

# St John the Baptist

High Street

Glastonbury, BA6 9DR



## Purpose of the *Securing the Future* Project

To create a modern, fresh, and flexible interior within a medieval church building to enhance worship, to provide an open space for a variety of worship and community activities, and to display and celebrate the historical legacy of the building and its prominent place within the Town of Glastonbury. To do this, we need to

- Install up-to-date under-floor heating and in the process create a clear, level, and stable floor.
- Install modern glazed draught-resistant porches at the west and south entrances, allowing unobstructed views of the full length of the church.
- Install flexible, multi-function lighting, and audio-visual facilities to support a wide variety of activities, including worship, concerts, productions, and history and heritage displays.
- Install a modern kitchen to permit hosting proper hot meals as well as casual refreshments.
- Refresh, enlarge, and relocate the organ to enhance choral, music, and worship events.

## Church Location, Background, and Features

St John's is centrally located in the Town of Glastonbury, on the High Street, and within easy walking distance of the Abbey, Glastonbury Tribunal, Lake Village Museum and Rural Life Museum, St Margaret's Chapel and Almshouses, Chalice Well, Wearyall Hill, and the Tor.

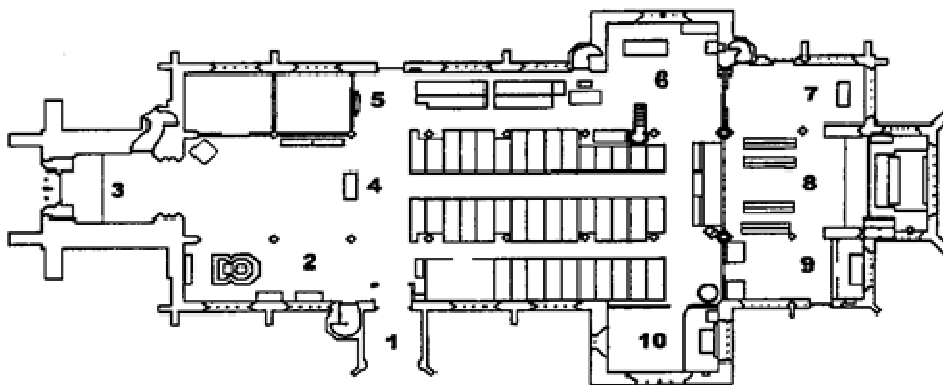
Of the original church on this site, little is known. However, recent excavations in the chancel, together with others in the nineteenth century in the nave, revealed early foundations. The excavations indicate a large central tower that possibly dated from Dunstan's abbacy, c. 950, and a later Norman nave arcade on the same plan as the existing one. A central tower survived until the fifteenth century.

The Church of the blessed Saint John the Baptist of Northbinne, as it is called in the early charters, was one of the seven local churches over which, from Saxon times, the Abbey of Glastonbury had claimed complete ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This led to disputes with the Bishop of Wells, and in 1170, these churches became a special Archdeaconry with the Abbot as Archdeacon. About this time, when a Master Alvred was the incumbent, there were attempts by the Abbey to appropriate the revenues of the church. This finally happened on the resignation of Ralph the Chaplain in 1203 and the Sacristan of the Abbey was then to appoint the future vicars and to pay them a stipend. Pope Honorius III confirmed this in 1225, when it was stated that the revenues were appropriated to help the Abbey's building fund. (The Abbey burnt down in 1184.) The parishioners also had to pay rent of 6s.9d. to the Abbey.

At the dissolution of the Abbey in 1539, the church passed to the Crown, and the rent was raised to £1 2s. 2d. in 1649, it passed to the Bishop of Bath and Wells, who is the patron of the living. St Benedict's Church, Glastonbury, and West Pennard Church were originally chapels of the mother church of St John's. They always had their own churchwardens, and eventually became separate parishes, but served by the same incumbent, except between 1846 and 1980.

In medieval times, the churchwardens were a corporate body owning considerable property in the town. We are fortunate that the number of their account rolls from the year 1366 onwards have been preserved, although with many gaps and doubts about the dates of some of them. They give much useful information about the church, the town, and its people.

