

A Guide to
The Church of
St. John the Baptist
FLADBURY

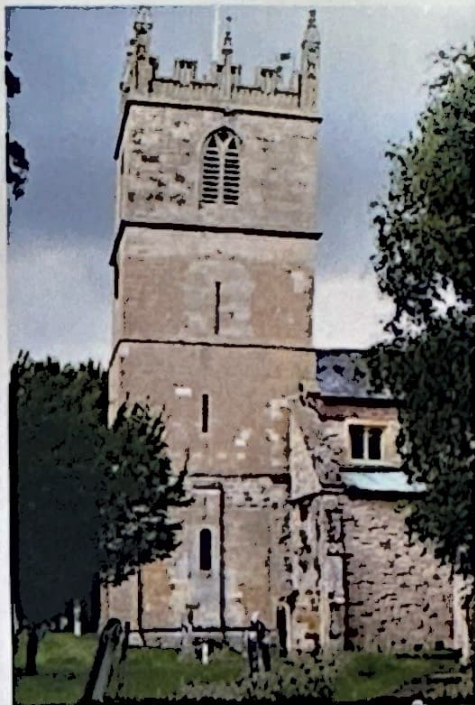


Welcome to our Parish Church

In 697 Aethelred, King of Mercia, granted the manor of 'Fledebyrig' (Fladbury) to Oftor, the second Bishop of Worcester. The grant required the bishop to build a minster here, and said that this would return the manor to the use for which it had first been granted. For an unstated reason an earlier minster no longer existed.

The new minster was provided and is known to have existed until the late 8th century after which the manor of Fladbury reverted in full to the bishop. When the minster finally closed is not known, but it was customary that following such a closure the church and a priest remained to serve the local community.

A resident priest is recorded here before and after the 1066 Norman Conquest and the present church seems to have been developed from the church of that time. A place of worship has stood on or near the site of this church for more than 1300 years.



The Tower.

The earliest part of the present building is the lowest stage of the tower, which is 'Norman'. A style which became wide spread in England during the 11th and 12th centuries. The walls are strengthened by pilasters, a form of buttressing which only slightly extends from the wall. With those to the sides pierced by narrow round-headed windows.

The 2007 edition of Pevsners guide suggests that the great arch between the base and the nave was built before the start of the 13th century. About the same time, to enable heightening the base was strengthened by the inner facing of pointed arches which still frame the small Norman windows.

The main body of the tower seems to be 13/14th century but the bell chamber louvres are in the decorated style and show this stage to be 14th century.

For centuries a wooden steeple capped the tower. This collapsed and was not replaced; instead, in about 1752 the perpendicular style battlements and pinnacles which now crown the tower were added.

The Bells

In 1552, there were three bells in the tower. A new ring, cast by William Bagley of Chalcombe, was installed in 1700. This was replaced in 1807 by a new ring of six cast by Thomas Mears of London. Finally, in 1992, the 1807 ring was augmented to eight by the addition of two new treble bells cast by John Taylor and Co of Loughborough.

A mediaeval Sanctus Bell cast by William Culverdon of London hangs in the south louver. The inscription reads "*Sancta Katerina ora pro me. Edvardo Gregson*" - Saint Catherine pray for me. St Catherine was the patron saint of lost causes. Perhaps Gregson who was Rector from 1504-1540 was a little uneasy at having been among the clergy who in 1531 reluctantly acknowledged Henry V^{III} as 'Supreme Head of the Church in England'.

The Porch

The church is entered through what Pevsner's guide describes as its "splendid rib-vaulted porch". Built in the early 14th century it has round corner shafts which support the rib vaulted ceiling. On the external left pillar of the entrance is a mediaeval scratch dial, often known as 'mass dials' as they enabled the priest to know the time for the daily round of services.



The porch has stone benches as in pre-reformation times it had much wider use than today; public penance and the initial ceremonies of baptism and marriage all took place here.

