

ST. MARY'S



Northolt · Middlesex

Historical Background

The Church of St. Mary, Northolt probably marks the site where pre-Christian Saxons settled in the seventh century. 'Northolt' comes from an Anglo-Saxon name meaning 'the northern neck of land'. When Christianity came to the area a wooden church would have been built, probably in the eleventh century. The Domesday Book of 1086 mentions that Geoffrey de Mandeville had held 'Northala', as it had become known, since the Norman Conquest. At that time there was a priest who had about sixty acres of land and (presumably) a house.

In about 1300 the Lord of the Manor, Peter le Boteler, built the first stone manor house on the clay ridge and surrounded it by a moat which can still be seen behind the east end of the church. At this time the present church was built – from the same materials as the manor house – and the village, which was originally on the top of the ridge, was moved down the hill to its present position. A door (now blocked up but visible from the outside) on the north wall of the church gave access from the manor house.

From 1300 to 1500 the church consisted of the present nave with the High Altar on the east wall, probably situated in a small apse. The window which remained was blocked up at an unknown date. In 1521 the chancel and sanctuary were added, giving the present off-centre appearance. These were built in red Tudor brick.

The small bell tower with spire was added to the nave roof in the sixteenth century and the gallery which now houses the organ was built in 1703 for musicians and servants. Buttresses of various sizes and ages have been added to the exterior, the latest additions being the two large ones on the west wall in 1718 when the church was thought to slipping down the hill.

Twentieth century additions to the church are the south porch which was rebuilt in 1943 and the vestry which was added in 1951.

The Interior

As you enter the church, one of the first things you might notice is the stone **font** which is mid to late fourteenth century. In 1943 it was moved from its original position under the gallery and mounted on a pedestal similar to the one which was probably smashed during times of religious upheaval. (Unfortunately, the modern pedestal lacks the amenity of a hole to drain the water into the soil, so when fresh water is needed for a baptism, the blessed water in the font now has to be baled out!) The font is octagonal and decorated with a rose, leaves, window tracery, circles and (probably) the escutcheon of Sir Nicholas Brembre, who was Lord of the Manor from 1374 to 1388 and was executed for high treason on a trumped-up charge. The oak cover was made in 1640 and bears the initials of the churchwardens of that time.

To the right of the door, as you enter, is a **holy water stoup** set in the wall. It now holds a bowl of holy water so that people may make the sign of the cross to remind themselves of their baptism and Christian commitment.

As you walk down the side aisle by the south wall you will see the **piscina** in St. Stephen's chapel. (The modern altar has recently been removed.) This was a basin for draining away the water used at the Eucharist. Above it is a shelf for the bread, wine and water before they were placed on the altar.

On the north wall, opposite the door, is the **Benefactions Board**. This mentions the Arundell Charity of 1697 and the Martha Jackson Charity of 1836, just two of the many gifts made to the poor of the parish over the centuries.

The nave **windows** are interesting. The one on the north wall, near the pulpit, is badly worn and awaits restoration while the window on the rear south-west wall has been restored recently. The west window, although also waiting for its crumbling stone to be restored, still shows fine tracery and carving which must have been very beautiful. To its right is a **grotesque head**; its companion on the left is missing. Lower down, on the same side, is a small metal **rush light holder** which would have been used before the days of candles and oil lights.

An interior view showing the gallery with the Laud hatchment board.

Other items of interest which have added to the worship at St. Mary's in this century are the **crucifix** which hangs over the altar, the statue of **St. Stephen** by Martin Travers, the various **icons** around the walls, the statue of our patron, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the **trptych** on the wall over the door, the **ambry** in the sanctuary wall which houses holy oils and the **tabernacle** on the east wall which houses the Blessed Sacrament (the consecrated bread used at Holy Communion).





The statues of Our Lady and St. Stephen.

Memorials

The church contains a number of interesting memorials including:

The Brasses

1. **Henry Rowdell**, a local landowner who died in 1452 was buried under the floor of St. Stephen's Chapel. His memorial brass (under the mat) depicts him in armour with his feet on a lion. An indentation marks a missing shield.

