

THE PARISH OF ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, MARPLE

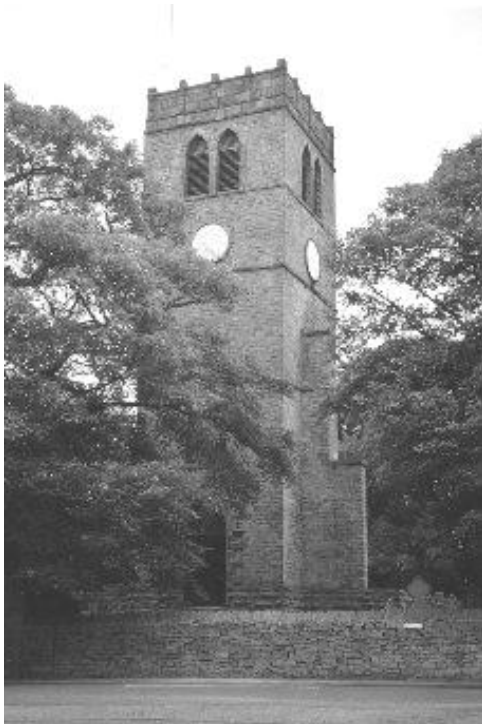
All Saints' parish covers a large proportion of Marple, a small town in the metropolitan borough of Stockport, Greater Manchester.

It is at the very edge of the Greater Manchester sprawl and is to be found facing the Pennines. There is another Anglican church in lower Marple called Saint Martin's. The two parishes work together to serve and reach out to the community.

Originally in Cheshire, local government reorganisation of the 1980s put Marple in Greater Manchester, but the Marple parish still belongs to the Cheshire diocese, and many Marple people feel that they still belong to that county.

HISTORY OF ALL SAINTS'

A church called All Saints' was a small timber framed building erected in the second half of the 16th century. The first recorded service took place in 1588. In 1803 the building was in a ruinous condition and it was decided that a new church should be built. In 1808 Robert Goldsmith was appointed as architect and the church was completed in 1811 at a cost of £4,000. A major financial contributor to the building of the church was Samuel Oldknow, a local cotton manufacturer. In 1816 a peal of bells arrived and in 1826 an organ was installed. By the 1870s the church was too small for the congregation. In 1875, a faculty was granted for extending the chapel, but the structure would not permit alteration and so the current Victorian Church was built to replace it, 30 metres to the south. J Medland Taylor and Henry Taylor were appointed as architects and the church cost £6,056. It was consecrated on 30 June 1880. In the following years some services were still held in the old church but its condition deteriorated and by 1964 it was considered to be dangerous and it was demolished. The tower was strengthened and the bells re-hung in it, making it a free-standing bell-tower that you can see today.



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However, it was not until 1964 that the Georgian Chapel itself was finally demolished. The main part of the church was grassed over as a garden of remembrance for the burial of ashes and all that remains today is the church tower.

A TOUR OF ALL SAINTS'

As you walk into the main body of the church, your first impression is of the splendid pillars and fine stained glass windows.

The original Victorian church contained pews, as shown in the photograph below but these were replaced by modern comfortable chairs and an improved lighting system in 2005.



As you walk up the main aisle of the nave, you notice on each wall above the pillars two ciphers:

One cipher is made up of two Greek letters, one looking like "X" (= "CH") and one looking like "P" (= "R"). Together they form the ancient abbreviation of the word "CHRISTOS" (= "Christ" or "Anointed One"). The background of the cipher suggests the shining sun, signifying Christ's divine glory and recalling Malachi's designation of Messiah as "The Sun of Righteousness" (Malachi 4:2).

The other cipher has a similar background and bears the letters "IHS" which are the initial (latinised) letters of the Greek words "Iesous Huios Soter" (= Jesus Son Saviour), a cryptic confession of faith in Jesus as the Son of God and Saviour of sinful people.

Notice that there are two faces on either side of the large east arch at the springers. One represents a Bishop and the other a King, to symbolise the link between Church and State as the pillars of a stable society. Over the top of the arch there is the inscription: "The Lord is in His Holy Temple". Those who are familiar with Scripture will be able to complete the quotation from Habakkuk: "Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Habakkuk 2:20), a call to humble worship.

To the left of the east arch is the place where the Pulpit used to be positioned and to the right the Lectern, the Word preached and read. Central, of course, is the Communion Table in the Chancel, speaking of the Word Incarnate as Redeemer and Lord. Hence the cross and crown emblem in mosaic on the Reredos (the wall behind the Communion Table). Along the top of the Pulpit are the words: "He that hath My Word let him speak My Word faithfully" (Jeremiah 23:28). The inscription on the stone base reads: "To the glory of God and in memory of her husband, James Dixon, who died January 9th 1972, aged 49. This Pulpit is presented by Esther Alice Dixon."

Across the low wall at the entrance to the Chancel is engraved, suitably, the collect for All Saints' Day.



The old Victorian pews

The four wooden supports of the Communion Rail bear the words "Mercy, Pity, Love and Life", each engraved on the shape of a human heart.