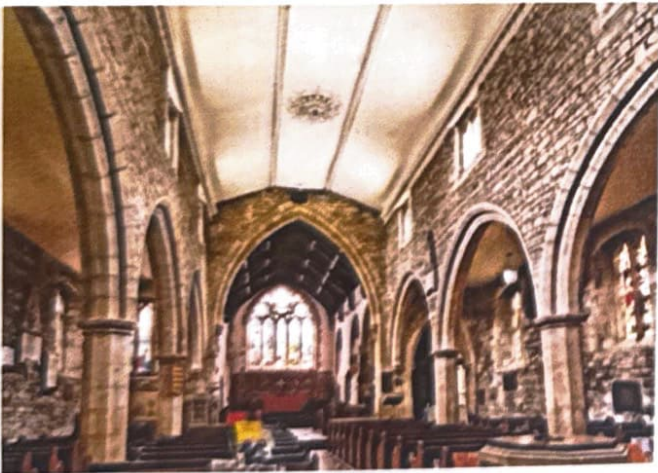
When first built the porch had an upper chamber which provided a safe place for books, documents and the depositing of wills. The parish priest may also have taught Latin here to those hoping to be ordained.

On entering the church look back toward the door; to the left hand side, now covered with 15th century Malvern tiles, is part of the access to the former upper chamber and above the door is an outline of the chamber window into the nave.

The Nave

While in both tower and chancel earlier work remains there is no evidence of pre 14th century work in the nave.

It is possible that as the upkeep of the nave was a lay responsibility they kept a serviceable stone built Anglo Saxon Church in use until the 14th century when the growing prosperity of many lay people would have enabled them to replace the early building. The nave's octagonal piers and chamfered arches are in the decorated style show it to be 14th century.



The external east face of the tower shows the steep outline of the early nave roof and the way it contrasts with the present roof's lower pitch. The change of pitch required the nave walls to be raised. This was done in brick which at that time would not have been visible as both interior and exterior of the church were plastered. The coved nave ceiling is clearly Georgian.

The work is likely to have been done in the 1750s.

In 1870 it was agreed to end the pew rental system and further restore the nave.

The faculty application reads "*to remove all galleries, the organ, the pews in the nave and aisles and to reseat with open seats, to move the tomb now in the centre of the church and place it in the tower, to take up the present floors and to repave the same and to erect a new pulpit.*"

The plan which accompanied the application (see back cover) shows the church after the chancel restoration but prior to the 19th century nave restoration. The seating is as installed in 1780 and the Throckmorton tomb stands in the center of nave.

During the restoration the chancel arch was heightened and the chancel organ chamber built. This required the removal of part of the south chancel wall which resulted in the loss or relocation of several memorials.

Tower Screen

The screen contains panels from the former west gallery which record various bequests to the church. The earliest of these commemorates Thomas Wilcox and his wife who in 1403 gave lands at Fladbury, Hill and Moor. In 1787, the former church lands

were exchanged for the holdings now let as allotments, the income from these still helps pay for the upkeep of the Church.

The Throckmorton tomb now stands beyond the screen in the base of the tower.



The Throckmorton's

From the 12th to the 21st century, the family which took their name from Throckmorton leased that area as a fee-farm or sub-manor within the manor of Fladbury. Set in the tomb's Purbeck marble top are the memorial brasses of John Throckmorton and his wife. The Latin inscription reads '*John Throckmorton and Eleanor his wife and Thomas their son. John was under treasurer of England who verily died the twenty third day of April Anno Domini 1445. On whose soul may God have mercy. Amen*'

Between the tower screen and font are further memorials connected to the family and include in full armor Edward Peytoo d.1488. The original figure of Godyth, his wife, was stolen and has been replaced by a replica.

The Chancel

The chancel as we see it today has been little altered since it's rededication in 1865 following a major restoration by Frederick Preedy, an architect whose family lived in the parish.

The two exceptions to this are the reinstatement of Bishop Lloyd's memorial which Preedy had moved to the vestry and the 1931 replacement of the 19th century chancel stalls by the present choir stalls.