2. In the chancel, another brass (under the carpet) commemorates **Susan and John Gyfforde** of Gyfforde's Farm (later Islips Manor). It portrays a man in armour and his wife. Their nine sons and three daughters are set in two separate shields, and there are four missing shields. The lady's dress dates it in the mid-sixteenth century. The inscription beneath the brass concludes with a reference to Susan:

*To whom the Almighty Lord three times three
sonnes by course hath lent
and daughters three but on the last her lyf
she spent.*

Of whose soul God have mercy.

The figures were set over earlier ones including an armed man of about 1480 and are in a slab of Purbeck marble thought to have been from an earlier altar, as a consecration cross is visible.

3. The third brass commemorates **Isaiah Bures**, Vicar of St. Mary's, 1592 to 1610. It is on the south-east wall of the chancel and shows a kneeling priest in gown.

The Hatchment Board

The hatchment on the front of the gallery was set up to mark the tercentenary of the martyrdom of Archbishop William Laud who was executed in 1645. As Bishop of London, he became Rector of Northolt in 1628. The hatchment bears the arms of three of the four episcopal sees which he occupied and on the edge, in Latin, are the words he uttered on the scaffold: *I desire to depart and to be with Christ.*

The altar with the crucifix above it.



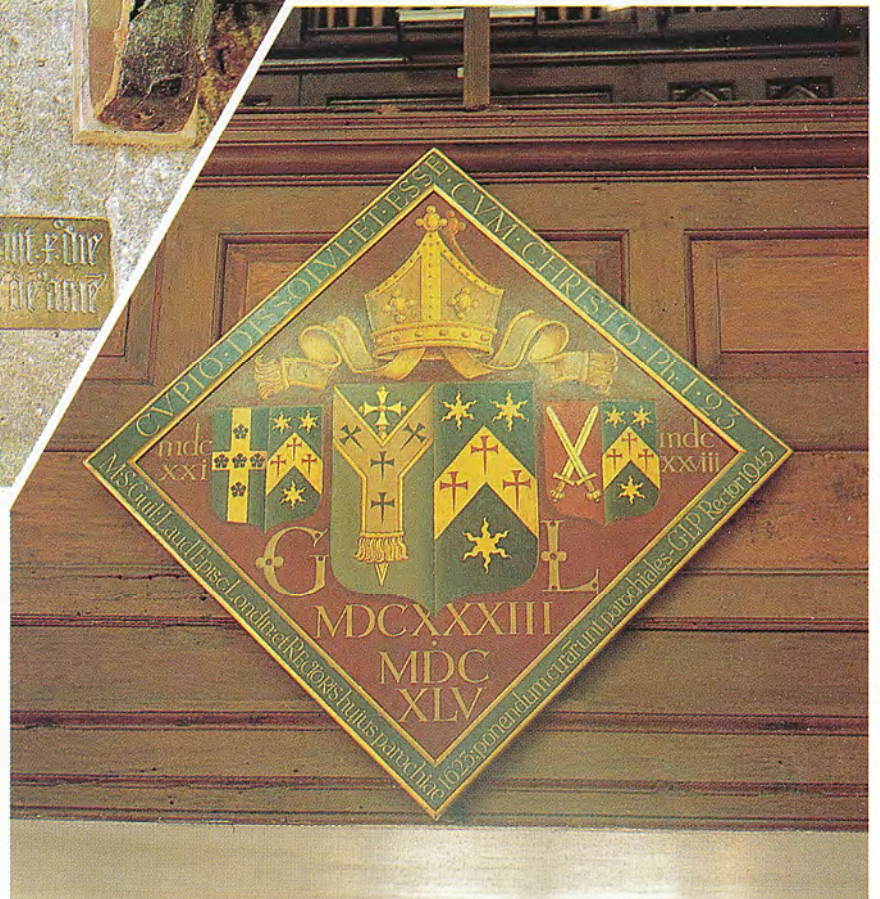
The Bells

The tiny white, wooden tower under its broach spire houses a miscellaneous collection of four seventeenth century bells which are surprisingly large for their cramped home. They hang 'dead' (for chiming, not full-circle ringing) and the three largest are chimed by ropes attached to rings on the clapper flights, a method unkind to bells as it puts them under considerable stress. The sanctus bell has a rope attached to a lever but it does not swing freely so is rarely used as it is difficult to chime the correct number of strokes.

