

Welcome to our Church of St Edmund and St George

The first church on this site was dedicated to St Edmund and was built in the early 12th Century by a Lord Norman de Verden, whose father served with William the Conqueror.

St Edmund (also known as Edmund the Martyr or Edmund of East Anglia) was the Anglo-Saxon King of East Anglia from about 855 until his death on 20th November 869 at the hands of the invading Vikings. By tradition he met his death after he refused the invaders demand that he renounce Christ. The photograph is of a statue of St Edmund on the front of Salisbury Cathedral.



After a hundred and fifty years, Hethe had outgrown its small Norman church which was then rebuilt and on a St George's Day around the turn of the 14th Century it was rededicated to become the Church of St Edmund and St George.

The Church was restored by George Street in 1859, when a new roof was placed over the nave and chancel; a north aisle was added (said in 1848 by the Rural Dean to be needed for the poor); new windows were put in; the whole church was re-seated and new furniture provided; the bell-turret with open timber sides and wood shingle roof constructed.

George Edmund Street (1824-1881) has been cited as one of the greatest architects of the 19th century. He published important books on gothic architecture in Italy and Spain following his tours of those countries. As well as restoring many churches his commissions included the building of new churches and his work can be seen in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

In the graveyard the oldest memorial can be found on the right of the path leading to the church. It is a tombstone erected by John Whithead to commemorate the burial of his wife Friswed in 1682. This is Grade 2 Listed and described as being "Ironstone. Winged cherub's head and Ionic columns in rustic style". It is believed that John was a member of the "Whitehead" family. The last record for a member of this family in Hethe is the baptism of Thomas, son of James and Ann Whitehead, in 1742.

If you continue to walk around the church you will see an interesting stone head on the east wall, we assume this was placed there by a mischievous stone mason!

The door of the church leads into the south aisle and facing you is a plain font, which is catalogued as Norman but could be from an earlier church. To the left of the door is a wooden plaque recording a contribution of £70 to provide seating in the church for the poor. The date of 1837 marked the installation of all, or nearly all, of the "pews for the richer families and open seats for the poor".

The names of John Dagley and Alexander Petty, churchwardens in 1708, were at one time painted on the west wall, but this can no longer be seen. Still on the wall is a list of Rectors of Hethe from 1232 to 1996.

The stained glass window on the west wall dates from 1895 and is in memory of Charles Price, the brother of the Revd A R Price who was Rector from 1887 to 1909. The alarmingly precipitous wall-ladder gives access to the clock tower. This structure, unusual in that it rests on the back wall and the roof, houses the single bell and the clock which was originally built in 1737 by a Mr Packer of Tingewick.

Three plaques on the north wall mark gifts to the poor by the Mansfield family, who are still prominent in the neighbourhood. The distribution of the interest earned by these gifts together with others from the Waddington and Salter families, which are noted on the south wall, is still made by the trustees. The window at the end of this aisle is interesting. Four of the panes, two very tiny, are fitted with special glass.

The quotation over the Chancel Arch "**Ye Shall Reverence My Sanctuary**" is made from a metal set in the stone but although it has been there for a long time we do not know how old it is.

The South Chancel has a restored 12th century priest's doorway and windows. The stained glass window behind the altar is dated 1882. It is in memory of Frederick Salter and his wife Mary Elizabeth. Frederick was our Rector for 27 years and died in 1881. In the south wall the window is within red surrounds and the glass has a pleasing design but little is known about it. A south aisle was added to the Nave in the 14th century and the clerestory in the 15th century. It is understood that in the early 17th century, "**the clerk digging a grave found an effigy of St George killing the dragon cut in stone with the face lying downwards**". This could at some time have stood somewhere in the Church but been taken down and hidden when images were demolished. The present statue of St George "slaying the dragon" at the east end of the south aisle was the gift of Mr Cyril Small in 1978, then landlord of the Whitmore Arms (later the Muddy Duck).

The eastern part of the south aisle forms the hagioscope, popularly believed to be the place where lepers and others with an infectious disease were allowed to assemble to view and join in the service. Interestingly, St Edmund was the patron saint of pandemics (an epidemic of infectious disease). In days when services were better attended it might have been used by an assistant priest giving the Holy Sacrament to a part of the congregation who used the opening or 'squint' to keep time with the Celebration of Communion at the main altar.

Inscriptions to Richard Evans and members of the Petty family are now illegible, but use to read as follows:

Richard Evans M.A. Magd. Coll. Oxon. 52 years rector, died Jan. 23 1698 aged 69 years and Grace, 50 years his wife died Nov. 12 1704.

Joan dau. of Alexander Petty died Ap. 12 1690 aged 8.

Elizabeth Wyatt dau. of Alexander Petty died Aug. 23 1700 aged 25 is buried in St. Anns Aldersgate churchyard.

Elizabeth wife of Richard Petty died July 30 1696, aged 77.

Richard s. of Alexander Petty died May 2 1686 aged 14.

There are legible inscriptions to the following:

18th century - to John Westcar (died 1784) and his wife Joanna (died 1800);

19th century - a memorial to George Lamb, Rector (died 1801); an alabaster monument to Richard Dutton (died 1802); an oval monument to Henry Westcar of Southwark (died 1805); an alabaster memorial to William Mansfield of Bainton (died 1846); a memorial to Frederick Salter, Rector (died 1881); alabaster memorials to benefactors John Mansfield (died 1869) and Thomas Mansfield (died 1874); an alabaster wall memorial to benefactor Mary Waddington (died 1876).

20th century - an alabaster memorial to a benefactor, George Mansfield (died 1946).

Our Church is now part of the Shelswell Benefice within the Bicester and Islip Deanery in the Oxford Diocese. It is Grade 2 Listed.

