



All Saints' Church in Alton Priors

Surrounded on all sides by fields and a stream, All Saints' Church in the village of Alton Priors with its mellow 15th century two-stage perpendicular tower is a quintessential Wiltshire rural church. Built in the 12th century, the presence of a yew tree over 1,400 years old and trapdoors giving access to two sandstone Sarsen stones suggest that the site of the church has a much earlier history as a sacred place. The church was originally constructed of limestone and rubble. However, following extensive alterations in the 14th century and possibly in the 16th century, and then again in the 19th century, now only the arch in the chancel is the survivor of the original Norman church. It is evident that fabric from its earlier constructions was reused in the alterations, and an incised cross in a stone above a doorway on the north side of the nave, now blocked up, may have been a consecration cross. Much of the interior of the church has been removed or replaced over recent centuries. The unusually high Jacobean backs to the choir stall in the chancel remain, as do the 18th century communion rails, but the box pews installed in the early 19th century in the nave have now been completely removed.



Much of the history of the church involves the Button family who were lords of the manor from the 13th century until the 17th century. On the floor at the west end of the nave is a brass commemorating Agnes Button who died in 1528. Her husband William who survived her by nearly 20 years was a Member of Parliament and had a chequered career, being briefly imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1538 before regaining the favour of Thomas Cromwell who referred to him as his "loving servant". Their son, also William, was like his father a Member of Parliament and a supporter of the Seymour family (see Wolf Hall). He died in 1590 and there is a tomb chest in the chancel where he and his wife Mary are buried. Above the tomb is a brass with an angel blowing the 'last trump (when) the dead shall be raised'. The brass was erected in the 17th century by his son, another William, who was only six when his father died. He was later knighted and became High Sheriff of Wiltshire.

All Saints became redundant in 1972 and is now in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust. It is open daily, usually between 10am and 4pm. The church can be accessed by a footpath leading across the fields from its neighbouring church of St Mary the Virgin in Alton Barnes. St Mary's is a charming small church built in the 10th century and mentioned in Domesday Book. Listed Grade 1, it was largely restored in 1904 but retains earlier features including its 16th century roof beams and an 18th century triple-decker pulpit. The box pews in the nave are 19th century. The chancel was rebuilt in 1748 and there are glass engravings by Laurence and Simon Whistler in its windows.