

# ST MARY THE VIRGIN

## Shalford

Although Shalford's present church is only just over a hundred and sixty years old, it is at least the fourth building on a site that has been sacred for around a thousand years.

The first church was probably built here by a Saxon landowner in the tenth century. Before the Norman Conquest this part of Shalford was included in a great estate centred on Bramley, which extended from the Guildford boundary down to the Sussex border. Shalford was the oldest church on the estate and was one of Bramley's three churches mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. Both Bramley and Womersley churches were originally founded as outlying chapels of Shalford.

Following the Conquest many churches were rebuilt and enlarged. In the late twelfth or early thirteenth century Shalford's Saxon church was replaced with the church illustrated below. The dedication to St Mary the Virgin probably dates from this rebuilding, which coincided with the growth of the great medieval cult of Our Lady. The new church originally had a nave and long chancel, with a small spire above a central tower. Over the next two centuries, transepts and a side chapel were added. These may have housed images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Nicholas mentioned in a fourteenth century list of church rents.



*Shalford's medieval church*

In 1305 Edward I granted the Rectory of Shalford, including the advowson (the right to appoint the incumbent), to the Augustinian Priory and Hospital of St Mary extra Bishopsgate in London. From this date the presiding clergyman at Shalford has been a vicar rather than a rector. The first vicarage lay beside the road to Guildford, to the north of the church. Vicars of Shalford lived there for seven and a half centuries, although the present vicarage is a modern house in East Shalford Lane.

The Priory and Hospital of St Mary extra Bishopsgate was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1539. The Rectory Manor of Shalford reverted to the Crown and was sold off, eventually coming to brothers George and John Austen in 1599. The Austens thus became lay rectors inappropriate, and built a new mansion to the rear of the church (demolished in 1967). Their descendants over

the course of the next three centuries became the major landowners in the parish and squires of the village.

The fabric of the church was in a very poor state by the end of the eighteenth century. Huge cracks had appeared in the tower and the west end of the nave, prompting a decision by parishioners in 1787 to demolish and rebuild. Robert Austen was given complete discretion in the church's reconstruction. Most of the stone used in rebuilding came from his own land at Nore near Hascombe. He adopted a contemporary style for his new church, with a cupola replacing the spire. The small apsidal chancel of the Georgian church, with a plain low altar table, reflected the profound theological changes that had occurred since the Reformation.

The 'New Church' soon proved too small for the growing population of the parish, and its appearance was considered 'squat' and 'unworthy'. By the mid-nineteenth century the country was in the middle of an evangelical revival, with medieval styles popular once more. In 1846, a mere fifty-eight years after its construction, the church was demolished.



*The 'New Church' of 1788*

Its replacement, a Victorian church built in thirteenth century Early English style, is the building we have today. The architect was Benjamin Ferrey, a pupil of the renowned Augustus Pugin, but his design has also been criticised - this time for being too high in proportion to its length, with poor detail. Various changes have taken place since the church was dedicated in 1847, most recently in 2011 when the pews were removed to create a large versatile space suitable for community use as well as services.

The oak panelling in the **Chancel** was installed in 1929. On the panelling behind the altar are plaster shields decorated with symbols of Christ's Passion. The triptych-style reredos is of the same date. It was painted by distinguished stained glass artist Christopher Webb and purchased with a bequest from long-serving churchwarden Edwin Hanmer Everett.

The Chancel holds memorials of the Austen family, rectors impropriate of Shalford and Bramley, including a monument to Robert Austen, the builder of the Georgian church; another commemorates



*The Elyot Brass*

Captain John Austen, who fought for the Parliamentary cause in the Civil War and died in 1660. Below this is the oldest monument in the church, a brass from 1509 in memory of Roger Elyot, who leased the Rectory Manor from the Priory of St Mary extra Bishopsgate, and his wife Margaret. During the course of the 2011 alterations the Austen burial vault beneath the Chancel was discovered, with bricked-up coffin niches each labelled with the name of the occupant

To the south of the chancel the church's **Lady Chapel** contains an African carving of the Virgin supplicating. The ash crucifix was carved by Martin Cundell in 1991. The east window of the chapel was given on the occasion of the Silver Wedding of Edgar Wigan of Bradstone Brook and his wife Cicely in 1935. The south window of the chapel dates from 1960 and commemorates Cicely Wigan.

High on the west wall of the Lady Chapel is a memorial to a survivor of the Charge of the Light Brigade. Col. Frederick George Shewell of the 8th Hussars led his men into battle with his open Bible propped against his saddle. His grave in the churchyard adjoins the south wall of the chapel. The chapel also contains a First World War memorial: decorative panels and the dedication from a pulpit given in memory of her brother Maurice Bagot by Cicely Wigan of Bradstone Brook. He was lost aboard HMS *Monmouth* at the Battle of Coronel on 1 November 1914. On the opposite side of the church, on the north wall of the aisle, is a memorial to Douglas Courtenay Tudor who perished in the same action aboard the *Good Hope*. A list of other men from the parish who died in the Great War appears beside the door on the south wall of the aisle.

Various memorials in the **South Aisle** include one to the Reverend Charles Bousfield Huleatt, son of a former vicar of Shalford, who died with his wife and four children in the great Messina earthquake of 1908. Nearby is a window in memory of Lieutenant Frederick Godwin-Austen killed at Isandhlwana in 1879 at the age of 26.

Also on the south wall hangs a list of Rectors and Vicars of the parish since 1199. Of these, William Oughtred, vicar from 1605-10, was the most famous mathematician of his day, inventor of the slide rule and the symbol  $x$  for multiplication. More recently, David Railton, Vicar from 1931-1935, was an army chaplain on the Western Front when he conceived the idea of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey. Beside the door is the Great War memorial tablet, and next to it an embroidery worked by the Women's Institute and finished in 1938. It draws on (unfounded) local legends of Shalford's connection with the Pilgrims' Way and with John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. The church itself is portrayed beyond the pilgrim's track.

The **Bell Tower** contains a peal of eight bells, expertly handled by an enthusiastic team of ringers.

The **North Aisle** contains memorials relating to the Duncumbe family, saved from the old church. At the end of the north aisle the east window contains six small roundels of English fifteenth century glass, and two fine examples of old Flemish glass: on the right an Annunciation dated 1626, and on the left a harbour scene. These fragments were found in the vicarage loft in 1946 and may have been rescued from the demolition of the old church in 1788.

Filled with reminders of its long history, Shalford's parish church stands as a monument to the community it has served for a thousand years, and as a witness to the future.