During the restoration Preedy replaced the former 3 light East window by an enlarged 5 light stained glass window. This was the gift of John Cartwright of Craycombe House who gave further financial support to John Haviland who as Rector was responsible for the upkeep of the chancel.

The reredos, the screen beneath the window, is alabaster enriched with Minton tiles, marbles, glass and gold mosaic and is the work of Richard Bolton, a notable Worcester mason.

When reporting the chancel rededication Berrow's Journal stated that when the south wall plaster was removed the remains of Norman arches were found over the windows and that both north

and south walls revealed remains of late 13c Early English work. Some early work remains visible. To the right of the altar is a somewhat restored Early English double piscine and the present vestry doorway which was found further to the east hidden beneath wall plaster is of much the same period.



When reroofing the chancel, where possible Preedy reused the 15th century timbers. These include some of the foliage work in the spandrels and braces and the wall posts carved with angels and other images.



On a corner brace above the incumbent's stall is a shield with a mitre and three cock's heads, a pun on the name of John Alcock, Bishop of Worcester 1476-87. This indicates that the roof originated in his time.



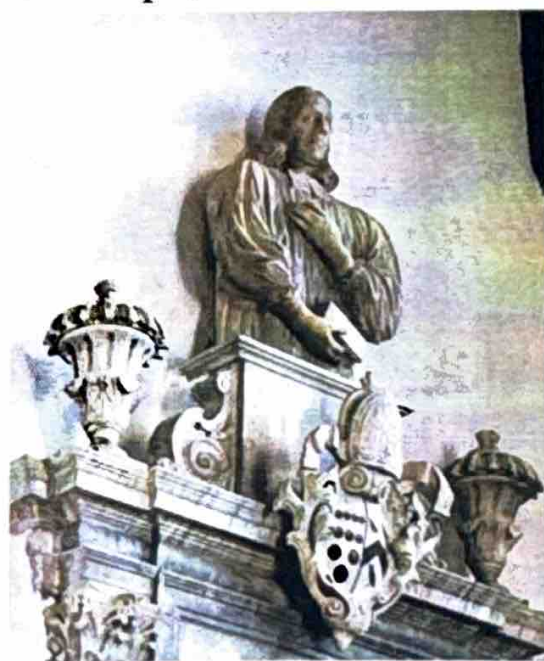
The Rector at that time was William Plewne d.1502 whose memorial brass (*above*) and that of Thomas Morden d.1458 (*below*) are set in the chancel floor immediately before the sanctuary steps.

Plewne is on the north side, tonsured and in full Eucharistic vestments. Morden, on the south side, is wearing a cope. He was Treasurer of St. Paul's Cathedral and gained a papal dispensation to hold Fladbury in plurality with various other appointments. The dispensation also states that he was of noble birth and had spent much time at the papal court.



Memorial to Bishop Lloyd

On the north wall of the sanctuary is a large marble memorial to William Lloyd who, while bishop of St. Asaph, was one of the seven



bishops imprisoned in the Tower for opposing James 2nd declaration of Indulgence. When brought to trial they were "gloriously acquitted."

In 1699 Lloyd became Bishop of Worcester and in 1713 he appointed his son, William, as Rector of Fladbury. Lloyd may also have helped him fund the building of the new Queen Anne style rectory.

In his will Bishop Lloyd left instruction that following his death he should lie in state in the Rectory



