

Robin Hood Connections

The romantic figures of Robin Hood and his merry men were said to have lived around Blidworth and dispensed their primitive justice at the end of the 12th century. Robin Hood is said to have taken Maid Marian from her home at Blidworth to be married at Edwinstowe, and it is not impossible to think that Friar Tuck may have

ministered occasionally in the old St Lawrence Chapel. It is also believed that Will Scarlett was buried in Blidworth Churchyard - look out for the curious pile of stones said to mark his grave.

The lovely setting of Fountain Dale (about a mile or so from the village, by Harlow Wood) is where



Friar Tuck is said to have lived, and legend has it that this was the scene of his fight with Robin Hood which ended in a friendship broken only by death. Till half a century ago the "Friar's cell" could be seen. His well and the moat into which Robin supposedly tumbled after the fight are still in the woods; and, incidentally, in the old house of Fountain Dale (modernised now) Sir Walter Scott often stayed, gleaning local colour for "Ivanhoe" and his other immortal novels.



Welcome to the church of St Mary of the Purification Blidworth



The church stands on a hill in the centre of Sherwood Forest. In olden days it was said to be "four miles from everywhere except heaven."

There is no precise history of the church and village in pre-Roman times, but it is thought that the Druid Stone (one of the great natural boulders at the foot of the hill in Rickett Lane) was used for sun worship over 3000 years ago. This is not surprising given that the stone stands at nearly 90 feet round and 15 feet high, and has a passage worn through the middle. It

is possible that a sun temple stood on the hill at that period of history. A Roman camp was probably situated in Rickett Lane.

The first definite history of the Christian faith in the village tells that before the year 1000 AD the Gospel was preached in the open air, at a rough wooden cross erected on the hill where the church now stands. At this time the population of the village was small, the workers were mostly charcoal burners and foresters.

From AD 1070 onwards the spiritual care of the village was in the hands of

missionary priests from Southwell. Eventually these priests built a chapel dedicated to St Lawrence in which to minister the "Word and Sacraments." Unfortunately in the 18th century a substantial part of the original church building collapsed, and a new church, later to be dedicated to St Mary of the Purification, was built. (Fragments of St Lawrence's can be found roughly reassembled in the churchyard.)

The church continues to crown the hilltop. Except for its 15th century tower, it is mainly in the classical style of the 18th and 19th centuries, but the lofty south arcade of round arches and pillars is said to be the work of a pupil of Christopher Wren.



The University of
Nottingham

Are you fascinated by church history? Could you help us bring church heritage to life? The Southwell & Nottingham Diocese Church History Project would like to hear from you! For more information please contact OpenChurchesCHP@southwell.anglican.org
Many thanks to J C Whitworth for the material used in this leaflet and also to Robin Sharp for his assistance.



3 Font

The bowl of the 15th century font includes a wonderful carving of the head of a child. The modern oak cover was made by the village carpenter.



2 Memorial to Thomas Leake

The church and village have several links to the legends of Robin Hood (see back page). However one *true* story bears interesting comparison to Robin's legendary fights.

In 1580 Thomas Leake (or Leek) of Halam was appointed to the important position of Head Ranger of Blidworth Forest. For eighteen years he ranged the Forest, when on the feast day of the village (Candlemas) he met his sudden end. Drinking at a roadside alehouse at Salterford (an outpost hamlet on the edge of the Forest) he quarrelled with a 'Captain Salmon'. A duel was fought and Leake was run through by the younger man, who ran away leaving poor Tom dead. As was the custom for sudden death, a cross was erected

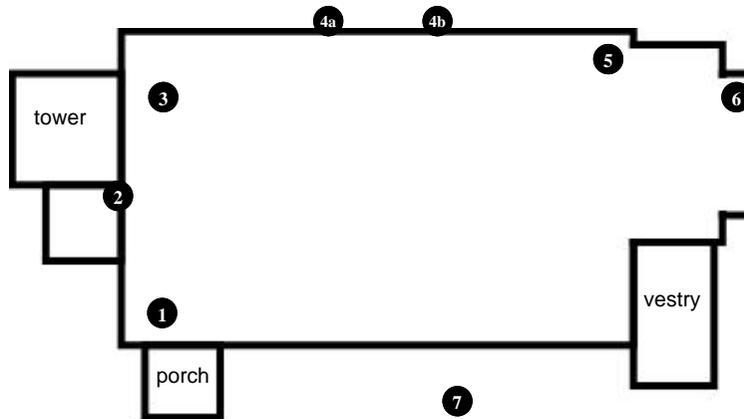
4a Stained Glass

The first window you come to on the north wall shows the Madonna holding in her arms the Infant Christ. Look closer and you will notice she also holds a black child; this may be a nod to the contemporary fight for the abolition of slavery at the time this window was made.



4b Stained Glass

Among many memorials of the Needs, a military family who lived at Fountain Dale, is a stained glass window made in Munich. It shows St Anne teaching Mary to read. St Anne is wearing a red mantle over her white robe and an amethyst wrap over her head, Mary is kneeling on a rich blue cushion. The glass was ordered from a firm at Metz before the Franco-German war, and was fashioned by the French during the Siege of Metz. After the war enquiries were made about it and in due course it arrived at Blidworth. A few months later a second window identical to the first was received, the explanation being that the Germans carried on the industry, when in possession of Metz, and took the letter enquiry to be another order! The second window was returned and found a place in Cologne Cathedral.



1 15th Century Floor Stone

As you enter the church notice the 15th century floor stone, with cross, scissars, hammer and square.



6 Chancel panelling

The oak panelling in the chancel, with a few richly carved panels, also came from Southwell Minster.



5 Pulpit

The Italian oak and plaster work pulpit (dating from 1760) was given to the church by Southwell Minster. The carvings depict 31 tiny heads, and the plasterwork includes a representation of Madonna and Child.

The "Rockings"

When the church was dedicated to St Mary of the Purification the congregation also began observing the annual "Rockings" ceremony. This custom, usual in churches all over Europe with this dedication, involves symbolically presenting a baby boy - who had been baptised nearest to the date of purification (40 days after Christmas) - to the Lord before the altar.

After the presentation the child was rocked before the altar in a flower-decked cradle, and then carried in procession through the village.

This was in memory of the Infant Saviour's presentation to the Lord at Mary's Purification.

The "Rockings" ceremony was later abandoned in England for some years, but here in Blidworth was revived, during the incumbency of the Rev John Lowndes (1922 - 1933). And continues to this day.

7 Churchyard

In the outside wall of the church is a tiny tapering coffin stone and another 15th century floorstone.