



# Christ Church . Reading

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**Christ Church is a Grade I listed building of historical and architectural interest which still has an almost complete set of Victorian stained glass windows.**

The building was designed by Henry Woodyer, the distinguished architect, who was also responsible for the designs of, among others, St. Paul's, Wokingham and Clewer Abbey, Windsor. The greater part of the building work was completed between 1861 and 1862 and the church was consecrated on August 7th, 1862 - the Feast of the Name of Jesus. Completion of the tower, spire, South aisle and vestries did not occur until 1874, the Christ Church schools and the vicarage being built locally in the meantime.



**Christ Church**, Christchurch Road, Reading Berks , RG2 7AR.

**Telephone:** 0118 9313468

**Office hours:** Tuesday and Wednesday mornings 9am- 2pm





# The Exterior

By the design standards of the day, Christ Church is relatively restrained displaying little over-ornamentation. The spire ( measuring 90 ft) is graceful in proportion and skilfully linked to the tower by small flying buttresses which run into elaborately carved pinnacles. One of the pinnacles (along with one of the gargoyles) was rebuilt and replaced recently as part of an extensive restoration project. The upper tower and spire are worked in Bath stone with a 'Mediaeval Effect' created by the presence of gargoyles and finishing in Grey Pennant stone. The gargoyles depict a monk, a fish, a lion and an eagle.

The tower houses the North porch, the principal entrance, which is surmounted by a false gable whose ornamentation was never completed. It was designed to carry a clock and a peal of bells. The clock, the work of Messrs. Smith of Derby, was installed in 1891 but the tower has only ever carried a solitary bell. The first bell cast by the John Warner & sons, London foundry remained in the tower until 1949 when it was replaced by a larger bell from the same foundry. The smaller bell was refixed over the Lady Chapel where it is now rung as a Sacring Bell.

The sweeping slate roof is juxtaposed beautifully with the ornamental settings of the windows. The clerestorey windows are linked by an arched motif peculiar to the architect, beneath them the further slate roofing of the aisles give way to detailed and architecturally competent windows. The rooves of the chancel, Lady Chapel and vestries, being set at various levels, give a pleasantly massed composition.

The churchyard is not consecrated for burials, consequently the land has been given over to gardens. There has been a tradition of vocational devotion in their upkeep and latterly the Northside has been developed with shrubs and herbaceous borders which frame the War Memorial Cross (erected in 1920 by public subscription). A 50ft high flagstaff was erected in 1954 but has since been lost.



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# The Interior

The North porch ( the main entrance currently used) was screened off from the nave in 1891. It was made by Messrs. Wheeler to Mr. Woodyer's design.

The nave of the church is striking in its sense of scale. It is 80ft (24m) in length which is divided into six bays of arcading. The arcades have bold cylindrical piers, each having eight attached shafts in Forest of Dean stone. The capitals are decorated with richly foliated canopies. The arcade arches have heavy mouldings of shallow cut above which the clerestorey is formed by a series of cusped arches, two to a bay, each framing a simple window. The roof is of an open tie-beam construction, without wind-braces, and the interstices between rafters and purline are plastered.

The only significant alterations to the original nave have been the removal of the old gas lamp brackets ( in ornate ironwork) and the removal of the screens from the front pews. In 1941 three pews positioned immediately in front of the font were removed to allow easier access to the font for Baptisms.

The Chancel Arch is very high, and its upper portion is filled with a distinctive screen in carved chalk of a reticulated design, the whole being supported on a cusped sub-arch. It has been suggested that it might have been intended to symbolise the Lifting of the Veil of the Temple. An illustration of the interior of 1880 shows that the text 'Heaven and Earth are full of the Majesty of Thy Glory' was painted around and immediately above the arch.

The 27ft.6in (8.25m) width of the nave is increased on each side by a single storey aisle of 12ft (3.6m). These aisles house one window to each bay, each consisting of two lights surmounted by a small window.

Other features in the nave and aisles include the font, pulpit, lectern, the War Memorial, memorial tablets and a picture.

The font was given by the Blandy family in memory of two children who died in 1860. It consists of a hemispherical alabaster bowl inscribed with the phrase "So many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into His Death" standing on a cylindrical pier inscribed around with "If we have been planted together in the likeness of His Death we shall be also in the likeness of His Resurrection.", with four detached coloured marble shafts crowned with shells. The whole standing on a podium of three steps at the East end of the nave and at the foot of the chancel arch.

The pulpit is in Bath stone, with Forest of Dean stone shafts. It is circular and supported on a cylindrical pier with detached shafts. Until 1949 the legend " Take heed how you hear" was prominent



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in the panels of the pulpit. The Exhiffa, or balustrade to the pulpit stair, is solid in panels decorated with carved roses and floral motifs. Most of the sculpted work was carried out by a Mr. Nicoll in a semi-naturalistic style of fine detail and high standard.

The lectern is of brass representing the traditional eagle standing on an orb. The gift of a parishioner, it was dedicated and put into use on Christmas Day 1872.

The picture 'The Annunciation' was presented in 1938 by its owner as a memorial to Revd. E.H. Winstanley.



The only significant alterations to the nave since the church was built are the removal of the old gas lamp brackets (very ornate ironwork according to a sketch of 1880) and slight alterations to the pews. The screens from the front pews were removed at some unknown date presumably to improve the circulation space, and three pews were removed from a position immediately in front of the font in 1941, to assist in the conducting of Baptisms.

The chancel arch is divided from the nave by the above mentioned arch and also by a low stone screen in Caen stone. The altar setting is very fine, though it is not all of one date.

The reredos is striking. The back panel is 11ft. long, and carries a sculptured representation of the eleven disciples reverently adoring the Ascending Lord, the work of Mr. Bernie Philip. The background of the panel was originally a very bright blue with incised gilded ornament, but by 1949 the gold had disappeared and the too prominent blue was covered with a dove grey which improved the setting. This panel is canopied by five gabled bays of delicately perforated tracery, springing from trefoil kneeler brackets with moulded capitals, with shafts of blue stone running down at each side. The gables are covered with carved foliage, and terminate in bold quatrefoil finials, which are silhouetted by the East window. Some of the details are picked out with gilding and concealed lighting highlights the whole scene from above.



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