

CHURCHYARD

The great yew by the path, a splendid old tree, is 13 feet 6 inches in circumference and must have been planted about the time of John and Christian Hunt. By the porch is a very attractive group of tombs and monuments. In 1676 the Hunt family was joined to the Watts family of Speen near Newbury when Mary Watts married John Hunt the younger. In a settlement a moiety of the remainder of the lease between John Hunt the elder and the Dean and Chapter of Winton was assigned to them. From this time the Watts family gradually became dominant in Ham. The tombs contain the remains of John Hunt, 1719, John Hunt, 1733, John Hunt, 1754, Richard Watts, 1775, John Hunt Watts, 1820, and Francis Richin Watts, 1867. Watts's were still at the manor when it passed into the hands of the Woodman family in the middle of the nineteenth century. There are Woodman graves in the churchyard and a brass memorial tablet to Henry Woodman who died in 1915 in the nave.

The tower has often been rather troublesome. It was re-roofed and perhaps added to in 1611, three years after the Pilgrim Fathers sailed for America. In 1741 it was reported as out of repair and in 1787 the exterior casing was renewed. There is a contemporary note in the report of the Archdeacon's Visitation: "Some little time hence the Parish having been at considerable expense repairing the Church". The castellations, which were becoming dangerous, were temporarily removed in 1962. They will be replaced, and the rough-cast again completely renewed when funds are available.

The sides of the tombs of the John Hunts who died in 1719 and 1733 are decorated with some very spirited cherubs and the hand of the same local craftsman is discernable on some of the tombstones on the south side of the church near the vestry. (See tailpiece). The village blacksmith who died in 1763 lies nearby. His stone bears this inscription (re-cut for clarity):

My Sledge and Hammer lies reclind
My Bellow too have lost their Wind
My fires extinct, my forge decay'd
And in the dust my Vice is laid
My Coals are spent my Irons gone
My Nails are drove my work is done.

Ham, whose population reached 280 in 1812 and is about 150 today has always been a small village. The map accompanying the Inclosure Award of 1828 shows that it was rather more compact in those days, with a few more cottages near the green and up the Buttermere road and none beyond the old vicarage on the Inkpen road.

Like its little church it has a long history, but has not been much changed externally. All Saints is, indeed an excellent example of an English village church, "modernised" in the early eighteenth century, a period of innate good taste, and still retaining the charming simplicity of its earliest days. John Betjeman in his "English Country Churches" awards it a star as "exceptionally attractive", an expert verdict with which we hope visitors will agree.



ALL SAINTS CHURCH HAM

All Saints Church

Ham

PRICE ONE SHILLING

Ham Church Restoration Fund

All Saints Church

Ham

The village of Ham is certainly more than 1000 years old. In 931 A.D. Athelstern King of Wessex defined its boundaries in a grant to his Thane Wulfgar. In Domesday Book (1086 A.D.) it was a part of the Lands of the Bishop of Winchester, a small place comprising the demesne of the Lord of the manor, nine villagers and ten cottagers. Villagers paid no rent for their lands, but were obliged to perform certain services on the demesne. Cottagers were small holders, supplying the Lord "with poultry, eggs and other menial provisions". There were 7 ploughlands (about 840 acres) of arable, 8 acres of meadow, mowed for hay, a pasture 3 furlongs in length by 1 in breadth and a wood 6 furlongs long by 3 broad. There is no record of the earliest place of worship, but a timber-built church would surely have existed here in Saxon times.

The plan of our present church is typically Early English, a period roughly fixed at 1200-1275 A.D., but the tooling on some of the quoins suggests that the nave was built earlier, in the 12th century. The tower is thus a later edition; its diagonal buttresses point to 14th century construction and the date 1349, cut on a stone near the bells, was visible in 1923 though now plastered over. The window on the west side of the tower is typical mid-fourteenth century "decorated" style. Local craftsmen used the materials most readily available and the walling is of flint, sarsen, ironstone and greensand. Only the quoins, window casings and other dressings are of coralline limestone properly worked. This freestone would have to be laboriously brought on sleds over the downs from the nearest quarry on the coralline limestone belt which runs from Faringdon to Calne; probably 'Cole's Pit', Shellingford over twenty miles away. There are indications that the original roof was of thatch.

