

St Matthew's Church, Rowde



Visitor Guide

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Welcome to St Matthew's Church.

Feel free to look around but please be respectful of any parishioners who may be here in quiet contemplation.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The Domesday book of 1086 AD mentions that there were twenty-eight people living in the village of Rowde, and that one of them was a priest. The earliest church was most likely on the current site as it is near running water, which was used for baptisms, and situated on high ground.

A document dated 1326, states that the vicar was to have a dwelling house with buildings and land next to the church. Oral tradition identifies this as the site of the "Jacobean House", which was built circa 1600, the large garden of which formerly stretched along the eastern boundary of the churchyard.

By 1400 the church was rebuilt, however, repairs to the church were minimal for some centuries as the Lord of the Manor was often absent and the manor was leased to tenants. The nave collapsed in 1830, and so between 1831 and 1833 the church, except the medieval tower, was rebuilt to the design of H E Goodridge using cut stone with slate roofs and embattled

parapets. The seventeenth century plaques to the Webb family were reset in the walls, and there is evidence of a former medieval building whose walls are behind the present facing of ashlar stone.

On Tuesday 17th September 1833, the church was re-opened for Divine Service and was re-dedicated to St Matthew, whose Patronal Festival is 21st September. Previously, the Patron Saint of the church was the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose birthday is kept on 8th September.

In the late 1800s many changes were made to the building, as attested by the following news article from September 1886:

‘The Parish Church – In the interior of this pretty edifice considerable improvements have been effected recently. It is a well-known fact that for many years past the whole of the accommodation in the chancel has been monopolised by the Lord of the Manor (now deceased), to the exclusion of the choir, who have been obliged to sit in the east end of the nave. Acting under the powers conferred by a faculty granted by the Bishop of the Diocese, the choir seats have now been restored to their proper place in the chancel, and the space thus left available has been filled with ordinary seats. This has greatly improved the appearance of the church, and afforded additional accommodation of 23 free sittings. A new arch has been opened through between the organ chamber and the chancel, to show the whole front of the organ, which is a sweetly-toned and powerful instrument. The whole of the fittings of the Communion table are new, and through the liberality of Mr Lowe, the chancel floor has been relaid with tiles, the walls tinted and other minor improvements carried out. A beautiful stained glass window has been inserted by Mrs Morant in memory of her parents, the late Mr. and Mrs. F. A. S. Locke. It is the work of Messrs. Heaton and Butler, of Garrick Street, London, and the principal features are: - a central figure of the Saviour, as Prophet, Priest, and King; the Woman at the Well; and the

Supper at Emmaus. It may be interesting to recall the fact that the other stained windows in the church include five inserted in the aisles in 1872 by the parishioners in memory of the late Vicar, the Rev. A. B. Starkey. The church, which is dedicated to St. Matthew, is in the Perpendicular style, and consists of a chancel, nave, and aisles, and a rectangular tower at the west end, turreted and embattled, and containing six bells. The church was rebuilt in 1830, excepting the tower and a portion of the chancel, and re-seated with oak benches in 1871. The Vicar and parishioners are to be congratulated upon the improvements recently carried out."

LOOKING AROUND THE CHURCH

Visitors to the church enter the edifice via the porch located on its north side. The current building is almost two hundred years old and was built on the site of the medieval church and includes some of the original walls and the church tower. It is recorded as a Grade II listed building.

Once inside you will see the belfry on the right-hand side (west wall), the vestry and the chancel to the left (east wall), and the south side of the building in front of you.

PEWS

The pews along the central aisle have notches in them which were used to house lamps. There are two Churchwardens' wands – oak staves, one surmounted by a crown with a cross on top; the other by a bishop's mitre; and a vergers' mace which is carved on each side of the top with a face.

There are now tables and chairs on the north side where there once were pews. These were removed in 2014 when permission was granted for the church to provide a community space. The area hosts a weekly cafe on Tuesdays and “Coffee and Craft” on Fridays.

KNEELERS

The brightly coloured kneelers were made by parishioners to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II’s silver jubilee in 1977. Each one bears the maker’s initials.

