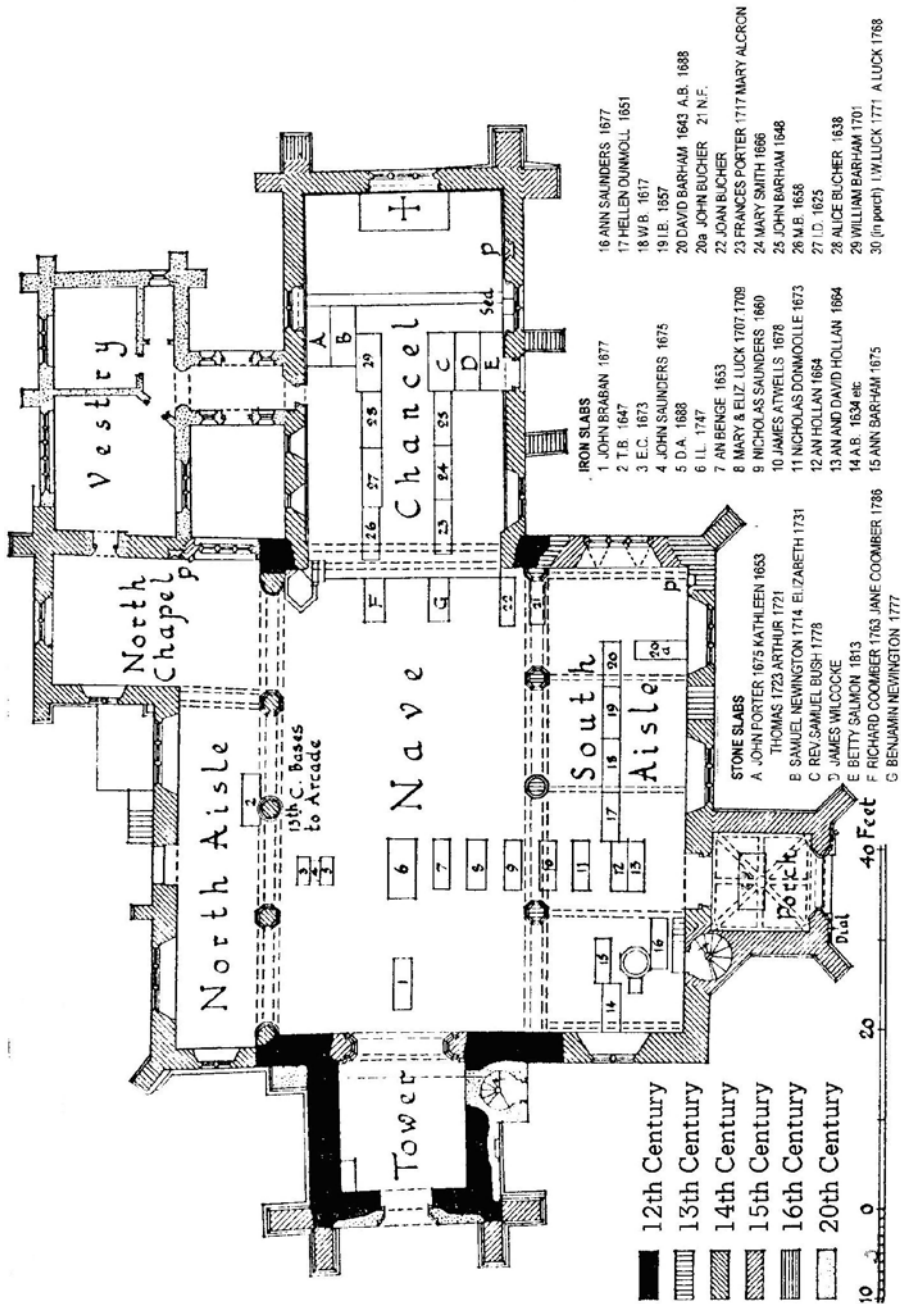


St Peter and St Paul, Wadhurst



Church Guide

A suggested donation of £1 to cover the costs of this guide may be left in the box in the church or at Carillon Cottage in the High Street. The guide is also available to download from our website, which is www.wadhurstparishchurch.org.



Introduction

Welcome to Wadhurst Parish Church. There has been a Christian community in Wadhurst for many centuries, and parts of the present church building are nearly a thousand years old.

The church in Wadhurst today builds on all those centuries of tradition, proclaiming that faith in Jesus Christ is as significant and relevant in the 21st century as it was in all those previous centuries.

