

A brief history of
ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST
Hills Road, Cambridge



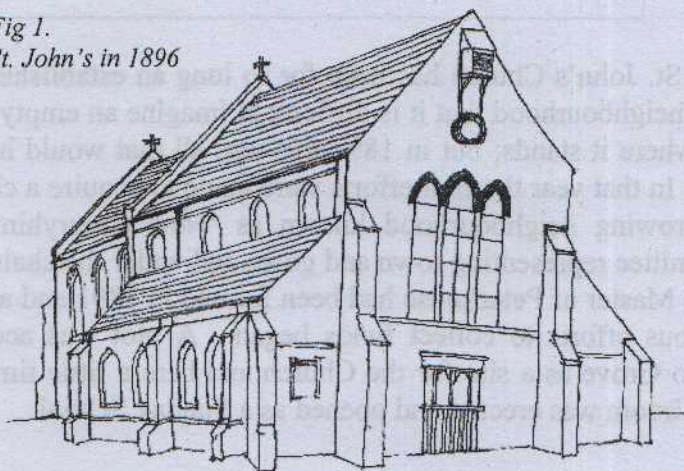
Also incorporating
‘The Stonework and Carvings’
by Ted Holt
(second edition)

St. John's Church has been for so long an established feature of its neighbourhood that it is difficult to imagine an empty building plot where it stands; but in 1892 this was all that would have been seen. In that year the first efforts were made to acquire a church for the growing neighbourhood known as 'New Cherryhinton'. A Committee representing town and gown and under the chairmanship of the Master of Peterhouse had been formed in 1891 and as a result vigorous efforts to collect funds began. A plot was acquired in Blinco Grove as a site for the Church and here a little timber-built schoolroom was erected and opened as a Sunday School.

The first church services were held over the road in the Chapel of Cavendish College (now Homerton) but in 1893 the College was unable to allow this to continue, and as the congregation now amounted to over 100 it was becoming too large to fit into the existing schoolroom which had to be adapted and enlarged. The services were led by university and local clergy – made necessary by the distance of St. John's from the mother church of St. Andrew, Cherry Hinton.

News of the pastoral needs of the area reached a retired clergyman, Revd. John George, who wrote to the Committee offering his services as curate-in-charge on a voluntary basis – he eventually became Vicar and his important ministry firmly established St. John's in being with the building of the first section of the church. Meanwhile fund-raising had reached the point where building could begin; in May 1896 the foundation stone was laid, with the completed building (chancel and two bays) being consecrated in December 1896 with dedication to St. John the Evangelist. The architects were Gordon, Lowther & Gunton. The parish was named 'St. John the Evangelist, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge' – a name which for all legal purposes remains today.

Fig 1.
St. John's in 1896



A blank wall of yellow brick terminated the West End of this short building, (*see figure 1*) but the church was in use, a choir was formed and an organ acquired. The children of the district subscribed a penny each to purchase the bell which rang for services (this can still be seen today over the choir vestry window, but it is no longer in use) and many gifts were made towards the furnishing. The magnificent East window was dedicated in 1897 and still dominates the church today. It depicts 'The Last Supper' after the world-famous picture by Leonardo da Vinci. Below the picture are the words 'Verily, verily I say unto you that one of you will betray me' – indeed Judas Iscariot is easily recognisable by his missing halo. Pictured from left to right, the disciples are Bartholomew, James the Less, Andrew, Judas, Peter, John, Thomas, James the Great, Philip, Matthew, Jude & Simon.

Another early gift to the church (1896) was the fine carved lectern in the image of an Eagle, the symbol of St. John the Evangelist.

Today, if you stand in the central aisle you can see the original pillars of the two bays with a demarcation line on the second pillars where the new part was added. (This line is prominent because before the extension was built, the church was lit by gas; with the 1928 extension came electric lighting. The colouration of the stonework in

the first two bays was the result of nearly 30 years of fumes from gas lighting – see p.19 in the *stonework & carving section of this booklet*). The Church door was halfway down today's central aisle with the line still seen today in the wooden flooring. It is interesting to note that (probably two) extra rows of seats were placed in front of the present front prayer desks in the nave.