MONUMENTS

Across the walls and in the belfry are plaques dedicated to parishioners and vicars. The oldest tablet is on the north aisle wall and dedicated to Eleazar Webb and shows his Clothier’s mark and skull – 1647. Tablets from the 1700s are dedicated to Benjamin Stephens and family, Elizabeth Sutton, John Delme, Reverend Walter Post and family, and Samuel Webb. From the 1800s Wadham Locke and family, Charles H Lowe, Reverend William Higginson. Tablets from the 1900s are dedicated to Anne Chandler, Captain Joseph Wiltshire, and men from Rowde who fought in the world wars.

ALTAR

The oak altar table is late 17th century, and was given by the then Rector, Reverend A J Clarke. It replaced an earlier stone altar.

VAULT

Just to the left of the main altar there is a plaque dedicated to Rev. William Higginson and his eldest daughter, who were laid to rest in a small vault under the church. A stone slab in front of the plaque has the initials W and H inlaid in brass and indicates their resting place. On the wall outside the chapel can be seen the outline of an old brickwork arch, which would have been the entrance to the vault.

HAGIOSCOPE OR SQUINT

Close to Reverend Higginson's plaque is a squint, which would have been in the outer wall prior to the alterations in the 1800s and may have been constructed for the ringing of the Sanctus Bell during Mass, so those not able to be present could take notice and pray.

PULPIT

The pulpit was erected in 1872 in memory of the Reverend Starky, whose family was associated with various gifts to the village.

THE ORGAN

The organ was installed in 1871, and was designed and built by William Sweetland, who was a well-known maker of organs and other musical instruments in Wiltshire. In 2009, following two years of fund raising, the organ was dismantled and cleaned for the first time since its installation. It is in excellent and original

condition with perhaps the last remaining original Sweetland patented swell box in the country.

REREDOS

In 1901 when the chancel roof was raised, the East window was raised too, which gave room for a larger reredos. Mr Charles H Lowe presented the large oak frame. It was designed for a panel of



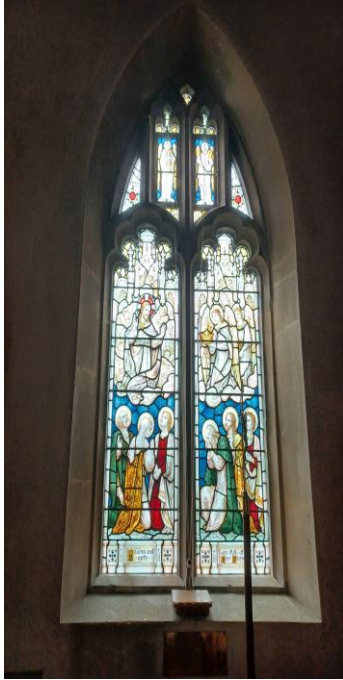
tapestry or needlework but was never completed. On his death the parishioners had it divided into three niches and filled with wooden sculptures. The centre scene is *“The Crucifixion with the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John”*. In the south niche is *“Elijah”* and in the north niche is *“St John the Baptist”*. The pomegranate in the border design, a fruit with many seeds, symbolises the unity of the church, also the resurrection and new life.

STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

West Window - when the Reverend Andrew Starkey had the belfry floor removed in 1870-1871, the West door was probably filled in as the stained-glass window above was his gift. The three lights show *“Sacrifice of Isaac”*, *“The Fall”*, and *“Crossing the Red Sea”*.

North and South Windows – after Reverend Starkey died in September 1871, three windows in the South Aisle and the two

in the North, were given in his memory and show the life of Christ from "*The Annunciation*" to "*The Resurrection*".



South Aisle, east end – a new window was placed in the east end of the south aisle and filled with stained glass, both being the gift of Mrs Sainsbury in memory of her late husband George Taylor Sainsbury of Newton House. The subject is "*The call of St Matthew*".

Mr C H Lowe gave the chancel south window as a thanks offering for worshipping twenty-four years in this church. It completes the life of Christ with "*The Ascension*".

East Window - The East window of three lights, showing "*The Well of Sychar*", "*The Risen Lord*", and "*The Lord with his two disciples at Emmaus*", was given in memory of John Locke in 1886.

MAUNDRELL CHAPEL

This was constructed in 1952 from pews taken from the South Aisle. The work was carried out by Mr J Dixon in the wheelwright and carpenters' yard at Tower Hill. It was in this yard, when owned by Perrett Bros, that all the other oak woodwork was completed in 1870 and 1901.

