

ST MARY-THE-LESS, CHILBOLTON

The 12th-century church of St Mary-the-Less stands in the picturesque village of Chilbolton, near the slow-moving River Test. The dedication is something of a mystery, and no-one seems quite sure to which St Mary the church is dedicated.



One possible explanation of the name may lie over 600 years ago, when the parish church of Andover changed its dedication from St Peter to St Mary. That made two St Mary's in the same deanery, and as the more important church Andover took precedence, so Chilbolton became St Mary-the-Less, being the lesser of the two churches.

Whatever the explanation, the church and the village have a long and rich history. King Athelstan gave Chilbolton manor to Winchester Priory, and we know that there was a church here at the time of the Domesday Book in 1086. The priors of Winchester hunted at Chilbolton in the medieval period, but after the Dissolution

of the Monasteries, the crown seized the estate and granted it to the Dean and Chapter of Winchester

The church retains 12th-century masonry in its nave walls, but the chancel dates to the following century. Aisles were added in the 14th century. A single 12th-century window is set into the south-west wall of the nave. The window is over 15 feet above ground level, suggesting a very early date.

The chancel is entered through an ornately carved screen, with some 15th-century woodwork. In the chancel, directly east of the screen, are 16th-century seats. The pulpit dates to the early 17th century.

Set into the south-east wall of the chancel is a 14th-century piscina with a stone shelf. There are 14th-century piscinas at the east end of both aisles. The altar table is 17th century, and very finely carved.



THE ALTAR

The font, although it looks medieval, was in fact made in 1891 in Perpendicular style.



THE FONT

Over the vestry door is an inscription detailing the restoration of the church in 1893. The inscription provides a fascinating glimpse into the process of a Victorian restoration. It reads:

'In 1893 this fabric being in a dangerous condition, the following repairs were undertaken. Modern plaster stripped from walls and roofs, old plaster disclosed being retained with fragments of fresco over chancel arch. Norman clerestory window in nave revealed, XIV century nave roof reconstructed, new aisle roofs erected, walls strengthened, vestry, organ arches and this door added, east wall rebuilt with new buttresses and window. Portion of previous window of 1851 remodelled and reused in new vestry. In east wall fragments of three windows were found of XIIIth, XVth, and XVIIth century, the last of wood. Various representative fragments are preserved in the vestry.' *HH Pereira, MA, HD Rector, Thos. E Study, E Silva Churchwardens.*

It is interesting to note that the 17th-century window discovered by the restorers was made of wood rather than stone.

More recent additions include a Millennium Sculpture above the Chancel of a seemingly floating Christ by the artist David Bagbie revealed as a stunning hologram by beams of light where you can pause for a moment to reflect upon this celebration of 2000 years of Christianity.



THE CHANCEL AND THE MILLENNIUM SCULPTURE

Most recently new toilet facilities and a kitchen serving area were added, making the church more accessible and able to accommodate a range of church and community activities.

St Mary-the-Less is an attractive historic parish church able to serve its community with both traditional and modern services and has hosted many community activities.



THE PULPIT