

St John the Baptist Church, Leamington Spa (Grade II*)

Statement of Significance

Historical background

The project to build a church for the spiritual welfare of the residents of South Leamington first occurred to Mrs. Matthew Wise of Shrubland Hall in 1874 whilst she was making alterations to her will and she donated £1,000 for the purpose. A Committee, including Lord Leigh of Stoneleigh, and Canon Young, Rector of Whitnash, was formed and a meeting was held in the Crown Hotel on 5th September 1875. In less than two months £2,700 had been collected from more than 200 subscribers. Mrs. Sarah Hitchman gave land adjoining her Arboretum for the site of the church along with a donation of £500.

The church was built in 1877-78 at a cost of £6,000 and is capable of seating 700 people. All of the seats were free which indicates that the main congregation didn't come from the wealthier parts of Leamington. The Rev. T. E Franklyn, formerly of All Saints Church, was appointed by the Bishop as Incumbent of the District and as soon as the church was consecrated, (on 14th February 1878) he became the Vicar of the Parish of South Leamington.

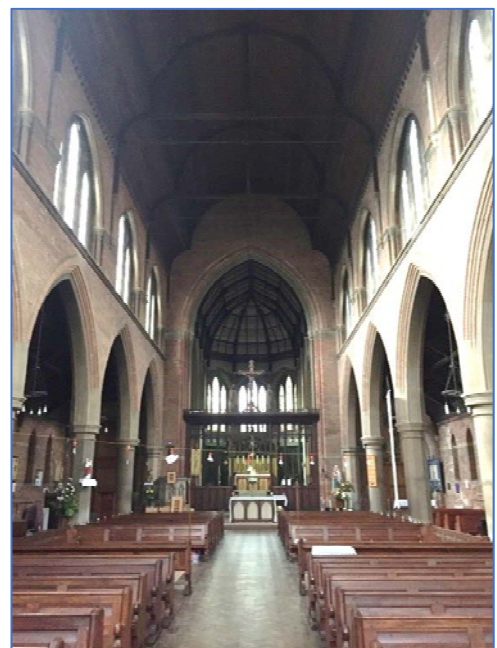


The church building

Pevsner notes that the church was constructed between 1877-88 by John Cundall of Leamington, who also designed Leamington Town Hall, St. Paul's Church, the now demolished St. Alban's Church and Warwick School. Pevsner describes St John the Baptist church as his "best work".

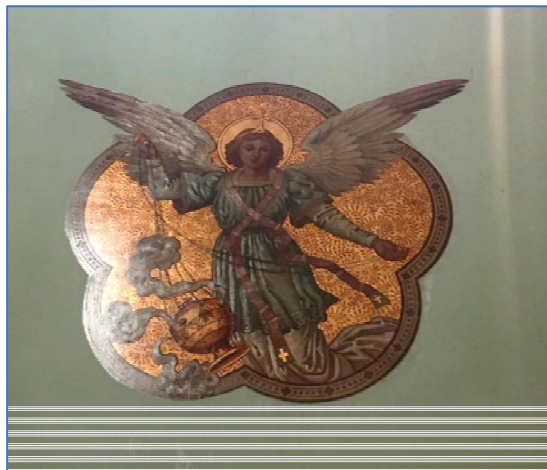
Rev. Franklyn, in the church magazine of May 1877, wrote: *"On the day we turned the first sod, the 28th of last August, the rain hindered us from carrying out the order of the Service which had been arranged."*

Constructed in the Early English Style, Pevsner goes on to describe the Church – "Large, of brick, with a prominent NE steeple, an apse, and lancets and bar tracery. In the apse and the clerestory stepped triplets of lancets. Good W end with three stepped above four longer, even lancets. Brick-faced interior."



The **nave aisle** was erected by Mr. John Fell of Leamington and consecrated on 14th February 1878. The seating consists of moveable, unfixed, oak pews.

The **Chancel** was constructed between 1881-82 by Thomas Mills of Leamington and contains a painted panel of the Baptism, an elaborate reredos, a painted wall frieze, and a Minton tile floor all dating to 1900.



Work on the **tower** and **spire** began in 1888 by G. F. Smith of Milverton.

The church **clock** with 3 cast iron faces was installed in 1891. The clock mechanism is marked J. Smith & Sons, Midland Steam Clock Works, Derby. Originally the clock was hand wound but has been operated electronically since 2010.