In 1903 Mr George resigned after 11 years of selfless and successful work and was succeeded by Revd. A. E. Love, who held the living until 1914. During his time the clergy vestry and the choir vestry were built. The Vicarage was established in the house standing opposite the gates of Homerton College, 189 Hills Road, which is now a residence for a privately-owned further education centre in Cambridge. (The more modern Vicarage at 9 Luard Road was bought in 1956.)

Mr Love was succeeded by Revd. G. F. Jackson whose arrival coincided with the outbreak of the First World War, which made further attempts at church extension impossible. By the time of Mr Jackson's retirement in 1927, the Parish Hall had been built on the corner of Blinco Grove and Baldock Way (where the original Sunday School building had been), and the funds were growing once again towards the extension of the church itself.

The incoming incumbent, Revd. J. Paterson Morgan (Vicar 1927-1938), threw himself into the project of completing the church with energy and enthusiasm. The fund grew to a sufficient amount to enable the whole building to be completed and consecrated in June 1929.

So, St. John's came into being through the vigorous efforts of many and other gifts were made to beautify it as the years passed, somewhat hindered at this point by the depression and the Second World War. The Vicar at this time was Revd. R. J. A. Jary, remembered for his ministry to the young, and in the hospital as well as the parish. The Parish Hall was in continual use as a 'British Restaurant' for the district during the War. Mr Jary was followed by

the Revd. John Needham in 1947 who remained for eight years – his ministry was marked by a significant growth in the youth of the parish.

In the early 1950's the present two-manual (Manders) organ with detached console was installed – a fine instrument for a parish church.

Canon F. E. Stanbury came to St. John's in 1956 from Fen Ditton, and was followed in 1974 by the Revd. (later Canon) Fred Wilkinson from Cottenham. It was his vision that saw the large vacant plot next to the church transformed into the Community Room opened in 1982. An active appeal committee raised the funds in a little over six months, the completion of the appeal exactly coinciding with the opening of the room. This new facility and other modernisation of the church transformed the impact of the church on the community and greatly enhanced the church's own life while the Parish Hall in Blinco Grove, although still busy with some community activities and use as a dining hall for Morley School, became less of a focal point for the work of the church.

Canon Wilkinson retired in 1988 three years after the church had welcomed Canon Professor Stephen Sykes as Honorary Assistant Priest alongside his position as Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge. Shortly after Canon Jones' arrival as Vicar of St. John's in 1989, it was announced that Canon Sykes was to become 67th Bishop of Ely.

Under the guidance of Canon Brian Jones the Parish Hall in Blinco Grove was sold and residences known as 'Morley Court' have now replaced the original structure. The sale provided the basis for the appeal in 1994/95 which successfully provided extended community facilities — a new entrance to the church, extension to the now overburdened community rooms with enlarged kitchen, together with the provision of the Parish Office and two smaller meeting rooms. The large downstairs meeting room was named the 'Wilkinson Room' (reflecting the original vision of the previous incumbent) and the two smaller upstairs meeting rooms were named 'Gray Room' (in memory of the Chairman of the 1982 Appeal Committee) and

