

St Mary Magdalene Church  
Trimdon Village



A  
Brief Tour

## Introduction

**W**elcome to the twelfth century church of St Mary Magdalene in the ancient village of Trimdon. Trimdon is one of County Durham's original medieval settlements centering on a long, sweeping village green.

The church, circa 1145, is constructed of local sandstone and limestone rubble on a mound in the centre of the green - enhancing its appearance and forming the centrepiece of the 'old village'.

The village was strategically positioned five hundred and twenty five feet above sea level and the highest point in the Sedgefield area; its origins are Roman but the village has gone through numerous stages. Derived from 'Tremeldon' (translated from Old English to 'cross on a hill'), Trimdon has been a farming village for centuries.

During the Industrial Revolution of 1750-1900 mining became the dominant industry of the county and the colliery villages of 'Five Houses' (now Trimdon Grange) and 'New Trimdon' (now Trimdon Colliery) developed. After the demise of the industry in the 1960s Trimdon Village was heavily altered by the construction of a thousand house estate to house families relocated from colliery slums.

From that ancient worship cross of the early settlers, a wooden church is thought to have been constructed. Upon the arrival of Anglo Saxons in Trimdon it is thought this was replaced by an earlier stone church. Whatever its past, the current Norman building has sections of twelfth century stonework with adaptations and changes adding to its appeal ever since.



*King Canute*

Trimdon's wider Christian significance was its placing on the pilgrimage trail to the shrine of St Cuthbert in Durham City. The most famous pilgrim to visit the village was King Canute in 1027 who travelled barefoot from Garmondsway Moor (to the west of the village) to the shrine. Local legend, although not proven, suggests that the king rested in Trimdon and had his head and beard shaved before continuing with his journey.

St Mary Magdalene Church was originally constructed as a chapel in Kelloe parish (the central church being St Helen). Trimdon church then passed into the hands of the monks of Guisborough Priory who held the church in 'free and perpetual alms' until the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the village, along with its church was gifted to Lord Wharton, in recognition of his effort in the king's Scottish wars.

Through many generations the church and village at large passed between dominant local families (from the Ropers to the Woodfields) before finally becoming the property of the Beckwith family through marriage. Whilst the Beckwith family retain their patronage of the church, St Mary Magdalene became a church in the Diocese of Durham after its rights were regained from The Queen's College, Cambridge.

The Parish of St Mary Magdalene operated until the early 1990s when the church joined with the parishes of St Alban, Trimdon Grange and St Paul, Deaf Hill cum Langdale to form Trimdon Benefice. In 2005, the benefice merged with the parishes of St Edmund, Sedgefield (which included St Catherine, Fishburn) and St Michael and All Angels at Bishop Middleham. This former locality became the Parish of the Upper Skerne.



St Alban's, Trimdon Grange



St Paul's, Deaf Hill



St Catherine's, Fishburn



St Michael's, Bishop Middleham



St Edmund's, Sedgefield

## The Churchyard and Surroundings

**T**he unique positioning of the church gives it much of its exterior appeal. Originally, the churchyard formed a coffin shape in the village green - extending much further to the east (approximately in line with the former Methodist Chapel on Front Street North). Today many of the gravestones have been removed, to aid grass cutting, and now form the easternmost boundary.

The land to the south of the church was, for many centuries, a farm holding and in medieval times was inhabited by monks from Guisborough who used the church for their prayers.

On the north side the 1728 vicarage (now a private dwelling) can be seen. It was replaced in the 1970s with The Gables in East Lane (now also a private dwelling).

At the western gateway to the church is the spot on which, the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair delivered his reaction to the tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales to the world's media. A bronze plaque installed in 2013 now marks this significant element of local and national history.

## The Porch

**B**ecause the church was designed to be functional and serve a small farming community - for many centuries there was no need for a porch and the door led directly into the nave.

