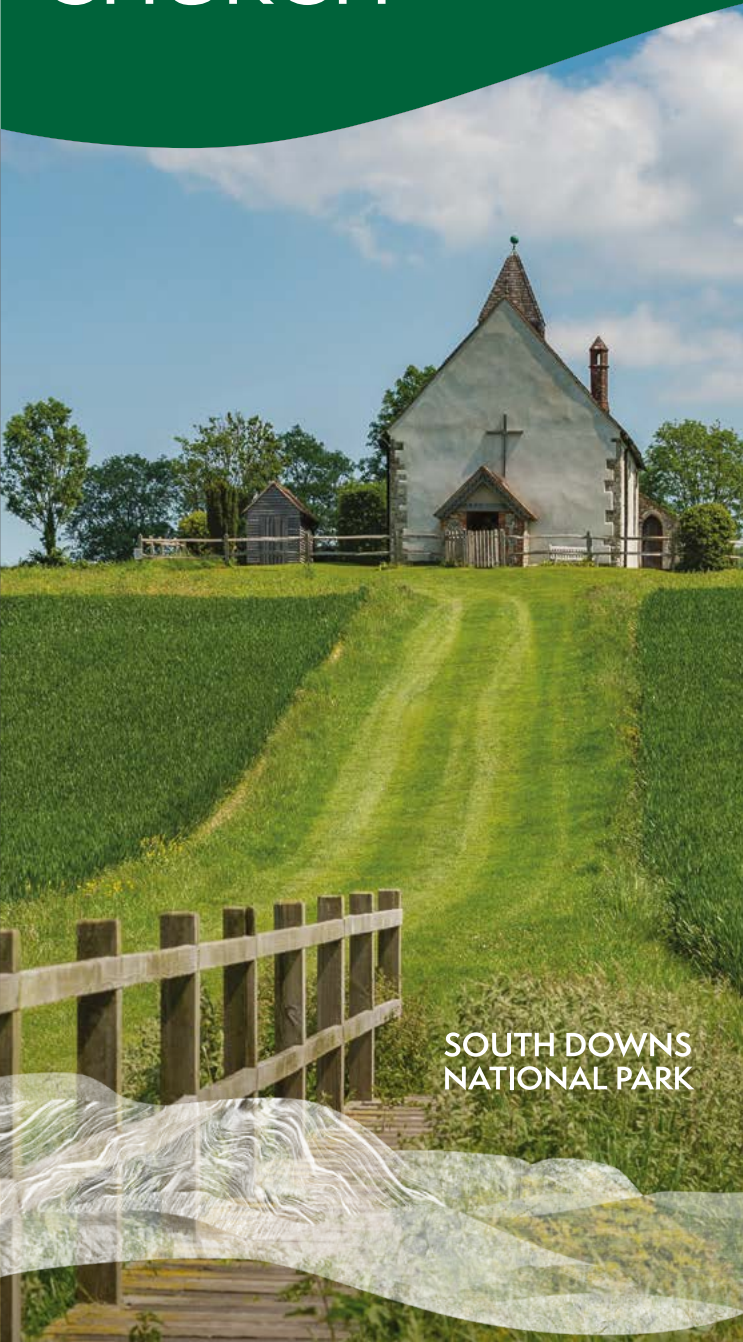


ST HUBERT'S CHURCH



SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK



© SDNPA/Mischa Haller

WELCOME TO ST HUBERT'S, 'THE LITTLE CHURCH IN THE FIELD'.

Set in the surrounding Bronze Age landscape of the South Downs National Park, the earliest recorded reference to this church is from 1053 but its foundations show evidence of an earlier history, with the north and west walls likely to date from the 900s and re-use of Roman material in the arches.

1 The Font

As you enter the church, see the font on your left – this is similar to that in St. Michael's church just over the hill at Chalton, suggesting a single craftsman or donor was responsible for both. It dates from around 1400. If you shine a torch upwards from under the blank shield faces on the font, you will see carved patterns which were thought to help capture evil spirits as they came out of the baby at baptism – an interesting fusion of Christian practice and magical superstition.

2 A Modern Fresco

Above the chancel arch you'll see the beautiful and bright fresco which was painted to celebrate the millennium in 2000. As a modern wall-painting in a heritage church, this is unique to Idsworth. At the centre is a 'Christ in Majesty' set in the traditional form of an 'oval mandorla frame' which was the usual representation for the chancel arch in the 13th century, beautifully linking the modern and ancient aspects of this church.

Outside that, it tells the story of a vision of St. Peter when he saw God open a cloth containing animals over the earth. The artist, Fleur Kelly, painted Idsworth church and the animals and people who lived near the church at that time. You can even see a scene based on a real wedding at the church while the painting was being created.



