

# St Giles' Shipbourne

## *A Brief Guide*

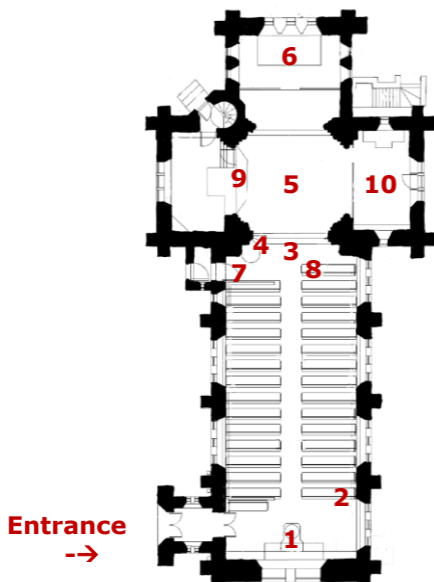


The parish of Shipbourne is united with the adjacent parish of Plaxtol in a single benefice. There is a strong congregation and regular Sunday worship with Parish Communion using a contemporary setting, Matins or a family service.

The church holds a thriving Farmers' Market on Thursday mornings throughout the year. Begun in 2003, this was a pioneering effort to connect the church with its community and to raise money for charity. Unusually, the market stalls are set up both inside the church and in the churchyard.

## Points of interest in this guide

**EAST**



**WEST**

**The Interior of St Giles**



1. The Font



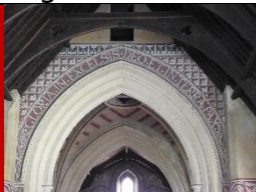
6. The Reredos



2. Sgraffito



7. The Pulpit



3. Chancel Arch



8. The Lectern



4. Carved Corbels



9. The Organ



5. Raising the Bells



10. Lady Vane  
Chapel

## Architecture and decoration

The interior of St Giles' is undeniably impressive. Although not large, the building has grandeur and richness from its complete scheme of decoration and furnishings of the 1880s. Indeed, the church has been very little altered since it was built and is something of a period piece.

Standing at the West end, by the font [1] and looking East you will see that the nave is dominated by the almost over-powering *sgraffito* decoration which covers much of the walls [2]. *Sgraffito* is produced by scratching through a top layer of plaster to reveal a different coloured plaster below. In this case the top layer is white and the under-layers are ochre or black. Over the chancel arch is the legend "*GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO ET IN TERRA PAX*" meaning "Glory to God on High and on Earth Peace".

### The Nave

If you walk down the nave to the chancel arch [3], you will see that it rests on richly carved corbels with stiff-leaf foliage. Notice the lizards (or are they dragons?) which crawl up the foliage [4]. See also the door above the chancel arch which when open enables the bell-ringers to see into the church so as to start or end their ringing at the right point.

In front of you the crossing space beneath the tower is stone-vaulted, more evidence of the Cazalets' ambition. The vaulting is supported on shafts of coloured marble and the vault webs use both limestone and red sandstone producing an attractive striped effect. Notice the circular opening in the middle of the vault through which the bells were raised into the tower [5].

## **Furnishings**

The reredos (the decorative screen behind the altar) shows the Last Supper and is of alabaster, a soft stone which is easily carved [6]. The pulpit to the left of the chancel arch is of limestone and alabaster, also with elaborate bands of carving [7]. The font at the West end of the nave is of limestone on shafts of red and black marble [1].

Reredos, pulpit and font were, according to contemporary newspaper reports, carved by a "Mr Bromfield". To the right of the chancel arch is a brass eagle lectern [8].

The only furnishing surviving from the earlier buildings is an early 17th century chair used as a bishop's chair (not usually shown). This carries a brass plate which asserts that it was used by Charles I when chairing his Council at the King's Manor, York in 1642. How the chair came to be at Shipbourne is not clear: perhaps Sir Henry Vane the elder,

formerly the King's Secretary of State, was responsible.

### **The Organ**

The organ [9] is a fine example of a late 19th century instrument produced by a builder with an outstanding reputation, T.C. Lewis of Brixton. It was constructed to a specification by Bertram Luard-Selby of Ightham Mote, and was given by Mrs Marshall, Edward Cazalet's mother-in-law. The organ, restored in 2010, has had few if any modifications since it was first installed.

