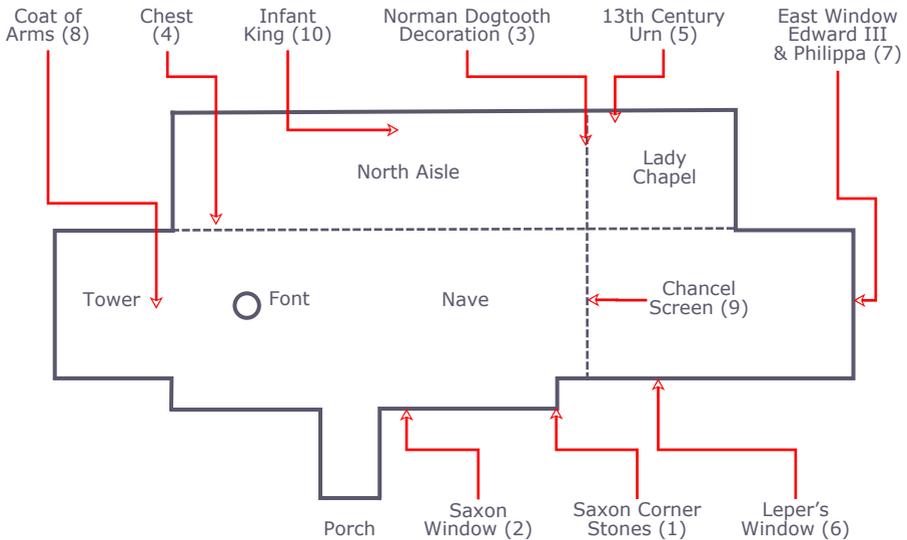


St. Pancras Church, Arlington

An Historical Guide

Note: numbers in parentheses refer to the position of items shown in the floorplan.



Churchyard

Set well away from busy roads, St Pancras is nonetheless visited by many walkers following the Wealdway and local footpaths to Arlington Reservoir and the 13th century Priory at Michelham. Many pause here to be refreshed by the beauty of the natural world enhanced by the presence of this ancient church.

Long ago, before the church was built, an ancient Chapel, the last remains of which disappeared in the 19th century, would have stood to the right as you walk onto the churchyard path through the Millennium Lychgate.

The lychgate is the most modern part of the church, built to commemorate 2000 years of Christianity. The earliest recorded burials in the churchyard date from 1607, when church record keeping began, but since the church has been in use for far longer, these were certainly not the first. St Pancras notably represents all early and medieval periods of architecture in one building.

Roman Connections (Pre-9th Century)

It is impossible to say when there was first a place of worship on this site, but churches dedicated to

St Pancras are generally among those founded in the earliest period of Christianity in England. This place, though not the building itself, may even have been used for worship by Romano-British Christians.

The excavation of the uneven ground on the path between the church and the modern reservoir has suggested to historians that there was a Romano-British settlement here before the stone Saxon part of the church was built. There is evidence here of a Romano-British port on the River Cuckmere, and the present farmer is still paid not to plough these fields in order to preserve the value of the archaeological remains. Roman tiles and pottery are incorporated in the small Saxon window by the porch and in the East wall of the chapel and elsewhere in the church walls.

Saxon origins 870-1066 (Alfred the Great to King Harold)

During restoration work in 1893, burnt remains of timber buildings from two distinct periods were found under the floor of the nave providing evidence of earlier wooden structures predating the existing stone Saxon building.

The Saxon features, from the 9th Century (c. 890?), are best seen from the outside - the large corner stones placed alternately "long" and "short" (1) are typically Saxon as is the small round topped

window (2) to the right of the porch (sole survivor of six original Saxon windows - mostly replaced by larger windows in the later Decorated style). There appears to have been an earlier Saxon chancel attached to the stone structure of the present nave.

As you go in through the porch, notice the original holy water piscine with its 1624 graffiti re-housed in the 20th Century reconstruction of the old South Porch. From inside the church you can see the depth of the Saxon window set into walls two and a half feet thick.

It seems that the parish of Arlington, then as now, was a scattered parish and the effort and resources put into this building are striking evidence of the faith of this small agricultural community over 1,000 years ago. The growth of the building in the mediaeval period, as detailed in the following notes, suggests that the population increased in this period, and up to the early 20th Century there were more buildings than at present in the vicinity of the church, including the old Rectory that was pulled down in 1850.

Norman Period 1066-1189 (William the Conqueror to Richard I)

The Domesday Book, from the Norman period, records this place as "Herlintone" but does not record the church.