Pray for those who worship here and for yourself:

"For this is none other than the House of God"

The chapel is dedicated to John Maundrell, who preached against the practices of the Roman Catholic Church. On the wall near the altar is a wooden plaque, which says, *“Pray remember John Maundrell, a native of this parish, martyred by fire in Salisbury 24th March 1556”*.

FONT

Sir Matthew Digby Wyatt designed the font in 1850 to imitate the perpendicular style of the fifteenth century. Sir Wyatt was born in Rowde and was a noted engineer and architect. He worked with Isambard Kingdom Brunel to design and build Paddington Station and also worked on the Crystal Palace for the 1851 Great Exhibition.

Mr Charles Henry Lowe, a generous benefactor of the village, donated the oak font cover with its central brass cross in 1887.



BELLS AND THE BELFRY

There were originally five bells in the belfry that were recast into six bells by J Taylor of Loughborough in 1870, at the expense of the Reverend Andrew Starkey. The six bells were retuned and rehung in steel frames in 1927.

Documents show that the original five bells bore the following inscriptions:

- No 1 *“Wm and Robt Cor 1706”*
- No 2 *“+Anno Domini 1639”*
- No 3 *“Nathaniel Bolter made mee 1654” and “R.E. H.R.”*
- No 4 *“+Anno Domini 1639”*
- No 5 *“I to the church the living call, And to the Grave do
summon all.”*

Notes:

William and Robert Cor were bell makers from Aldbourne, and their earliest bells went to St Mary’s Devizes and Rowde.

Nathaniel Bolter was a bell founder at Salisbury. On one side of the third bell was a large shield, bearing the arms of Sir Edward Hungerford who purchased the manor in 1591 from Queen Elizabeth I. Upon his death, in 1648, the land (1,158 acres) passed to his widow, Margaret, Lady Hungerford. She probably gifted the bell to the church prior to her death in 1672.

The belfry ringing floor and the western gallery were removed in 1871, and in 2007 the ringing chamber floor was raised to its original historic position in order that toilet and kitchen facilities could be installed in the base of the tower.

VICARS OF ROWDE

A board showing a complete list of priests from 1216 AD can be found on the north wall near the main door. Those first mentioned were important men such as Walter de Leuch, who was a King’s Musician. Rowde priests were granted special privileges such as ‘wood from the King’s Chippenham Forest’.

In 1436, the vicar, Reginald Newbury, complained that the income from the living was insufficient at £4 a year and that it had been £8 in 1291.

Vicars of Rowde	
1216 John de Samford	1703 Latimer Crosse
1223 Walter de Leuch	1708 John Baker
1247 Robert de Chawri	1718 Thomas Pierce
1263 Alexander de Bradeham	1730 Fernando Warner
1267 Robert Fulconis	1732 James Warner
1275 Hugh de Clopton	1762 John Collinson
1294 William de Luggesarsale	1764 William Higginson
1297 Nicholas	1816 Edward Vincent
1325 William de Hereford	1864 Andrew Starkey
1329 Gilbert de Yatesbury	1872 William Oke
1335 Thomas de Peuesey	1874 Ellis Harris
1337 John de Clissiby	1898 Arthur Clark
1342 John de Northwode	1904 Thomas Jervis
1377 Walter Sage	1911 Arthur Clark
1405 John Hurl	1920 Henry Wright
1428 Reginald Newbury	1930 Phillip Opperman
1442 Thomas Smith	1946 Edward B. Brooks
1485 Richard Foster	1956 Christopher J. Pooley
1489 William Higgs	1964 Leslie Kingsbury
1492 William Walle	1966 Thomas T. Gibson
1502 Robert Yonge	1975 F. Michael Henly
1517 William Jayns	1984 John D. James, M.A.
1537 William Daungerfield	1988 Richard H. Basten
1541 Thomas Mason	1995 Richard J. Press
1550 Thomas Wrexhall	2000 Jonathan R.J. Hiscox
1554 Henry Taylor	2010 John. N. Rees
1557 John Tyce	2017 Ruth Schofield
1628 Timothy Richards	
1651 Thomas Collyer	
1661 Timothy Richards	
1663 Thomas Symes	
1671 Thomas Jekyl	
1694 John Hinde	
1700 William Smart	

IN THANKSGIVING — E.B.B.

