpted by Wellow resident, Gilbert Sursion in 1952.

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 in the mid-14th century, three parish priests died, in 1349, 1350 and 1351.

In 1369, Sir Thomas Hungerford bought the villages of Farleigh and Wellow for 1100 marks. A follower of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in 1357 Hungerford became a Member of Parliament and in 1376, the leader of the House of Commons, the first 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 re-appointed as 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 the 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. Again they 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 were the architects for the subsequent restoration in 1952. The work included a new rood loft and rood, the original having been destroyed at some time.



The rood screen which divides the nave from the chancel with a rood loft and rood (the crucifix.)

The Interior of the Church

The Nave is divided into four bays with columns in the Perpendicular style. The tie-beams of the panelled 15th century roof 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. Originally painted, some of the angels retain traces of this.

The 15th century pews have fine poppy heads and simple panelled tracery on their ends. One unusual feature is the reservation of seats for parishioners from the parishes in the Wellow Hundred, including Hinton Charterhouse and Southstoke. Hand written on some of the pew backs, these inscriptions probably date from the 17th or 18th 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 18th 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 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 15th century, the loft and rood dating to the 1952 restoration. The oak door to the right of the rood gives entry to the 15th 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.



One of the angels on the tie beam bosses.



One seat reserved for males from Hinton Charterhouse.

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 rebuilt and extended.

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

The pulpit is mid-20th 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 stair 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 14th century heads of kings and bishops set in the south wall and either side of the east window.[1] They were found during the 1952 restoration, though their origins are unknown. The stained glass windows date from the early years of the 20th century.

The South Aisle probably dates from the 15th 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.[2] Several generations of the Scudamore (Skydmore) family lived in the parish of Wellow from the early 16th century to the late 17th century, some of whom are buried in the churchyard. Thomas is buried in the church. In 1523, William Skydmore (Scudamore) leased the Wellow parsonage from Cirencester Abbey, which gave him the right to appoint the incumbent, then a curate, of St Julian’s Church. In 1543, he was allegedly murdered by William Crouch who purchased the lease and in 1745 appointed John Simmons as the curate of St Julian’s.



One of the heads mounted on the south wall of the chancel.

There is a 15th century piscina, used for washing the communion vessels, in the south wall.[3] 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.[4] Probably dating from around 1400, it was unearthed when the chancel was being rebuilt in 1845.



Top right-hand part of the wall painting in the Hungerford Chapel.

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 15th century alterations. On the east wall is a 15th century painting of Christ and the twelve apostles, believed to be the only 15th century church wall painting of this subject surviving in England.

Below the painting is an ornate tomb, with a carved and painted effigy of Dorothy Popham who died in 1614.[5] She was married to Edward Popham, a local magistrate and MP for Bridgewater, Somerset, from 1618-26. He owned property in Wellow and Hinton Charterhouse as well as his principal residence, the Huntworth Estate near Bridgewater.

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 regilded 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.[6] Referring to the building of the chapel, it is inscribed “For the love of Jesus 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 13th 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.[7]

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. [8]

The tower contains a ring of 6 bells which were rehung in 1949. The bells date from the 18th and early 19th 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.*"



At the rear left, is the No. 4 bell, the oldest in the tower; with, to its right, the No. 5 and then the tenor. The bell in the front is No. 3. The bells are raised, i.e. mouth up, ready for ringing.

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, founders of the treble and No. 5 bells, was started in the late 17th 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 the No. 3 and tenor bells. In 1904, it was taken over by the Hughes family. It was started in 1570 and was the oldest bell foundry in Britain until its closure in 2017.

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

In 1859, a set of rules was agreed for the bellringers, and a copy still hangs in the ringing chamber. The rules include one that states that *“A fine of 3d. to be imposed on any member of the Company of Ringers on every occasion 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 with castellated parapets and crocketed pinnacles.

