

# **St MARY'S CHURCH, RICKMANSWORTH**

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **Section one: Brief history and description of the church building, contents, churchyard, and setting.**

#### **The Setting of the church.**

Saint Mary's Church, Rickmansworth, a Grade II listed building, has a prominent position on one of the two routes through Rickmansworth. It is the dominant building as one travels along Church Street. The other route through Rickmansworth takes one along the High Street, which runs at right angles to Church Street, and that is where most of the economic activity of the town takes place. The High Street has a good selection of food stores, coffee shops, chemists, hair salons, nail bars, dress shops, jewellers and charity shops.

Church Street itself has mainly offices, but importantly has a pub next-door to the church, The Feathers; two or three restaurants including San Georgio, a 16th century building; and some shops, near Church Street's intersection with the High Street. The church features prominently in amateur and professional pictorial representations of Rickmansworth in both art and photography. Other buildings of historical interest, are the Priory dating from the early 16th Century and The Bury which was built in the later decades of the 16th century .

Another important building in Church Street is the Old Vicarage, which stands on the west side. It is in part, a mediaeval building, consisting originally of a hall and two wings. There have been many structural alterations during the house's history and so it is difficult to assign a date. However, one feature in the construction, (which regrettably has now been

destroyed), red brick arcading, can also be seen on the parapet to the south side of Redbourn Church. The date of this construction being not later than 1450 to 60. For this reason, the the old Vicarage may be of a similar date.  
insert photo and Map.

## **The History of Rickmansworth.**

Rickmansworth has long been an inhabited area probably for several thousand years before Christ's coming. It would have seen the ebb and flow of wandering or invading peoples and, under the Roman occupation the bringing of the gospel, albeit secretly, because of the persecution of the Christians. This persecution led to Alban's Martyrdom in 209A.D, (or traditionally in 301–305 AD). The legacy of Alban has been a major influence on Rickmansworth's development through the monastic control of Saint Alban's Abbey. Today the focus, for the Parish Church of Rickmansworth is the cathedral of Saint Alban as the Diocesan Centre and the cathedra of the Bishop.

From an early date, there was a veneration of Alban, with pilgrimages to the site of his execution and the subsequent setting up of a monastic church there prior 400 A.D.. This community was greatly developed when, reputedly, Offa, King of Mercia (757–796), made a pilgrimage to Rome. There he made his kingdom subject to a tribute (called Peter-pence) and procured the canonisation of Alban. On Offa's return from Rome he founded a Benedictine Abbey and convent in 793, the endowments of which included five manors within 'Pynesfeld' of which Rickmansworth's was one. At the time of the Domesday survey in 1086 the Abbott is recorded as holding 'Prichemareworth'. Later spellings varied considerably but generally approximated to Rickmer(e)sworth until changed to the present form in the late 19th century.

Domesday does not record any church here and in fact, the population then may well have been as few as 200 persons. In 1119, when Geoffrey, 16th Abbot of Saint Albans, directed the tithes should be paid from Rickmansworth, they should supply 48 hens and one pig at Christmas and 1,000 eggs, and one pig at Easter towards the maintenance of the Abbey. However, there is no indication at all of there being a church or chapel until 1191.

### **The History of the Church.**

Between 1191 and 1216 there is a reference to one "Adam" as being a chaplain to Rickmansworth. Then in 1219 Pope Honorius III confirmed the 'church' to the Abbot and around 1270 Richard de Chelveston was the earliest recorded Vicar. The church was valued at £16 per annum in the ecclesiastical taxation of 1291 ordered by Pope Nicolas IV.

The Church of Saint Mary the Virgin Rickmansworth, is a mediaeval foundation, but except, for the tower, the early building, was rebuilt between 1825 and 1826 as the earlier building was in disrepair. The new brick Church built by a Mr. Walker was an austere building, with a slight Gothic revival character as maybe judged from the present aisles, walls and windows. The interior was furnished, much as before with box pews and galleries supported on iron columns to the north, south and west, the latter containing the organ choir. The pulpit was on the south side of the nave by the chancel arch. In turn this was pulled down, and the church was rebuilt in 1889 to 1890 to the design of Sir Arthur Blomfield; the aisle walls were retained with their Gothic revival windows.

In 1982, the church centre, a joint Methodist Anglican project was completed to the south of the church and is linked by a covered way to the south aisle. St Mary's was a shared building (LEP) with the Methodists, for some 40 years, from 1982. A re-ordering project was carried out within the church between 1992 and 2002. This involved the re-fitting and refurbishing of the Church interior, particularly the tower base, the chapel, and the nave altar.

