THE PARISH OF WADDESDON

Waddesdon, Upper Winchendon, Westcott, Fleet Marston

OPEN DAYS 11am – 3pm

Friday 3 & Saturday 4

October 2025

300TH Anniversary

3rd October 1725

following Ordination in Oxford

Rev John Wesley preached on Job 3 v17

at Mattins, here in St Mary's Fleet Marston





SERVICE OF CELEBRATION

Sunday 5 October 2025 3pm

St Mary Magdalene, Upper Winchendon HP18 0EP

Church of St Mary, Fleet Marston, Buckinghamshire
by Roy Tricker, church enthusiast, historian and lay canon, formerly with The Churches Conservation Trust

The name Fleet Marston indicates an enclosure or settlement ('tun') near a marsh and a stream (Fleet). Its former parish occupied some 934 acres (378 hectares), forming a narrow strip of Buckinghamshire which stretched roughly north–south and was sandwiched between Waddesdon to the west and the former parish of Quarrendon (where the church of St Peter has long been in ruins) to the east. The parish was once bisected by the Roman Akeman Street on its way from Verulamium (St Albans) to Alcester. It is now crossed by the A41 trunk road and by the former Great Central Railway line between Aylesbury and Brackley.

The church of St Mary stands a little to the east of what was the centre of its parish, which had its own rector until 1933. He ministered to a population of 69 in 1901 and only 42 in 1931. From1933 Fleet Marston was served by the Rector of Waddesdon and Upper Winchendon. After a period of very little use, the little church was vested in what is now The Churches Conservation Trust in 1973. Its parish, with a population of 34 in 1997, has been united with Waddesdon, where the church of St Michael is now the parish church.

Fleet Marston church is becoming increasingly known and visited by people interested in **John Wesley**, the founder of Methodism and one of the spearheads of the Evangelical Revival. Recent research has shown that he preached his **first sermon** in **Fleet Marston church** on the morning of **Sunday 3 October 1725** – a fortnight after having been made deacon in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. He preached at nearby Upper Winchendon in the afternoon. The text was from the Book of Job, chapter 3, verse 17

and he delivered this sermon again on 12 February 1727 at South Leigh, Oxon, recording in his Journal that there it was 'that I preached my first sermon' – which indeed he did, but not for the first time.

Situation and exterior

St Mary's stands in complete isolation upon its hillock, about 250 yards (229m) walk across a field from the busy A41. Until 1772 there was a manor house nearby and aerial pictures show cropmarks which suggest evidence of a former community. In the 15th century the common land was enclosed, making 50 or so parishioners homeless and it is said that this may have been the start of the community's decline.

The church stands elevated above its surroundings, within a roughly circular churchyard, indicating a possibly Saxon or even earlier site, with pleasant views across the lush Buckinghamshire countryside towards Waddesdon Manor to the west and other villages and their churches to the north and east.

This small church comprises nave, chancel and north porch. It has grey stone walls, strengthened by buttresses, including a large central buttress at the west end, and red tiled roofs. At the west end of the north nave wall is a projection which once supported a wooden bell turret. The present small 19th-century bell turret, which squats upon the apex of the nave roof at its west end, has cream rendered sides and a tiled and gabled roof.

Although the core of the building is probably Norman, its windows and doorways date mostly from the 14th century. The three single trefoil-headed windows are work of the early part of the century, whilst the two light south chancel window was added towards the end.

The large four-light south nave window and the single north-west window were probably added during the late 15th century.
The porch shelters a 14th-century north doorway, which has one of its two carved corbel heads remaining. Above it is a 15th-century niche, which was built to contain a statue.
The porch and the east wall of the chancel were rebuilt in 1868–69, when the church was restored to the designs of Sir George Gilbert Scott.

Interior
The nave of this small church measures 39ft (11.9m) long and 14ft (4.2m) wide and the chancel 19ft (5.8m) by 13 1⁄2 ft (4.1m).
The interior is simply proportioned and furnished, the leaning walls betraying the early origins of the building.
The nave is now furnished with an assortment of 19th-century **benches** from other churches. Sir Gilbert Scott's restoration in 1868–69 removed the plaster ceiling to reveal the grand, and once beautifully coloured, 15th-century timbers of the **nave roof**, where sturdy tie beams support pairs of queen posts which, in turn, support arch-braced collar beams. The roof is further strengthened by arched wind-braces at the sides. The renewed **chancel roof** retains one ancient cambered tie beam, supporting a later king post.
Scott probably also designed the **choir stalls** and the north-western **vestry screen**.
The circular stem of the font may have been fashioned in the 13th century but the crude tub-shaped bowl which it supports could be even earlier.