This changed in the early 1800s when a small stone porch with a flat roof was constructed. Upon the heavy restoration of the church in 1874 the current slate roofed porch was added.

Outside stands a sandstone bench in memory of Alan Browell and Mary Seymour - it provides a useful waiting place for services. The exterior wooden door also dates from 1874 and has become a much loved part of the church, being the backdrop to the wedding photographs of generations of village families.

A new inner porch door was installed in 2006, donated by Mrs M. Robinson MBE in memory of her husband. The American White Oak frame is complemented by floor to ceiling glass panels which flood the church with natural light.

## The Organ

The original church organ was installed in 1911 by eminent County Durham firm Harrison & Harrison and was situated in the north west corner of the chancel. It was moved to the south east corner of the nave in 1919 when the installation of choir stalls in the chancel made its original placing unsuitable.

The current organ was installed in 1982 and dedicated by the then Bishop of Jarrow, The Right Reverend Michael Ball. The instrument was designed and constructed by Nigel Church and Company of Stamfordham. It has an unusual arrangement of keys – black and white keys reversed – and shorter keys than normal.



Following the devastating loss of Stoker J.W. Goodbody in the Second World War, his sister Elsie, church organist for more than half a century, donated the oak organ stool in his memory. It transferred to the new organ in 1982.

## The Churchwarden's Stall

Originally the high armed seats, which form the churchwarden's stall, stretched the whole length of the western wall. Today only two remain, which provide seating for the Churchwarden and Deputy Warden - Mr J. Burton MBE and Mrs. D. Robson.



Under the traditional parish structure a Vicar's Warden (appointed by the vicar) and a People's Warden (elected by the congregation at the annual general meeting) sat in the stall. These two positions are identified by a mitre symbolising the vicar's warden and a crown for the people's warden. In celebration of sixty years of faithful service by HM The Queen, two cushions were embroidered by congregation member Miss K.S. Hopper in 2012: significantly increasing the comfort of the stall.

## Refreshment Centre and Memorial Window

The western end of the North Aisle was originally tiled with black and red, square Staffordshire tiles and housed the 1880s font. This stone font was removed in order to make a functional refreshment area for use at special events and after services.

Its complementary design is enhanced by a new stone floor making access easier and safer. The American White Oak units were installed in 2006.

The first window in the north side of the church is known as the Memorial Window and provides a place for members of the community to leave flowers in memory of a loved one. A Remembrance Book and case can also be found - this contains the names of the faithful departed commemorated in the Garden of Remembrance in the East End Cemetery.



## The North Aisle

In 1874 the ancient Norman church was unmistakably redesigned by William Hardie and John Hay of Liverpool at a cost of £700. The north aisle was added and joined to the nave by three gothic style arches. The seating capacity was significantly increased. The works were completed by infamous Darlington builder Robert Borrowdale. At the same time, eleven stone framed windows were added and the floor replaced.

At the east end of the North Aisle stands an accessible toilet – converted from a heating chamber. This facility was finally installed in 2010 following a successful fundraising appeal and equipped the church for its 21<sup>st</sup> century mission. It is accessed by another American White oak door - the kind gift of Mr and Mrs W. Anderson in thanks for their lifetime of friendship at St Mary Magdalene.

On the adjacent wall hangs a memorial to those who gave their lives for our freedom. Since the closure of the British Legion premises, the standards of the Trimdon Branch and Women's Section have rested in the rafters above.

## The Pulpit

The gift of St Cuthbert's Quilting Club in 1895, the current gothic pulpit stands between the horseshoe arch and the north aisle. Its grand style epitomises the time of its installation - a time in church architecture which has little resonance in our church. It was preceded by a smaller stone pulpit - more suited to the size of the church.

Keen-eyed visitors will note that the current pulpit is not compatible with its plinth.



## The Horseshoe Arch

Without doubt one of the oldest elements of the church interior is our Norman horseshoe arch. Once again it is simple and functional in design and adequately separates nave and chancel.



