

St Swithun's Church, Bathford **Statement of Significance**



Bathford – the village [See Footnote 1](#)

Bathford sits in the River Avon valley and is surrounded by lovely open countryside. It lies some 4 miles to the east of the world heritage city of Bath with regular bus services (taking about 15 minutes) to the city. The history of the village can be traced back to Anglo Saxon times and its name is derived from the ford which crossed the By Brook leading to the neighbouring village of Batheaston. This ford



View of village from river Avon

was connected to the Roman Fosse Way which still forms part of the boundary of the parish (set out in a charter of 957 AD). Evidence has been discovered of a Roman villa near the village.

There have been many mills on the By Brook. There is one mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086 just north of the village. Most of these (used to grind corn and make cloth and leather) have closed but the one in Bathford remains (run by Portals, part of Drewsen Spezialpapiere group) now making paper and security applications such as passports.

The village grew through housing for local agricultural workers and those working in the nearby stone quarries. Alongside these modest houses are more substantial properties built in and around the village by successful businessmen in Bath. More recently estates have been added (Dovers Park, Mountain Wood and Garstons) and there are now approximately 2,000 residents in Bathford. There are also thriving Rugby and Cricket clubs and two pubs at the entrances to the village – one at the bottom and the other at the top of the hill on which Bathford sits.



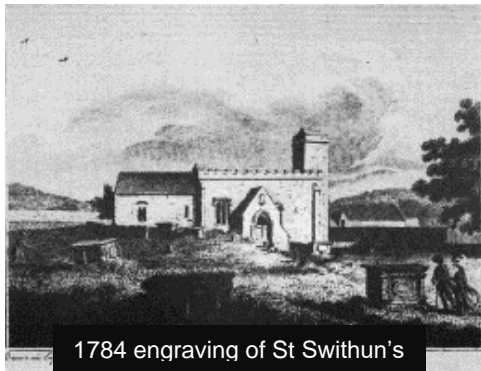
View of Church Street

The church is in the heart of the beautifully picturesque village, along the road from the Parish rooms and very close to both the popular (volunteer run) village shop and village club.

¹ Thanks go to Bathford Society for much of the historical information in this document
<http://www.bathfordsociety.org.uk/>

St Swithun's church – a brief history

There is thought to have been a church in Bathford since before the Norman



1784 engraving of St Swithun's

conquest but the earliest documentary evidence of a church is in 1140. The first description of the church is in 1791 with an engraving being published in 1784. Whether this bears any resemblance to the original church or how and when the original was altered or rebuilt is not known. Alterations subsequent to this engraving, largely to provide additional seating, included an additional gallery above the south aisle in 1818, a new tower in 1842 and a new north aisle in 1856.

In 1872 and largely due to the poor state of the building and the continuing need for more seating, the church was almost completely rebuilt except for the then recently completed north aisle. The present tower was completed in 1880 and the last major new building work was the extension of the north aisle in 1911 to form the Lady Chapel. The tower contains a peal of six bells first rung in August 1880 and they continue to be rung regularly on Sundays and special occasions such as coronations. The lych gate and war memorial were built in 1919.



Current view of St Swithun's

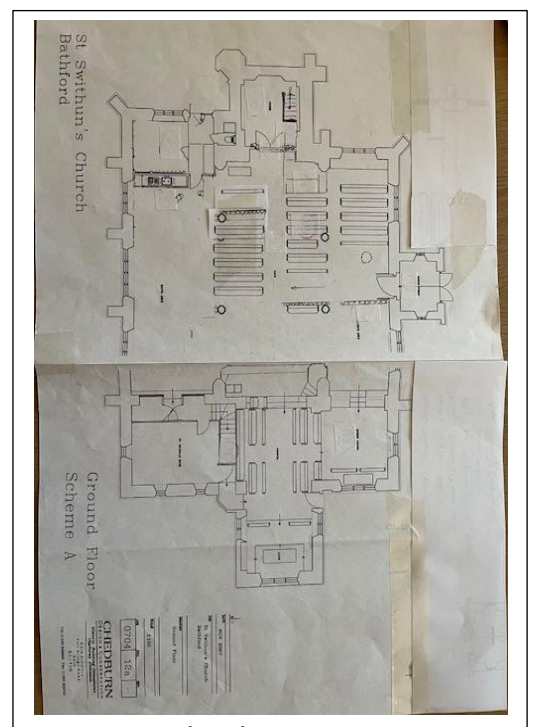
In 1956 St Swithun's church was given Grade 2 Listed Building status. An extract from the formal listing is set out in Appendix 1.

