



St Peter's, Woolavington
A visitor's guide

This guide has been researched and written by Joscelyn Johnson.

Joscelyn was married in St Peter's Church in 1946 to the Rev. Charles Johnson, Headmaster of Seaford College (1944-1990). She still lives in Lavington Park, playing an active role in both school and church activities. She has also written a history of the College, entitled Mosaic of Memories.

Photographs of St Peter's have been taken for this booklet by Fiona Gray.



St Peter's Woolavington

Welcome to this beautiful church nestling at the foot of the South Downs. The shield above the nave bearing St Peter's keys reminds us of its patron saint. Mentioned in the Domesday Book survey of 1087, the statistical survey made by order of William I in 1087, East Lavington is described as "eleven villagers with seven smallholders have four ploughs, a church, woodland, ten pigs" The first illustration of the Church is in a pictorial map of 1597 standing close to the Elizabethan mansion built by the first owner of the estates of Woolavington and Graffham when they were bought from the Earl of Arundel in 1578 for £4,000.

St Peter's is one of the shepherds' churches on the Sussex Downs. Their church bells would carry the message of Sunday services to the shepherds tending their sheep on the Downs above. Sometimes the shepherds and their dogs were free to leave their flock, joining the village congregation but more often the sound of the bells would remind them of the service as many such men were thoughtful and devout. Frequently their sheep could not be left unattended, particularly at lambing times. This churchyard may contain some of their coffins buried with a tuft of sheep's wool nailed on each lid. This was a Sussex custom and would explain the absence of its owner from regular church-going to the recording Angel in Heaven.

This little country church with its simple structure is noteworthy for the great personalities who have served and worshipped here: the Rev John Sargent (rector and squire), the Rev Charles Simeon (the great evangelist), Bishop Samuel Wilberforce (son of William the anti slave trade campaigner), Henry (later Cardinal) Manning, James Buchanan (later Lord Woolavington) and more recently Archbishop Ramsey and the eminent theologian Canon Charlie Moule. The families, who held the advowson of the church (i.e. the permission to select the incumbent) and owned the estate, comprising both Graffham and Woolavington, are shown on the heraldic window in the Transept.

The first Lord of the Manor, Giles Garton, built the original Elizabethan House above the church, looking across the weald and with the wooded Downs behind. Through him the family names and heraldic shields can be traced. The change of surname indicates the times when the blood line passed through the female line, though interestingly the surname Garton used as a Christian name continues until the last Wilberforce Squire left the estate in 1900. Thus the old saying locally "The first Garton built the house; the last Garton will lose it." (Reginald Garton Wilberforce sold the estate in 1903). The graves of the Wilberforce family are to be found on the south side of the graveyard.

Many people have contributed to St Peter's; three people in particular deserve special thanks: first James Buchanan who installed the beautiful stained glass windows and his daughter Catharine MacDonald Buchanan who in 1937 replaced the high sided dark pews with ones of light oak in his memory. More recently Alderman Albert Johnson (who secured the future for Seaford College in its current home) improved the acoustics and installed the electric lighting. His memorial is the stained glass window on the south wall of the Sanctuary.

The Christmas tradition in this church is to put a pen lined with fresh straw in the Nave and for lambs or other young animals to be placed there for everyone to enjoy during the Crib service, a fitting tradition for a Shepherd's church.

Right: Heraldic window in the transept



A Tour around the Church

Take time to explore this beautiful Sussex church; one of a line of shepherds' churches that stretch along the base of the South Downs. Following the plan you can find some of the features of interest which are described in the following sections.

The Nave

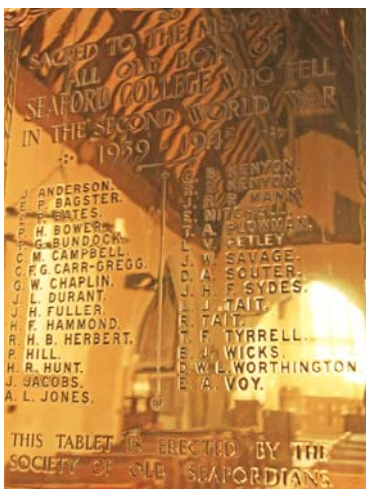
Standing inside the West Door (through which you have entered) you are facing the Nave; the Altar Table is at the east end through the Archway.