The arch is widely acknowledged to be from the medieval period. Debate does, however, exist over its horseshoe shape - whether it was intentional or, in fact, merely the result of depression over the centuries. It is architecturally rare to see a horseshoe arch in a church and it has even been asserted that ours is one of only two in the whole of western Christendom.

## The Chancel

The chancel has become a very special and intimate area of the church, making it perfect for children's services, mid-week communion and church meetings and functions. This, however, was not always the case. In 1910, the Harrison & Harrison organ was installed, followed by choir stalls in 1919 thus making the space less usable.

When the choir folded, there was little need for choir stalls and in 1989 they were eventually removed to create the current multi-user space. Movable wooden chairs can be seen, which allow different styles of layout.

## The Beckwith Family Vault

**U**nder the floor of the chancel is the entrance to the Beckwith Family Vault, constructed in 1828 to be the last resting place of the Beckwith Family - the patrons of the village and the church.

For generations, rumours had circulated in the village about tunnels underneath the church; one to the farm on the south side of the church and even one to Durham Cathedral. Rumours about a family vault and the tomb of Bryan Lancaster (curate who passed away in 1759) also existed.



In 1989 the levelling of the floor and removal of badly broken tiles proved the perfect opportunity to answer the many questions over what lay beneath the church. During excavations in the chancel a stone slab was lifted, revealing steps into a brick built vault. The vault is the last resting place of five people - four adults and a child. After leaving a record of the visit and following the relevant archeological procedures, the vault was resealed.

A quarter of a century later questions remain over whether tunnels exist, but the Beckwith Family vault has become a local curiosity.

*For more detailed information please see the separate information booklet.*

## The Vestry

**A**lthough closed to the public, a small wooden door can be seen on the left hand side of the chancel. This door leads to the vestry. As part of the 2010 extension to the north aisle the vestry was enlarged, creating a larger space to be used by Sunday School and other church groups.

## The Sanctuary

The most important and holiest part of the church is the sanctuary. It is separated from the rest of the chancel by a very interestingly carved altar rail installed in 1958 in memory of Mrs Ethel Paul.

The simple arches of the rail reflect the simple style of the time. Three embroidered long kneelers can also be seen - the kind donation of the Mothers Union.



The Altar Table is another beautiful, yet simple, addition to the church. It was the 1913 gift of Mrs Hannah Brown. Behind this is a stunning reredos which matches the style of the table. The reredos is decorated with fantastic mosaics of the Virgin Mary and Christ Child in the centre and St Cuthbert holding the head of St Oswald on the right. On the left a depiction of a Bishop with mitre is suspected to be a portrayal of St Aidan - continuing the theme of the Great Northern Saints. It also dates to 1913. Central to the reredos is the brass stepped cross which

symbolises the Christian virtues of faith, hope and love. Two wooden, movable candles stand at either side of the reredos and are used for servers during a procession.

To the right of the reredos stands the vassal table of a far darker wood. On the left, the aumbry covered by a curtain, is a beautiful and intricately carved element of the church.

Above is the sanctuary candle which burns continuously to symbolise the presence of holy sacraments. It is only extinguished from Good Friday to the first service of Easter on Easter Eve. Similarly the Pascal candle is dominant, symbolising Christ as light of the world. It burns from the first service of Easter and is lit at special services during the year.



## The Font

In 2006 the 1880s font at the rear of the church was replaced with this modern, functional and movable font crafted from American White Oak. It is the work of local craftsman, Mr Bas Hawkins, and makes the logistics of Baptism ceremonies more straightforward.

It was the gift of the family of much loved Parish Clerk, Peter Tate who passed away in 2005. His first granddaughter was the first child to be baptised in the new font.

Disposing of the old font had to be either by giving it to another church or by burial in the churchyard. Coinciding with its disposal, the open sides of a table top tomb in the churchyard were being filled in for safety reasons and the inside of that made a perfect place to "bury" the old font!!