Wadhurst and its church stand high on the Weald. The church itself is just over 500 feet above sea level and its slightly crooked spire adds another 124 feet. It can be seen from afar from various points in the surrounding countryside.

As you approached the church, you will have noticed its large size, the warm browns and greys of its walls, made of local sandstone, the “shingles”, or wooden tiles, of its spire and its two-storey porch.

And on first entering the church you are almost certain to have noticed the large number of iron slabs on the floor; for these the church is justly famous, containing as it does more of them (over thirty) than any other church in England. Wadhurst was one of the leading centres of the Wealden iron industry that flourished in the 16th century and continued through the following two centuries, and even into the 19th.

The building itself

Dates

The oldest part of the church is the tower, which goes back at least to the early 12th century (1100s), and perhaps even to the late 11th century. Significant portions of the present building were additions to the church in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries. Although the tower goes back to the early 12th century, the arch between tower and nave is 15th century.

The Norman church that extended eastwards from the tower, probably consisting of an aisleless nave and small chancel only, has disappeared. The side walls of the nave were dismantled in the 13th century when the side aisles were added. In the following (14th) century, the south aisle was widened, the chancel was enlarged and the north transept built. In the 15th century, the clerestory windows were added and the fine porch built, with a parvise, or priest's room, over. (The parvise is accessed by a spiral staircase through a door by the font.) The nave roof was probably reconstructed at about this time, and the present east windows of the side aisles inserted. The roof of the south aisle was rebuilt in the late 16th century, judging by the date, 1592,

inscribed on the support of one of the tie-beams. Nevertheless all these statements about dates should be treated with caution.

In the east wall of the north transept, built, like the chancel, in the 14th century – or it may be a rebuilding of an existing Norman side chapel – is a piscina apparently made from pieces of window tracery; its presence indicates that the transept was used as a chapel.

Beams

Notice the immense oak beams, over 500 years old, of the nave roof; the countryside around Wadhurst has always been well wooded, possessing some of the finest oak trees in England. At the end of the nave comes the broad sweep of the chancel arch, and the view is closed by the east window.

Pillars

The pillars of the two aisles bear very little relation to each other: the north aisle is slightly higher and its arches narrower. Only in the case of one pair of pillars are they opposite one another; on both sides pillars are alternately round and octagonal, except the easternmost pillar on the south side, which reveals itself as octagonal before fading into the wall.

Vestry

From the north transept, a door leads into the vestry, which dates from 1911-12. There is another vestry door in the chancel. Until 1911, the ground floor of the tower was used as the vestry, but in that year there was a serious fire in which the vestry was so badly damaged that the opportunity was taken to build another, in the angle of the north transept and chancel.

Running round the chancel walls is a “string course”, a tubular band of stone whose fussy changes of level, due partly to alterations and enlargements carried out over the years, are rather unfortunate as they call attention to this somewhat crude feature of the church, although it was intended to be decorative.

The windows

The church is bright, having a number of clear glass windows, and a clerestory, the row of windows high up on both sides above the arches.

Clerestory windows

The middle clerestory window on the north side was given in 1903 in memory of F. Field Richards, a former curate, and his wife. It shows Pope Gregory I – “Gregory the Great” – with his emblem, the dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, which was said to perch on his shoulder while he wrote. It was Pope Gregory who sent Augustine on his famous mission to England in the year 597.

The porch

The porch is 15th century, with a fine ribbed vault, in the centre of which is the sacred monogram IHS, the first three letters of the Greek word for Jesus, surrounded by oak leaves. There is yet another iron slab on the floor, and three wall monuments, all to members of the Luck family, who were once considerable landowners in Wadhurst. The elaborate memorial to Mary Georgiana Luck, who died in 1817 at the age of nine, and her mother, d. 1836, with terracotta reliefs and arms below, was worked by Jonathan Harmer, the well known potter of Heathfield. The verse below the inscription for Mary Georgiana reads:

Farewell my Friends and thou my Mother dear,
No longer shed the unavailing Tear;
Your fondest efforts to allay my Pain
Mysterious Heaven in wisdom rendered vain.
Now cold and silent all that once was gay,
So blithe to greet you and your love repay.
I here repose in blissful hope to rise,
And mix with kindred Spirits in the skies;
The Grave our Bark that wafts us to yon shore
Where Child and Parent meet to part no more.

