

Visitors Information Leaflet



Please take this **free** leaflet

Sunday at St Nicholas



Your first impression may be that the Church is here because of dead people! But that of course is not the reason for the church. Nonetheless, these memorials help to provide some interesting facts.

When was the Church Built?

There isn't a simple answer to that question! Different parts come from different times.

The church is of Norman foundation and there has been a place of Christian Worship here for over seven hundred and fifty years. There are signs of Norman work in the Chancel, and the Tower is in part prior to the seventeenth century.

The current building began in the eighteenth century with the arrival of Ralph Allen who acquired Bathampton Manor by marriage in 1731 and largely rebuilt the church in about 1750. Ralph Allen is famous in the area for developing national postal services, and for providing the Lime stone from his quarries to build the City of Bath. Other modifications to this Church were made in 1879, 1882, 1970, 1979 and 1993.

As you enter the church, at your feet you will find the grave of Captain Arthur Phillip, who landed in Australia in January 1788 at a site he named as Sydney in honour of Lord Sydney, and he was officially appointed Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales on 7 February 1788. When he retired he lived at 19 Bennett Street in Bath where he died in 1814. His wife Isabella lies with him.



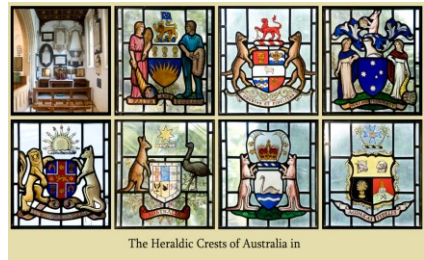
To your right is the Australia Chapel. The floor is of Australian Wombeyan Marble and the memorial screen made of Australian Blackbean wood. The windows of the sanctuary carry the coat of arms of the Federal Government and the six Australian States.



Australian Chapel

The Kneelers were given by Tasmania. In recent years, the High Commissioner for Australia, or his Deputy, performs an annual wreath laying ceremony near to 11 October, the date of Arthur Phillip's birth.

The stained glass windows in the Chapel show the coat of arms of the federal government and the six Australian states.



What is the most important thing in the Church?

To answer this question it is helpful to look at one of the stained glass windows: the one in three panels in the middle of the North wall, also depicted below. On a sunny afternoon light reflects off the Bath stone of the buildings next door to give a remarkably warm glow to the bright colours.



The central figure is of course the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the reason the church exists and the most important person. Why is he so important to us?

The window tells a story that illustrates why. It's a true story you can find in the church bibles on page 1003, in Mark 2:1-12. (The incident is so significant it is also described in Matthew and Luke's accounts.)

Maybe Jesus himself has been telling a story at the moment depicted. Certainly he was a popular teacher and his style involved storytelling. Mark has already told us (1:22) that *The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.*

Look at the people's facial expressions in the left-hand pane: they are spellbound! Perhaps Jesus' very popularity brought him into conflict with the jealous teachers of the law with whom he was contrasted and whose snarls we can see in the right-hand pane.



All of these people are packed into a house. In addition to all the people sitting and standing around to hear Jesus, at his feet is a man sitting on a mat.



His bare arms in the stained glass reveal visibly atrophied muscles. This man is not well. Mark's account tells us he was a "paralytic" – a man suffering from paralysis, maybe just in his legs or maybe none of his limbs have been working.

Nobody would want to be in that condition today, but in Jesus' day it was a truly desperate situation. He can't work, he can't do anything for himself, and he is totally reliant on others. So how did this man get to the feet of Jesus? This isn't his home. But he needed to get to Jesus. Whether he wanted to give the famous teacher a try or not, his only hope was with this extraordinary man with extraordinary healing powers or – as Mark shows us – **authority** over sickness.



The answer to how he got there is depicted high in the two side window panes, where the man's friends are leaning in. If you look closely you can see their hands hold the ends of the sheet the man is sitting on, the lines of which hold the three panels of the picture together as one scene.



These men were so determined to get their friend to Jesus that when they found the house full and the doorway blocked, they climbed up on the roof and made an opening in it to lower the paralysed man through. In reality the scene was probably not so tidy as it is beautifully depicted here! The two



small kite-shaped panes above the main window show a close-up of their hands, perhaps hinting at where they literally were in relation to Jesus whilst in the constraints of space the artist wanted to bring them into the frame as key players in the scene.

