

The Friends of the Church

The Friends organise educational and other events for the community and raise money to maintain and improve the Church. While some of us are churchgoers, many are not. There is no membership fee and we warmly welcome new members. See: friendsofspc.org

Opening hours and services

The Church is open every day. See: steyningparishchurch.org for opening hours and service times.

Find us at

Steyning Parish Church
Vicarage Lane, Steyning BN44 3YQ



Produced by the Friends of Steyning Parish Church
Registered charity number 1169773

Tours and visits

Take the audio tour of the interior, free of charge, to understand more of the Church's dramatic history. It is best done from inside the building, but you can also do it from your own home. An illustrated guide is available in the Church, price £4.

Scan the QR code or see: friendsofspc.org/tour



There is also an audio tour of the churchyard created by Steyning Museum, see <https://tinyurl.com/3baznvwp> (or scan the QR code on left) where you can learn about the fascinating lives of former Steyning residents, for example Cowerson the smuggler, shot by a Customs officer in 1832. You will need to download the Echoes app to view the tour.

There is much more information on many features of the church and its history on steyningparishchurch.org

Accessibility

We are fundraising for better disabled access and improved facilities. The main entrance leads down a flight of steps with a banister for support. Step-free access is through the north door (round the east end of the Church) which is not generally open except for services and events. Should you need level access at other times please ring 01903 813276 in the first instance.

Fundraising

The Friends of the Church have raised money to improve the church, particularly for the use of the community. We helped to pay for our excellent internal lighting (photo below) and sound system. We welcome donations; the current project aims to provide better disabled access, more toilets and a servery.



Steyning Museum

A minute's walk from the Church and housing a huge variety of local artefacts, it has fine sculpture and exhibits about the Church, with lots for children to see. Entrance free. Check opening times: steyningmuseum.org.uk

DISCOVER

history, architecture and sculpture

Steyning Parish Church

of St Andrew & St Cuthman



According to Pevsner's *Buildings of England*, Steyning Parish Church is 'certainly the best Norman church in Sussex', and 'among the best in the whole country'.

We (the Friends of the Church) want everyone in Steyning and beyond to enjoy the history, the splendour of the nave and the early 12th century sculpture. Other remarkable features are the font in which Steyning babies have been baptised for 850 years, the intricately carved Tudor screen, and the stained glass windows.

Apart from almost daily services for its thriving congregation, the Church is frequently used for community events such as concerts, children's half-term sessions and more. Given its exceptional acoustics and lighting, it is perfect for many types of events and currently the Church is planning major improvements to its facilities to make them even better.



Above: Concert in Church, note the magnificent carved arches.

Left: 'Fun with the Tudors', marking the 500th anniversary of the Tudor screen.

History of the Church

The first church here was built around 700 A.D. Legend says it was founded by a shepherd boy called Cuthman who brought his mother across the Downs on a cart and vowed to found a church where the rope broke. Our stained glass window by the Arts and Crafts artist Christopher Whall represents the story as recounted in the *Life of St Cuthman*, written in around 1100, four hundred or so years after Cuthman's probable lifetime. It shows him with his sheep and in this section building the first church on this site, a wooden stave church.



The truth is likely to be more prosaic, that Cuthman was someone despatched here by the then King of Wessex to found a church in the course of the conversion of Sussex to Christianity at the end of the 7th century. By 858 when King Aethelwulf of Wessex, father of Alfred the Great, was buried here there was probably already a stone church; but nothing now remains of any church built before 1100.

Our present building is truly Norman; not only was it built after the Norman Conquest but by the Abbey of Fécamp, on the north coast of Normandy. After the Norman Conquest in 1066 the manor and Church of Steyning were given to the monks of the Abbey, who brought stone from the Caen quarries across the Channel in boats.



The building began in about 1090 and finished around 1175. Our ancient entrance door, by far the oldest church door in Sussex, also dates from the late 12th century.

At that point the Church looked very different from now (see drawing below), with a tower at its centre, transepts (rectangular wings) each side and a long east end. All this was allowed to fall down at the end of the 16th century, after the Reformation.

All that remains of the east end today are the two crossing arches (marked in grey in the plan). Our earliest surviving sculpture is on the south aisle archway and dates from about 1100. It has Norman and Viking motifs around the capitals (at the top of the column on the right) including two pairs of lions sharing a head. Beneath it is a scene of working people in a relief, almost unique in Europe in that it is in the middle of a column.



Winchester has a number of features which are only found there and in our Church.

In 1414, during the 100 Years War with France, King Henry V decided to confiscate all the properties of French abbeys, including Steyning, and gave them to the Abbey of Syon in Middlesex. The Abbess paid thirteen shillings and fourpence every year (worth about £420 now) towards the maintenance of the Church. But in 1536-9 this stopped as Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries. (Ironically we have in the Church a screen which commemorates his marriage to Catherine of Aragon whom he had married twenty years earlier.)

In 1577 Queen Elizabeth sent instructions to repair the east end but in the 1590s it was all demolished, including the tower. In the early 1600s our present tower was built at the west end of the Church.

In 1864 the crossing arches were in danger of collapse and there was a major rescue operation to preserve the Church. Our east window and the marble reredos (behind the altar) were installed at that time.