Did You Know?

Small rural churches such as St Hubert's would have been entirely covered in painted decoration until the impact of the Reformation in the 16th century decreed that paintings be destroyed – often by whitewashing over them.



3 Paintings in the Chancel

Notice the uphill slant as you walk through the nave and through the arch into the chancel. This was probably a later addition dating from the period after the church was given to Tarrant Crawford nunnery, by Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, wife of King Henry II.

On your left, on the north wall, is one of the most important wall paintings in England. It dates from approximately 1330. The coloured band in the

centre is an elaborate example of framing which divides the painting into upper and lower levels. The lower scene depicts the final scenes of the life of St. John the Baptist. The other scenes show John's arrest by Herod, the dance of Salome and her request for John's head, and John's beheading.

Paintings in the chancel tend to be more biblical or theological, providing material for the priest's sermons and to reflect on his duties. St. John the Baptist was a preacher

and a baptizer, roles that the priest of Idsworth would have been trying to emulate for his parishioners.

The upper part of the painting has provoked discussion since its discovery. Originally identified as the rather obscure legend of St. Hubert and the Hairy Anchorite, it led to the change of the church's dedication from St. Peter and St. Paul to St. Hubert in 1864. The 'hairy anchorite' is the figure seen towards the right on all fours, with the halo of

a saint but an animal-like appearance. However, an alternative theory proposed is that it is the early life of St. John the Baptist, tying it in with the lower scenes. Matthew's biblical account of the life of John includes his life in the wilderness of Judea where he specifically cites his wearing of a camel skin, another 'hairy' covering.



4 Saints Above the Altar

In the window recesses above the altar are special paintings of St. Peter and St. Paul. This location in the chancel by the altar is the typical place for paintings of the patrons of a church, reminding us of Idsworth's original dedication to these saints.

The paintings would have formed part of the special worship of the saints on their saint's day, when the parish would have had special masses and processions, using the processional door at the west end of the church. These days were called 'festa ferianda' and would have been a highlight to the local people as a rare non-working feasting day. The saints appear holding their attributes (the keys of heaven by Peter, the book and sword for Paul) painted in 'fictive niches' – the backdrop painted to look like a masonry recess, reminding us again that, in a rural parish, painting was far cheaper than real sculpture.

5 St Hubert and the Stag

The altar is the original stone altar of the medieval church, discovered in the floor and re-erected in 1913. Look up at the stained glass roundel in the East Window, a gift from the architect, Goodhart-Rendell, that same year. The scene depicts St Hubert and the stag, together with a representation of St Hubert's chapel. (This roundel was re-set into the new window frame during restoration works in 2019 when the outer East Wall was also re-rendered.)

The ceiling above was restored in 1913 and contains 13 medallions of religious symbolism, including the 'pelican in piety' – a pelican pecking drops of her own blood to feed her chicks which is a popular representation of the Passion of Jesus.



7 Pews and Processions

The way the church is used has changed greatly over time. In Medieval times, until the 14th and 15th centuries, there wouldn't have been any pews so people would have stood, generally men to the south, women to the north. There was also much greater use of processions in services and rituals. If you look at the west entrance door, you will see that it sits within a larger outline of an ancient doorway, large enough to process through with a raised cross on feast days. Circulating through the church required additional doors – looking at the north wall, you will see the outline of a door likely used for just such purposes.



6 The Pulpit

Turning back towards the nave, look at the pulpit. This dates from the early 17th century and although it is known to have been positioned in several different places, its current place is probably original as the Reformation sought to bring the word of God amongst the people, resulting in pulpits being placed centrally in naves.



8 The View from Outside

Walking round the church exterior you can see the north door is now blocked up, showing the change of use. As you come to the south west corner of the church, you'll see inscribed in the stone work a 'mass dial' or 'scratch dial'. Looking similar to a sun dial, it is still unclear exactly what purpose these had but it is thought they relate to the times of services.

Can you Find...

...the smallest window? It's the oldest window in the church, dating from the Norman period.



We hope you enjoyed your visit to St. Hubert's today, please visit idsworthchurchfriends.org for more information about this special place, together with details of The Idsworth Church Friends Trust.

Special thanks to historian Tanya Heath for her contribution to this leaflet.



TAKE THE LEAD

For a safe and fun visit with your dog please remember to keep them on a lead around livestock, horses and wildlife. Always bag and bin your dog poo – any public bin will do!

GETTING HERE

By bus: There are regular services to Rowlands Castle, visit traveline.info/se

By rail: Rowlands Castle is the nearest train station. Check nationalrail.co.uk for details.

CONTACT

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