The Lady Chapel next to the chancel (to your left as you look at the altar) shows various features of Norman architecture, for example the dogtooth decoration (3) in the archway and the round-arched lancet windows on the North wall (the East wall windows having been replaced by a later Decorated window). Coincidentally, the nearby Lewes Priory was also dedicated to St Pancras in 1131. The Lady Chapel may have been linked with the Priory or it may have been built following the murder, in 1181, of Thomas a Becket, who became a saint whose shrine attracted many pilgrims along this route to Canterbury.

The expensive coffin lids found here indicate that the Lady Chapel was used for burial of important persons in the neighbourhood. However, it was not until the 1890s restoration that the coffin under the arcade (between Chapel and Chancel) was excavated to reveal a solid chalk sarcophagus containing a skeleton. This was reburied at a higher level to reduce further erosion of the coffin lid - as you now see it.

Middle Ages 12th to 13th Centuries 1190-1299 (King John to Edward I)

The bell tower, spire and the north aisle were built in the 1200s. On the north wall the list of Arlington's priests begins with "1276-7 Henry is the Vicar" and, at this time, the Rectory of Arlington became part

of the diocese of Chichester Cathedral (as it remains to this day). You can see various objects here from this period - near the font a 12th century oak chest (4) with two half lids, all the boards rough cut from a tree - and, in a glass case in the Lady Chapel, a 13th century pottery urn (5) uncovered during 19th century restoration. Also from this period is the leper's window (6) behind the priest's stall in the Chancel. Anyone too sick to join the congregation could participate in the service by looking through this window, which gives a good view of the altar and the ministry of the sacrament.

Much of the stone used for this medieval building work was of Eastbourne rock, an iron-bearing sandstone of the sort still seen on Eastbourne beach. In 1893 this same source was used for the large scale restoration of the church. If you look at the arch at the West end of the nave you can see a number of small holes; these were made when the rock was under the sea by rock boring creatures called "piddocks".

14th Century (Edward 11 to Henry IV)

Fragments of 14th century wall paintings are evident on most of the church walls: large red roses over the Chancel arch with large crosses; the remains of a fine St. Christopher, patron of pilgrims, over the arcades in the North aisle and, opposite, a small red figure

by the Saxon window. Other traces of colour and design suggest that the church was extensively decorated during the 14th century (though the scroll texts are Elizabethan - added in the 16th century, 200 years later).

What a wonderfully colourful place the pre-Reformation church must have been, divided into several candlelit shrines to St. Nicholas, St. Pancras, St. Michael, St. Katherine and Our Lady. Unfortunately the lime in early period whitewash destroyed much of the original colour and, when the old whitewash was removed, these wall fragments were all that was left.

The 14th century saw the last major construction in the building of St Pancras - replacing the earlier Saxon Chancel with a Chancel in the Decorated Gothic style (1250-1380). The discovery of burnt structures beneath the present chancel, and incorporation of burnt stones in the walls, would seem to indicate that a severe fire occasioned the rebuilding of the Chancel.

Above the Chancel Arch you can still make out the shape of the earlier arch in the stonework. Apart from its Decorated style, the Chancel can easily be dated by the heads of Edward III (1327-1377) and his Queen, Philippa (7) (parents of the Black Prince) on the feet of the window arch. Edward's face being readily identified by his characteristic

twisted mouth. You can see this feature, possibly caused by a stroke, in Edward's death mask in the Jerusalem Chamber in Westminster Abbey.

Note also the Masons' marks on the main Chancel arch - two within the Screen have been given a chalk surround for better identification. The larger windows put in at this time, in the tower, nave and North aisle, introduced more light into the church but replaced the earlier Saxon windows.

The 14th century arch built to link the nave to the tower, at the West end, probably replaced the original doorway to the old Saxon church, the North, South and West doors all being of a later medieval date.

15th Century (Henry V to Henry VII)

Look up and admire the magnificent kingposts, roof trusses and timbers dating from around 1450 and originally covered in lath and plaster as evidenced by the rusty nail holes in the wood.

Churchwardens' accounts of the 15th century are rare and in Sussex practically unknown, but the Arlington Churchwardens' accounts for 1455-1479, now preserved in the British Museum, appear to be the earliest. From these records we know that Arlington Church had a pulpit at least as early as 1458 as there is an entry for "repairs to pulpit ii shgs. iii pence".

Among other things, the accounts record a herd of 28 cows belonging to the Church, hired out to farmers on payment of two pounds of beeswax per cow to make votive candles for the shrines of the Blessed Virgin, St Pancras, St Michael, St Katherine and for the original ancient Lady Chapel in the Churchyard (mentioned above). These fascinating medieval records show the complex interrelationship of community and church, still developing and enduring today. Perhaps most striking is the reference to "39 shillings paid for 4,000 shingles" for the spire - it's not just in modern times that local woodpeckers have sought out the wooden spire as a desirable residence. It may be the descendants of those mediaeval woodpeckers who do the damage today!