The oak benches here were placed in memory of Annora Watson Smyth, who died in 1912 at the age of ten. This family were the owners of the 19th century Wadhurst Castle from 1844 for about ninety years.

The exterior of the building

Looking at the church itself, notice the rough stonework of parts of the tower, which betrays its age. The buttresses, however, were added in the 15th century, and the grey stone stairway in the south-east angle in the early 19th.

The lofty broach spire, which, seen from some angles is noticeably out of true, is 14th century. (A “broach” spire is usually octagonal in plan and rises from a square tower without an intermediate parapet, the four angles of the tower not covered by the base of the spire being filled with masonry or *broach* built into the sides of the spire.) The 5,400 shingles of this spire are of cedarwood. The weathervane bears the date 1699 and the initials TD and RC, those of the then churchwardens Thomas Duplock and Richard Comber. The flag of the weather vane is of brass, the rest of wrought iron. According to records, the spire has been struck by lightning no fewer than six times – in or about 1575, 1595, 1631, 1679, 1850, 1873. Most of the building itself was re-roofed in 1978 with Bradstone Cotswold slates.

The Royal Arms

Against the blocked up doorway in the north aisle is a small oak communion table dated 1638, while above are the Royal Arms, painted to mark the silver jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in 1977 and formally erected at a ceremony attended by Richmond Herald.



John and Judith Legas

John Legas was a wealthy ironmaster, who lived at the Old Vicarage in the High Street and who built Hill House above it. His wife Judith was some 14 years older than her husband, and they had no children. Their joint memorial may be seen on the wall to the right (north) side of the tower arch, bearing an inscription and their coat of arms, or rather, the arms of Saunders appear on her half of the shield, while his half is blank; close examination reveals that this bore arms that were later obliterated. The reason for this is a mystery. It is possible that when it became known that the forge he had owned was selling cannon not only to the British Admiralty, in accordance with contract, but also to French privateers at more lucrative prices, it was decided to demonstrate disapproval in this way. The discovery was made during the time of his successor at the forge, Richard Tapsell, husband of Legas's niece, and there is no conclusive evidence that Legas had done anything wrong. Perhaps the arms were erased by someone who considered he was simply not entitled to them, since no record can be traced of a grant of arms to him or anyone bearing the name Legas. In any case, his eulogistic inscription has been left intact.

War Memorials

The glass in the 15th century window at the east end of the Chapel shows Christ in Glory (Rev 7: 9) and was inserted in memory of 114 men of the parish who fell in the First World War. Their names are on the panels on either side; an especially black day for Wadhurst was 9th May 1915, when no fewer than 24 of her sons, all but one of them serving in the Royal Sussex Regiment, were killed at the battle of Aubers Ridge in France. Wadhurst is now twinned with Aubers, and details may be found on the Wadhurst website.

The three painted panels in front of the window commemorate the 33 men who fell on active service in the Second World War. They are named in the window to the south.

East window

Above the altar, the east window is filled with late Victorian stained glass.

Window near the font

The glass in the window west of the font in memory of Olive Maude Roberts, depicting Christ among the children (Mark 10.13-16), dates from the end of the 19th century and was made from a design by the Pre-Raphaelite artist Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

Fixtures and Fittings

Font

The font itself is probably 13th century, which means that it has been in use here for at least 700 years.

The lectern

The lectern was given in memory of Frances Anne, widow of the Rev. Frederick Gardiner, and their children. Frederick's brother was the Rev. Robert Barlow Gardiner, vicar of Wadhurst from 1818 to 1846, while his eldest child was Frances Elizabeth, wife of William Courthope, 1807-66, who was a historian of Wadhurst and fulfilled the roles of Rouge Pursuivant and later Somerset Herald, and distantly related to the Courthopes of Whiligh, Wadhurst's squires and benefactors. The Courthopes resided at Whiligh from 1512. The house stands just over the boundary in the neighbouring parish of Ticehurst, but much of the estate is in Wadhurst, and there were in any case Courthopes in Wadhurst long before the 16th Century. Oaks from their estate were always believed to have been used for the roof of Westminster Hall in the 14th century and were certainly used in its repairs after the World Wars.

The altar

The front of the altar itself, erected in 1932, has beautiful carvings by Rosier of Frant. Above the altar itself hangs a cross of iron, while to the sides are two medallions of the same material, one depicting corn and the other grapes, symbolic of the body and blood of Christ. The material the cross and medallions are made of recalls the iron industry, once so important in the life of Wadhurst.