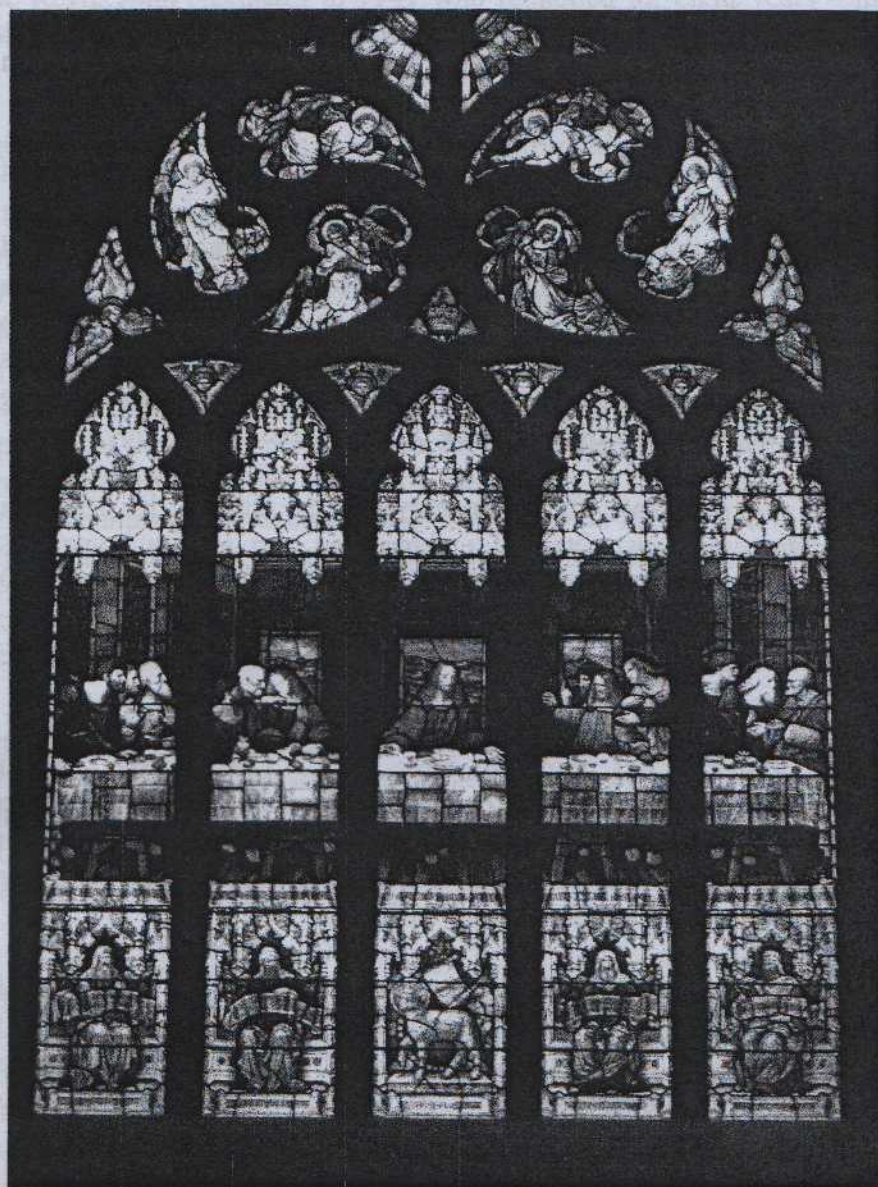
‘Cavendish Room’ (reflecting the roots of St. John’s congregation which were in Cavendish College, now Homerton).

This latest extension to St. John’s, opened in 1995 and dedicated by the Bishop of Ely, provided a more welcoming entrance to the church over the rather dark Narthex (porch) used since the 1928 extension. The interior of this original porch bears the inscription ‘But the greatest of these is charity’ and can be seen above the inner doorway – now only in use for weddings, funerals and ceremonial occasions. It is interesting to note that this carving was paid for by the men working on the extension.

To celebrate the Centenary of St. John’s in 1996, a wallhanging constructed of embroidered and appliqué symbols was designed by Rosalind Jones and worked over a period of 9 months by many members of the congregation. This hangs in the new lobby where an explanation of the symbolism can also be found.

Canon Jones retired in early 1998. The Reverend David Reindorp was appointed to the parish in the same year. In 2005 he was appointed an Honoray Canon of Ely Cathedral, and in December the same year he accepted an invitation to become Vicar of Chelsea Old Church (Diocese of London).

In November 2006, the Reverend Susan Wyatt was collated and inducted as Vicar. In 2009 the Diocese of Ely celebrates 900 years since its foundation, with the Revd. Sue Wyatt as Chairman of the Ely 900 Planning Group. A number of festivities are being held throughout the diocese during this anniversary year.



The great East window at St. John's — a representation in stained glass of Leonardo da Vinci's 'The Last Supper'.
A coloured postcard is available.

CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST CAMBRIDGE



The Stonework and Carvings

E. Holt : 1986

Foreword to this second edition:

To anyone entering St. John's for the first time, it might seem that there is little decoration of significant interest in this red brick Victorian church. But look a little closer, preferably with assistance from the notes that follow, and you will gain a fascinating insight into the particular communion of saints that sought to make St. John's the place of warmth that it remains today.

Ted Holt (who wrote these notes) was a much-loved and respected friend to my family. He was forthright and direct and never failed to speak his mind. He did not always agree with innovative ideas and forcefully stated his point at many a PCC meeting; however, democratic decisions to proceed always found his full support, an indication of his unswerving loyalty to St. John's.

