

A short guide to St Nicholas Church, Hurst.



The Church of St. Nicholas Hurst is situated on an isolated ancient mound of clay, which overlooks the River Loddon and its connecting meadowland. The river forms a natural western boundary to the parish and at one time marked the extent of the Great Forest of Windsor in these parts. Much of the history of the Church and its parish is determined by a Charter of King Edgar dated 968 AD, granting the clearing of Uiscelea (Whistley) to Wulfstan, Abbot of Abingdon. From the date of this Charter to the dissolution of the Monasteries, Whistley remained the undisputed property of the Abbey of Abingdon; rents and dues from Whistley were devoted to the upkeep of the Abbey kitchens. In spite of the ecclesiastical connection, Hurst had no place of worship of its own for some time; no permanent Church or Chapel is recorded in the Domesday Survey (1085-86). Abingdon Abbey Chronicler (1089) informs us that the first wooden Chapel must have been built between 1078 and 1084. It could not have been dedicated before 1078, because that was the year of Osmund's appointment to Salisbury; it must have been built before September 10th, 1084, because that was the date of Abbot Athelm's death.



A prayer to take away:

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the faint hearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honour every one; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Only a few years can have elapsed before it was decided to build in stone, and the chalk pillar **(1)** and arches on the north side of the nave are the earliest remaining part of the original permanent structure. (It might pay you to sit here a while to read this guide and to get your bearings.) The succeeding additions and elaborations represent architectural styles of many ages; this makes St. Nicholas Hurst typical of many English parish churches, rich in content and a veritable treasure house for all to enjoy.

The outside walls of the Chancel were re-faced in flint and largely renewed in 1855 when the Choir Vestry was added. This caused the original 13th century north doorway **(2)** to be blocked. In 1908 the Clergy Vestry was added. The main work of restoration took place in 1875-6 at the time when the south aisle was added, and included work on the tower. All this work was sponsored by Miss Palmer of Holme Park, Sonning. The original porch was re-sited and restored. Though the red brick tower was added in 1612 and built in three levels, the cupola, which protects the clock chiming bell, was added in 1876. At this time, the parapet was rebuilt, the four gargoyles added, the shape of the upper windows was altered, the west window was added, the arch leading to the nave raised and the new font installed **(4)**. The Church was re-opened by the Bishop on Wednesday, 27th September 1876, upon completion of the work.

The flag-staff was originally erected to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

The massive circular chalk pillar **(1)** and arches on the north side of the nave are early Norman from the 12th century. To the west, is a later transitional Norman style and the north doorway **(3)** is almost certainly of the 13th century. The western most bay with squared pillars is 14th century and at the bases of the stone arches are some interesting carved heads of the period **(5)**. The south arcade of the nave also has three bays; the columns are circular limestone and have moulded bases and capitals.

