

St John the Evangelist  
Northington

*A Visitors' Guide*



Sts James & Thomas



Sts Matthew & Jacob



Sts John & Andrew



Sts Simon Zel & Judas Thad.



Sts Bartholemew & Matthias



Sts Peter & Paul



## St John the Evangelist, Northington

### ONE MAN'S DREAM



Welcome to our wonderful church that celebrated its centenary in 1990. It was built through the generosity of the 4th Lord Ashburton and his wife Leonora. It replaced a church built in 1832 by Edward Hunt of Alresford that in turn had replaced a mediaeval church, both of which stood in the old churchyard, now the site of the present car park. Material from these buildings provided the aggregate for the concrete of the present building.



The architect was Sir Thomas Graham Jackson Bt. RA (1835-1924), a pupil of Sir Gilbert Scott and one of the most distinguished architects of his generation. Much of his work is to be found in Oxford, the Bridge of Sighs, for example, and the Examination Schools and chapel of Hertford College, built, it was said, in the 'Anglo-Jackson style'. He built two other churches in Hampshire (one being All Saints' in East Stratton) and from 1905 he was instrumental in the under-pinning of the east end of Winchester Cathedral (see p.8)

The impressive exterior of St John's, in a mature Perpendicular style with its polygonal apse and strait-turreted west tower, is splendidly set above the two villages of Northington and Swarraton. At a later stage, at the request of Lady Ashburton, Jackson improved his original design (see centre pages) by the substitution of a much more sumptuous and taller tower. St John's is affectionately known as the "cathedral of the valley".



The church is remarkable in many ways. First and foremost, it and all its fittings were planned and designed by this one man as a single concept and it has remained largely unaltered to this day as an important example of late Victorian ecclesiastical art. Novel techniques were used in its construction. The flints, for example, were bedded into concrete panels that enabled comparatively unskilled estate workers to assist with much of the building work. Note especially the significant flint-capped churchyard wall, the only one of its kind in England. Beneath the apse there is a remarkable crypt and undercroft which extends the length of the church.





When looking at the late Gothic style exterior, you will see the flint-work with stone dressing and symmetrical chequer patterning, the fine tower in the Somerset manner that presides over the Candover valley, and the unusual gargoyles which include a bull, an eagle, a frog, a hare and other animals. The bear, emblem of the Baring family, guards both entrances.



Inside, a wealth of elaborately carved woodwork is contrasted effectively against the ashlar walls of Caen stone. The church is opulent with an exceptionally complete ensemble of furnishings: a reredos with the Last Supper scene carved in high relief by French sculptor Émile Guillemin (1841-1907) within a Gothic canopy by Farmer and Brindley of the Natural History Museum fame; choir stalls joined on the north side by a richly filigreed organ case (there is a full description of this Charles Martin organ beside the lectern) are all in Black Walnut: and above all an amazing candelabrum of wrought iron, suspended on a hoist like all the other candelabra in the nave to enable easy access to the glass shielded candles. The floors of both chancel and sanctuary are paved with black and white marble and the windows are filled with exquisitely detailed stained glass by London glass manufacturers James Powell and Sons fashioned in 1889. They portray the twelve Apostles (see inside front cover) and were designed by Harry Ellis Wooldridge (1845-1917), once Sir Edward Burne-Jones' assistant, and who became Powell's chief designer for twenty years.

The craftsmanship throughout St John's is without exception outstanding - only the best in their trade were chosen to do the work.

A commanding stone pulpit with an impressive canopy and supported by a strange beast dominates the nave, noticeably less ornate than the chancel. The preacher ascends through a spiral stair within an externally projecting turret and enters the pulpit through a doorway high in the wall (Lord Ashburton's "hole in the wall"). The imposing lectern with its individually modelled eagle is also Jackson's own design.





All the pews are remarkable for their wonderfully carved bench ends, each with a different design. In the chancel, figures of the four evangelists set in scrolls of foliage form the ends of the back row of the choir stalls, whilst their emblems form the elbows of the front rows. The Baring family pews at the front of the nave have heraldry with the familiar bear supporters, whilst the other pews for estate workers and villagers have a fascinating variety of sacred emblems including a "Pelican in Her Piety". If you search carefully, you may even find a "Green Man" or wodewose! All the embroidered kneelers were made by members of the local Women's Institute (WI) to mark both the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 and also their own 25th anniversary since formation.