The three larger bells are fixed to **very** old elm headstocks by iron supporting straps and keys. These fittings are probably original but the oak frame in which they hang is of a much later date. There is no floor in the tower and very little room to climb around. The bells are packed in tightly with just enough room to swing slightly but they could never be hung with wheels for full-circle ringing. They do not have consecutive notes which accounts for their odd sound, although the two larger bells have a fine tone in spite of their restricted movement.

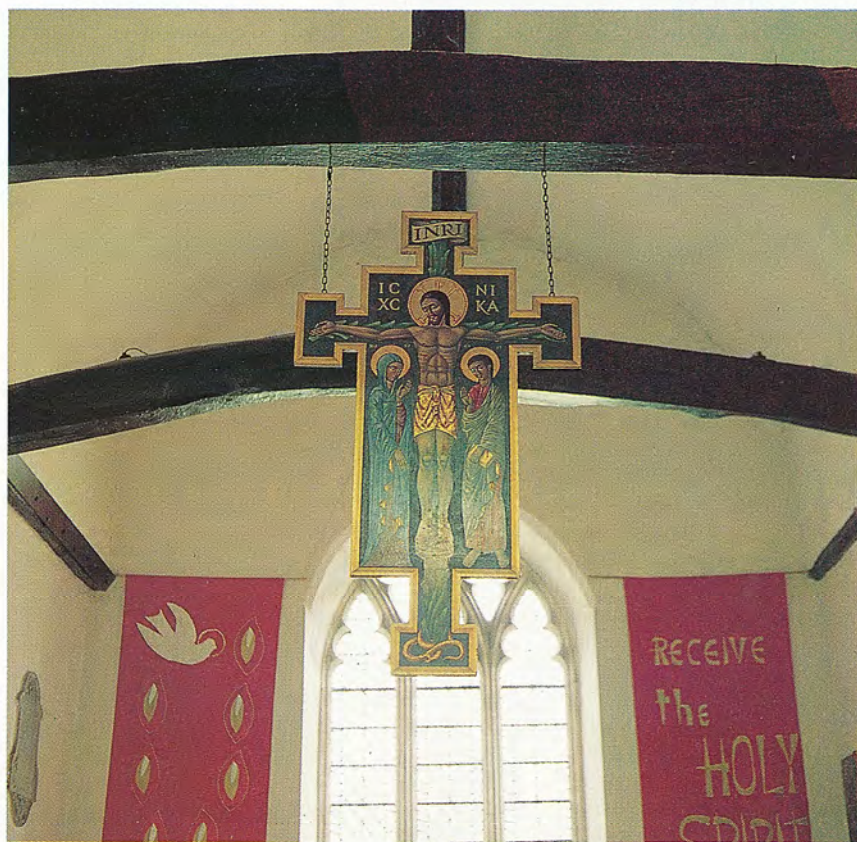


The memorial to Henry Rowdell.



The William Laud hatchment.

The font.



The crucifix above the altar.

The tenor (largest bell) is $7\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. in B flat, 2' 10" in diameter and was cast at the Whitechapel Foundry by the master founder. It is inscribed with his name, *Thomas Bartlet made me. 1624*, and the Whitechapel foundry mark is clearly visible on the bell's crown.

The second bell is $5\frac{3}{4}$ cwt. in C and was cast in 1617 by a Houndsditch bellfounder, William Land, whose name is inscribed on the crown.

The treble is $3\frac{3}{4}$ cwt. in E flat and is inscribed with the names *William King and Thomas Lewes*, most likely, the churchwardens. It was cast in 1656 by an itinerant founder, William Whitmore.

The tiny 28 lb. sanctus bell is also a Thomas Bartlet bell.

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