The existing church premises, much like any church of its age, experienced many changes of the centuries. The following drawing and notes highlight many of the interesting features and changes.



**1 Entrance:**

The Parvis (upper room) which dates from 1484 AD is above the south porch, the primary entrance.

**2 South Aisle West End:**

The font designed by Sir George Scott (1856). Behind an 18th Century copy, of the 'Madonna of the Palafroniere' by Caravaggio showing Mary teaching Christ to bruise the serpent's head whilst St Anna looks on. The south wall has many interesting plaques and memorials, including a memorial to Alice Buckton, authoress.

**3 Tower:**

The tower built in 1475 is 135 feet high; it houses a ring of eight bells. At the front of the tower are two large carvings, the 'Madonna with Child', and the 'Resurrection Christ', early works of Ernst Blesendorf, carved in 1945 after his escape from the Nazis.

**4 Nave:**

The Nave roof is 35 feet above the nave floor.

**5 North Aisle:**

Over the north door is a royal coat of arms of the time of Charles II. Behind the organ console is a St Christopher in glazed tile. The stone pulpit was designed by Scott and carved by Frederick Merrick, with images of the twelve disciples. The hourglass stand is from an earlier pulpit, and the hourglass was given by the American Embassy to replace one that was lost just before D-Day, 1944. Below the pulpit is the tomb of John Camel, who died in 1487.

**6 North Transept:**

The Joseph of Arimathea window is from 1936 by AJ Davies depicting St Joseph, King Arviragus, St Aristobulus and St Simon the Zealot. On the tomb below the window is displayed a funeral pall made in 1774 from a cope said to be worn by Abbott Whiting who was put to death on the Tor in 1539. On the east wall is a 17th Century 'Pieta with Two Angels' from the school of GB Langhetti. In the safe is a 17th Century baroque ivory crucifix on a cross of bog oak, an Elizabethan chalice, and 18th century silver. In the bookcase is a chained copy of Erasmus' Paraphrase of the New Testament in English (~1548), volumes of Fox's Acts and Monuments (1571), and a Breeches Bible (1584) bound with an Elizabethan Book of Common Prayer.

**7 Memorial Chapel:**

The window shows the patronal saint St John the Baptist. Here you will find books of remembrance recording the names of Glastonbury's fallen and flags associated with remembrance.

**8 Chancel and Sanctuary:**

The Sanctuary reredos and altar are by Alban Caroe (1955). Note the South window is a jumble of many fragments including the figure of an Archbishop, reputedly St Dunstan, and below an angel bearing a shield on which are the Sacred Wounds. At the bottom are the arms of St Joseph of Arimathea (associated with Abbot Bere). The tombs are of Richard and Joan Attwell.

**9 Lady Chapel:**

Bligh Bond (1921) designed the screen. The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the wall safe.

## 10 South Transept and St George's Chapel:

The oak screen is a reconstruction of the original, by Bligh Bond 1927, incorporating 15c portions found in an old house. The east window includes St George and the Dragon; St Michael with a goblin holding down the scales of justice; and St Bride (St Bridget) with her wolf, tending sheep, with the Tor in the background. Above the altar are 15th Century linen fold panelling frames the centre panel of a triptych of c.1500 from the school of Conrad Witz. This chapel is reserved for quiet prayer and meditation.

## Use of the Church and Public Access

St John's is generally open for visitors Monday to Saturday, from 10.00am to 15.00pm, except during services. Group daytime visits may be arranged in advance by emailing the Benefice Office at [abbeyparishes@gmail.com](mailto:abbeyparishes@gmail.com)

Regular services are as follows:

Wednesday	9.00am	Morning Prayer
	10.00am	Holy Communion
Saturday	9.00am	Morning Prayer
Sunday	8.00am	Holy Communion (BCP 1662)
	9.30am	Parish Communion

Displayed on the notice board just inside the entrance gates on the High Street and in the regular pew sheets are the times for monthly services, including healing services and sung evensong.

## Mission, Ministry, and Change

St John's is a living building, which has changed and evolved over the centuries along with the ever-changing Town of Glastonbury. Catastrophic events, such as the collapse of the central tower in the fifteenth century, have caused major changes, while the changing needs of the congregation and town, resulted in relocating the organ, pulpit, font, and the rather peripatetic tomb of John Camel. Normal wear and tear and weathering, most recently requiring the restoration of the clerestory windows, are part of the continuing life of the fabric.