In 1969 the chancel, south aisle and the organ were severely damaged by arson. As a result, the barrel ceiling in the chancel was replaced by an open timbered roof, the pews were not replaced in the south aisle and a new organ was installed in 1971 at the west end, under the tower, rather than in the previous north east corner. Some of the organ pipes were salvaged from the fire and reused.

In 1865 there was a need to extend the churchyard and land was bought adjacent to, and east of, the original churchyard. The churchyard is still open for burials and has a popular garden of remembrance for ashes with an attractive wall of inscribed names. Churchyard maintenance is carried out by members of the congregation and some members of the village. There is one notable grave of Ann Nelson, the sister of Admiral Nelson, and also some interesting altar tombs (43 are grade 2 listed) towards the bottom of the original churchyard.

St Swithun's – the Building and its fixtures and fittings

The church is a pretty building of Romanesque origins but largely rebuilt between 1870 and 1880 and so the majority of the church is Victorian. It seats



approximately 120 people. It has an open chancel and nave, a choir, small Lady Chapel, North and South aisle (a flexible space where the pews have been removed), vicar's vestry, choir vestry, a downstairs room (used for storage and safes), an attractive upstairs room used for meetings and children's groups, a limited kitchenette with a small open area for socialising, and a Bell tower. There is also an office and one very small toilet.

The choir vestry, which is at the base of the tower, is accessed from the nave at the west end. The vestry is no longer used for purpose and has become, by default a store. Disposing of and relocating items stored in this area will be considered as part of our plans.

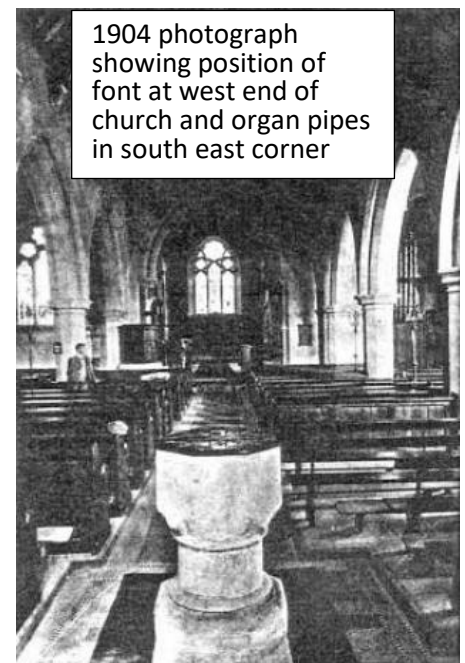
The church holds a number of plaques and wall monuments some of which have been taken down and stored in the choir vestry. A catalogue of them is available. If any plaques and wall monuments need to be moved, relocated or refastened, the appropriate permissions and advice on doing this will be obtained as the details of the proposals are worked through.

The building is regularly maintained and in good order. The boiler was replaced in 2020. No major issues were identified in the December 2021 quinquennial.

There are some beautiful stained-glass windows including one at the West End which is currently obscured by the organ pipes. Most of these windows were designed by Frederick Preedy, the architect of the rebuilding in the 1870s. The east window is more modern, dating from 1947 – interestingly this window is on record as an 'ancient painted east window by Cornelius Jansen, mysteriously stolen some years since', thought to be around 1840. It would have been a valuable window because Cornelius Jansen was a notable Flemish painter born in London in 1593 who was patronised by James I and Charles I. There is also a modern window in the South aisle which is a replacement as a result of the arson attack on the church in 1969. This window includes some of the pieces of glass recovered from the broken window in 1969.

The stone font, thought to be thirteenth century, is at the entrance to the building and is always used for baptisms. It was moved to its current location as part of the relocation of the organ into an organ loft in the tower in the early 1970s.

The organ, built in 1971 was installed at the West End as part of the then re-ordering as a consequence of the fire in 1969. The associated pipes were set in the loft space above the choir vestry, utilising some of the recovered pipework from the South East corner. It was inspected by the reputable firm of Harrison and Harrison, organ builders from Durham in 2018. The electronic switching control system was found to be unreliable and out of date. The verdict given was that it had “no future” since it was “not a sufficiently good instrument to justify the significant outlay that would be required to put it into good working order”. It has not been used in services for nearly 10 years.



1904 photograph showing position of font at west end of church and organ pipes in south east corner

The Jacobean pulpit is thought possibly to have been originally part of a three decker. It now sits on a carved stone base introduced by Preedy as part of the 1870 changes

The Nave and the North Aisle have Victorian pews/benches. These are believed to be machine made and of 'Russian' pine. The wood on the pews/benches is stained with a dark coating that unfortunately does not cope with hot weather when it is liable to come off on people's clothing. As a partial remedial measure an area of the backs have been sanded down to reveal the original pine colour.