In 1291 Pope Nicholas IV granted the Tenthms paid to his predecessors to King Edward I to help defray the cost of an expedition to the Holy Land (the Seventh Crusade). Ham Church was then taxed at £6 13 4d. a year.

The earliest recorded name of our long line of rectors is Wm. de Stunford, the incumbent in 1302. In 1362 "Hamme" was important enough for its parson to be granted "a messuage of 20 acres of land and a rood of meadow for the maintenance of a Chaplain to celebrate in the Parish Church . . . every day for ever". Clearly the village had escaped the worst ravages of the Black Death which, in 1348-59, carried off between a third and a half of the whole population of England. Isolation may have saved it, lying as it then did within the bounds of the great royal game reserve, not all woodland, called Savernake Forest.

In spite of extensive alterations early in the 18th century the simple plan of the early church has been preserved. The lancet windows with their pointed arches, in the chancel and on the north side of the nave are 13th century or earlier and the pitch of the thatched roof is indicated on the East side of the tower. Our church was again modernised in 1849, but fortunately, not much harm was done.

TOUR OF THE CHURCH

The porch dates from the 18th century, before which, the west door under the tower may have been the only entrance. The box pews, altar rail, gallery with its matching balustrade and the heavy oak communion table are eighteenth century. The windows of clear glass in the chancel and on the north side of the nave may have been renewed or repaired at that time, but follow the original design. The texts on the front of the gallery are attractive. The design of the roof is interesting and unusual; heavy beams across the nave have an upturned camber, each with a pair of serpentine or stags' horn Queen Posts, at the top of which are further beams or 'collars'. The wall plates are cleverly decorated. Most of this work was completed in the 1740's when George II was King, but the east window was given a new, plain, unfoliated head in Bath Stone at the end of the 18th century (Regency gothic).

The Norman-style windows on the south side of the nave were inserted and the vestry built in 1849. The gallery was enlarged by extending it into the tower. The walls of the nave and chancel were partly wainscotted at this time and the box pews lowered. The 18th century "three-decker" pulpit was lowered and altered to its present form and the manor pew opened up in 1871, though the arrangement is still attractive.

MEMORIALS

Above the manor pew is a very interesting memorial in brass and wood, painted to imitate marble. It depicts John Hunt, who died at the age of 90 in 1590 two years after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and his wife Christian. The Hunt family lived at the adjoining manor house for over 250 years. Eldest sons seem invariably to have been christened John, which adds to the difficulties of the biographer. The inscription tells us that this particular John Hunt gave "fortye poundes to the mariage of poore maydens", a considerable sum in those days. He also erected "three houses for poore and impotent people" towards the maintenance of which he contributed "yerely forever eight pounds and eighteen shillings".

The handsome herakdic marble wall memorial on the north side of the chancel is to Richard Gillingham, rector of Ham from 1688 to 1719. He was a man of property who by his will "devised £500 and the sale of his household goods for general charitable use" and £900 "as his Executors should judge most conducive to the honour of God". The contemporary John Hunt, in his will dated 23 July 1714 left monies for the poor of the village and it is reasonable to assume that it was largely through these two benefactors that the alterations carried out in the early 18th century were financed. He, or his father John, presented a silver Chalice to the church in 1734, the cover of which, date-marked 1719, made by Humphrey Payne, is still used as a Paten.

Another benefactor was one William Hore, churchwarden, whose wife or sister Elizabeth died on 21 June 1677 and has a memorial slab on the south side of the altar near the canopied piscina. One of the original set of bells became defective in 1590, but it was not replaced until 1663, three years after the restoration of the monarchy, when three of the present bells were hung. They are inscribed with the names of John Hunt and William Hore and were cast at Salisbury by Nathaniel Bolter and William Purdue II. As the big tenor bell weighs about 6 cwts. transport must have been a problem. The small treble bell, inscribed with the names of William Hunt and Michael Benet was cast at Aldbourne in 1712 by William and Robert Cor. The oak bell frame, made in 1633 when Charles I was on the throne is still intact, an unusual feature.