

Early History of Christ Church Chalford

The chapel at Chalford was originally built in 1724-5; the nave with its Romanesque pillars dates from this time and there was also a gallery along the north aisle. In 1840, an appeal went out for subscribers to fund an enlarged church and also open a graveyard, so that the new 'ecclesiastical district' of Chalford could be formed, separate from the parish of Bisley, of which it had hitherto formed part. In 1841, the church was extended to the east, in accordance with plans drawn up by Foster of Bristol, the existing walls being lengthened and the new rectangular sanctuary constructed. The south porches were added in 1857, and the gallery dismantled in about 1890.

The chief glory of this parish church lies in its Arts and Crafts Movement furnishings. These represent a late flowering of the style which took inspiration from the ideas of William Morris and which had been nurtured and developed in the Sapperton workshops of Ernest Gimson and Ernest and Sidney Barnsley.

The organ gallery was built by Peter Waals' workshop and erected in 1927. Peter Waals had moved to Halliday's Mill, Chalford in 1919 after the early death of Gimson, whose foreman he had been since 1902. Most of Gimson's skilled craftsmen moved with Waals to the new workshop, where they continued to work to the very high standards of craftsmanship demanded by Waals.

In 1932, the chancel screen, designed by Norman Jewson (the 'Arts and Crafts' architect and designer) and made in Peter Waals' workshops, was erected. It is made of oak, has beautiful tracery, and clearly shows many typical features, especially the use of chamfering. The lectern, in walnut, was finished the following year, a result of the same team of designer and builder. It is a magnificent piece of craftsmanship, with typical 'Arts and Crafts' stringing, and inlay made of ivory, mother of pearl, and silver. Jewson also designed the remodelled pulpit in 1934 and communion rail in 1946.

In 1934, the wooden attendant figures of the Virgin Mary and St John were added either side of the crucifixion (which itself had been commissioned from Oberammegau in 1910) on top of the screen. They were carved by William Simmonds, a local sculptor and puppet maker, some of whose marionettes can be seen in the Folk Museum in Gloucester. He also carved the band of fishes around the font in 1937. The font and its cover were designed by Norman Jewson.

Four of the stained glass windows - unusual in style - are the work of Edward Payne, who lived in Box. They were installed between 1951 and 1954, whenever finance allowed.

There is a fine sculpture entitled "Charity" above the south door, carved by John Thomas (1813-62), who was born in Chalford but rose to become a renowned sculptor, supervising the sculptural work in the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament in mid nineteenth century and carrying out commissions for Queen Victoria. "Charity" was shown at the Great Exhibition in 1851, and then adapted to form a memorial to his brother Richard who had remained in the village and died in 1852.

The ring of six bells was installed in 1859 and is unusually cast in steel rather than bronze.