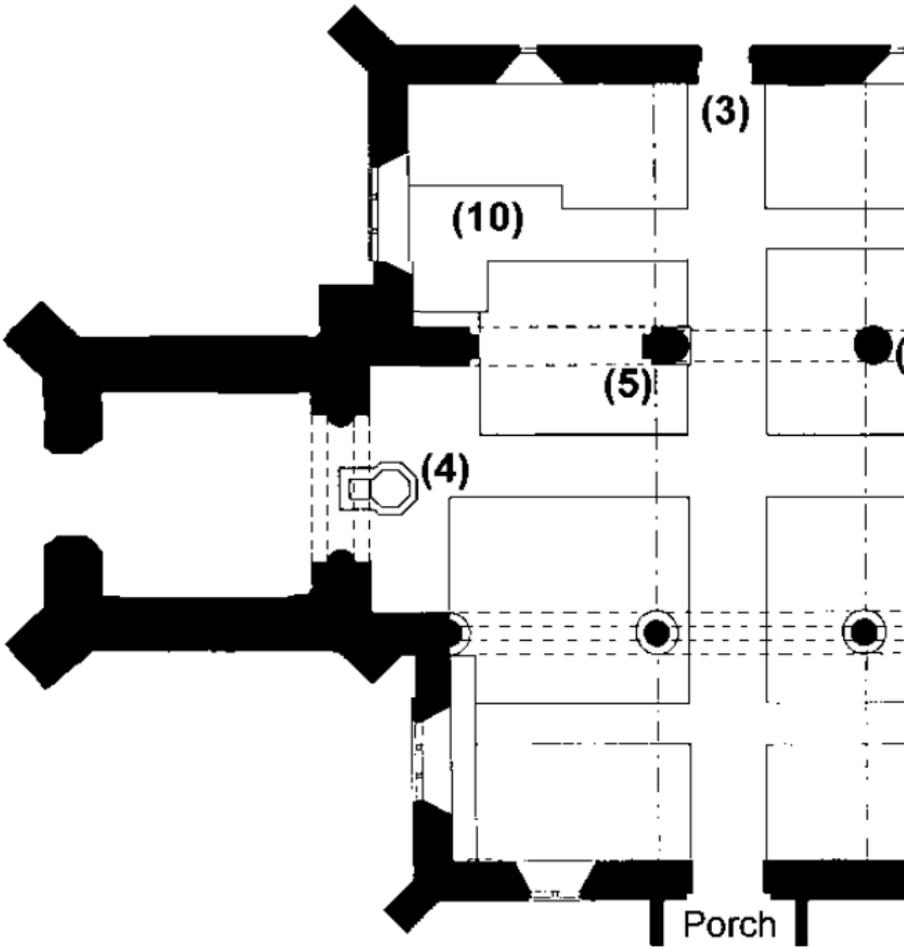
None of the old windows to the Church remain, although a number of them are 14th century in design and the glass of one roundel in the North West window is medieval.

The supports for the roofs of the nave and north Chapel are 15th century and the roofs themselves are probably of that date. The large tie beams should be noted.

During the 1855 restoration of the Chancel and north Chapel, 14th century fragments of stone work were

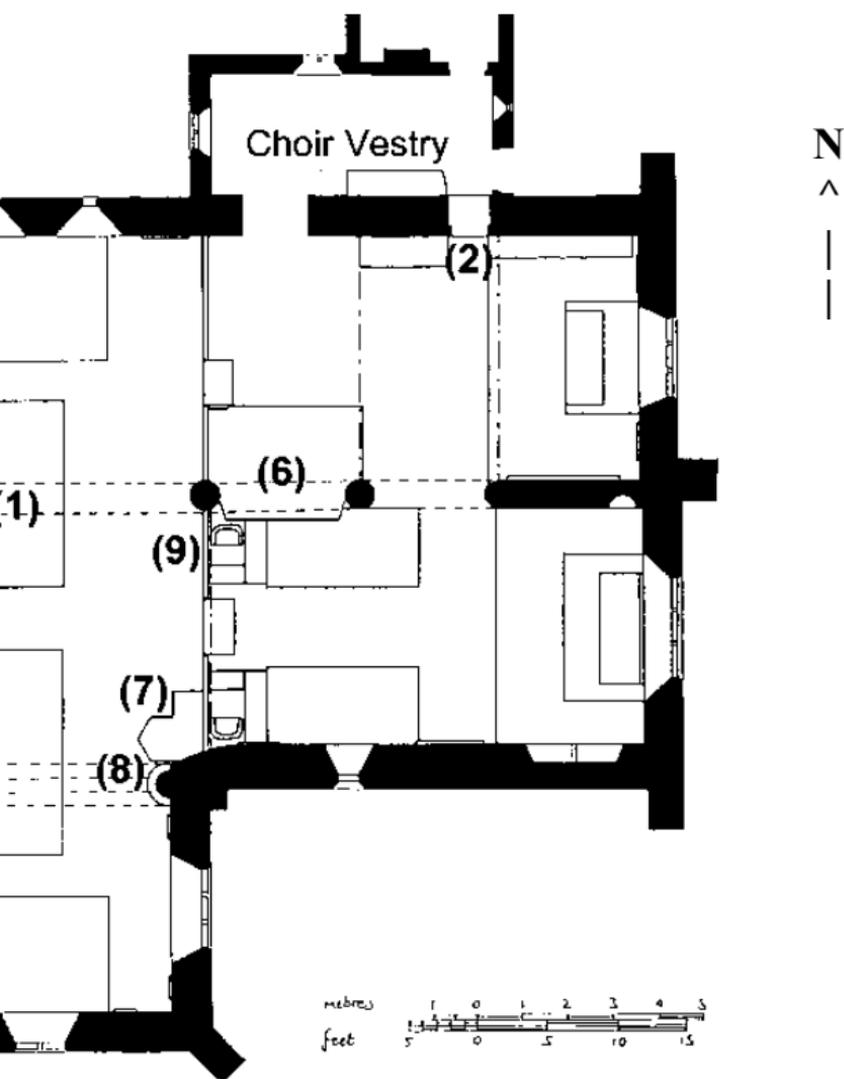
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found in the Church walls. The pews, tiling, under floor ventilation and boarding date from the Victorian restoration. With the enlargement of the Church, galleries were removed; open pews were placed in the north aisle and nave. The Chancel furnishings are also Victorian, the marble reredos, representing 'The Fall of Man' and 'The Nativity of Christ', was erected in 1873. The organ **(6)** was installed in 1977 for the Queen's Silver Jubilee and upgraded in 2000. This replaced a previous instrument of 1907 which was housed in the north Chapel. The casing for the old blower mechanism remains in the Choir Vestry.