## Bryan Lancaster Plaque

On the south wall of the chancel, to the right of the emergency exit is the oldest remaining interior fitting in church. This brass plaque contains a Latin inscription in memory of Bryan Lancaster who was curate (priest) at St Mary Magdalene from 1752 until his death in 1759.

Burial records suggest that he is buried in church, but it has not been possible to determine the precise location of his last resting place. The current bell was also installed in his memory. The plaque was the gift of his loving wife Margaret and roughly translates as follows:



*"Bryan Lancaster, deceased, truly worthy curate of this church. Died on the ninth day of November in the year of Our Lord 1759 at the age of forty eight. Who lived a life pious and dutiful to his parishioners as is attested here in this brass which was commissioned, not without tears, by Margaret Lancaster - herself a most holy widow - in memory of her beloved husband."*

# Love thy Neighbour

The George Terrans Memorial Window - 2000

After the sad death of Mr G.W. Terrans OBE - pillar of the Trimdon community - in 1994, the church council worked with the Terrans family to install a new memorial window in the chancel. After diocesan deliberations, the artist, Bridget Jones, from Northumberland was chosen to design a window entitled "*Love thy Neighbour*".

Councillor Terrans (known locally simply as "Mick") was a much loved member of the congregation and served as churchwarden for many years. In his working life he went from lifelong miner to Labour member and chairman, then leader of Durham County Council. He was made an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in recognition of his contribution to the North East Region in its quest for regeneration. A brass plaque on the left hand side of the window bears an inscription to both Mick and his wife Margaret.

Bridget Jones was primarily interested in producing a timeless work which would reflect Mick's work in the community. She works from a central theme but aims to provide an artwork which promotes thought and contemplation - and above all to allow the viewer to interpret the design in their own way.



The window uses the central Christian teaching of one half of the greatest commandment of all - "*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*" (Matthew 22:39). This is a most fitting choice to demonstrate the lifetime service of Mick to the Trimdon people.

Jones also took inspiration from the "tree of life" in Chapter 22 of St John's Revelation (Revelation 22:1-9). The scripture in the window - "*the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations*" - provides a view for the future and for peace.

The window is comprised of fragments of leaves, roots and branches (including a leaf pattern from South East Asia) which represent the

community having roots but growing, expanding and changing. The mining heritage of both Councillor Terrans and our community at large is also represented with the flashes of red and details taken from miners banners. The window floods the chancel with light. *(For more see Matthew 22 and Revelation 22)*

## St Mary of Magdala

The Leper Window – 1873

**W**ithout doubt the oldest window and one of the intricacies of St Mary Magdalene Church is the norman window in the south east corner of the chancel. This window is said to have been installed to serve holy communion to lepers without risking the contamination of other parishioners in church. A second theory is that it was a window through which a handbell could be rung to signal the elevation of the host. Whatever its history, the window is now a beautiful depiction of our patron saint.

Installed during the 1874 renovations, it was the gift of churchwarden Edward Hardy. Both a small inscription across the bottom of the glazing and a stone shield below tell of the benefactor. The stone shield, set into the window sill, also details Edward's parents James and Elizabeth Hardy of Trimdon Colliery (engraved by S. Lamb of Thornley). The small, but much loved window was the work of Mr Walles of Newcastle. Note the intricacies of the gothic leaves and floral designs as well as the rich red of the outer border.