The Prayer Desk on the north side was given in memory of Canon FS Spackman, Vicar of the Parish from 1929 to 1952.

The brass bookstands on the Communion Table are engraved with the four symbols of the Gospel writers, following the traditional "cherubic" symbolism (Matthew = Man; Mark = Lion; Luke = Ox; John = Eagle; see Ezekiel 1:10). High on the walls of the Chancel and Sanctuary are the same four faces.

The walls of the Chancel have murals of angel figures praising God with a variety of instruments. The Latin subscriptions are quotations from the Latin form of the Te Deum and read: "We praise Thee, O God: we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord"; "All the earth doth worship Thee: the Father everlasting"; "To Thee all angels: to Thee the powers of the heaven and world"; "To Thee cherubim and seraphim: continually do cry."

The Reredos behind the Communion Table pictures six of the Apostles in mosaic:

St John is holding a goblet containing a snake, to illustrate Mark 16:18, "They will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them".

St James is holding a shell, signifying the pouring of the waters of baptism, and a sturdy staff with which to shepherd.

St Paul holds a sword, seeing that he handled so mightily "the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Ephesians 6:17).

St Peter, inevitably, has a key in his hands, a reminder that our Lord once said to him, "I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

St Andrew carries a Bible to symbolise his evangelistic zeal and has beside him his martyr's cross.

St Philip bears a cross-staff as a symbol of his pastoral authority and his martyrdom.

Above the Apostles you notice the different ciphers. The three intersecting circles are a symbol of the Trinity; the Alpha-Omega cipher is the Greek equivalent of our A-Z and speaks of the Christ who is sometimes called "The First and the Last" in Scripture. Over the top of the Reredos are the words of St Paul from 1 Corinthians

As you step up into the elevated area you enter the Chancel, a word derived from the Latin "cancelli" ("lattice") and reminiscent of the Latin word "to sing" ("cantare"). The separation of the Chancel from the Nave comes from pro-Reformation times when members of the congregation were barred from the area in front of the Communion Table.

The Georgian Church, which this present building has replaced, had no such wall. The ceiling of the Chancel is starred, reminding us of Psalm 19:1: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims His handiwork."

11:26 - "Shew the Lord's death until He come", inscribed over a grapevine, reminding us that Jesus once called Himself "The True Vine" (John 15:1). Above this again, in the centre of the east window, is the original stained glass from the Georgian Church. The clear glass of the new enlarged design lets in a great deal more light than was the case in the older church. On the left-hand side of this window, but hardly visible looking into the light, are the Ten Commandments, continued on the right-hand side.

On the left of the Reredos you see the Lord's Prayer and, on the right, the Apostles' Creed.

Notice again the central cross (see above) and the inscription which tells us that the Reredos was erected in memory of Ellen Wilford and Sgt Richard Spackman, September 28th 1924, by MH Wilford and his family.

Returning to the Nave of the church, notice the fine chandelier from the Georgian Church and perhaps the finest feature of this present building, the large Rose Window on the upper west wall. The cipher mentioned above appears in the centre, and words around the window read: "All Thy works praise Thee, O Lord, and Thy Saints shall bless Thee" (Psalm 145:10).

The main church building was extended with a church hall in 1988, called the Bowyer Hall after Edith Bowyer who gave her services to the church as secretary and administrator for many years.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BUILDINGS

The separate tower is in four stages with string courses between the stages. At the west is a door with a rusticated surround and a two-light window. In the third stage is a clock face. Above this are lancet bell openings. The parapet has plain pilasters and square pinnacles.

The church is built in stone with a patterned tiled roof. Its plan consists of a three-bay nave with clerestory, north and south aisles, and a two-bay chancel. At the east end is a five-light window and at the west end is a rose window.

FITTINGS AND FURNITURE

Inside the tower are memorials. Pevsner considers that the best is a tablet by John Flaxman in memory of Rev. Kelsall Prescott, who died in 1823, showing him standing and instructing boys. The monument to Samuel Oldknow, who died in 1828, is by Francis Legatt Chantrey, but Pevsner considers it to be disappointing. A monument to Elizabeth Isherwood, who died in 1835, is by Manning and shows a woman kneeling by an urn. Other monuments are to Nathaniel Wright who died in 1818, showing a cherub with an extinguished torch, and to John Clayton who died in 1848 and shows a standing woman with a lamp and a torch.

In the church the chandelier and font were removed from the old church. Also in the church are memorials to the Bradshaw-Isherwood family. The organ was built by Conacher & Wadsworth and extended by Walker in 1972. The ring consists of eight bells. Six of these, which came from Stockport parish church in 1816, were cast by Rudhall of Gloucester in 1731. The other two bells are by John Taylor & Co and are dated 1963. The communion plate includes a silver chalice dated 1762. The parish registers date from 1655.

EXTERNAL FEATURES

The lych gate dated 1893 is listed Grade II. Also listed Grade II are a stable and coach house from the early 19th century erected for the use of the owner of Marple Hall when visiting the church and the adjacent hearse house, also from the early 19th century.