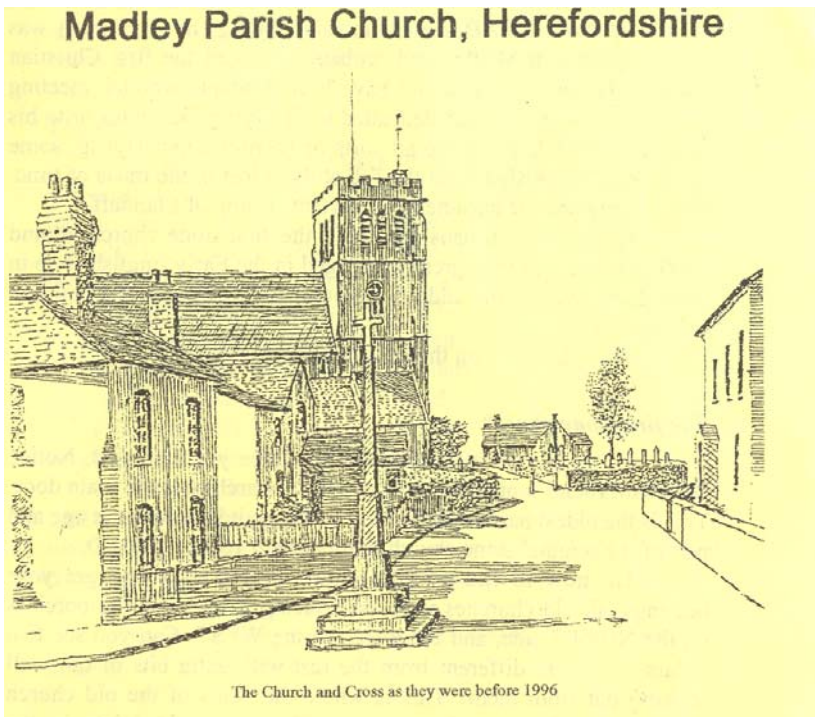


MADLEY PARISH CHURCH: A SHORT GUIDE

You are recommended to print off this guide so that you can take it with you on your visit to the church



We welcome you to Madley Parish Church and hope you will enjoy this beautiful and ancient building. It is very large for a village church, and can be seen for miles around, set as it is in the wide valley of the River Wye. You are following in the footsteps of countless other worshippers and pilgrims who have been coming here for nearly 1500 years! The aim of this leaflet is to help you to explore the building, to give a sense of its history, and to encourage you to be something of a 'church detective' as you walk around. We hope you will also feel a sense of God's presence with you.

The beginnings

In about 550AD the Celtic saint Dyfrig (or Dubricius) was reputedly born in Madley and probably founded the first Christian community here. There would have been a simple wooden meeting place on this site, a church dedicated to St. Dyfrig/Dubricius or to his mother St.Efrdyl. There are all sorts of legends about Dyfrig, some involving King Arthur – but the full story is lost in the mists of time. We do know that he became an important Bishop of Llandaff.

It was the Normans who built the first stone church around 1100 AD; this was then greatly enlarged in the Early English style in about 1250 with further additions around 1320 giving us the building we see today.

There is a plan at the back of this guide to help you.

The first stone church

Go to the main North porch (where you came in). Notice the small, round-topped window and the old arch over the main door. This is the oldest part of the present building; it is of Norman age and part of the original stone church, built around 1050 – 1100 AD.

Go now to the middle of the church. Try and get your bearings: all old churches were built facing EAST – so the porch is on the NORTH side, and the tower on the WEST. Can you see two pillars which are different from the rest with extra bits of old wall sticking out from them? This is where the walls of the old church used to be. If you look up, you will see straight joints in the stonework. The first stone church was cross-shaped; the porch we now have was once one arm, or *transept* of the cross. (The two pillars here were probably where the chancel arch of the old church was.)

Go to the opposite (South) side of the church, by the stone tomb. This is called the *Chilstone Chapel*, and we shall see it again later – but for now, look at the lower half of the end (West) wall, behind the tomb. Can you see part of an old window, blocked in? This wall is also part of the first, cross-shaped stone church – like the porch.

The only other thing of Norman age is the enormous *font*, where children and adults have been baptised (or 'Christened') over nearly 1000 years. It is one of the largest in Britain.

The second stone church

Go and stand at the back of the church. About 1200 AD the old Norman church was thought to be too small. Perhaps it needed a lot of repairs anyway. The people decided to build a NEW CHURCH, just keeping the bits of the old one which we have seen. Most of the walls, pillars and tower we have today date from this time. But the front (East) end would have looked different; the old chancel (Choir) was smaller and square-ended. This second stone church would also have been much darker than it is now: see the little slit windows at the back of the church; all the windows of the *Early English* building would have been like these. Can you think why they would have had small windows?