The Commando Memorial (above the south door)

Lavington Park was the Commando Headquarters in the Second World War. Many of the plans for D-Day were formulated in the Mansion. Years later, after the war, they would return to St Peter's for an annual service of thanksgiving.

Memorials to the Old Seafordians (on each side of the west door)

Two tablets showing the names of Seafordians who died in the First and Second World Wars tell their own sad stories. The surname Savage appears on the tablets of both wars; these boys were relatives of Colonel Savage, who founded Seaford College at Seaford in East Sussex in 1884.





Above: View of the Nave from the west door

Left: Memorials to Old Seafordians

Transept

Before entering the Sanctuary go across the aisle into the Transept. The Transept was added to the church during the Rev Henry Manning's incumbency in the 1840s. As a result of the Oxford Movement Manning seceded to Rome in 1853, later becoming Cardinal Manning. On one of his later visits back to the Church he wrote "the little church under a green hillside where the morning and evening prayers, and the music of the English Bible, for seventeen years became part of my soul."

This area with organ and choir stalls holds the College choir, well known for their singing.

The memorials on the walls surrounding them tell the history of owners of Lavington Park.

The Heraldic Window (south side)

Most estates which have been in one family for several years are known by one surname and have one family crest. However the surname of the squires of Lavington changed in each generation. Thus the crest changes from generation to generation as the female crest is added to that of her husband. The stained glass window names the first squire of the Garton family which often passes through the female line (hence the quartering of the family crests and change of surname).



Above: Memorial to James Buchanan



Above: Transept taken from the Nave

Bishop Wilberforce's Crook (at the south eastern corner)

This is in the glass case on the wall. Samuel Wilberforce (1805-73) was the son of William Wilberforce who had spent his life fighting for the abolition of slavery.

Bishop Wilberforce was a kind and understanding squire and well-loved by the villagers of Graffham and Woolavington. He became Bishop of Oxford and later of Winchester. A bishop's crook signifies his role as the "shepherd" of his diocese.

His father, William Wilberforce, was the driving force in parliament behind the movement to secure the Abolition of Slavery in 1837. Rather than being buried in Westminster Abbey next to his father, Bishop Wilberforce was buried in the churchyard next to his wife, according to his wishes.

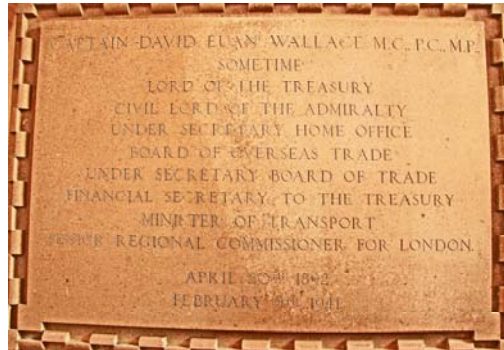
The Buchanan Memorials

James Buchanan bought the estate from Reginald Wilberforce in 1903. Besides being known for his Black and White whisky he was also celebrated as the owner of the famous horses housed in the stable block (now the music centre). Hurry On was the winner of the 1916 St Leger who then sired Captain Cuttle the 1922 Derby winner and Coronach, another St Leger winner. He died in 1935, greatly mourned by the villagers of Graffham and Lavington.



The Wallace Memorials

The Wallace family owned the estate between 1935 and 1946. Euan Wallace had been the Minister of Transport. Tragically his four sons died on active service in World War 11 and the plaques on the walls pay tribute to them.