At the western end of the **South Aisle**, the angle buttress bears an unidentified mason's mark.[9] At the east end, a similar buttress carries a type of sundial known as a mass clock or scratch dial.[10] These were not intended to tell the hours but, with the aid of a, now missing, central peg or gnomon, the times 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. [11]

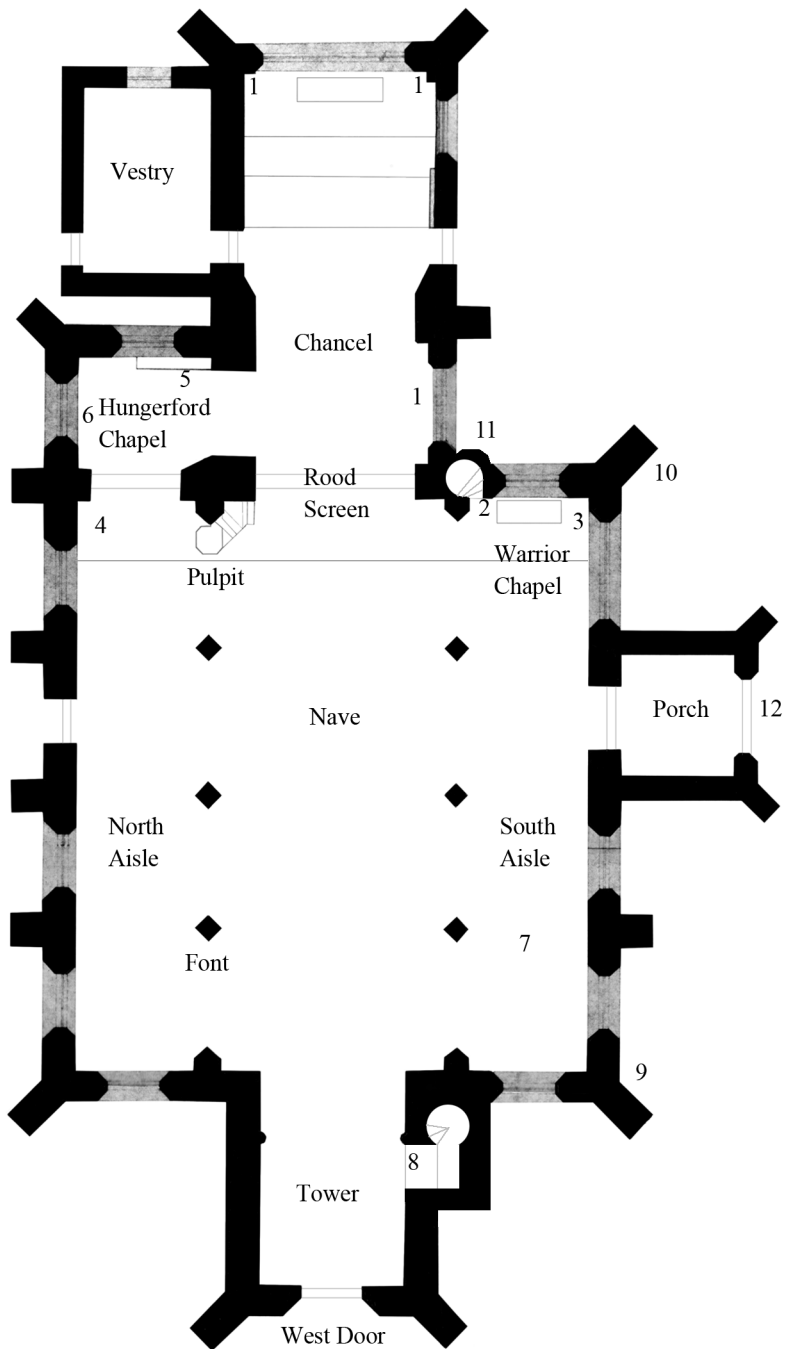
The Porch is on the south side of the church. In the niche over the entrance doorway is a statue of St Julian, representing him as the Hospitaller with an oar in his hand.[12] It was sculpted by Wellow resident, Gilbert Sumson, as part of the 1952 restoration. Inside the porch, there are four carved stone angel corbels, one 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 14th 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 tower is later than the church but it has not been possible to establish the date of its construction.

The West Door, shown below, 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.





Diagrammatic plan of St Julian's Church

*Lord, give us grace to hear your message
and the courage to respond.*