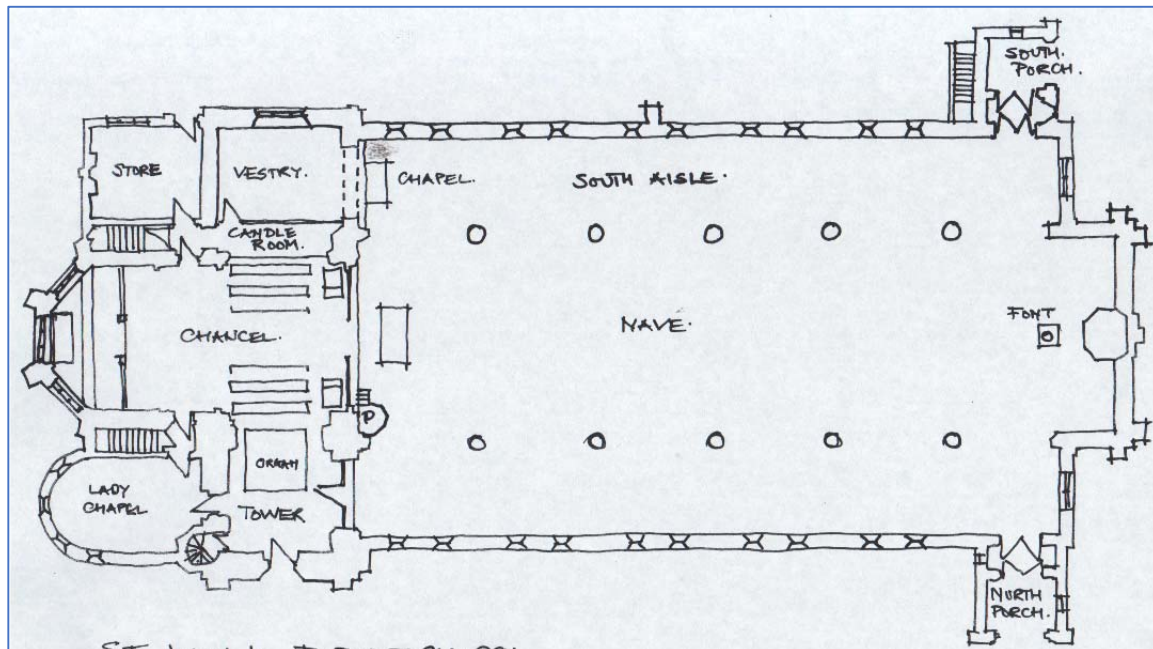
There are two **bells**. The treble dates to 1676 (cast by John Martin II of Worcester), and is dedicated to Francis Mole and Thomas Harris who were churchwardens. The tenor dates to 1745 (cast by Abel Rudhall of Gloucester) and is dedicated to Joseph Clark and John Bushell, also both churchwardens. They were originally in the old church at North Piddle in Worcestershire (then in the same Diocese) but became redundant when the new church was rebuilt in 1876. It has been suggested that the bells hung in a temporary belfry in the grounds of St John the Baptist Church until the tower and spire were completed in 1889 (as they were mentioned in a report of the consecration of the building dating to 1878).

The Church contains a **war memorial** to the men of the parish who died during the First World War. This is found on the north Nave Wall. The **Rood Screen**, designed by J. Wippell, is also dedicated to the glory of God and the men of the parish who served in the Great War.

The **stained glass** in the church dates to 1884-89 and includes a memorial window in the North aisle to John Cundall, the architect.

The curtilage contains no graveyard or external war memorials.

Interestingly, in 1941 during the Second World War a public **Air Raid Shelter** was installed in the grounds of the church. This was removed in 1946. The Vicar described the site as, "A grass plot comprising the southern portion of the churchyard and lying between the south wall of the church and the north boundary of the grounds of the vicarage".



Sources

'The borough of Leamington Spa', in *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 6, Knightlow Hundred*, ed. L F Salzman (London, 1951), pp. 155-161. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol6/pp155-161> [accessed 25 January 2018].

The Buildings of England: Warwickshire. N. Pevsner and A. Wedgwood. (London, 2003), p.334.

Historic England Listing Entry Summary. <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1056546> [accessed 25th January 2018].

Discover Royal Leamington Spa. <http://www.leamingtonhistory.co.uk/st-johns-church-%C2%AD-tachbrook-street-a-brief-history/> [accessed 25th January 2018].