(We can follow the example of those friends. Is there someone with a desperate need you want to bring to Jesus? Why not take some time to pray for them here and now? He is still compassionate, still able to

help. Behind you in the Australia Chapel is a book in which you can write prayer requests if you would like members of the church to pray too.)

Jesus' first words to the man are a surprise. *"Son, your sins are forgiven."* Could he not see why they had gone to such lengths to get him to Jesus? As a modern wag has put it, never mind his sins, what about his pins? This expresses the feeling of many in today's world about the church's heavenly message. What about the here and now? We don't want pie in the sky when we die, we want steak on the plate while we wait! Spiritual concerns seem hopelessly out of touch with the reality of living in today's world. And isn't sin a discredited concept in the face of diversity anyway? Who is Jesus to judge him a sinner?

But for Jesus, putting right the man's relationship with God takes priority even over his obvious need for healing. Jesus speaks with affection, calling him "son" and desiring what is good for him. The disabled man needs to know he is loved (and don't we all?).



To the right of the picture are three scowling faces. They represent the religious establishment. They are the "teachers of the Law" mentioned earlier taking a dislike to this young upstart preacher. They react against Jesus' words. The problem is not that he calls the man a sinner.

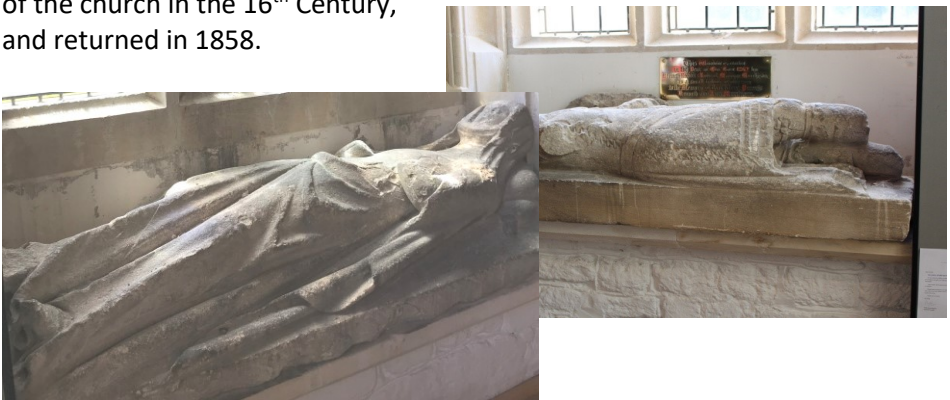
They know everyone is a sinner. It is the audacious claim of Jesus to be forgiving sins off his own bat that gets their goat. How can Jesus be so presumptuous as to say he cancels a debt owed to God? Surely no mere human can be a signatory to that account, and to say such a thing must be blasphemy!

And yet Jesus repeated the claim. *“That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...”* he said to the paralytic, *“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home”*. And the man’s healing backed up Jesus’ words, silenced his critics, and amazed everyone.

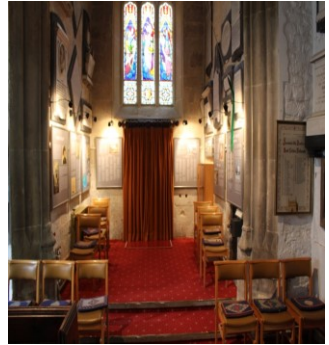
This is the Jesus we honour in this church. The one who is fully human and fully God, and so is able to forgive us our sins as well. Our experience is of receiving peace and friendship with God through trusting him, giving the sure hope of eternal life with him. And this offer is open to everyone. If you are interested to find out more about this, have a look at our website, and the presentation produced by our Australian friends at <https://twowaystolive.com/> .

Find a church that teaches from the Bible. Of course you will be more than welcome at our services. **We meet here at 10.45 every Sunday** and at other times on certain days – see the noticeboard or website.
God bless you.

The two effigies, on the window sills near the Font, are of a Knight and his Lady, and are thought to date from the 14th Century. They were thrown out of the church in the 16th Century, and returned in 1858.