Immediately to the right of the altar, are the remains of the stepped 14th century sedilia, three seats where priests sat during services, while alongside is a piscina of the same period, for washing sacred vessels.

Organ and choirstalls

Also on the north side of the chancel is the organ console, installed in 1932. Several stops were added in 1970 and the console was reconditioned in 1975. The pipes were built in the late 19th century and were ranged on either side of

the chancel until being rebuilt in 1933 and moved to their present position at the west end. The choir stalls date from 1913: Sir George Barham of Snape, who claimed kinship with the ironmaster Barhams, gave them “in pious memory of his ancestors whose bodies lie within these walls”. The use of the word “ancestors” is not really correct, as Sir George was their kinsman by collateral descent only. However, Sir George took a close interest in local affairs and was a great benefactor of Wadhurst, and should be allowed a slight excursion into fantasy.

The altar in the Chapel

The frontal was given by her parents in memory of Margaret Lambert, née Mynors, who died in 1970.

Above the altar is a painting of the Resurrection. It has been suggested that this painting, from a design by Martin Travers, may have been inspired by the painting of the same subject by the Italian Renaissance artist Andrea del Castagno (d. 1457), of which it is strongly reminiscent.

The belfry and ringing chamber

The tower of the church was built in the 12th century and has contained bells for hundreds of years. Although there was formerly a ringing gallery, the bells are now rung from the ground floor and this means that each bell has a rope which is 75 feet long. The belfry contains a ring of eight bells, which are considered to be some of the most melodious and easy-going in Sussex, very popular with visiting ringers.

The bells

The oldest bell currently in use is No. 5 and bears the inscription “Iohn Hodson ma[d]e me 1670. Nathaniel Iohnson Iohn Barham Chvrch Wardens”. John Hodson started as a carpenter who turned to bell founding in 1653, and was the principal founder in London between 1653 and 1693. Bells 4, 6, 7 and 8 were all cast at the Whitechapel Foundry in London and bear the names of the different owners of the foundry at the time they were cast. The Whitechapel Foundry is Britain’s oldest manufacturing company, having been established in 1570 and having cast bells on the same site ever since. Bell No 4 was first cast there in 1752, recast in 1925. No 6 was cast in 1753 and No 7 in 1764. The tenor bell, No 8, which weighs in at 12.5 cwt (over half a ton) was cast in 1872.

The newest bells are the lightest bells in the tower and were cast in Taylor’s Bell Foundry in Loughborough. No 3 was recast in 1954 from a bell originally cast in Whitechapel in 1764, with 1 and 2 added the following year.

stronger character than her husband, and prevailed upon him to leave the estate to her nephew George Egles rather than to his rightful heirs. Under the terms of his inheritance, Egles was required to erect this monument at a cost of £300, which he did in 1730. He also contrived to run through the rest of the money and died bankrupt in 1752.

Anne Courthope

On the same wall, in the sanctuary, is a monument to Anne Courthope, d. 1689, wife of George Courthope, d. 1691. They were, we are told, "wise, & careful parents of 14 dutiful Children all Educated in ye pure Orthodox Religion of ye Church of England".

The Foley family

Also on the south wall of the sanctuary is a brass in memory of Caroline, the widow of Rev. John Foley (vicar of Wadhurst 1846 to 1886). She died in 1898. Six of their children, struck down by diphtheria in the 1850s, are commemorated in five windows, three on the north side of the chancel and two on the south, only the latter retaining any of their original stained glass.

Mary Davison, nee Dunmoll

Among the monuments on the north wall of the sanctuary there is one erected by "her sad husband" to Mary Davison, née Dunmoll, who died in 1651 at the age of 31. There is a kneeling figure in a frame of alabaster and grey marble, and an inscription in verse:

Although the Earth thy Corps detain
Yet shall wee once more meet againe
For to rejoice and praises singe
To God in Christ our glorious King.

The monument is surmounted by their coats of arms: a stag for Davison and a pelican for Dunmoll. The pelican is wounding itself; according to legend, such is the love of the pelican for its offspring that it pierces its breast to feed them with its own blood. Thus it came to symbolize the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, and, by extension, the Eucharist.

John Tompsett

On the west wall of the north transept is a handsome monument to John Tompsett, d. 1820, and his wife Ann, d. 1802, of Scrag Oak. Nicholas Barham (1708-88) sold Scrag Oak to James Tompsett in 1741, and it remained in Tompsett hands for over 100 years.