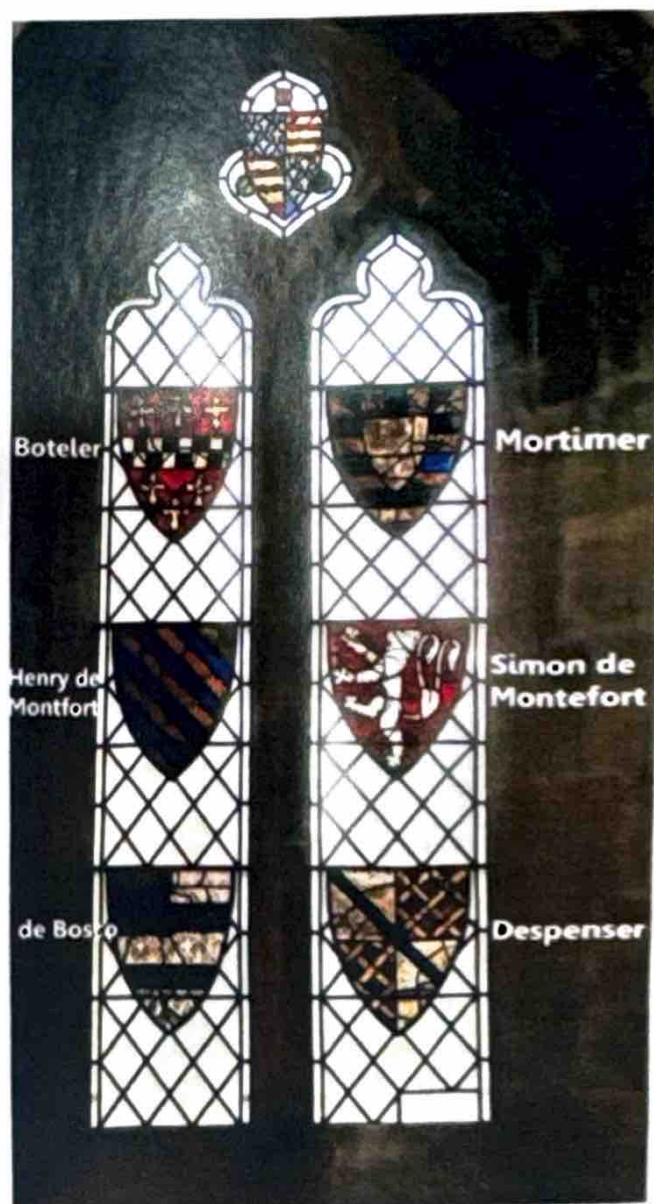
– ‘a state room to be hung at Fladbury, scoured and sealed, with wax candles, tapers and other things fitting for the occasion’ and for ‘a second room hung from top to bottom and the chairs covered with black’.

Bishop Lloyd was a man of considerable learning and is remembered for founding a school in Worcester for boys and girls of the poorer classes.

14th Century Heraldic Glass.

The north window of the chancel contains 14th century heraldic glass. In 1644 the diarist Richard Symonds, an officer in the King’s Army which halted for the night at Fladbury recorded “In the east

window of the chancel the pictures, notwithstanding being broken about a fortnight before by Waller’s (Cromwellian) army these six following coats very fair and old.....”



During the 19thc. restoration Preedy moved the shields from the East Window to their present position. The window has long been associated with the battle of Evesham and in 1965 it was restored as part of the 600th anniversary commemoration of that battle.

Simon de Montfort, Henry de Montfort and Hugh le Despenser were killed in the Battle and buried before the Abbey's high altar. Mortimer, who fought on the King's side, survived and Bosco and Boteler may have sympathized with de Montfort but died well after the battle and there is no record of either being involved.

The shields probably came from the former Evesham Abbey but before coming here may not have been grouped together.

The Crypt

During the restoration of the chancel a large crypt was revealed beneath the sanctuary. This seems likely to have been the medieval chancel house as in 1644 Richard Symonds described it as being 'full of bones'. It now contains two early lead coffins, possibly those of former rectors, and the coffins of Bishop Lloyd and his family.

The Organ

Frederick Gauntlett, Rector of Fladbury 1834 - 1863, commissioned Fladbury's first pipe organ. In 1837 Richard Nicholson of Rochdale installed it as a single manual, five stop instrument in the west gallery. When the gallery was removed the organ was moved to the newly built chancel organ chamber.

In 1900 Richard Nicholson, the eldest son of the original builder, considerably enlarged the instrument. The 19th century case remains intact and while the pedal organ is now tubular pneumatic the main organ retains its mechanical action and original hand blowing apparatus.