The **chancel arch** is a beautiful piece of early-14th-century craftsmanship, as is indicated by the ball-flowers (four on each side) which decorate the capitals supporting the arch.
The **stone bracket** in the north wall of the nave helped to support the rood loft which, before its removal during the Reformation, jutted out across the nave in front of the chancel arch.
The tastefully carved **wooden lectern** is a memorial to the Fleet Marston people who perished in the First World War (1914–18), whose names are carved in relief on the front of the bookrest. It was fashioned by Mr M R Jones in 1921.
The pulpit from which John Wesley preached in 1725 has long since gone and so has its 19th-century successor: only the stone **pulpit base** of 1868–69 remains.
The sill of the **north chancel window** has been lowered. May be this served as a low-side window, through which a small sanctus bell was rung at the climax of the daily Mass, so that workers in the fields could pause and join in prayer.
In the wall on this side is a rectangular **aumbry** (a cupboard, where communion vessels were stored); its opening is rebated for a former door.
In the sill of the south-east chancel window is a tiny sexfoil (six-lobed) piscina drain, into which was poured the water from the washing of the priest's hands at the Eucharist.

Three **wall plaques** commemorate past Fleet Marston residents.
On the north chancel wall is an attractive plaque, with a cherub at its apex, to Agnes Hoffman, wife of a former rector, who died in 1639.
On the south nave wall, towards its east end, is commemorated Thomas Markham (d.1803), also his two wives, Mary and Martha.
To the west of the south nave window is a plaque to Thomas Grace who died, aged 32, in 1823. It bears this inscription:

Reader! Thou lookest upon the monument of a
pure Christian.
Art thou a Christian? Rejoice; that a Glorified Spirit
Hath burst from its earthly prison.
Wouldst thou be a Glorified Spirit?
Go, and clothe thyself in the Christian Graces,
Which ripened him for the eternal world
Of Righteousness before he had shed the
first blossoms of life.
He went to his Grave in peace
And to his God in Glory.

In the turret over the west end of nave hangs the single **bell**. It was cast by Edward Hall of Drayton Parslow in 1746, is inscribed with the name of John Woodman, churchwarden, and has a diameter of 151⁄2 in (39.3cm).

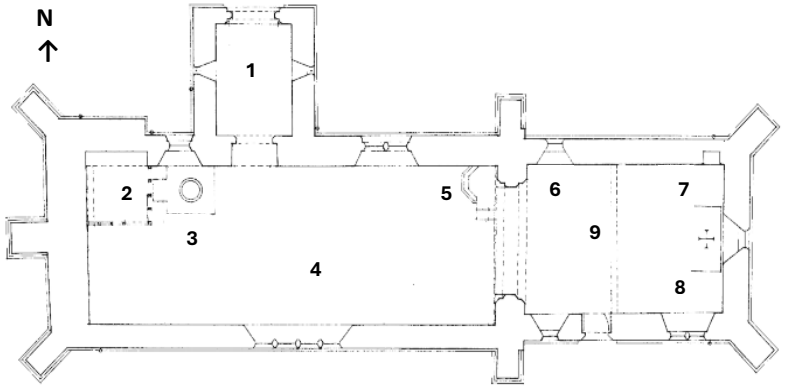
Churches Conservation Trust

is the national charity protecting historic churches at risk.

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www.visitchurches.org.uk
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1 Porch
2 Vestry
3 Font
4 Nave
5 Pulpit Base
6 Low-side window
7 Aumbry
8 Piscina in window sill
9 Chancel



Church of St Mary, Fleet Marston, Buckinghamshire

Please use Rev John Wesley's words as you pray, reflect and continue your faith journey

I build on Christ, the rock of ages; on His sure mercies described in His word, and on His promises, all which I know are yea and Amen

I the chief of sinners am, but Jesus died for me

Prayer is where the action is

God does nothing except in response to believing prayer

Do all the good you can
by all the means you can
in all the ways you can
in all the places you can
at all times you can
to all the people you can
as long as ever you can

I look upon the whole world as my parish

"The best of all is, God is with us" were John Wesley's last words

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further information

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