His ability in all sorts of craftwork encouraged me to seek his advice on many occasions, both of a domestic and an ecclesiastical nature! His unique ability to bring the past to life is epitomised here. Despite recent additions to the church, the original decorations as described here remain totally intact.

Bridget Garton, September 2000

Foreword to the first edition (1987):

This piece of research by Ted Holt was completed within a year before his death. Although in failing health at the time, he applied himself to the task of finding out about certain features in St. John's Church about which fewer and fewer in the congregation knew much, and of writing the information in booklet form. The meticulous care and detail shown in his research epitomise the character of Ted Holt, and, in that he was dealing with craftsman's art, the task appealed to him all the more as he himself enjoyed hours of pleasure in craftwork as a hobby.

I have no doubt that, had he lived longer, Ted's research would have been extended to other areas in St. John's.

Eileen Wilkinson, July 1987

THE STONE WORK AND CARVINGS AT THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST, CAMBRIDGE

AN EXPLANATION OF SOME TERMS USED IN THIS BOOKLET:

capital	top part or piece of an architectural column
clerestory	part of an outside wall of building that rises above the adjoining roof.
corbelstone	a projection from a wall which supports a weight, especially one stepped upwards and outwards from a vertical surface
cusps	point, or apex
hood-mould	a stone cover or canopy
label-stop	the end of a narrow band, or strip, of stone
ogee	a moulding in the form of a shallow S-shaped curve
oolitic	type of limestone consisting of small round grains, especially of calcium carbonate
sill	a horizontal sheet of stone running between other vertical stone

Illustrations of the carved crests of the educational establishments in the parish — see pp16-17



*Badge of the Morley
Memorial School*



*Badge of the Cambridge &
County High School for
Boys, now Hills Road VIth
Form College*



*Badge of The
Perse School
for Boys*



*Badge of Homerton
College, Cambridge*

THE STONEWORK AND CARVINGS AT THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST, CAMBRIDGE

INTRODUCTION:

Most of the stonework is Bath Stone, one of the oolitic limestones, and probably came from the extensive quarries of this material in Wiltshire.

Nearly all the carvings in the chancel are the work of Mr G. H. Barnsdale and those in the rest of the church, both inside and out, were done by or under the supervision of Mr C. J. Whitaker. Both these men worked for Rattee and Kett and both lived in the parish, as did Mr Kett, and all were regular worshippers here. Mr Whitaker was for some time a Churchwarden.

Many of the carvings were done to illustrate something particular and these, so far as I have found recorded or been able to deduce, have been mentioned individually, and attention has been drawn to the rest with notes as appropriate.

It is interesting to see that the porch windows immediately to the left and right of the entrance door have as many as seven carved items each. The whole church has just over 150.

EXTERIOR DECORATIONS:

The chief glory of the church is the well-proportioned West End with its large window and the excellent geometrical tracery. The neat stonework at the apex of the gable adds further interest.

The WEST DOORWAY has an ogee-shaped hood moulding with a finial-like cluster of stonework in which there is the figure of St. John and his eagle at his feet, standing on a corbelstone which is decorated with vine leaves and grapes. When the figure of St. John was placed in position, it was found to be much lighter in colour than the rest of the work. Some members of the Church Council objected to this, and to placate them, some coffee grounds were steeped in water and when a

suitable hue was obtained the figure was brushed with the liquid and everyone was happy with the result.

The left label-stop shows an angel with a shield on which is the Greek letter Alpha and the right label-stop is identical but with the letter Omega.

The two side doors show only leaves, flowers and fruit.

The emblems on the GREAT WEST WINDOW are of the four Evangelists:

Top left label-stop:	A winged Ox for St. Luke
Top right label-stop:	An Eagle for St. John
Left sill:	A winged Man for St. Matthew
Right sill:	A winged Lion for St. Mark

Window at the WEST END of NORTH AISLE:

Left label-stop:	Three fishes arranged to represent the Holy Trinity
Right label-top:	Pelican on nest feeding her young. This is an emblem used by Corpus Christi College. The second Chairman and the first Secretary of the General Committee set up in 1892 to establish a church in the locality were both Corpus Christi men.

Window to the LEFT of the MAIN DOOR:

Left label-stop:	A shield showing the emblems of the Passion – spear, ladder, reed and sponge.
Right label-stop:	A shield with IHS with rays of glory in the background.