At the rear of the Church under the tower area you will find a display depicting the story of the First Fleet to Australia which departed from Portsmouth in May 1787. One of the panels depicts a list of the names of those who travelled within it.



The Georgian 'Barrel ceiling was restored when the Church was re-decorated, as were some of the wall memorials.

The 19th Century font is used to baptise children and adults as a sign of our need for Christ's forgiveness and our entry into the church family.



The 19th Century 'reredos', behind the Communion table, depicts the Last Supper, reminding us of when Jesus took bread and wine in the institution of communion.

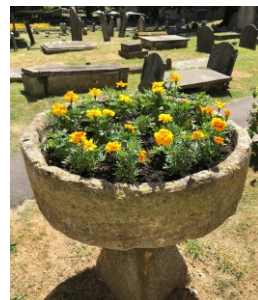


Stained glass window in the porch.
"With thanks to God..."



Features of special interest outside the Church

(1) The Tower clock was built in 1865.



(2) The font outside the porch was an old cider press which was then used as the font until the 1750s.

(3) On the exterior of the east wall is an ancient figure in high relief within a semi-circular headed niche. Its provenance has been the subject of endless debate but all the physical evidence and modern opinion, points to it being the figure of a Bishop dating from about 1160. He is under a Norman semi-circular headed niche which carries traces of purple (oxblood?) colouring.

He is in the act of blessing, a function reserved for priests and is obviously a male. He holds a Crozier (Bishops crook) and carries a book. His collar is

decorated with a Norman characteristic of a chevron (zig zag). He is surrounded by some twelve consecration crosses, so he has been cherished in the same place for centuries and is clearly pre-reformation.



The Archaeologist Katherine Symons wrote in 1935 that the Bathampton effigy is the “earliest and most valuable specimen of ecclesiastical sculpture to be found in Somerset”.



(4) The ‘hip-knob’ on the east end of the Chancel roof. The bent cross was used in medieval times to represent Christ’s suffering.

Three graves worthy of note:

(5) William Harbutt A.R.C.A (1844-1921) the inventor and manufacturer of 'Plasticine', whose factory was in a canal-side mill in Bathampton on the site now occupied by homes named 'Harbutts'.



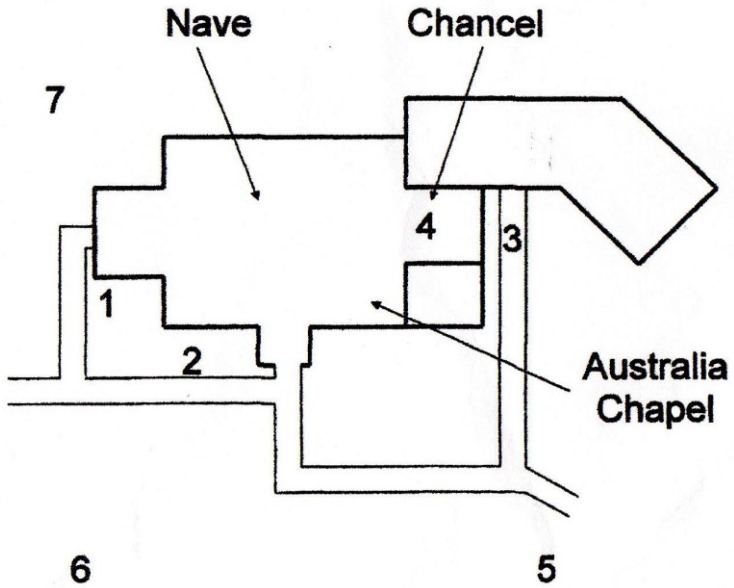
(6) Walter Sickert (1860-1942) the artist, who lived in St Georges Hill House at the top of Bathampton Lane and passed away there. His ashes along with those of his wife are in the churchyard. It is said Sickert's habitual attire comprised of a tail coat of reddish Harris tweed, a fisherman's cap and bedroom slippers!



(7) Jean Baptiste du Barry – the last man in England to fight a legal duel with Count Rice, on 18th November 1778 on Claverton Down. Mortally wounded, he was brought down to the George Pub opposite the Church, where he subsequently died.



Plan:



St Nicholas Church
Church Close Bathampton BA2 6TU
Website: www.stnicholasbathampton.org.uk