In 2008 a further restoration of the instrument received a major grant from English Heritage and again Nicholson & Co. who have had the care of the instrument since its first build carried out the work.

The Vestry and Early Sacristy

On the external north wall of the sanctuary the remains of a 14th



century piscine can be seen and as the present 14c. vestry door was formerly further east it seems to have provided an entry from the chancel to a former

sacristy. This may also have served as a chantry chapel as there are 14c records of the appointment of a priest to serve a Fladbury chantry. After the abolition of chantries the sacristy remained as a vestry.

By mid-19th century the vestry had fallen into a ruinous condition and during the restoration of the chancel it was demolished and replaced by the present vestry.

In 1840, thirty years before the chancel restoration, the Virgin and Child glass panel was recorded as being in the former vestry.



The Virgin and Child panel

The 14th century stained glass panel depicting the Virgin and Child is now in the south aisle chapel. Both mother and child hold fruit. Mary is the new Eve and offers her child an apple, the Latin word for apple, *malum*, is also the word for evil hence the forbidden fruit becomes a symbol of the world's sin. The Christ Child, the world's redeemer, took that sin on himself and in return offers his mother a pomegranate

which with its countless seeds united in one fruit is a symbol of the universal church.

It is rare for such glass to have survived the iconoclastic zeal of the 16th century reformers and the later wanton destruction by puritanical Cromwellian troops. This panel is of considerable importance and has been loaned for major exhibitions in both London and Paris"

While tradition claims the panel came from the former Evesham Abbey. it is almost identical to a similar panel in the little Warndon Church, Worcester. Both panels are modelled from the same drawing and both churches have links with the great Beauchamp family. The Throckmorton chantry chapel was dedicated in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary and it may well have once contained this or a similar panel.

The Lady Chapel and South Aisle

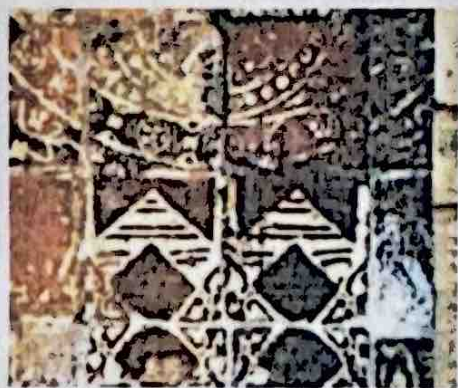
At the east end of the south aisle is a Lady-chapel which stands on the site of the former Throckmorton chantry. The remains of the former piscine basin and the chantry aumbry, the locker for storing the chantry communion vessels remain in the south wall.

The 1448 licence giving consent for providing the chantry reads :-

"Eleanor, widow of John Throckmerton, late chamberlain of the exchequer and their son Thomas, for John's good servicesto Kings Henry 4 and 5, granted a licence to found a chantry in the parish church of Fladbury, for the souls of said John and Eleanor his wife, and Thomas and Agnes his wife, parents of the said John

The chantry survived barely a hundred years as in 1547 an act of parliament suppressed all chantries.

The 15th century Malvern inlaid tiles which now clad the blocked stair doorway to the porch upper chamber and the lower half of the blocked former north door may have come from the floor of the chantry or from the Throckmorton tomb's surround.



(The tiles in the upper part of the north door commemorate the 19th century restoration of the nave.)

The present chapel was dedicated in 1961. The altar frontal now used in Lent is made from material used at Westminster Abbey for the Queen's coronation.



The frontal used at other times is the 2005 work of Shelagh Hancox and was given in memory of three asylum seekers who died when their vehicle was hit by a train at a nearby level crossing.

The Virgin and Child panel is now set in the large wooden cross provided in memory of Herbert Vial, Rector 1950 – 1970.

