



## FSCC Church Card No 28

# MELLS

## CHURCH OF ST ANDREW

Mells is a picturesque rural village in the Mendip hills with a population of some 700. The Church of St Andrew stands at the end of mediaeval New Street, set back from the main road. Approaching the building the visitor enters a fine churchyard with many good memorial stones including those to Ronald Knox and Siegfried Sassoon.



Seating 230, this Grade I listed Perpendicular church is impressive, with a "noble tower and a profusion of carved detail" (John Betjeman). With the adjoining manor the group "is among the happiest in Somerset" (Pevsner), while the "arrangements of buttresses and pinnacles is as ingenious as any in Somerset" Records show payments for the building of tower and vestry at Mells in the fifteenth and sixteenth

centuries. The limestone oolite walls of the church are from this period, but most roofing and internal furnishings are from a major restoration in the 1850's. Early jurisdiction was under Glastonbury Abbey, and a room over the porch is sometimes said to be quarters for a visiting priest.

Viewing the church first from a distance, the full battlements that top the walls delight the eye. A start may be at the porch (1), said by Simon Jenkins to be a "superb creation". A statue of St Andrew as fisherman, with loaves and fishes at his feet, was commissioned in 2002 for the niche high above the porch door. The tower (2), a "four-decker culminating in a fine crown" (Jenkins), carries a peal of eight bells. Its faceless clock strikes the quarter hours, but also plays one of four

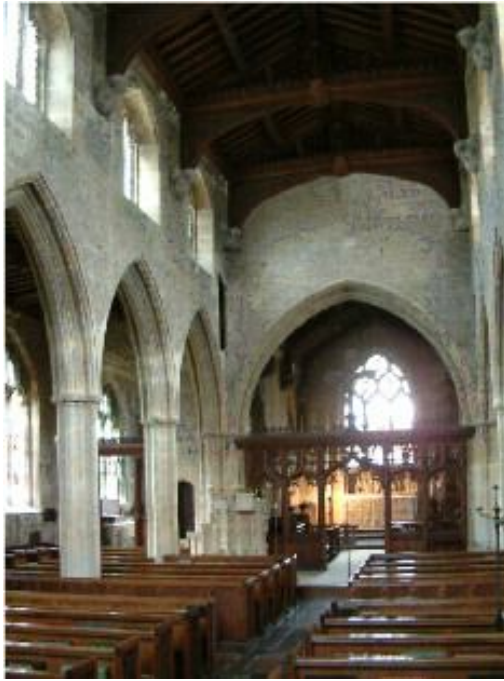


tunes over three-hour intervals. Two bells remain of a 1717 recasting, Nos 4 and 7, and the No 4 bell is inscribed "Prosperity to the Church of England".



Walking round the outside to the north door, an avenue of yews, designed by Lutyens, leads to the meadow beyond. Outside the East Window (3), an area is reserved for the graves of rectors, while beyond are the graves of the Horners, Asquiths and Lady Violet Bonham Carter. Designs of headstones include those by Lutyens and Gill. The Horners and their descendants the Asquiths have held the manor at Mells since Henry VIII, and still do today. On the south side, returning towards the porch, is a two-storied polygonal vestry (4), "a fine and curious pece of worke" wrote Leyland in the sixteenth century.

Enter the church through the south porch, with its fan vaulted ceiling of unusual design.



The baptistery (5) has a large Norman font with a recent wooden cover. Here on the west wall hangs a large tapestry designed by Burne-Jones, recently refurbished. The needlework showing an angel was worked by Lady Frances Horner.

Proceeding in a clockwise direction, the base of the tower (2) supports a ringing chamber above its lofty fan-vaulted ceiling. Brides entering from the west door pass an inscription by Gill to their right and a Burne-Jones plaster panel portraying a peacock, a memorial to Laura Lyttelton, to their left.

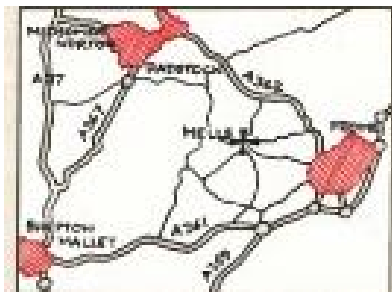
The north aisle and Lady Chapel (6) contain war memorials. The lists of names of the fallen include a brass plate from Vobster church brought here after its closure in 1983. Here is also an imposing equestrian bronze statue of Edward Horner, a lieutenant in the 18th Hussars killed in France. The statue is by Munnings, cast by Fiorini of Battersea, standing on a plinth by Lutyens. The Lady Chapel includes a chest tomb that is in fact a

cover for the Horner family vault below.

There is a marble altar in the sanctuary (7) with panels brought from India by the Horners, likely to be draped in most seasons of the year. Continuing clockwise, the St Katherine chapel (8) is almost filled by our 1880 Vowles tracker-action organ in a modern case. The vestry, kept locked, has a stair to the upper vestry, with a window of mediaeval glass fragments.



The main body of windows can be viewed from the central aisle. Many are by the Horwood brothers, made at the Manor when the rector of the day set up a craft school in the 1840's. Pew ends by the Clark brothers were also made in the school. At roof level are some 51 stone corbels, busts of angels.



**How to get there :** Mells lies in the triangle of roads connecting Shepton Mallet, Radstock and Frome. It is best approached either by turning south from the A362, or north from the A361. Turnings and the approaches to Mells are well signposted. In the village, the straight New Street of mediaeval buildings leads off by the Talbot Inn from the main street running from the Post Office towards Vobster. There is no designated church car park, but there is usually space in the adjacent streets.