St John's is also a living community, with a firm commitment to being a Christian spiritual centre at the heart of the town for everyone.

The clergy, supported by members of the congregation, visit those in need, assisted by bereavement, baptismal, nursing, and residential homes visitors.

Healing was a major part of Jesus' ministry, and at St John's, we continue this tradition by offering individual prayers for healing and wholeness of body, mind, and spirit to anyone who desires it, believing that God intends each one of us to be fully alive and to grow into our full potential. St John's is also available as a safe place in the event of personal or national disasters. This is part of our ministry of listening and prayer; we do not offer advice or counselling. The service is free to everyone and is strictly confidential.

The church is central to Glastonbury life and we hold Civic services on an annual basis, including Remembrance, Mayor's Service, and blessing the Holy Thorn. At Christmas, St John's sends to Her Majesty the Queen a sprig from the Holy Thorn in the churchyard.

Music was and is a major part of our Judaeo-Christian heritage, and here at St John's, we have a well-known and respected music ministry. Under the tutelage of our present Choirmaster, our choir regularly leads the musical aspect of our worship services, and occasionally at Wells and Exeter Cathedrals. Several of our organ scholars have gone on to internships at major cathedrals, and some of our junior choristers have become members of the Wells Cathedral choir.

Recently, the congregation realised it was time to refocus on our mission and ministry and address the situation caused by the subsidence of the nave floor, which has resulted in several areas, including the area of the floor under the Sir George Scott font, becoming unsafe. In addition, the central aisle portion of the nave floor has partially collapsed, requiring a temporary floor over the broken Blue Lias flagstones.

The PCC and several members of the congregation spent an 'away half-day' to consider our mission and ministry. We decided that, while we successfully minister to several of what may be thought of as communities within Glastonbury and the surrounding area, such as the civic needs of the town, there are a number of communities in which we could do better. One such community is the 40-50 year-old young adults. Another is the 15-20 year-old junior adults. The Mendip District Council has identified these two age groups as the predominant age groups in our area.

Among the many communities we serve is the history community, where enthusiasts come to Glastonbury, primarily to visit the Abbey and the museums. With no disrespect to the Abbey and museums, they are frozen in time. St John's however is a fully functioning building, moving, growing with the times, and able to highlight and display examples of its historical, traditional, and even mystical, elements. St John's hosts some 25,000 visitors and they and history enthusiasts would appreciate a history centre with information material about the history of the building perhaps supported by focused lights on significant area, including mentioned above features.

Glastonbury is famous for its spiritual diversity, and St John's provides a safe space within its Christian ethos for any who wish to come and simply meditate or pray. St George's chapel provides a private space for them.

The activities and events, and therefore needs of the diverse communities we wish to serve, include

- Additional, different, informal, or alternative worship services
- Town, abbey, and church history displays and workshops
- Drama, including dinner dramas, and repertory productions
- Music, including concerts of all types
- Youth, breakfast, and similar clubs

To provide for these activities and events, St John's needs six areas of change:

1. A warm, level, stable, and open-plan floor, with comfortable chairs.
2. Audio-visual and lighting facilities to enhance worship and productions and a history and heritage centre.
3. Modern glazed draught-resistant porches at the west and south entrances, allowing unobstructed views of the full length of the church
4. Flexible, multi-function lighting, and audio-visual facilities to support a wide variety of activities, including worship, concerts, and productions

5. A modern kitchen to permit hosting proper hot meals as well as the traditional casual coffee, tea, and biscuits.
6. Refreshing, enlarging, and relocating the organ to enhance choral, music, and worship events

## **Project Management**

### **Committees and Responsible People**

Vicar: Revd David MacGeoch

Project Manager: Larry Schenck

Churchwardens: Bill Wych and Joan Lewsey

Publicity (external): Joy Taylor, Ann Merritt, Sue Gowland, Michael Masters

Publicity (external): Kay Wych, Derek Dorey, Michael Masters

Facebook: Kathy MacGeoch