The Darby Memorial

About the mid-point of the south aisle wall is a memorial dated 1608 which was moved from the chancel. The Latin inscription commemorates John Darby, gentleman, who by his wife Juliana had, a son George "who

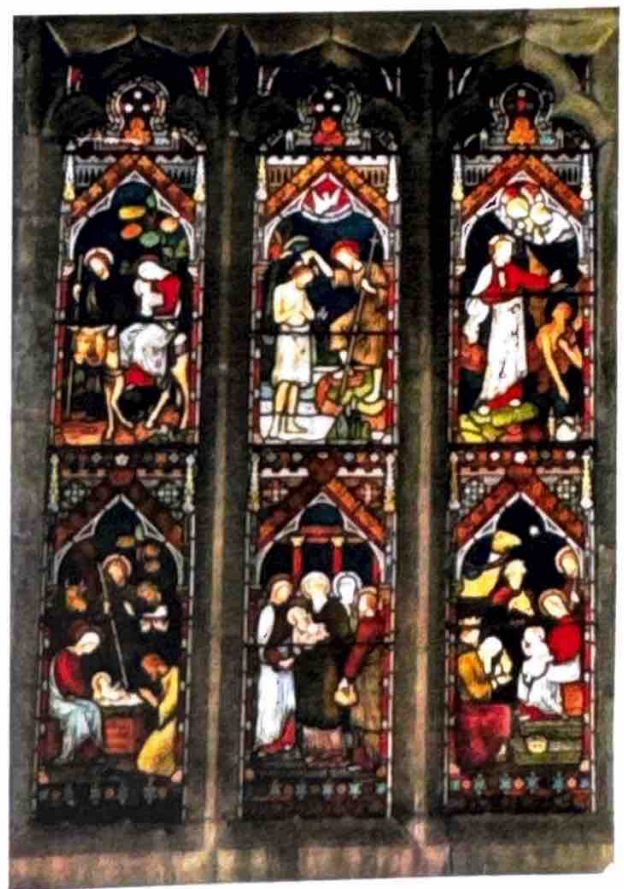
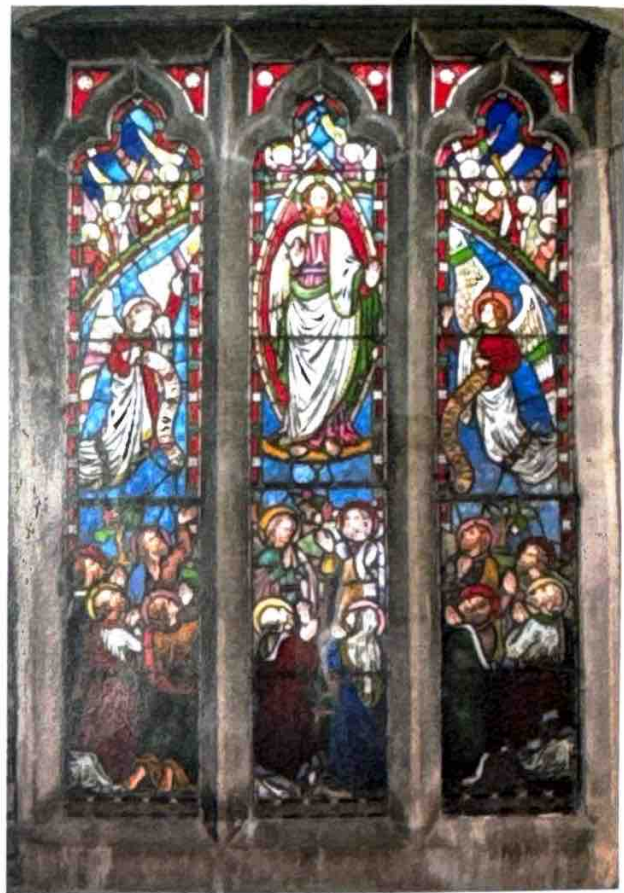
merited the name "Arborator" – 'one who plants and cares for trees'; an interesting tribute to a late 16th century person who lived in an area which was to become famous for its orchards.

The changes to the nave and aisle floors caused the loss of many memorial slab-stones. Some of these now floor the porch.