Why are there so many holes in the walls, both inside and out? They were 'puttock' or 'putlock' holes, where the ends of the wooden scaffolding were held in the walls as they built. Presumably they were left in case of future repair needs?

But the building's story doesn't end here. Stay at the back and imagine ...

Pilgrims!

People began to come specially to Madley from far away; they were on a special journey, rather as some people go to Lourdes in France today. We are fairly certain that there was a statue of the Virgin Mary (Jesus' mother) here, which was believed to have special powers. People came to pray, to ask for God's blessing or to be healed from illness.

No doubt the pilgrims had to stay somewhere in the parish, and also paid money to the church and the monks who served here from their 'mother church' in Hereford (now the Cathedral). The money which came to Madley from these pilgrims probably paid for the building work, and is the reason why the church is so big. We know about the pilgrims and the statue from a record of 1318AD in the Cathedral records. It was probably at this time that the church was given its curious dedication to 'The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary'.

Wall paintings.

Go to the front of the Nave (the main part of the church). High up, over the chancel arch, you will see the remains of a painting done soon after the present nave was built – about 1300. There is a light on a timed switch which you can press, on the North wall. There is also a board on the wall telling you more about the paintings, which were restored in 1992. In an age where very few could read, the pictures would tell a cartoon-like story of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. Wall paintings of this age are very rare.

The 'Lulham pew'

While you are at the front of the nave, have a look at the little wooden room at the East end of the North aisle. This was the private pew of a rich family – there have never been fixed pews in the main body of the church, as far as we know. It was made out of an old screen, which probably went right across the chancel arch, dividing the chancel from the nave. Can you find the little door through which, presumably, the family received the bread and wine at Communion? This pew was originally further down the church. While you are here, look across to the main altar at the front of the chancel: the stone of the pillar has been chamfered to allow people standing in the North aisle to see the bread and wine – in those days the ordinary people would not receive Communion, and they believed that God's blessing depended on them seeing the priest lift up the bread and wine.

More building.....

Go into the Chancel (where the choir stalls are). The chancel of the second stone church was pulled down only 50 - 100 years after it was built. It obviously was not thought grand enough, now that plenty of money was coming in! The one you are now standing in dates from about 1320 and has an apse at the East end, instead of being straight-ended. Such polygonal apses are very unusual in Britain – there is another, much smaller, at Marden near Hereford, and one at Wells Cathedral. Notice the sedilia (arch-topped stone seats) in the North wall of the chancel, which have a lot of little carved ball-flower decorations round them – very characteristic of church building of this age in the West of England.

The choir stalls are as old as the chancel, and have special tip-up seats called misericords. Weary monks or others could rest their bottoms while seeming to stand up!

Stained glass

The glass in the top half of the middle window was saved from the older church, and dates from about 1250. At this time they did not know how to get more than one colour on one piece of glass: look at the hair, and you will see it is separate from the faces.

Now look at the glass in the lower part of the middle window; this has few blues and more brown and green – and the hair of the figures is painted on in much more detail. This was a new technique in about 1350 when this glass was made.

The other windows contain fragments of glass from 1250-1500. (Anyone good at jigsaw puzzles?)

The Crypt

The Crypt was restored in 2007 and has been brought back into use for meditation and quiet prayer, and for certain types of meetings; it is also used for some of our children's work. Can you find the small door leading to this 'secret' room underneath the Chancel? **BE VERY CAREFUL ON THE STEPS AND THE CRYPT FLOOR.** Follow the steps of the pilgrims ... for this is where we think the statue would have been.

The pilgrims would have come down these steps, prayed in front of the statue, and then returned to the church by another similar passage on the other side of the crypt. (This other passage is still there, but comes out behind the organ). For some time the crypt was used as a coal boiler house.

The building finished

Go back into the church, and to the South side near the stone tomb. The building was still not quite finished, even after the rebuilding of the chancel. As soon as they had finished the chancel, this *Chilstone Chapel* was built – about 1330. This is the extra aisle added on, and incorporating that part of the wall of the very first stone church behind the tomb which we saw earlier. By now glass was more available, and they could have these big windows. This period of church building is called '*Decorated*'. When the people saw how nice the big windows were, they decided to put similar ones in on the other side of the church as well – replacing the little slit windows except at the back.

We use this Chilstone Chapel for services in the Winter, when the main body of the church gets extremely cold!

