



St Michael's, Bishop Middleham



St Michael's Church is located on a hill on the southern edge of the ancient village of Bishop Middleham. The current church dates from the early thirteenth century although parts of an earlier Norman building are incorporated in the building. Records show that it has been restored on a number of occasions during the centuries. An extensive renovation was carried out in the mid-19th century.

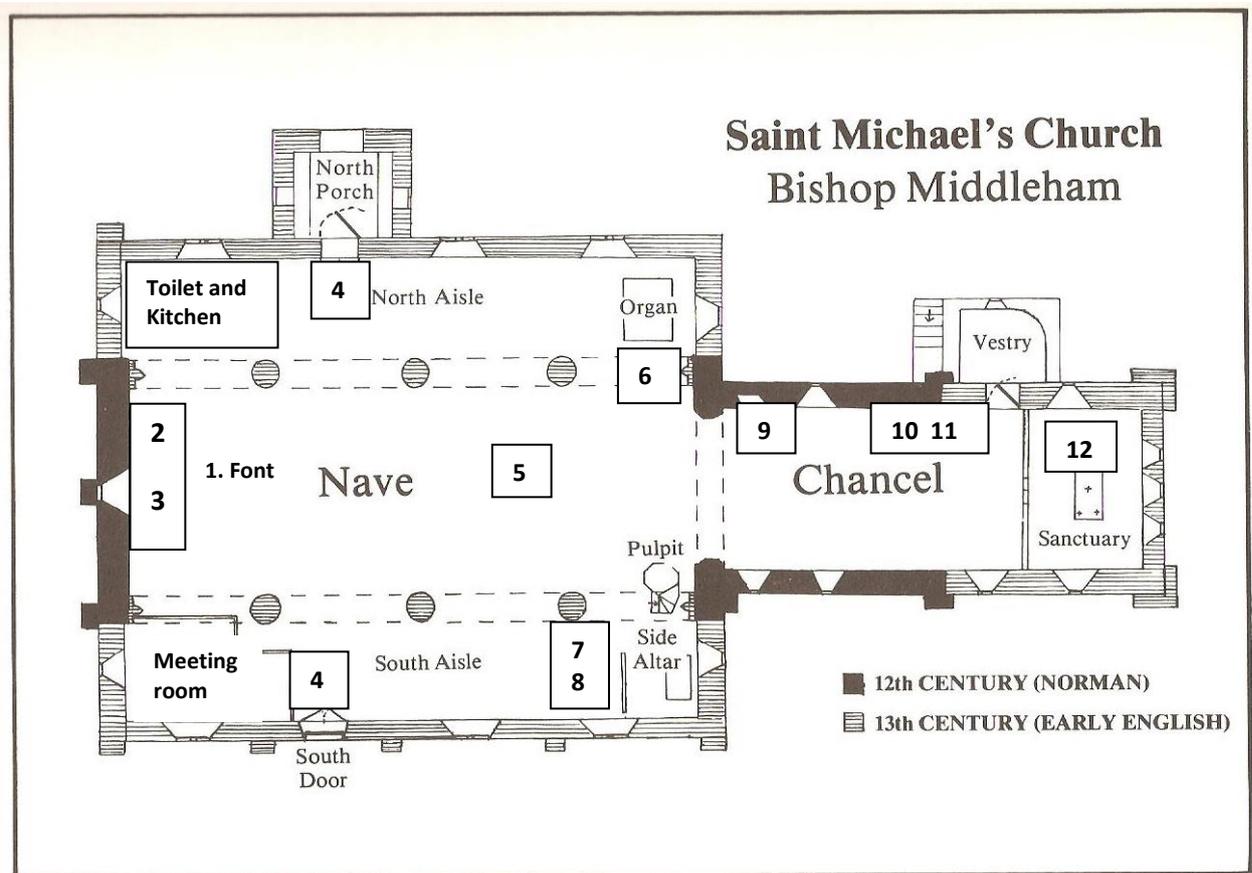
The church has undergone a number of major repairs and improvements in recent years. The roof was replaced in 2000; in the early months of 2001 the interior of the church was completely redecorated; in 2003 a new gas-fired heating boiler was installed. Two years ago, the rear of the interior was refurbished with the removal of the pews, which created a space for a kitchen, toilet and open area giving a more flexible use of the building.

Eucharistic worship follows the Common Worship Liturgy. Elements of the service are sung. Churchmanship is broadly central. Vestments are worn and the sacrament is reserved. The church has also developed a successful Messy Church, led by members of the congregation, which meets half-termly.

The church has close links with the village school. The Team Rector is an *ex officio* member of the Board of Governors. Clergy visit the school regularly to take assemblies and pupils are brought to church for school services to mark the main Christian festivals.

A Short Tour of St Michael's Church

A Plan of the Church



A Short History of the Church

Some important dates:

- Early 1100s: The first stone church was built. This consisted of the nave (without the aisles) and about half of the current chancel.
- Early 1200s: The church was enlarged. Aisles were added to the nave and the chancel was extended to its present length. If you look at the walls above the pillars in the nave you will see how thick they are. This is because they were originally the outside walls of the church.
- 1843-1846 The church building was restored by Mrs Surtees in memory of her husband, the county historian Robert Surtees. The structure of the building has been largely unchanged since this time.