The intricate, gothic design centres on a figure of St Mary Magdalene carrying the alabaster jar of the unnamed sinner in St Luke's gospel. Theologians have long suspected that St Luke's unnamed sinner was St Mary Magdalene. The gospel tells of an unsavoury lady who entered the house of Simon whilst Jesus was staying with him in order to repent. She washed the Lord's feet with her long blonde hair and tears of gratitude whilst anointing them with ointment. The acceptance and forgiveness demonstrated by Jesus is the central message of the story. *(For more see: Luke 7:36-50)*



# The Magnificat

The Lily Burton Memorial Window – 2013

The latest addition to the collection of stained glass is Bridget Jones's stunning depiction of 'The Magnificat' the ancient song of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The window was installed in November 2013 in memory of Lily Burton, church organist for thirty years and floral organiser for forty years. Lily, a much loved member of the Trimdon community, was the wife of current churchwarden John Burton MBE, himself a stalwart of the local community and former constituency agent to Tony Blair. Mrs Burton passed away on 16th November 2011 after a long battle with cancer. The window was paid for by an appeal launched in Mrs Burton's memory, with contributions doubled by Mr Blair and his wife Cherie. It was dedicated by The Bishop of Jarrow, The Right Reverend Mark Bryant on Saturday 16th November 2013.

Adjacent to the Ruth Window, 'The Magnificat' complements the other windows in church with clever inclusions such as taking the blue of the Ruth Window and the calligraphic text of the Terrans window. Its striking modern design reflects the modern nature of Christianity and is a fitting addition to the church fabric.



Jones's design blends Lily's love of flowers with her passion for music and as such is focussed on the words of 'The Magnificat' traditionally sung at evensong. The quotations prevalent in the design, including "My soul doth magnify the lord", are taken from multiple translations of the famous canticle and are chosen to reflect the constant nature of

scripture in a changing world.

The design blends the colours of the sunset with vibrant reds and shades of blue providing a blaze of colour in church. At its head, the roundel takes the iota chi monochrome (symbolising Christ), but also symbolising the



sun in the sunset and the six radiating veins of an open lily.

The central message of the canticle is a new world order in God's kingdom as the lowly rise up and the mighty are cast down. A central cross can also be seen. *(For more see Luke 1:46-50)*

## Ruth and Naomi

The Margaret Parker Memorial Window (1925)

Upon the sad death of Margaret Parker in 1925, the aesthetics of the nave were heavily influenced by the installation of a depiction of Ruth and Naomi. Margaret was the wife of eminent local farmer and churchwarden Robert Wearmouth Parker who died some thirteen years later. The window is a special element of St Mary Magdalene Church because it honours Trimdon's primary industry - farming.



The window composes of both panels as well as the beautiful roundel at their head. The left panel contains the dedication to Mrs Parker and the right a quotation from the second chapter of the book of Ruth.

On the left pane stands a depiction of the Hebrew widow Naomi. During famine in Judea, Naomi, her two sons and her husband Elimelech, migrated to Moab to find work and food. The two sons married local women - Oprah and Ruth. Whilst in Moab the two sons along with their father passed away and Naomi was left a widow, without money in a strange land. Ruth accompanied Naomi back to Judea where they collected (gleaned) corn to make a living.

This scene depicts Ruth, who remained intrinsically loyal to Naomi, as she says "Let me know go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I may find favour." (Ruth 2.2). The central message of the window is loyalty, devotion and acceptance and is a perfect image to symbolise the life of Mrs Parker. *(For more see: Ruth 2)*

*For more detailed information about all the windows,  
please see the separate information booklet.*

## The Church and the Community Today

**B**y viewing the many and varied elements of this church you will have come to appreciate the importance of this ancient building to the people of Trimdon both past and present.

St Mary Magdalene church remains a dynamic place of worship, constantly adapting to the needs of an ever changing community.

After eight hundred and fifty years the building remains the village icon, a source of pride and a bastion of memories.



*Thank you for visiting us  
and our sincere best wishes  
for a safe journey home.*



*This leaflet was written by Adam Luke and designed by Lesley Tate.  
Adam is an undergraduate historian at Trinity College, Oxford and  
a widely respected member of St Mary Magdalene church and the wider community.  
He is the author of two books on local history :-  
"Doves, Pigeons and Masonry Bees" (2011)  
"Spinning the Wheel of Fortune" (2012).*

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