### **Lady Vane Chapel**



The major monument in the church is that to Christopher, Lord Barnard, his wife Elizabeth and infant daughter, also Elizabeth, in the Vane chapel [10]). As noted above, he died in 1723, while his wife died in 1725; their daughter predeceased them in 1688. The monument is of white, grey and mottled pink marble, probably Italian, and reaches to the roof. This is a typical example of the dynastic pride so characteristic of 18th century families, seen in its size and in the display of Barnard's arms and peer's



coronet on the pediment. The monument was erected in the newly constructed church before Lord Barnard's death. Barnard had been involved in a bitter legal dispute with his eldest son about the latter's inheritance which went all the way to the House of Lords and he probably put up the monument in his own lifetime because he calculated that his son would be unwilling to do it after his death, such was the bad blood between them.

The fact that the inscription plate was left blank until the 1930s when the present inscription (evidently replicating what had been intended by Lord Barnard) was carved suggests that Lord Barnard's judgment of his son was correct.

The other memorials in the Vane chapel include those on the South wall to Frances, Viscountess Torrington and Sir John Jervis. Lady Torrington lived in Shipbourne later in life and died in 1868. Her tablet of white marble is signed by the sculptor C. Sharp of St Leonards.

Sir John Jervis, whose tablet is of coloured marbles and is in a Venetian style of the 15th century, lived at Fairhill in Riding Lane in the South West corner of the parish (a house subsequently occupied by the Earl of Derby, Prime Minister in the 1860s). He was one of the leading law reformers and jurists of the 19th century. He wrote in 1829 the standard work on coroners and inquests: *Jervis's*

*Offices and Duties of Coroners*, which has never been out of print.

A remarkable optical illusion can be observed when standing in the Lady Vane Chapel and looking towards the organ – the stained glass of the South window appears to be suspended in the chancel.

## **Shipbourne and the Vane family**

St Giles' church at Shipbourne, Kent is an impressive building of 1881 but there were at least two preceding churches on this site. The crypt under the church holds the remains of members of the Vane family.



The Vanes achieved national prominence in the 17th century when Sir Henry Vane the elder (1589-1655) was first knighted by James I in 1620 and subsequently became Secretary of State to the latter's son Charles I. This Sir Henry bought a lease of Raby Castle in County Durham in 1628, which in due course became the family's main seat, though they continued to own Fairlawne for another 150 years.

Sir Henry's son, Henry Vane the younger (1613-1662) (3), was a Puritan who emigrated to the new Massachusetts Bay colony in 1635 and was elected its Governor. There he acquired a formidable reputation as a man of the highest principle, so much so





that the American politician and lawyer Wendell Phillips called him 'the noblest human being who ever walked the streets of yonder city [Boston].' There is a statue of him at the Boston Public Library. But he also seems to

have been a difficult, somewhat angular figure. Clarendon, Charles II's Lord Chancellor, said that he was 'above ordinances, unlimited and unrestrained by any rules or bounds prescribed to other men, by reason of his perfection.' He returned to England in 1638, served as MP in the Long Parliament and was knighted by Charles I. However, in the Civil War he was an ardent Parliamentarian and republican and during the Commonwealth one of Cromwell's key supporters in the Rump Parliament, so that, although he did not support the execution of Charles I, at Charles II's restoration in 1660 he was considered too dangerous a figure to be at liberty and was arrested for treason and executed in 1662.

There is a detailed account in Samuel Pepys' diary of the chaotic scenes at Vane's execution on Tower Hill: Pepys seems to have been slightly put out that because of the press of spectators he missed the moment of beheading.

## **Fairlawne and the Cazalets**





Cazalet was well known as a racehorse trainer - he trained the horses of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. He died in 1973. His monument is unusual in being a modern brass.

The Queen Mother sometimes worshipped at St Giles while staying with the Cazalets in the 1950s and 1960s. After Peter's death, Fairlawne was sold to Prince Khalid Abdullah, whose family continue to own the house and surrounding estate.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This brief guide is based on a more detailed pamphlet prepared by Paul Britton. Images of Sir Henry Vane the Elder and Sir Henry Vane the Younger reproduced under a creative commons licence courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

All photographs were taken by Gordon Wright.

### **Prepared by the Arts Society Sevenoaks**

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