In 1603 a canon law was passed which ordered "*a decent pulpit in every Church.*" The pulpit **(7)** dates from about this time, and is similar to that at Ruscombe. The panels were painted during 1876, with figures of the four Evangelists. To one side of the pulpit in oak leaf and acorn style, is to be found the original hour glass stand **(8)**, dated 1636, with the initials "E.A.": presumably those of the donor. The inscription reads: "*As this glasse runneth so man's*



life passethe." The hour glass is certainly old, but not the original. From his diaries it is clear that William Laud preached from this very pulpit on occasions when he stayed with his "greatest friend", Sir Francis Windebank of Haines Hill House, who in 1632, became Secretary of State to Charles I.

The Chancel is separated from the nave by a wooden screen (9), painted and gilded of the reign of Henry VII. The craftsmanship of the screen is considered crude: not the best example of Tudor work. It was installed about 1860 but was condemned in "The Times" as "introducing Popery". In 1875 the screen was partly covered with a dull brown paint, painstakingly removed by a group of parishioners in 1969, so revealing the original rose colour.

Under the patronage of Cromwell and the Parliamentarians. Mr. Richard Bigg succeeded Sir Francis Windebank, a Royalist, to the property of Haines Hill House. His son Richard was the founder of the Hurst Bread Charity, details of which are inscribed upon the tomb in the North Aisle (10).

For enquiries about Baptisms, Weddings, Marriage Blessings, Funerals, etc. please ring the Parish Office on (0118) 9344792 or email at office@thru-christ.org.uk .

Prayers for healing are offered continuously and names can be added to the list on request.



Services at St Nicholas:

Please consult the Weekly Newsletter or the Church Notice-board for the times, place and types of services and note that there are also services each week in the Benefice which integrate with the pattern here if the timing at St Nicholas is inconvenient.

The normal pattern is:-

Main Sunday worship at St Nicholas at 11.00am of Family Eucharist each Sunday except on the 3rd Sunday when there is an 8.00am. Holy Communion followed by, Messy Church, at St. Nicholas School at 11.00am.

Sunday school coincides with these services.