The two sill carvings show only leaves, flowers and fruit.

Window to the RIGHT of the MAIN DOOR:

The same as the corresponding window on the left, but in reverse order, and similar sill carvings.

Window at the WEST END of the SOUTH AISLE:

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|-------------------|--|
| Left label-stop: | Cross Keys for St. Peter. The gift of the living of Cherry Hinton, mainly from which parish that of St. John's was taken, was held by Peterhouse. When the College was offered the Gift of the living of the new parish of St. John it declined the offer and so it went to the Bishop of Ely. |
| Right label-stop: | A Dove holding an Olive Branch, which is the emblem of Peace and the Holy Spirit. |

The external label-stops of the AISLE WINDOWS and CLERESTORY WINDOWS are much larger than the ones inside and show carvings which include Acanthus leaves, Pomegranates, Thistles, Lilies, Daffodils, Roses, Hawthorn, Daisies, Grapes and Figs. The two side windows of the chancel are carved in a similar manner. All are worth studying.

The EAST WINDOW of the church has no label-stops due to the use of a continuous hood-mould, but there are, at each end of the sill, blocks of stone which have not yet been carved. There are also two uncarved blocks of stone at the label-stops of the small window above.

INTERNAL DECORATIONS:

On the lintel of the central door between the porch and the church¹ are carved a cross, an anchor, a heart and a

branch of palm and in Gothic lettering "*BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS CHARITY*". It is interesting that it is recorded that the carving on this lintel was paid for by the men working on the church extension.

Before studying the internal carvings, compare the tracery of the West window with that of the East window and notice the pleasing differences, e.g. four 'spokes' in each roundel instead of three and four cusps at the head of each light instead of two.

THE GREAT WEST WINDOW:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Left label-stop: | Arms of Keble College, Oxford, which was the college of the Revd. J. Paterson Morgan, who was Vicar at the time of the extension. |
| Right label-stop: | Arms of the Diocese of Bangor where the Revd. J. Paterson Morgan attended a theological college. |
| Left sill: | Arms of the Diocese of Ely. |
| Right sill: | Arms of the Archbishopric of Canterbury |

Window at the WEST END of the SOUTH AISLE:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Left label-stop: | The badge of the Perse Boys' School, which, at the time of the church enlargement, only had a hostel and playing field in the parish. |
| Right label-stop: | The badge of the Cambridge and County High School for Boys ² |

Window at the WEST END of the NORTH AISLE:

Left label-stop: The badge of Homerton College

Right label-stop: The monogram of the Morley Memorial School.

(These four schools were then the educational establishments in the parish.)

The corbels under the stone shafts in the NAVE:

There are five on each side and starting from the west end they are:

North side:

1. Fig: the staple diet of Mediterranean countries, known as the 'poor man's food'. (Also a symbol of prosperity.)
2. Lily: The symbol of purity and for the Virgin
3. Mary.
3. Thistle: This is the symbol of earthly sorrow and sin. Genesis 3:15-17 *'Cursed is the ground in sorrow shalt thou eat of it thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth.'*
4. Thorn: The Hawthorn reminds us of the crown of thorns.
5. Oak: Because of its solidity and endurance, is the symbol of the strength and the virtue and of the endurance of the Christian against adversity.

South side:

1. Vine & Grapes: The emblem of Christ from his words 'I am the true vine'.
2. Pomegranate: All seeds make one fruit as all Christians make one Church.
3. Hawthorn: The crown of thorns.

4. Rose: If red the symbol of Martyrdom and if white a symbol of purity.
5. Sycamore: otherwise called the Egyptian fig tree. This was the tree Zacchaeus climbed – Luke 19.

The corbel stones supporting the timbers in the NAVE working from West to East:

North side: King David, St. Agnes, St. Peter, St. Etheldreda

South side: St. Barbara, St. George, St. Anne, St. James

Mr Whitaker, not long before he died, gave a talk to St. John's Branch of the CEMS³ about the carvings which he had done and mentioned during this the names of the models on which he had based the faces of the various saints. It is a pity that no note was made of this at the time. It is remembered, though, that David was modelled on the face of Mr I. G. Elworthy (the first Secretary of the original Executive Committee and for several years a Churchwarden), and one of the other male saints on the face of Mr Edward Baldock who was vergers for many, many years.

