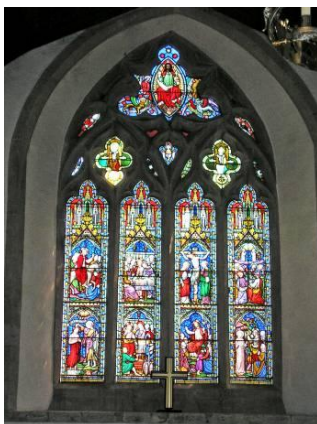


THE CHURCH OF ST DENYS STANFORD IN THE VALE



ILLUSTRATED HISTORY & SHORT GUIDE OF THE CHURCH

Welcome to the ancient parish church of St. Denys, Stanford in the Vale.



People have almost certainly worshipped here for more than a thousand years.

This simple but beautiful church is a witness to the faith of villagers through many generations, with medieval stonework, Jacobean woodwork, Victorian glass and contemporary embroidery.

As well as an historical monument, this is a place where people acknowledge and experience the presence of God at the centre of a busy world.

As you look round, do take time to enjoy the quiet and to seek God for yourself.

General History

The church is dedicated to St Denys, patron saint of France. The story goes that he was beheaded on Montmartre in Paris, but carried his head beneath his arm to the grave. When the Abbey of Abingdon was presented with a relic in the form of a finger of St Denys, it is likely that the church was named from this association. The church was founded about AD 939.



The construction of the church has followed an interesting sequence of events. By 1000 it probably had a nave only, with small slit windows and a thatched roof.

However, no part of the existing building can be dated exactly from before the 12th century, except perhaps the north and south doorways. At that time the church was narrower than it is today, with no north aisle.

As with most other churches of the period, a small, semi-circular chancel was most likely built. By this time the roof was probably clad with Cotswold Stone.





In the late 13th century, a major reconstruction took place. The north aisle, with a roof lower than now and a larger, square ended chancel were built. The tower was probably added in the 13th century, in two stages, up to the level of the corbel-frieze below the top windows.



Three small clerestory windows were provided in the north wall of the nave. The internal arcade of arches would have been built with the aisle on the line of the original north wall.

The north porch and vestry were constructed in the early 14th century and the chancel extended incorporating the present east window.



In the late 15th century the south porch and the window over it were added.

By the end of the 16th century the nave, chancel and aisle had been raised and the roof reconstructed at a flatter pitch. This work rather curiously covered the three small (late 13th century) clerestory windows that are still visible in the north wall from the nave; three new and higher ones were provided. The roof was leaded. Finally, the top storey of the tower was added, and ornamental battlements erected all round.



The churchwardens' accounts refer to a steeple which may have fallen down or been blown down in 1631. The 16th century church is how the church appears externally to this day, apart from the steeple, pinnacles and sanctus bell, with the addition of the clock, made by G.Nethercott of Wantage in 1768. In 1887 the clock was given a face-lift, to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

The masonry visible today in a lighter shade than the older building indicates the extensive repairs to the tower undertaken in 1986: this was chiefly to combat the ravages of the weather over the years.

A Tour of the Church

In the north porch there are three stone coffin lids of 13th century origin. When entering the church, turn left into the north aisle and leading from the side chapel, on the right, is a small doorway to a spiral staircase, now blocked off. This used to give access to the rood loft, a wooden screen fixed to the west of the large chancel arch, separating the east from the rest of the church and surmounted with the scene of the cross (*rood*). This was finally removed in 1560, after having been taken down earlier by royal decree and quietly replaced.

By the foot of the stairway is a full length ‘squint’, or opening, to give worshippers a view of the priest in the sanctuary from the north aisle. This unusual feature dates from the 13th century. The altar table was removed and replaced again, rather like the rood screen during the turbulent years of the Reformation.

Passing through the squint into the choir, you see the one-manual organ, built in 1983 for the church, on the left with its pipework on the wall above. At the east end, in the left hand corner, is a fine brass to Roger Campdene, a rector of the parish who died in 1398. During restoration work in 1983, it was discovered that parts were second-hand, having been used for an earlier brass in Warwickshire. A replica of the palimpsest is on display.



In the east window, fragments of medieval glass can be seen.

Most of the glass, however, is Victorian, given by Christopher Wordsworth, vicar of Stanford from 1850 to 1868 and later Bishop of Lincoln. He was nephew of the poet William Wordsworth, and himself the author of several well-known hymns.

In the south wall of the sanctuary is a piscina beneath a beautifully carved reliquary, all in stone. Tradition has it that Abingdon Abbey's finger of St Denys was once preserved here, or brought on occasion by the monks.



The heraldic shields in the last window on your left facing down the church are of 14th century glass and comprise, from left to right, the arms of Lord Zouch of Mortimer, King Edward I, and Clare, Earl of Gloucester. The Manor of Stanford was given by Edward I to Gilbert de Clare, when he married the King's daughter, Joan, in 1290. It later passed to Zouch of Mortimer.

Before leaving the chancel, note the brass candelabra (the sole survivor of four which once lit the church), and the altar frontal, an impressive piece of modern craftsmanship and potent reminder of what lies at the heart of the Christian faith – the cross of Christ.

A memorial by public subscription to Wordsworth's curate, George Proctor who died in the Crimean War, is situated above the pulpit.

The fine Jacobean carved pulpit has a low window behind it that would once have given light to an altar table in the nave. One has been recently reinstated in the same place.



The seventeenth-century aumbry

The South door is rarely used but leads into the south porch and into a minor world of speculation about its origin. This should be visited outside the church.

At the west end of the nave, above the tower arch, are the royal arms of George III. In the tower is a peal of eight bells. In 1738 six bells were brought for the church, but were replaced in 1968 with eight lighter bells from the disused church of St Peter-in-the-East in Oxford, as cracks had appeared in the tower walls.

As you turn to leave, on your left you will see an exceptional lidded font with its original counter-balance mechanism still in action. Like the pulpit, this also dates from the Jacobean (17th century) period.



It is worth pausing to look down the full length of the church, to take in the distinctive bowed arch before the altar table, which is widest at the top.

Outside the Church

Turning left as you leave the north door takes you towards a path crossing north-south. This is called Church Path and comes on its way from All Saints' Church, Goosey, in the south, to St George's Church, Hatford, in the north – both of which are now part of the parish of Stanford in the Vale. The path from Goosey was known as The Coffin Path, since it was the route taken to bring coffins to be buried in Stanford, with large stones on the way for resting the coffin.

Retracing your steps to the church, bear right to see the south porch. Outside the porch, on each side of the

doorway, are two weather-beaten shields, on which are carved ‘Rose and Fetterlock’ of York and the ‘Ragged Staff’ of the Warwicks. The tradition is that the porch was built to commemorate the marriage of Richard, Duke of Gloucester (later Richard III), to Anne Neville, Countess of Warwick. She was a direct descendant of Edward I and at that time was Lord of the Manor here. Further east, a scratch dial can be seen – used for service-times before the clock was installed.



Continuing round the church to approach Church Green, any apparent neglect of the churchyard is deliberate as, since 1990, this area has been set aside as a wildlife sanctuary. It has received a number of awards as an outstanding example of conservation. A separate guide to the area can be found in the church, as well as an informative display. The wildlife sanctuary is monitored as a conservation project by the children of the village school.



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