### **The Tower**

"A fair Church covered with lead, with a square tower at the west end of it, where is a ring of five bells, and a spire upon the tower also covered with lead".

So wrote Sir Henry Chauncey in 1700 the earliest known description of the church and its tower and it is the same tower that exists today.

As mentioned earlier the tower graces the town of Rickmansworth with its Hertfordshire Spike and clasping buttresses creating the familiar, strong four square silhouette especially as the backdrop to the old buildings of Church Street.

On the north face is the chiming clock installed in 1904. It rings the Westminster Chimes on the quarters and chimes the hour, during the day. The tower is centrally situated at the west end of the nave, though not square to it as the nave deviates some 2 to 3° southwards. Sharpe's plan of 1825 showing the mediaeval nave does not reveal such a distinct divergence, though the layout was far from symmetrical. The tower had been rebuilt in 1630 but retaining the earlier base as the 1889-90 rebuilding retained the 1826 Aisles possibly the 1826 rebuilding introduced the deviation for some practical reason relating to the site.

There are four stages in the tower, separated by moulded stone horizontal stringcourses, ground floor, ringing chamber, clock chamber and belfry. Clasp buttresses at each corner extend up three stages stepping in at each. The top terminates in an embattled parapet around a flat lead roof from which rises a small lead clad spire or spike in the tradition of Hertfordshire and the adjoining counties.

## **The Architecture of the Church**

The aisles remain from the 1826 rebuilding; the nave, chancel, chapel and vestry are part of the rebuild carried out in 1890 - 91. Sir Arthur Blomfield, designed the rebuild which was carried out by Daniel and William Goddard, the final cost being £5,675 6s 9p. The vestries were a slightly later addition in 1898 and North porch at the beginning of the 20th century. It is thought that Blomfield's additions can be distinguished from Atkinsons by his use of knapped flint with stone dressings.

## **Interior and Fittings**

### **Stained Glass**

One of the most striking features of the interior, is the stained glass, east window showing the Crucifixion. It was made by Morris and Company in 1896, it is partly based on a design by Burne-Jones and was installed in memory of Robert, the first Baron Ebury and his wife Charlotte.

Two other stained glass windows in the north and south walls of the Chancel, were originally from the Methodist Church in the High Street, and

installed in Saint Mary's with additional panels designed by Alfred Fisher of Chapel studio (1995)

Two windows in the North Aisle (1942) and the North porch (1946) are by William Starmer.

**Lectern:** the oak Lectern, was presented by the Vicar (at the time of the 1890 rebuild), Rev. A E Northey. It came from Penshurst Church in Kent.

**Font:** the fine octagonal carved stone font was given in memory of Lt. Alfred Northey, son of the above-mentioned Vicar, who was killed in action on the 12th of October 1914. It has an oak cover presented by the Reverend Shepherd in 1945.

**Pulpit:** the carved stone pulpit was installed during the 1889-90 rebuilding and the Oak choir stalls are also of that period.

## **Monuments**

To the left of the high altar is the most notable monument, a simple tomb chest of stone with a black slate inscription panel, carved white marble coats of arms with animal supporters to each end and a black marble top.

On the east wall of the North choir aisle is another monument of distinction in white marble. Erected by John Foley around the time of the end of the 1600s in memory of his father who was a privy counsellor to Prince Charles, later Charles the second

Another simple poignant memorial is to be found on the North Aisle wall and reads John Robert Cunningham born the 7th of May 1810 and died the next day.

One brass memorial has survived and that is mounted on the South Aisle wall, three figures Thomas Day Alice's first wife and Joan his second wife. There are several other wall Plaques of the 18th and 19th century in the Aisles and Tower and many headstones and chest tombs of note in the churchyard.

### **Church plate**

The church plate is now comprised of modern silverware, the older items dating between 1574 and 1692 having been sold at Christies in 1972 in order to establish a maintenance fund for the Church building.