Monuments & War Memorials

John Newington

The Newington family of Towngate were an important family in Wadhurst. Towngate (now “Downgate”) is in the ecclesiastical parish of Tidebrook, which lies to the east of Wadhurst on the way to Mayfield. Tidebrook was created out of Wadhurst and Mayfield in 1856, although since 1951 the benefice has been united with Wadhurst. In 1856, too, Tidebrook church was built, on land given by John Joseph Newington, also of Towngate. The six eagles of the fine Newington arms may also be seen on the wall to the left of the wrought-iron screen at the west end of Wadhurst church, at the base of a memorial commemorating John Newington of Hightown, d. 1780. Hightown stood on the site now occupied by the modern house called Wadhurst Park, which stands high up about 2 miles as the crow flies south of Wadhurst. There are three more Newington memorials on the south wall, above and to east and west of the south door.



Thomas Whitfeild

As we go up the south aisle, notice on its south wall the monument of 1631 to Thomas Whitfeild (or Whitfield), who although not an ironmaster was at the time the largest landowner in the parish, and who gave “3 almes howses & twelve cords of wood for 6 poore families yearly & 10 pounds yearly to the use of the poore”. (A cord of wood is 128 cubic feet.)

John Barham

On the south wall of the chancel there is a huge and ornate marble monument in memory of John Barham, d. 1723. Grandson of the builder of Shoemiths, he rebuilt the house in 1695, was sheriff of Sussex in 1702, and left “five pounds pr ann: for instructing Twelve Children of this Parish to read, whose parents are not of Ability” (that is, unable to pay). This endowment is still disbursed as a separate charity. John and his wife Lucy had two children, a son, John, who died in infancy and a daughter, Elizabeth, who died “of a consumption” in 1712 at the age of sixteen. Lucy seems to have been a

The ringing chamber screen

The wrought-iron screen by Duncan Wilson between the tower and nave was erected in 1957; the lambs and hops represent local farming activities, while the mythical footless martlets, emblems of Sussex, represent the swallow, perpetuating the old belief that swallows are for ever on the wing, even when sleeping, and thus have no need of feet.

The iron and stone slabs

The iron slabs are mainly 17th century, a period which saw a huge increase in the local iron industry. The way the slabs were made was to prepare a bed of sand and to press into it a block of wood already carved with the names, dates and inscriptions, coats of arms and so on that were required. This was then lifted off and molten iron poured over the sand, filling the indentations made by the carvings. When the iron had cooled and solidified it was turned over, any sand adhering to it being brushed off, and the slab was then ready to be taken to the church and lowered into place. In some cases the letters of the inscription were carved and pressed into the sand individually, slats being used to keep them in line.

The numbers in the following refer to the plan on the inside front cover.

Barham family

On the north side of the font is an iron slab to Ann Barham (15), 1655-75, granddaughter of David Barham the builder of Snape, a well-known house in the parish. The Barhams may be considered the chief "ironmaster family" of Wadhurst, commemorated individually by no fewer than eight slabs in the church and by the huge wall monument in the chancel, and collectively by the choir stalls (see above).

Of the iron slabs in the south aisle, always referred to locally as the Chapel, the westernmost is that of Hellen (Helen) Dunmoll (17), d. 1651, David Barham's daughter. The next commemorates David's elder brother William (18), d. 1617, and the next recalls their nephew John Barham (19), d. 1657, once the owner of Scrag Oak, a house in the southern area of the parish which may date partly from as early as the 15th century, or even from the late 14th. It was his cousin, another John, whose name appears on the bell made by John Hodson in 1670. A further slab commemorates David Barham himself (20), and, since his mother was a Courthope, displays the Courthope arms. The initials A.B. and the date 1688 scratched in at the foot are those of his daughter-in-law Ann.

In the chancel are slabs commemorating Mary Barham (26) d.1658 and William Barham (29) d.1701 (the mother and brother respectively of the John Barham of slab 19). William's slab includes the three muzzled bears of the Barham arms (pictured); the name was originally Berham, and the bears are a pun on the name. Yet another slab (25) commemorates John Barham of Shoosmithes (Shoesmiths), d. 1648, son of the builder of the house.