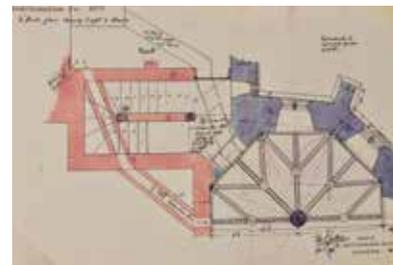
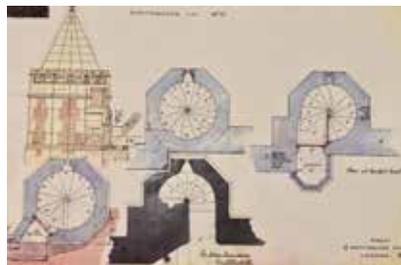
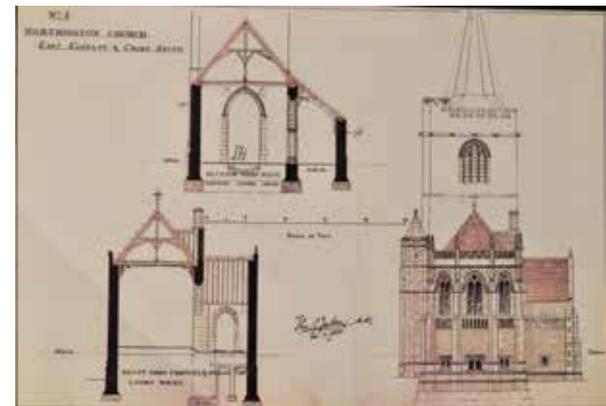
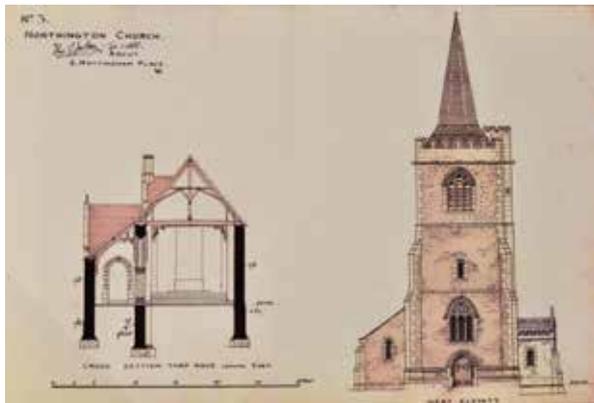


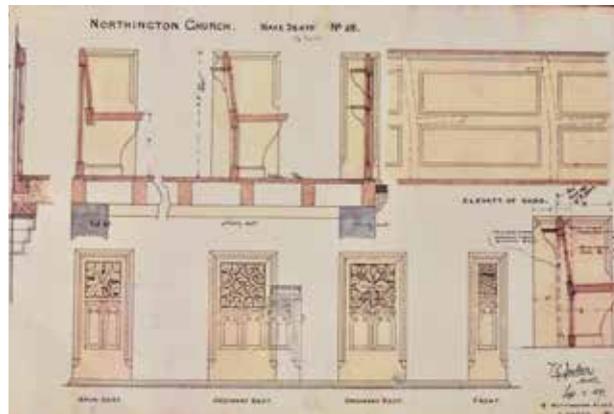
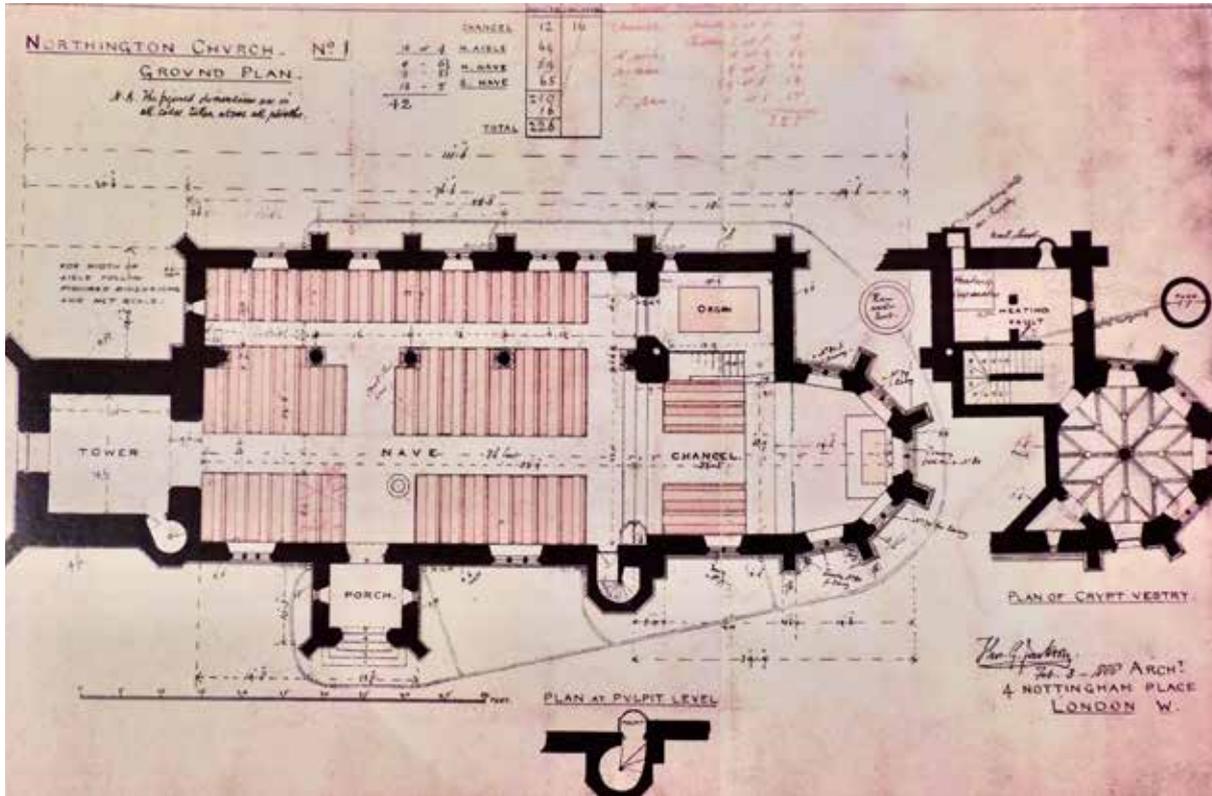
Further west is the elaborate font with angels carved beneath the bowl and a crocketed cover (the curled leaves on the inclined sides) that can also be raised and lowered by a Gothic iron hoist.