- 1906-1910 The internal fittings and furniture were remodelled. This included the installation of the pews, the choir stalls and the pulpit and the building of the choir vestry. The font was moved into the north west corner of the nave.
- 1970-1971 The original stone altar table was restored and the wooden side altar was installed.
- 2015 A further re-ordering of the west end of the nave was carried out. The pews were removed from this part of the nave; the font was restored to the centre of the nave; and toilet and kitchen facilities were installed. The choir vestry was converted into a meeting room.

A Short Tour of the Church

1. **The Font.** This is made of Frosterley marble and probably dates from the early 1200s.



At one time it was taken out of use and ended up as a bird bath in the gardens of Bishop Middleham Hall before being restored and returned to the church. It is considered by the county archaeologist as being one of the ten most important fonts in the county. Frosterley marble is actually a black limestone, quarried near the Weardale village of Frosterley. It is distinguished by the number of fossils it contains. These were created when the stone was formed on the sea bed 325 million years ago. It is worth spending a few minutes looking at the wide range of fossils.

2. Turn away from the altar and face the west end of the church. **The west window**, showing the Archangel Michael, dates from the mid-20th century and is the work of the leading local stained glass artist, Leonard Evetts. He also designed the window showing the coat of arms of Bishop Anthony Bek which can now be seen in the toilet! The rest of the stained glass in the church dates from the mid-19th century.



3. The wooden screen, or **reredos**, below the west window was originally made to go behind the main altar. It dates from the period after the First World War and

was created as a memorial to Captain Percy Douglas Robinson, who died during the Battle of the Somme. Capt. Robinson was the son in law of the Vicar of St Michael's, Revd Matthew Parker. The reredos was placed in its present position during the 2015 re-ordering. On the table to the left of the reredos you can see a bottle of Bishop Middleham Cream Stout. This was brewed at the village brewery and placed under the pew platform in the early 1900s. It was found during the 2015 re-ordering.

4. Above both of the main doors you can see **hatchments**, or memorials. The one over the north door (the main entrance) is to Revd Thomas Bedford, vicar of St Michael's between 1613 and 1660, and his wife, Anne. It records the fact that when Mrs Bedford died in 1680 she was mother, grandmother and great-grandmother to 74 children 'besides numerous embryos'. Bedford was vicar during the Civil War and, in his Book of St Michael's Church, Newton Haile records the story that Bedford was driven out of the church by Cromwell's soldiers. The story is that, after a skirmish in the churchyard, one of the soldiers, John Brabant, forced his way into the church and climbed onto the altar. Meanwhile, Vicar Bedford took refuge in the pulpit surrounded by many of the villagers. However true this is, John Brabant was later ordained and became Vicar of Bishop Middleham in 1661.



The hatchment over the south door also dates from the 17th century and remembers Ralph Hutton of Mainsforth.

5. The **painted shields** in the nave are the coats of arms of various local families. The one closest to the organ is the coat of arms of the Surtees family who lived at Mainsforth Hall and have been closely associated with the church since the early 19th century.



6. The **organ** was built by the leading organ manufacturers, Harrison and Harrison of Durham.



It was installed in the church in 1891 and cost £141 (at least £19,000 at today's values). It was originally installed in the chancel but was moved to its present position during the re-ordering of 1906-1910.

7. The **parish chest** is a plain oak box with the date 1843. According to the church accounts it was made by a man named Burden.
8. The **side altar** was set up in this position in 1970. The openings in the wall are a piscina and aumbry and show that there must have been an altar in this position in the Middle Ages. The present aumbry has been placed inside the medieval one. [Note: an aumbry is for storing consecrated bread and wine between services. A piscina was for washing the vessels used in the service.]



The piscina and aumbry

9. The **squint** is a cupboard like recess with slanted sides in the north wall of the chancel, half-hidden by the choir stalls. It originally went right through the wall and outside the church the stonework shows where the hole was filled in. This must have been part of the original Norman building as the angle is focussed on the place of the original altar, in the middle of the present chancel. It is traditionally believed that



such openings were for the benefit of lepers and others who were not allowed in the church but who could see the priest at the altar through this opening.

10. **The Surtees Memorials.** In the centre of the north wall of the chancel are three stone tablets and a brass plaque in memory of members of the Surtees family. The middle one is dedicated to Robert Surtees who wrote an important history of County Durham. The brass plaque remembers his wife who restored the church in her husband's memory.



11. The **vestry door** was originally the priest's door into the church from outside. Above it is a small shield showing a single sheaf of corn, and a human skull above.
12. The **main altar** is a medieval altar slab. It had five crosses carved into it at its consecration. The one on the front left corner was chiselled off, possibly when the altar went out of use to prevent its misuse in black magic rituals. Until 1971, when it was restored to its original use, the altar slab was set into the chancel floor.



Thank you for visiting our website and looking round our beautiful church.

You will be very welcome at our regular Sunday services at 10am.