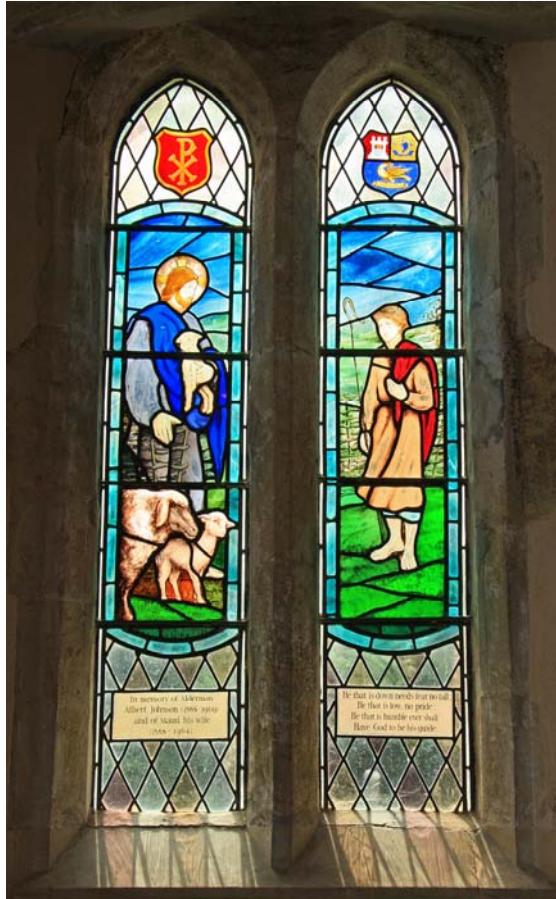
The Sanctuary

Entering the Sanctuary through the stone arch, we face the altar. The surface of the altar is a piece of Sussex Marble in which you can see many fossilized winkle shells. It is amazing to remember that much of Sussex was once covered by the sea.



Shepherds' Window

A memorial to Alderman Albert Johnson and his wife was added in the late 20th century.



The window shows the shepherd boy from Pilgrim's Progress and his verse:

He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.



**The Font
(in the north aisle)**

The font with the Twelve Apostles dates from the early 20th century when the church was restored by James Buchanan (Lord Woolavington). His daughter, Catharine, replaced the pews and the altar with ones of light oak in his memory in 1937.

Shields

Walking down the Nave and looking upwards to the left you can see a row of coloured shields depicting the national saints of England (St George), Scotland (St Andrew) and Ireland (St Patrick), the keys of St Peter and the cockleshells of the Crusaders.



The Pulpit (at the eastern end of the nave)

The pulpit was given to the college by the Southwark Diocese. It came from St Mark's, Kennington Oval, one of the four churches built as a thank-offering for victory in the Battle of Waterloo.



The Graves in the Churchyard

The graves of the Sargent and Wilberforce families are sited along the west wall.

Rev John Sargent 1780-1833

Rector of Lavington, father of Emily Wilberforce and Caroline Manning, is buried in an unnamed grave close to his family. Died of pneumonia after giving up his seat inside the coach and travelling outside in bad weather from Godalming to Petworth.

Emily Wilberforce 1807-1841

Samuel's wife, the eldest daughter of the Rev John Sargent.

Bishop Samuel Wilberforce 1805-1873

The third son of William Wilberforce (campaigner against slavery) became Bishop of Oxford in 1845. His crozier (cross) stands in its glass case in the Transept.

Herbert Wilberforce 1833-1856

Samuel's eldest son who served in the Navy and died of an illness contracted in Crimea, aged 23.

Caroline Manning 1812-1837

Fourth daughter of the Rev John Sargent. Married to Henry Manning who came to Lavington as curate to the Rev John Sargent in 1833. He married Caroline Sargent ten months later and lived in the Rectory in Graffham. His wife, always delicate, died four years later.

The Memorial to the Wallace family includes the names of Euan Wallace, his four sons who were killed in the 1939-45 war and his fifth son William and his wife.

The Oxford Movement

In the 19th Century the church of St Peter's, its congregation and clergy were torn apart by the religious controversy in the Church, known as the Oxford Movement. This brought the parting of the ways of the Wilberforce family. Samuel Wilberforce, now Bishop of Oxford, remained in the Anglican Church, whereas his brother-in-law Henry Manning seceded to Rome. Both men had married the daughters of the Rev John Sargent, they were close friends and remained so throughout their lives, despite their differing beliefs. Manning had first come to Lavington as curate to his father-in-law, on whose death he replaced as Rector of both parishes, here and at Graffham. He revisited Lavington in later years and never lost contact with his old friends.