The North Aisle

Frederick Preedy was in his teens but already training as an architect when his family moved to Fladbury. He eventually build up a very extensive practice and is noted for the design and manufacture of stained glass. Fladbury has ten of his windows and these cover almost every stage of his career. The north aisle windows mainly commemorate members of the Preedy family. It is interesting to see how Preedy's work changed and developed. Compare the art and style of the 1856 north aisle east window, 'The Ascension', to the 1874 and 1876 west windows of the north and south aisles which picture the life of Christ.

There is memorial plaque to Preedy about half way along the north aisle wall.





The north aisle contains several memorials to the Charlett family; that of **Elizabeth Charlett, d.1746** is complete with a fine bust by Thomas Ricketts of Gloucester.

Hatchments



In the late 18th century the lease of the Manor of Fladbury was acquired by George Perrott a notable lawyer who resided at Pershore.

On his death the lease passed to his nephew a further George Perrott who built and resided at Craycombe House. He died in

1806 and his funeral hatchment (*above*) is the one to the right of the of the two at the west end of the north aisle.

The one to the left (*below*) is that of his son George Wigley Perrott d.1831.



The parrot on the crest and pears in the shield are puns on the 'Perrott' name. An interesting collection of Perrott family memorials can be found at the west end of the south aisle.

The Rectors of Fladbury

A board on the West wall of the south aisle records the names of Rectors from the 13th century onward. Before 1834 many Rectors were wealthy pluralists who received the income of the parish but were seldom in residence here, but paid deputies (*vice-curates*, '*vicars*') to exercise pastoral care on their behalf.

Nicholas de Woodeford, Rector 1278-1302 was Bishop Giffard's principal administrator and held Fladbury together with three other parishes.

He had a long standing disagreement with the Rector of Bishampton as to who should receive the Bishampton mortuary fees; that parish was once part of Fladbury and its parishioners were still buried here. A church court finally decided that the fees should be evenly divided.

The 16th century registers for Bishampton note that *"ye plague began at Bishampton about the feast of St. Michael the Archangel in 1594 ... such was the first time that ye church at Bishampton was made a burial place"*.



Standing upright against the Church south wall is what seems to be a sandstone grave cover engraved with a 13th century cross, moved here

during the 19thc. restoration of the chancel. Could this once have covered de Woodeford's tomb?

Martin Stafford Smith 1793-1834 – whose memorial is in the chancel, was Rector for 40 years. His father and brother were both notable organists and he was usually resident during the Three Choirs Festivals. Other than that, he lived mainly at Prior Park, Bath and left the care of this parish and that of another he held in Somerset to resident curates.

For twenty seven years Stafford Smith's resident curate at Fladbury was **William Pruen** who was widely respected. He ran a small fee paying school and being acquainted with Edward Jenner became a keen advocate of cowpox as a protection against small pox. His close friend John Keeble, a god-son of Stafford Smith, frequently stayed in the parish. Keeble was influential in the reform of the 19th century church and is also remembered for his poetry and hymns which include 'Blest are the pure in heart'. He is reputed to have composed some of his hymns while staying here.

Following Stafford Smith's death Pruen became rector of Snitterfield near Stratford. A memorial on the south aisle wall tells of his sudden death from a stroke received while preaching the sermon at an Archdeacon's visitation. His epitaph carries the warning 'Be ye also ready'. The font was given in memory of his widow.

In 1834 Stafford Smith was



succeeded by **Frederick Gauntlett**

and from then on by act of parliament all incumbents were

required to reside in their benefice.

Gauntlett established Fladbury's first National School and worked to provide new schools in both Fladbury and Wyre Piddle, though these were not built until shortly after his death.

Gauntlett is commemorated in the chancel south window.



PORTIA

The dog's head on the North east corner of the chancel is that of "Portia the

Rectory dog" owned by John Champion, Rector 1975-1993. She was a legend in her life time'. She daily attended Matins and also had her by-line in the weekly Parish Bulletin.

Church Registers All early registers are now in the care of the Worcester County Archives. These include Baptisms, Marriages and Burials from 1560 onward.