CHEST

The Parish chest was located at the foot of the tower but has since been moved to the vestry. The chest is bound in iron, and fitted with three locks, indicating the keyholders as Overseer of the Poor, the Minister, and a Church warden, and on the front is engraved "M 1694". This was the safe in which was kept the Parish Registers, the Church Plate, monies and the Priest's vestments.

REGISTERS OF BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, DEATHS, AND BURIALS

The Parish registers are complete from 1606 and are in the possession of the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, and images are available on several websites.

SOME RESIDENTS OF THE GRAVEYARD

Private P Hurn, junior

In the summer of 1884, a military funeral took place in the churchyard for Private P Hurn, junior, a member of the Devizes detachment 2nd Wilts Volunteers. His coffin was covered in the Union flag, his helmet and sidearms, and floral wreaths, and it was carried by six of his colleagues. Around seventy people attended his funeral, and at the conclusion of the service at the grave three volleys were fired, with bugle calls between them. Private Hurn was much respected in the village and curtains were drawn in nearly every house along the route to the church. It is believed that the last military funeral was around the 1650s, at the time of Oliver Cromwell.

Police Sergeant William Crouch

In April 1913, Police Sergeant Crouch was murdered at Enford by Constable Ernest Pike, who later took his own life. Approximately one hundred and sixty police officers from across Wiltshire assembled in Devizes, including Chief Constable Hughes from Salisbury, and marched to Rowde for Sergeant Crouch's funeral. The coffin was draped with the

Union Flag and the band of the 3rd Battalion of the Wilts Regiment played Chopin's Funeral March and The Last Post.

Beatrice Elizabeth Watts

This lady was 101 years of age when she died in June 1980.

THE WAR MEMORIALS

The war memorial to the soldiers and the Boys Brigade of Rowde who were casualties of the First and Second World Wars can be found in the graveyard on the eastern side of the church, and bronze plaques can be found at the Maundrell Chapel inside the church.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH BUILDING

Since the rebuilding in 1831-1833, there have been several structural alterations and additions to the interior of the building:

- 1860 - the north and south aisles and arcades were added.
- 1870 - the five bells were re-cast to form a ring of six. Additionally, the box pews were removed, and the choir and nave reseated in oak.
- 1871 - a new porch was added, the ringing floor of the belfry and the western gallery were removed, and an organ was installed in the north chapel.
- 1872: a new pulpit, reading desk, and lectern were added, and three windows of the south aisle were filled with stained glass.
- 1882 - a new window was installed in the South Aisle.
- 1887 - an oak screen was erected.
- 1897 - a chiming apparatus was added in commemoration of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.
- 1901 - the chancel walls were raised, and the new oak roof and reredos were installed and were the gift of Mr Charles Henry Lowe of Rowde Hall.
- 1902 - it was reported that work carried out in the 1830s consisted of thin walls, weak timbers and the building suffered poverty in design and detail.
- 1952 – creation of The Maundrell Chapel.
- 1985 - major work was completed in the south Chapel including a new roof and floor.



- 2002 - slate and lead-work repairs were made to the north roof above the organ.
- The spirelets/pinnacles were removed and stored in church grounds
- 2007 - the ringing chamber floor was raised in order that toilet and kitchen facilities could be installed underneath.
- 2008 - following a full survey, work was identified to maintain the structure of the church at a potential cost of £85,000 over the next 15 years.
- 2024 - following another full survey, work was identified to maintain the structure of the church at an estimated cost of £250,000 over the next 15 years.

THE EXTERIOR OF ST MATTHEW'S CHURCH AS DRAWN IN 1983



Most of the small spires shown in the image above, by Lexi Hiscocks, were later removed due to being weathered and no longer sound.

The drawing on the front cover of this booklet was also by Mr Hiscocks.

DONATIONS FOR THE RESTORATION OF ST MATTHEW'S CHURCH

The maintenance of this beautiful church and its contents is the responsibility of Rowde Parochial Church Council.

Please help us to preserve it for future generations by donating

- there is a cash box in the wall to the right of the door
- a card machine, to the left of the door
- or you can donate online using this code:



Thank you!