Saunders family

The memorial slab at the centre of the cross aisle (6) bears the inscription "I.L. 1747". It is unique in this church, as it is the only slab whose letters or figures, instead of being raised, are indented and filled with brass. It commemorates Judith Legas, née Saunders, (a "J" was written "I" in those days), the wife of the wealthy ironmaster John Legas, who lived at the Old Vicarage in the High Street. They also have a joint memorial on the wall.

Judith's cousin John, who died in childhood in 1675, is commemorated by a small slab (4) to the north.

Nicholas Saunders (9) (d. 1660, and grandfather to Judith Legas) was the ironmaster-owner of Great Pell, a house still standing today. The slab of Nicholas's widow Ann (16), d. 1677, is next to the font, on its south side. She was John's grandmother and it was she who laid down the iron slab in his memory, two years before her own death.

John Braban

This slab (1) commemorating John Braban, d. 1677, demonstrates a feature common to many of the slabs, on which the craftsmen continued with the lettering of the text right up to the end of each line, no matter where it came in a name or word: in this case we have the initial "S" of "Salehurst" at the end of a line and the rest of the place name ("alehurst") at the start of the next; we find many similar oddities here and elsewhere.

Nicholas Fowle

The screen separating the Chapel from the nave partly hides an iron slab (21) faintly inscribed "N.F." with no date, but with the arms of the family of Fowle. As many of the Fowles were called Nicholas it is impossible even to guess

which is commemorated here. The Fowles were another ironmaster family of Wadhurst: Nicholas Fowle, ironfounder, built the house called Riverhall, which still stands today to the north-west of Wadhurst, close to the boundary with Frant. His initials can be made out on a doorway on the south side of the house, together with the date, 1591.

Benjamin Newington

On the floor below the chancel steps is a slab (G) of Purbeck marble (as opposed to cast iron) in memory of Benjamin Newington of Towngate, d. 1777. Four wall monuments remember further members of that family (see later).

Joan Bucher

Through the screen is the brass lectern, partly covering a good iron slab (22) commemorating Joan Bucher, d. 1638.

Mary Smith

In the chancel, a rather crude slab (24) commemorates Mary Smith, d. 1666, mother of John Smith, vicar of Wadhurst from 1662 to 1714, whose son became the owner of Great Pell.

Frances Porter

A better example (23) is that of Frances Porter, d. 1717, the wife of Thomas Porter, the owner of Dewhurst, then an important estate on the north-west part of the parish. Dewhurst is still there, but the estate has long since been broken up, and the present house is in 19th century Italianate style.

Rev Samuel Bush

Also in the chancel are three more stone slabs, one of Purbeck marble (C) commemorating the Rev Samuel Bush, vicar 1743-83.

Rev James Wilcocke

The slab (D) commemorating the Rev James Wilcocke (correctly Wilcocks or Wilcox), d. 1662, is black marble and is inscribed "indignissimus hujus loci minister" ("most unworthy minister of this place"); but the inscription goes on to say that he and his beloved wife Mary sleep in the same tomb in confident expectation of redemption: "come, Lord Jesus, come quickly". The fact is, however, that Wilcocks was "intruded", that is, foisted upon an unwilling parish during the time of the Commonwealth because he was prepared to take services in accordance with Puritan rites which were alien and unpalatable to a Church of England congregation, and it is not unlikely that some considered him "indignissimus".

Betty Salmon

Betty Salmon (E) was the mother of the Rev. William Salmon, vicar 1804-18.

The 19th century clock is capable of striking the hours and quarters, but is in fact silent. It was thoroughly overhauled during 1972-4, when an electric winding mechanism was installed, although all the original works remain intact.

The west door of the tower, probably inserted in the 15th century, was reformed in 1812; this date appears in the spandrel to the right of it, while to left and right are the churchwardens' initials: JT for John Tompsett (see the monument in the north transept) and SB for Samuel Baldwin. On the north side of the tower is a small Norman window to the belfry, with twin lights divided by a column.

*Based on original text and research by Oliver Mason
and updated during 2008.*

We hope you have enjoyed visiting our church. Before you leave, please pray for the people of Wadhurst and for those who worship here week by week. By doing so you will forge a link in a chain of prayer stretching back nearly a thousand years in this place.



ST RICHARD'S PRAYER

Thanks be to thee, O Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits which thou hast given us,
for all the pains and insults which thou hast borne for us:
O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,
may we know thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly,
and follow thee more nearly, day by day. Amen.

St Richard was Bishop of Chichester 1245-54