The pews/benches in the South Aisle were removed following the fire in 1969 and replaced with comfortable chairs which allows flexible use of the space. Some of rows in the Nave were also removed in 2020 at the front of the church to create room to facilitate children's involvement in Sunday services.

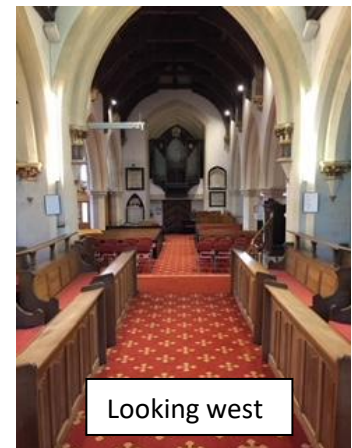
The choir stalls in the Chancel, which are of a different style to the seating in the Nave and North Aisle were installed in the early 1970s following the fire.



Looking east



Looking down onto the south aisle



Looking west

The church does not have an adjacent hall, so all the activities for children are held in church. An upstairs room was created in the late 1970s, soundproofed and equipped with TV etc so that it could be used as a children's teaching room with reduced disturbance to the main congregation. It is also used as a meeting room.

In 2010, it was felt that facilities should be introduced to allow tea, coffee and basic refreshments to be provided after services. A kitchenette was provided and behind that an office created which is used by the part-time church administrator. This is a discreet area at the West End of the South Aisle.

The church is carpeted throughout and the warm and welcoming atmosphere this creates is much appreciated by the congregation and many visitors to the church. Carpets have been a feature at St Swithun's for many years. The current red carpets, replacing blue dating from the 1950's, were fitted in the late 1990's. The original footprint of the church's aisles is picked out in a different pattern.

The heating system is gas fired. The boiler was replaced in 2020, following a comprehensive review of options. The original cast iron radiators continue to be used.

The pews/benches in the Nave and North Aisle are on a raised, suspended floor the sits some 4 inches above the aisles. On Health and Safety recommendation the aisle was raised in the Nave to eliminate the potential trip hazard and assist access generally in the main body of the church.

Outline of proposed changes to meet the evolving needs of the church

Full details of what is proposed and how they link with one another are set out in our Statement of Need, but in outline what we want to do is:

- I. Introduce a new disabled toilet.
- II. Install better catering facilities.
- III. Repurpose the choir vestry as accessible office space including removing the organ..
- IV. Introduce a permanent ramp, with handrails, to allow improved access to the church.

All of the changes proposed above are repurposing existing space and will therefore have virtually no impact on what is seen in the church other than much improved natural light to the west end.

The main focus of the proposal will be at the west end of the church, which will not directly impact on the existing footprint, service provision or facilities in the body of the church

Draft agreed by

Rev'd Laurretta Wilson

John Keelty -Church Warden

Michael Gilbert- Treasurer

On behalf of the St Swithun's, Bathford PCC

26 March 2025

Extract from Historic England website

Official list entry

Heritage Category:

Listed Building

Grade:

II

List Entry Number:

1320515

Date first listed:

01-Feb-1956

List Entry Name:

PARISH CHURCH OF ST SWITHUN'S

Statutory Address 1:

PARISH CHURCH OF ST SWITHUN'S, CHURCH STREET

National Grid Reference:

ST 78805 66615

Details

ST 7866-7966 BATHFORD C.P. CHURCH STREET (South-east side) 9/44
1.2.56 Parish Church of St. Swithun's G.V. II

Parish Church of St. Swithun's. Romanesque origins: restored by F. Preedy of London and Worcester; West tower (1879-80); north aisle and porch 1856; south aisle and nave 1870-72; chancel, north and south chancel chapels. Coursed, squared rubble with freestone dressings; slate roof. West tower: 3 stages, pierced parapet with finials, angle buttresses, 2-light lancet openings to bell chamber. Aisles: panelled bracer with foiled heads. 3-bay nave with Early English style arcades. 2 bay chancel. Font: C13th, octagonal with scalloped underside. Pulpit: Jacobean, finely carved with Biblical text on frieze, raised on stone base by Preedy (1870). Monuments: 2 lettered tablets in north wall of chancel; Philip Ellis 1661; Thomas Hendy 1676; south wall Marie Herd 1674. Elizabeth Phillips, 1759 by John Ford of Bath.

Listing NGR: ST7880566615