Some interesting parochial collections made on behalf of various causes are recorded in the registers:

1668 Given toward the loss by the fire of London and paid to Mr George Darby, High Constable, £1.17.0.

1670 19s 9p collected at Fladbury for the English slaves in Turkey.

1678 £2.6.8p toward the building of St. Paul's Cathedral.

1680 for the captives in Algiers £3.11.3

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This revised guide contains some new material and amendments to my previous guides. Sources include the earlier guides by **John Haviland**, **Herbert Vial** and **John Champion**, all of whom served as Rectors of this parish; also the registers of various bishops and other documents now available at the Worcester Record Office.

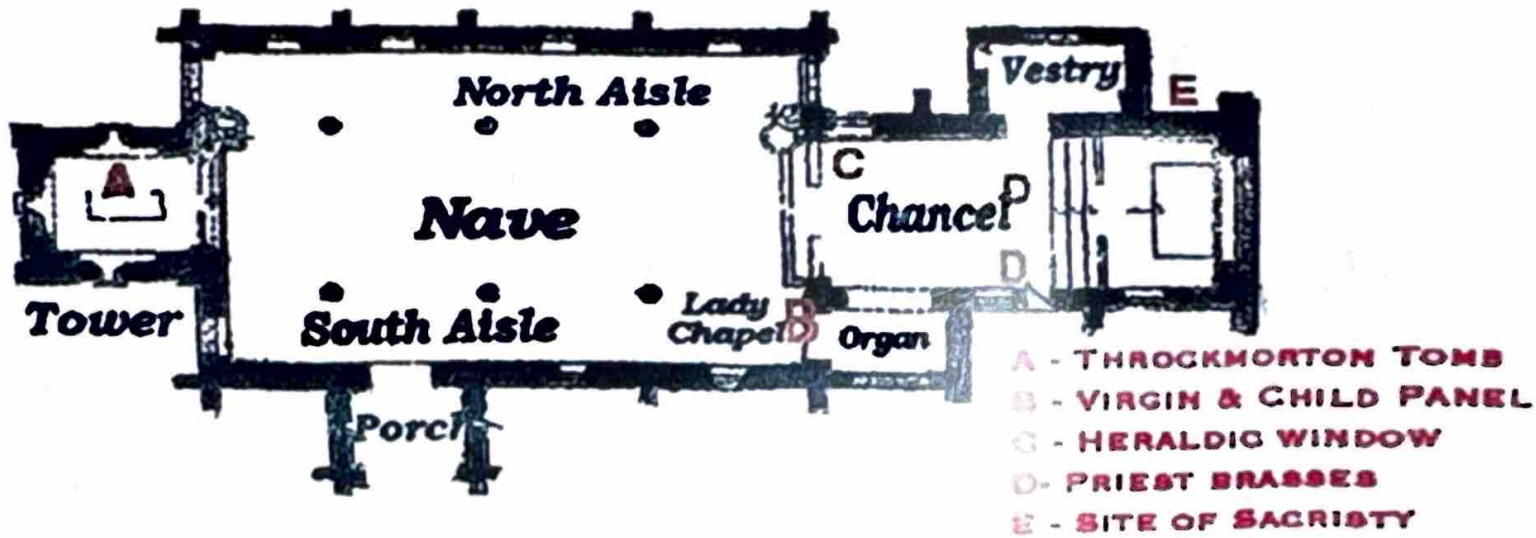
Tim Bridges "Churches of Worcestershire" and **Alan Brooks** 2007 revision of 'Pevsner's Buildings of Worcestershire' proved invaluable sources for checking architectural descriptions.

The photography comes from various contributors and I remain indebted to **Kieran and Roger Hunt** whose photography provided the majority of images in earlier guides and especially for photographing the chancel roof timbers which had not been previously recorded. The front cover image: copyright Roger Hunt.

Frank Bentley 2022

PLAN OF FLADBURY CHURCH

SHOWING POINTS OF SPECIAL INTEREST



Preedy's 1870 Plan

The church before restoration of the nave