St. Barbara's face was modelled on that of Mr Whitaker's daughter – a Barbara.

Windows in the SIDE AISLES:

The small label-stops at these are well-worth studying for many have fruit and flowers hidden among the foliage. Look for the acorns on the south side and the daffodil on the north.

Those at the CLERESTORY windows are much the same.

In the VICAR'S VESTRY – Door to North Aisle – this was originally an outside door and has two large label-stops showing emblems of the Sacrament. One has wheat and the other grapes.

North aisle arch to WAR MEMORIAL CHAPEL:

The three capitals here show acorns, fruit and leaves, and are quite different from those in the corresponding arch on the south side of the church.

Between here and the chancel arch is a large corbel which acts as a springer for the nave arch. This and the corresponding one on the South side are interesting for their thistles and pomegranates and for being the only carvings by Mr Barnsdale which are outside the chancel.

They are probably the ones mentioned at the AGM of the church council on 8th April 1910. He was thanked for some carving he had done as a free-will offering, for no mention was made of them in his estimate.

THE CHANCEL ARCH:

The detached marble shafts with their corbels and capitals are of little interest except as typical pieces of Victoriana.

Aisle arch to the ORGAN CHAMBER:

The three capitals here are of particular interest for they are done in a style which appears nowhere else in the church. They are carved in almost the 'still-leaf' manner. Who did them? A pupil of Mr Whitaker's, maybe.

It is also noticeable that the carving here shows up much whiter than the piers, which are of a light biscuit here as is all the stonework in the first part of the church and the War Memorial Chapel and the Vestries. This is due to the fumes from the gas lighting which was in use until the 1928/29 extension. (This change is most noticeable on the two central piers of the nave, for half of each was incorporated into the temporary west wall of the early church.)

The carvings here, then, must have been done after the church extension – probably a task given to an apprentice learning his trade.

CHANCEL CARVINGS:

It was said at the beginning of these notes that most of the chancel carvings were done by Mr G. H. Barnsdale. Here is his estimate for the work as recorded in the Parish Magazine for July 1909:

	£	s.	d.
45ft run of enrichment round the east end	40	10	0
4 label-stops, N & S windows in Chancel	4	0	0
2 corbels to roof principals	4	10	0
2 bases of columns – chancel arch	24	0	0
2 cluster caps – chancel arch	7	0	0
2 caps – chancel window	4	10	0
3 caps, arches – N. side of chancel	11	0	0
1 cap, centre pier, Aisle Arch (North)	3	0	0
2 caps side piers, Aisle Arch (North)	3	0	0
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£	101	10	0
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Except for the first item, which was paid for by general subscription, the items were paid for by individual members of the congregation. Their names are given in the Magazine – the most interesting of which is for the capital of the central pier on the north side of the chancel which is given as ‘By the Vicarage children -- £5’.

NORTH ARCADE:

The capitals show roses, vine and grapes and pomegranates.

SOUTH ARCADE:

This does not appear in the estimate as it was built later (1914). The capitals show lilies, pomegranates and hawthorn, quite in keeping with the north side, and were done by Mr Whitaker early in 1919.

SIDE WINDOWS:

The label-stops for these show fruit and leaves, as do the two corbels for the roof timbers.

String course in the SANCTUARY:

This is of vine leaves with grapes and wheat ears and Mr Barnsdale didn't quite finish it. It was completed much later (1920) by Mr Whitaker, at a cost of £15.10.0 and it is interesting to note the change in workmanship, which takes place on the east wall about six feet from the corner on the right of the altar.

The work is somewhat coarser and the difference is most noticeable in the size of the grains of wheat.

VESTRIES and WAR MEMORIAL CHAPEL:

There are no carved label-stops inside or outside of any of the windows or doors. A different architect was responsible for this extension from the one responsible for the first part of the building and he merely put a plain label or hood-mould with returned ends, where necessary.

E. HOLT, June 1986

¹ This inside the old main double door which was in use until the new lobby and Community Room extension was opened in 1995. This area now forms part of the baby room and is opened up for weddings and funerals only.

² This is now Hills Road Sixth Form College

³ Church of England Mens' Society



*The wallhanging,
designed by
Rosalind Jones, and
worked by members
of St. John's
congregation, to
celebrate the
Centenary of
St. John's in 1996.*

*A coloured
bookmark is
available.*