Additions since 1350

The only structural addition is the window at the back of the South aisle, near the curtained-off area; this was put in during Tudor times, around 1500. The church was re-floored and repaired in the 1870s; this was when the foundations of the older buildings were discovered.

The *lectern*, the big book rest for the Bible, is carved in the shape of an eagle. The *pulpit*, where the minister can stand to preach, is also carved. Both of these were carved by local craftsmen about 100 years ago, using panels from an older pulpit.

The tower

Sometimes, by arrangement, you may be able to climb up the tower. The door is right at the back of church. Notice the original door and ironwork – from about 1250. TAKE CARE ON THE SPIRAL STEPS.

The first floor in the tower is the *ringing chamber*, from which the bells are rung each week. It also houses the clock mechanism, the weights for which hang down into the church below. Can you find a small spy-hole used by the ringers to see into the church? When might they need to be able to see down?

The next floor up houses the eight bells, hung for ringing in the traditional English way. They were re-hung in 1983 and the last two added in 1987.

It is just a short climb now to the tower roof. BE CAREFUL! THE LEAD CAN BE SLIPPERY. PLEASE DO NOT LEAN OVER THE EDGE, AND AVOID TREADING ON THE RAISED-UP PARTS OF THE LEAD.

On a clear day there is a lovely view of the village and surrounding countryside. You can see well into Wales to the west, to the ridge of the Black Mountains to the south, to the Malverns in the east and over the flattish Wye Valley to the north. The newest addition to the landscape is British Telecom's satellite station to the south-east.

The churchyard

If it is good weather, have a walk round the outside of the church. There is an ancient preaching cross near the 500 year old yew tree. Can you spot an old sun-dial from here? (Clue – it is on the church building). Some of the gravestones have interesting inscriptions, for example this one near the East end of the Chilstone Chapel still just legible, commemorating a local innkeeper of 1793:-

*'Famed little John a terror to many a boxing blade,
But now alas an insult brooks from sexton's dirty spade,
For coward Death waiting the time till Jack was weak and low
The moment seized and spite of art put in his favourite blow.'*

Among the stones alongside the path to the North Porch is the following:-

*'An aged cupple here doth lie
Who lived in peaceful unitie
We hope their souls is gone to rest
With God above forever blest'*

You may spot other interesting verses! Many memorials however make sad reading – see for example the one right by the church door. Thank God that child deaths are now so much less common.

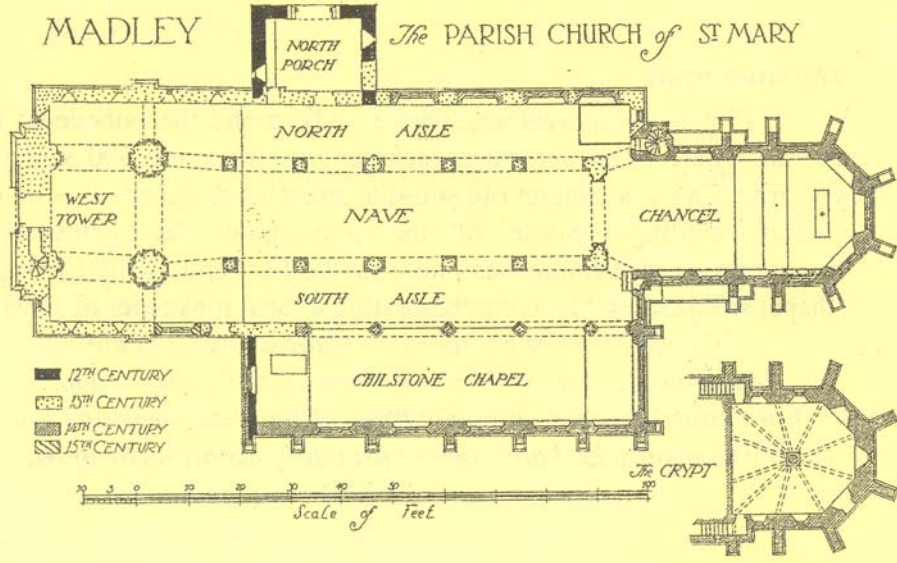
The church today

Although we have concentrated on the building in this simple guide, the real church is the people who meet here. We are glad to have such a lovely building where we can come and worship God together and rejoice in what he has done for us through Jesus Christ. We welcome all to our services, including families with children – please see the noticeboard in the porch for full details. There is also a Methodist chapel in Madley, with whom we work closely.

We hope you have enjoyed your visit – whether you have come from far or near – and we pray that God's blessing may be with you.

MADLEY

The PARISH CHURCH of ST MARY



- 12TH CENTURY
- 13TH CENTURY
- 14TH CENTURY
- 15TH CENTURY

Scale of feet