Note also the fine panelled king-post roof and the human head in the rear arch of the aisle that may be a portrait, perhaps even of the architect himself. But above all, the compatibility of the whole design springing from just one mind is the most remarkable feature of St John's.

**ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS**  
**Signed by Sir Thomas Graham Jackson**







To many visitors the most interesting, even outstanding, features of the church are the monuments to the Henley and Baring families of The Grange. The earliest and the most impressive of them are at the foot of the tower and were originally in the 1832 church. A large

neoclassical tablet on the north wall to Robert Henley, 1st Earl of Northington (1708-1772), Lord Chancellor and to Robert, Second Earl (1747-1786), is obscurely signed by Richard Hayward (1728-1800). The signature authenticates a previously unidentified work by this major sculptor, whose statue of Lord Botetourt, erected in 1773 at Williamsburg, Virginia, is the earliest existing public statue in North America (Rupert Forbes Gunnis). It will be of particular interest to our many American visitors.



Opposite the Henley Memorial, standing against the south wall, is the striking monument to the Baring family dated 1848, sculpted by Richard Westmacott (the younger) (1799-1872). Two angels are seated above the entrance to a vault, described by architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner as 'sentimental, but restrained'.



Either side of the west door are busts of the 4th Lord Ashburton (instigator and benefactor of this building) and Leonora his wife, both by Joseph Erasmus Boehm (1834-1890), signed and dated 1879. About six years earlier Boehm had designed Sir Thomas Baring's memorial in St Mary the Virgin, Micheldever, of two kneeling angels. His accurate appreciation of Victorian dress is exemplified in both these life-like busts (cf. his General Scarlett memorial in the Royal Garrison Church of All Saints at Aldershot).



In the nave on the north side of the tower arch, is an elegant tablet in Florentine Renaissance style to Claire, 3rd Lady Ashburton (1812-1882) with a dainty portrait in profile. By Austrian/American Emil Fuchs (1866-1929), well known for his Lady Ashley memorial at Romsey Abbey, this marble looks as if it is straight out of Père Lachaise, the great Parisian cemetery, where Lady Ashburton is actually buried.



Caryl Digby Baring's tablet on the south wall is also not to be missed. It is by John Skelton MBE (1923-1999), the ablest of his uncle Eric Gill's pupils. A brilliant lecturer and versatile sculptor, he created the lovely lectern and altar rail at South Warnborough Church and Dean Standcliffe's memorial tablet in the north transept of Winchester Cathedral.



The tower initially contained a ring of three bells. In 2019, through the generosity of The Friends of St John's, others within the community and further afield, various grants and our many visitors, this was enhanced to a ring of six by Matthew Higby and Company of Radstock, Somerset. Due to its frailty, the old tenor bell of 1602, has been hung as a seventh bell in a static position and can still be chimed from the foot of the tower. The provenance of all the bells and their founders is listed on the wall by the tower stair access door. (Please note: The door is kept locked for health and safety reasons.)