### **The Parish.**

The original Parish was large extending over Croxley Green, Moor Park, Batchworth, West Hyde, Mill End and Chorleywood. At the 1851 census the population was 4,851 an increase of almost 1,000 from 1821. To meet the needs of the growing out lying communities new parishes were formed:

1846 West Hyde

1854 Northwood

1868 Chorleywood

1872 Croxley Green

1875 Mill End

### **Church yard**

The church is surrounded by mature trees. In the spring there is a fantastic display of snowdrops. One area of the church yard is surrounded by a low growing rosemary hedge which delineates the garden of remembrance. This is often visited by loved ones of the deceased. Two sides of the Church yard

are surrounded by a low brick wall which is maintained by Three Rivers, the local District Council.

However, the most prominent feature in the church yard is the war memorial, which was moved to the churchyard from another location in Rickmansworth (due to a road widening scheme) in 1960s.

The church agreed to have the war memorial section with the names inscribed but adamantly refused to have the Lion and Eagle sculpture which was on the top of the wall memorial. This is now in the Three Rivers District Council Rose Garden.

### **Social history.**

Suffice it to say, that the church's main function, is for the worship of God. This takes many different forms, a Eucharistic service, a Service of The Word, and a well attended 8 am service using the Book of Common Prayer. In the mid week there is a well attended Communion service. For several decades, the church was jointly shared with the Methodist community in a Local Ecumenical Partnership. A new church Centre was built in 1982 and hosts many activities, for example Zumba classes and a toddlers' group.

### **The significance for mission.**

The significance for mission is limited in the "Billy Graham" sense. However a ring of 12 bells is a significant attraction particularly for people moving into the area. It is interesting to note that of the current band two individuals moved into the area some 40 years ago because of the fact that the church had a ring of 10 bells. It is also of note that the sounding of the bells on a Sunday morning indicates to more people that the church is present in Rickmansworth than the actual services in Church.

## **The significance of the area affected by the proposal.**

Visually none of the area will be affected by the proposal, however auditorily, it will make a fantastic difference. At the moment the sound of the bells in Rickmansworth is very poor. We have the opportunity to make the sound much better and in a strange way the fact that the bells are heard across the town of Rickmansworth every Sunday morning indicates that more people will be affected by the mission of these bells.

At the time of writing in summer 2025, we have a consistent band who are able to ring every Sunday morning.

The band is particularly keen at the moment with five learners, two youngsters under 18 and three adults, who have basically “walked in off the street”. Very often new recruits come from family members or chatting. Our learners are all at different stages and so the youngsters are encouraged as they can see that they have made progress compared to the three adult members who are learning to handle at the moment. Learning to ring is a staged process and takes 6 to 8 weeks to become competent to handle Bell. A lifetime of learning follows that.

## **Ringling Chamber**

The Ringling chamber is large enough to accommodate a ring of 12 with the addition of a Sharp 2nd or flat 6th and an extra treble to make a light ring of 8 or ten.

## **Clock Chamber**

The clock mechanism is housed in a case, in the clock room on the second floor of the tower. The clock mechanism, in addition to driving the clock,

which is mounted on the north exterior face of the tower, also chimes a number of bells for the hour and the quarters, nominally 4,5,6,9 and 10. The clock case also includes mechanisms for disconnecting the chimes when the bells are being rung, one lever for the hour and another lever for the chimes. The chime hammers are operated by wires transmitted to the bell hammers via various pulleys from the clock case. The force to operate the hammers and the clock are via a system of weights which are lowered when the clock operates, these weights are raised by electric motors when they reach a certain point in their downward travel.

### **New Frame.**

The provision of a new frame is thought by some authorities to be a requirement as the present frame does not have enough stability to accommodate 12 bells.

### **Why is this proposal needed now?**

There is a need to encourage a greater use of the fantastic resource of Saint Mary's bells. However, at the moment they are difficult to ring and do not sound well and so there are very few visiting bands, for example, teenagers involved with "Young at Herts" do not visit to Rickmansworth. The opportunity to improve these bells needs to be taken.

### **The evidence for the need.**

There is a general consensus of opinion from very experienced ringers that Rickmansworth bells are very poor compared to other rings in the diocese. The lack of visitors is also a very clear indication of the poor quality of the bells.

The Diocesan Bell Advisor states that.....

## **6. How is the proposal contributing to the need for Environmental Sustainability**

The tower has swift boxes which contribute to the environment, are well used. The existing louvres are used to absorb the sound on Practice nights.

**7. What other options were considered, taking Point 6 and the impact identified in the Statement of Significance into account?**

Other options would be a 'make do and mend', which would not produce the desired result.

**References**

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mplk 2nd June 2025

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2nd amendment 8th July 2025

3rd amendment Epiphany 2026