



## About St John the Evangelist

The church of St John the Evangelist is a rare church as few were built during the Carolian period (the reign of Charles I - Carolus being the Latin form of Charles). St John the Evangelist was founded by John Harrison, a wealthy wool merchant in 1634. Harrison was well known for his acts of philanthropy and his contribution to the civic development of Leeds. Amongst his acts of benevolence Harrison built twenty almshouses between 1628-1634, and he gave land and a new building for the Town Grammar School. John Harrison and other leading merchants petitioned Charles I for a new Borough Charter and this was granted in 1626 allowing Leeds its first town council.

Leeds was increasing in size and population by the beginning of the seventeenth century, and it seems it was in reaction to the growing demand for another place of worship that the building of St John the Evangelist was embarked upon. The finely carved screen, pulpit and lively strap work ceiling express Harrison's civic pride.

John Harrison it seems was loyal to the King during the Civil War if we are to believe the story that has come down from his nephew Rev. Henry Robinson's family. The tale relates how King Charles I, a prisoner of the Scots in 1647 stayed overnight at Red Hall, the home of Thomas Metcalf, a Leeds merchant. Harrison asked permission to give the king a tankard of ale, however, when the King lifted the lid of the tankard it was filled with gold coins!

St John the Evangelist - an extraordinary church built by an extraordinary man.

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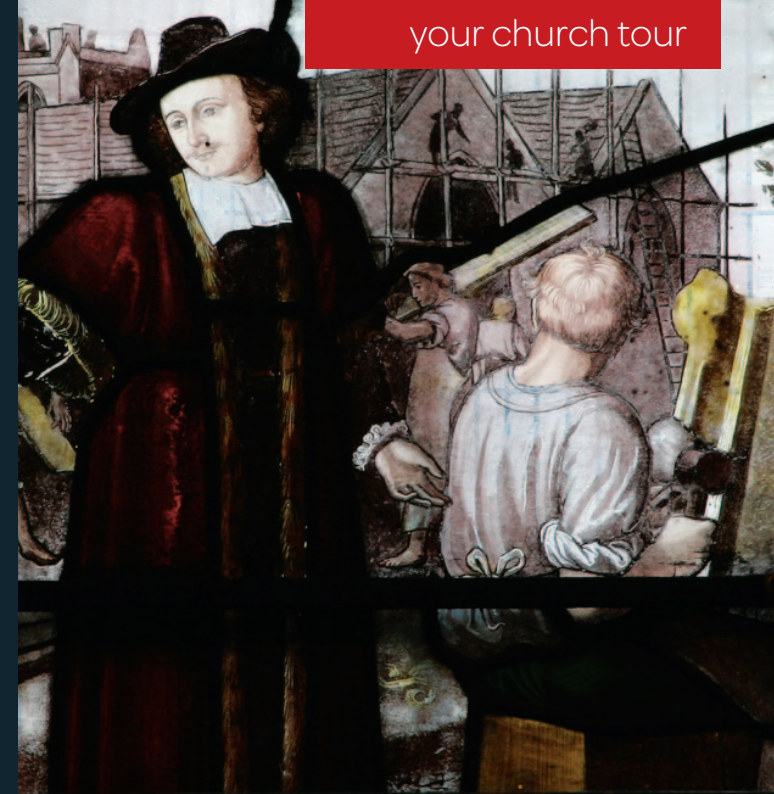
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your church tour



Church of  
St John the  
Evangelist  
Leeds



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## The historic Church of St John the Evangelist

### 10 things to see before you leave...

- 1 **The Font** was designed by Norman Shaw in 1868 and executed by James Forsyth.
- 2 **The Ceiling** is a fine Carolian strap-work ceiling containing panels with flowers, birds and male dryads playing pipes. The decoration is domestic in nature and illustrates the type of ornate plasterwork that would have graced the ceilings in wealthy merchants' principal rooms.
- 3 **The Pews** still retain their fine seventeenth century carving even though they have been cut down, and had their doors removed!
- 4 There are a number of **Brasses** in the church. However, to illustrate Benjamin Franklin's famous quote "*In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes*" here is the commemorative brass of Posthumous Dixon, Collector of Excise who died aged 79yrs in 1767. He was probably christened Posthumous as he was born after the death of his father.
- 5 **The Harrison Painting** is a large painting of the church's founder John Harrison which hangs on the wall with a framed biography below. There is some debate as to its age, but stylistically it is probably late seventeenth/early eighteenth century.
- 6 **The Pulpit** was originally situated one bay down and situated further out into the church so that was more centrally placed amongst the pews. The pulpit was taken down during Norman Shaw's 1866-68 restoration of the church, and some of the original pulpit was lost. However, it was rebuilt using what had survived and moved to its present position in the 1880s.
- 7 **The Screen** is a marvellous example of seventeenth century craftsmanship with its finely carved griffins, hearts, flowers and carved grotesque heads. It is surmounted by two coats of arms, above the north aisle the coat of arms of James I and to the south, Charles I. The inclusion of James I is curious as the church was built after the death of James I. However, it is probable that John Harrison was celebrating the new Stuart dynasty. There are two lions either side of a wreath with a thistle at its centre on the pulpit celebrating the Scottish Stuart dynasty.

- 8 **The Communion Table** is probably the original communion table. It is decorated with carved heads that resemble Charles I with their flowing locks, moustache and beard.
- 9 **The Harrison Memorial Window** was produced by Burlison and Grylls in 1885. It depicts John Harrison's life and his philanthropic deeds.
- 10 **The Garnet Monument** is a late seventeenth century monument depicting a grinning skull with bones on the tablet with a winged skull below. These macabre death head monuments were designed to illustrate man's mortality and our fleeting time on this earth.