16th to 17th Centuries (Henry VIII to Queen Anne)

Cromwell's Puritans finished off what remained of the old shrines, sacred objects and paintings and defaced the carved heads of cherubs in the Chancel. However, activities seem to have continued relatively unaffected; the list of incumbents (on the North wall) continues through the Commonwealth period and the church's registers show continued marriages, baptisms and funerals.

These registers began in 1607 and include some notable Puritan names: Moredruit Stone, Charity French, Sin-deny Earle, No-Merit

Vinall, Zealous Foote, Thankfull Foote, God's Blessing Bell (Curate) and the wonderfully named Patience Tester.

In 1615 comes a record: "*Baptised Stephen the son of John Williams, executed fortnight before for stealing (God give his sonne more grace.)*". And later "*Buried Stephen the son of John Williams (The Lord will be more merciful.)*". Full records are held in the East Sussex County Archives in Lewes.

The church's three bells make a lovely peal and date from 1606 (15 cwt second), 1616 (10 cwt treble), both by Edmund Giles of Lewes and 1677 (1 ton tenor) by William Hull. The original Elizabethan communion chalice is now held in the British Museum.

Modern Period - 1700 to the Present

Many of our most beautiful possessions date from this later period, including a silver communion chalice (maker Timothy Lay, London, 1697), a paten of silver gilt, 1846, with letters I.J.K. on reverse, and a pewter flagon inscribed by the churchwardens of 1685 (currently on loan to the Barbican Museum, Lewes).

Note the Royal Arms of George III, painted by George Ade and dated 1819 above the entrance to the bell tower at the West end (8).

The 19th century, despite our image of the Victorians as a

churchgoing nation, saw a decline in Arlington's fortunes; such that when Revd. Thomas Bunston took over in 1889, St Pancras was described as being "*in a state of decay, dirt and ruin..., worse than any other church in Sussex..., devoid of every decent requisite of worship.*" However, Bunston (like Boys-Ellman in nearby Berwick at the same period) led a major restoration of the church, remarkably sympathetic to its heritage, contradicting the generally poor press given to Victorian restoration, and, most important, filling the church with regular parish worship once again.

As part of this restoration, a Chancel Screen (9) was made from ancient oaks which formerly supported the West gallery in the tower and was beautifully crafted by the local Mayfield School of Carving.

The floor of the nave, which had been at the same level as the Chancel, was lowered, creating steps up to the communion rail. It was during this excavation that the evidence of the two fires was found, including pieces of clay with hollows formed by the wood of the wattles which had supported it, indicating earlier wattle and daub construction. The Lady Chapel, which had been used as a school cut off from the rest of the church interior (with traces of the boiler chimney and door still evident in the restored North wall!) was restored to its original use. The stone coffin lids which had served

as a floor for the school can now be seen, much eroded, against the walls in various parts of the church. The old box pews were replaced by the present pews, made by William Levett, who also made the font cover and enlarged the altar from the same trees.

Also during the 1890s restoration the stucco was removed from the South wall to reveal the flint walls and the Saxon window.

In the late 19th century the East Window (7) was filled with a stained glass depiction of the Crucifixion and dedicated to the memory of William Chandless of this parish - Christian cowboy and Amazon explorer, whose exploits you can read about in the offprints at the back of the church (or in Wikipedia). We could be the only church in England with a window dedicated to a cowboy! A separate offprint gives some details of our bats, mostly roosted at the east end, above the chapel.

From 1977 to 1989, Christmas services were enlivened by the celebrated annual performances of "The Infant King" (featuring a real donkey!) in which parishioners got together to enact the story of the Nativity under the leadership of incumbent Revd. W.D. (Bill) Hardy and his wife Jean - see the illustrations in the North aisle (10).

There are also many beautiful 20th century embroideries in the altar frontals and cushions in the chapel (details in the separate brochure in the chapel).

21st Century Mission

Arlington's congregation continues to meet for regular weekly and other occasional and festival services and events and the church is much loved and well supported by the Arlington village community within the Benefice of Berwick, Selmeston-with Alciston and Wilmington.

Notices of services are posted on the noticeboards in the porch. You are very welcome to join us for traditional worship in these lovely surroundings.

*Friend, be grateful to
the strong and loyal
who in the name of Jesus Christ
buidled this place of worship,
and to all who have beautified and
hallowed it by their
prayer and praise,
beseeching His blessing on
all those who love this
House of Prayer
as the inspiration of their labour -
and may that Blessing
rest upon you and yours.*