

# **A Brief History of St. Swithuns Church**

There has probably been a Christian community in Sandy since Roman times, but the earliest mention of a church at Sandy is found in a document dated c 1214.

The present church was built from locally quarried ironstone, probably towards the end of the 15th century on the site of an earlier church. Between 1859 and 1861 the building was heavily restored and enlarged, under the direction of Sandy's longest serving Rector, the Revd John Richardson (Rector 1858-1913).

## **The South Aisle**

Entry to the church is through the Victorian south porch with its carved angel finial. The font bowl is thought to be Saxon in origin and the base medieval. The stained glass window depicting Christ's Baptism was installed c. 1960 and the window depicting the Annunciation was designed by Mary Lowndes in 1902. The Board of Rectors near the door lists incumbents back to the early 13th century.

## **The South Transept**

This transept includes the memorials to men of Sandy who fell in the two World Wars. The memorial on the floor is in memory of the son of the Revd John Hooker, Rector from 1682-1722. The statue in the corner of the transept is of Captain Sir William Peel, RN, KCB, VC, who was the third son of Sir Robert Peel, founder of the Metropolitan Police Force. William was born in 1824 and entered the Navy aged 13. After a distinguished career in the Navy (during which he also found time to organise the building of the Sandy to Potton railway) he was wounded at Luchnow in 1858 whilst fighting the Indian Mutiny and contracted small-pox in 1858 whilst recovering from his injuries. He was one of the first recipients of the Victoria Cross.

## **The Lady Chapel**

The Lady Chapel was refurbished in the late 1950's including the stone altar, oak altar rails, oak screens and bronze crucifix. The window in the Chapel show scenes of the Nativity, Transfiguration and Resurrection. Amongst the carvings on the capitals of the pillars there is a lizard.

## **The Chancel**

The piscine (stone sink & drain) and sedilia (stone seats) on the south wall of the chancel date from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the floor level having been raised at the Victorian restoration. Above the sedilia can be seen a fragment of alabaster showing the head and shoulders of two soldiers arresting Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. This fragment was part of a large brightly coloured reredos, thought to date from about 1370. The reredos was probably demolished during the Reformation.

The window on the south side of the sanctuary is by Charles Gibbs, and is the oldest stained glass window in the church.

The east window has as its theme Faith, Hope and Charity and is in memory of Adelaide, wife of Arthur (late Viscount) Peel who built Sandy Lodge, now headquarters of the RSPB.

The present organ was installed in about 1872 and was made by Hill & Son (London).

Among the maskheads on the capitals of the chancel pillars are depicted Our Lord and the Virgin Mary.

## **The Nave**

On the south side of the chancel arch looking down into the nave is a carved head of King Egbert and on the north side that of our patron saint, St. Swithun, who was chaplain to King Egbert. In the nave one can also see carvings of Green Men, a monkey, an otter, a squirrel and a dove. The octagonal piers in the south arcade contain 15<sup>th</sup> century work. The eagle lectern was donated in 1889.

## **The North Transept**

The north transept contains memorials to the Pym family of Hazells Hall who have been patrons of the living since 1829. The earliest monument dates from 1760. The glass panel on the floor covers part of the brick domed roof over the Pym family vault in which 16 members of the family were buried between 1775 and 1860.

## **The Tower**

This is 15<sup>th</sup> century in origin, and has been restored in 1692, 1756 and 1955. There are 6 bells- the oldest of which dates from 1602 and the newest, the treble, was added in 1892. The present clock was installed in 1892. The symbol commemorating the Festival of Britain which hangs near the tower screen was made from cog wheels removed from the clock during its restoration in 1951.

## **The Exterior & Churchyard**

Look up at the window and roof eaves to see the many carvings of heads, beasts, foliage and other symbols. There is evidence of older stone work on the outside of the north aisle. The churchyard was closed in 1891 and there have been a number of burials since then including Sir Frederick Liddell, whose sister Alice inspired Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland".

Opposite the tower is the brown granite tomb of the Graves family, last owners of Sandye Place (the red bricked Georgian mansion seen from here). To enable the family to be buried in the closed churchyard, part of the park was donated to the church and one can see where the boundary was moved outwards.