

Ballidon is an area of great antiquity. Nearby, there are remains of Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows and house platforms near the church attest to a sizeable medieval settlement. As industry in the form of quarrying limestone took the place of agriculture the population decreased considerably.

The church was a parochial chapel in the parish of Bradborne. Whilst Ballidon is mentioned in Domesday Book (1086) there is no mention of a church, but this is not uncommon and cannot be taken as evidence that there wasn't a church here.



The present building dates from shortly afterwards, c.1100, with the south doorway being a good example of simple Romanesque architecture. There was once a north door as well, but this is now only visible externally. The plan of the church is simple: a nave, chancel and vestry. It is constructed of local limestone rubble with gritstone dressings. Its massive plinth foundation is clearly visible outside at the northwest corner.

In 1205 the church at Bradborne, with its parochial chapels including Ballidon, was given to Dunstable Priory in Bedfordshire; Ballidon is mentioned in several of their documents. In 1287 some of the Priory lands here were being illegally farmed by the locals. In 1547 a record of church goods was compiled, showing that the church was well equipped for divine service. However, the most amusing record dates from a hundred years later when William Alsop was dismissed as a clergyman for conducting illegal marriages here!

The church has been significantly remodelled on two occasions – firstly in 1822 and again in 1882.



Interior

The font is the most important object in the church. It dates from the fourteenth century and has interesting carvings. Strangely a lot of the designs are upside down. The bowl of the font obviously doesn't belong to the darker coloured stem, although they are of similar date.

Facing east is a naïve depiction of a man with a book. On the north side is a relief of shears whilst the most interesting carving is on the west side depicting a sexualised woman. These images are relatively common in medieval churches and this one, being located on the font, may be associated with childbirth.



Font carving



East window

Above the font is a fireplace high in the wall. This shows that there must have once been a gallery across the west end. Local tradition tells that this was used by visiting clergy for overnight accommodation. The nave roof is entirely Victorian, as is the brick floor laid in herringbone pattern.

In the 1851 Census of Religious Worship, Ballidon church had seats for 72 people. Most were rented with just 8 being free. A service was only held once a fortnight in the evening and the average attendance was between 20 and 35. The present open benches date from 1882.

The impressive chancel arch, in twelfth century style, is too smooth to be original but may have been recut as part of the 1882 restoration. To either side are the Ten Commandments and Lord's Prayer, on glazed tiles. The altar

on the north side of the chancel arch has a reredos made up of four naïvely painted tiles showing scenes from the Life of Christ. In the panel depicting the Adoration of the Magi one of the magi has a block of stone on his robe whilst on the Burial of Christ tile Our Lord has no neck!

The panelling in the chancel dates from the 1882 restoration and incorporates a central arch in Romanesque style. There is another small painted tile set into this, depicting the Crucifixion. It hides an aumbry, or cupboard, where liturgical items could be stored. It is worth opening the cupboard to see the garish reds and greens inside!

Stained glass in the east window is by the London designer Charles Eamer Kempe. It depicts the appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalene and was installed in 1894. The chancel roof retains some medieval timbers in its construction.

To the north of the chancel is a small choir vestry with a rail for hanging the robes. Leading off it is a small clergy vestry complete with fireplace and originally with an exterior door.

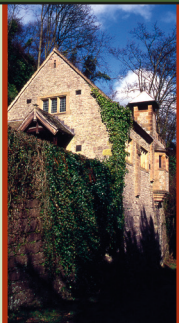
Text: John Vigar. Photography: Cameron Newham



Not far from Ballidon

St John the Baptist, Matlock Bath

Dismayed by the 'low churchmanship' of the nearby parish church, Mrs Louisa Harris decided to erect her own private chapel, and assembled a glittering array of Arts & Crafts artists to execute it. (contact office for keyholder).



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Church of All Saints Ballidon

a guide to its history