As you leave, you will see a 'mound' in the car park. Beneath it is the sealed crypt of the 1832 church. The Celtic Cross was erected beside this church in 1865 by the widow of William Bingham Baring, 2nd Lord Ashburton, in his memory. There is also an interesting story about him and George Harding, one of his employees, in a framed document at the back of the church.



On 14<sup>th</sup> July 2015, the Memorial Cross was further "dedicated to the memory of all those who have given their lives to the defence of the realm from the Parish of Northington". It was commissioned by the 7th Baron Ashburton to mark the 100th anniversary of the First World War and the date chosen for the dedication was 100 years to the day of the death of Rifleman Charles Hubert Albury, the first resident of the Parish to lose his life in the conflict.



## ***St John's – the 'Cathedral of the Valley'***



### **RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR THOMAS GRAHAM JACKSON Bt RA**

**“In 1885 I had an interesting task in building a church for Lord Northbrook, lately returned from the Viceroyalty of India. Stratton Church, a little mean damp building of brick and stucco, stood in his Park on a site, which I afterwards marked by a stone cross. The new church was outside the park on the hill by the high road. I built it with flint inlaid here and there with chequers and patterns and used the native chalk for the ashlar and wrought iron dressing inside”.**

**“The artist in stucco whose work I demolished at Stratton seems to have had a good innings in the neighbourhood, for I was shortly afterwards invited by Lord Ashburton to do what I could for his church at Northington, which was in the same style and which I also replaced by a new one. This was a more ambitious affair and was very handsomely finished with black walnut seats, richly carved, and other fittings in due proportion. 'Two things there must be' said Lord Ashburton; 'an apse and a pulpit reached through a hole in the wall'. At first there was to be only a low tower with a shingle spire as at Stratton, but when it was 15 or 20 feet high Lady Ashburton saw the tower of St John's, Glastonbury, and nothing would do but something of the same kind here.”**

**“As these two churches were rising at the same time there was an amusing rivalry between them. Lord Ashburton used to say 'Now, tell me in confidence, I won't tell Northbrook, which of the two do you really like best?' Before it was finished he fell into ill health, went on a long sea voyage, without gaining much by it, and came home to die. His widow devoted herself to completing the church as a memorial to him.”**

### **Thomas Graham Jackson - a few facts**

Born in Hampstead, London, he was educated at Brighton College and Wadham College, Oxford, where he became a Fellow in 1864 and of which he wrote a history. He then served his articles with Sir George Gilbert Scott with whom he worked for three years. Although his work is widespread, as mentioned earlier, he is best remembered for his many striking works in Oxford, so much so that present architectural historian James Bettley writes “No other architect has altered the face of Oxford so greatly”. He was also a prolific author of carefully researched works of architectural history, often illustrated with his own sketches, and a number of travelogues and memoirs. To amuse members of his family, he also wrote “Six Ghost Stories”. Involved in educational reform, historical research and conservation work, he also designed glassware, silverware and furniture. He was partly instrumental in the establishment of the statutory Register of Architects and was made a baronet in 1913 for his vital underpinning work, with engineer Sir Francis Fox, securing Winchester Cathedral's stability. He was living at Eagle House, Wimbledon, one of the many buildings that he extensively restored, when he died.



## ***How you can help***



***We have inherited a large church for the relatively small villages of Northington and Swarraton with Totford. It is a much used and loved centre of the community which we would clearly wish to pass on to future generations. It is a popular wedding and funeral location due to its capacity to seat some 200 people, and the acoustics are exceptionally good for both voice and instrumentalists. As well as our regular church activities, we organise charity concerts, poetry readings, art exhibitions and other similar events, all of which create a small income towards the church's upkeep. Meanwhile, the community works continually to keep St John's clean and in good order.***

***But all such buildings suffer from the elements through time. One of the many things that we have had to do, for example, is to repair the entire church roof, completed by TM Roofing and Building, Fleet in 2017 and which you may have noticed now looks magnificent. With the old "unsafe" electric wiring system in dire need of change, we also took the opportunity in 2020 to contract CES Lighting, Wallington, Surrey to install a new eco-friendly lighting system to enhance the beauty of our church.***

***There are many other ongoing projects. For example, the organ requires a complete overhaul (we hope to do this in the next few years) and the unique flint capped churchyard wall sorely needs repair. Any such maintenance strains the resources of the PCC and all contributions to help us in this task are gratefully received. St John's, the building, is Grade II\* listed and the churchyard wall is Grade II listed in its own right. English Heritage, Hampshire County Council, Winchester City Council and other organisations do help to support church maintenance, but a great deal more is always needed to preserve this wonderful and important building.***

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***Many thanks and we hope you enjoyed your visit.***



**CCTV protected**

**The publication of this Visitors' Guide has been sponsored generously by the Baring Family**

