

Father Swain's 100 Favourite Churches in England

I haven't put these in any particular order, and the criteria are simply that these are my favourite churches, I have visited every one listed at least once, and I find the combination of architecture, furnishings and atmosphere compelling. If I know of a church website, I have included the link. Cathedrals, Oxbridge college chapels and Royal Peculiars are not listed; every single one is worth a serious visit. Traditional county locations are used because they are what makes sense to people, they are coming back, and, well, they're just better. All churches are Church of England. I make no judgement on the services offered or theology taught or the nature of the services, and they occupy various places on the spectrum of belief in the Church of England.

- * *Worth a visit if near*
- ** *Worth a visit*
- *** *Very special, try to go*
- **** *Extremely highly recommended*
- ***** *Will change your life*

1. St Magnus the Martyr, London Bridge. (City of London). *****

This exquisite Wren church had a lovely ensemble of furnishings from the 17th century, beautified and added to by Martin Travers in the 1920s. Referred to by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*. Particularly attractive is Travers' statue of St Magnus with Viking horns & axe. <http://www.stmagnusmartyr.org.uk/>

2. St Swithun, Compton Beauchamp, Berks. **

Small mediaeval church of chalk. Gorgeous neo-Baroque appointments by Martin Travers. A lovely country setting by a moated manor house. http://www.berkshirehistory.com/churches/compton_beauchamp.html

3. Most Holy Trinity, Reading, Berks.***

This dull brick church has almost no interest on the outside on its dingy central Reading street, but inside Aladdin's cave beckons with treasures from far and wide, 17c pulpit, reliquaries, the ex-Nashdom Abbey altar, etc. <http://www.holytrinityreading.org.uk/>

4. St Mary the Less, Cambridge. (Little St Mary's).***

Light and airy 14c hall church, marvellous Kempe glass, and Comper reredos and altar. Splendid. <http://www.ely.anglican.org/parishes/camlsm/index.html>

5. St Mary and All Saints, Chesterfield, Derbyshire.**

Town church famous for its "wonky" spire. Oldest parts from 1234. Exquisite Lady Chapel, Jacobean pulpit, Comper glass. <http://www.chesterfieldparishchurch.org.uk/>

6. All Saints, Kedleston, Derbyshire. **

13c Norman church, full of Curzon family tombs. Immediately adjacent to the fabulous Kedleston Hall by Robert Adam.

http://www.visitchurches.org.uk/text-only/FeaturedChurch.asp?ChurchID=f_67

7. St Martin, Cathedral Close, Exeter. *

14c tiny city church a stone's throw from the Cathedral. A very mediaeval feel, but often overlooked.

http://www.exeter.gov.uk/timetrail/08_tudorstuart/object_detail.asp?photoref=5_21

8. Sherborne Abbey, Sherborne, Dorset. ***

Magnificent former Abbey church, originally Norman, mostly 15c, and then heavily restored in the 19c.
<http://www.sherborneabbey.com/>

9. St John Baptist, Thaxted, Essex. ***

Charming 15c church, in a very attractive town. Kempe glass and unique atmosphere. Home of the famous Fr Conrad Noel in the 20c. <http://www.openchurchestrust.org.uk/Churches/Thaxted.htm>

10. St Clement's, Bournemouth, Hampshire.***

Sedding's Gothic masterpiece. Every square inch carved, decorated, adorned.
<http://www.openchurchestrust.org.uk/Churches/Bournemouth.htm>

11. St Francis', Bournemouth, Hampshire.**

Fascinating Italian Romanesque building, large basilican altar under baldacchino.
<http://www.stfrancis-bournemouth.org.uk/index.php>

12. St Mildred's, Whippingham, Isle of Wight.**

The Prince Consort designed this frankly bizarre Germanic Gothic nightmare; I like it a lot. The inside is chock-a-block with monuments and memorabilia relating to the Royal Family and their foreign relations and retainers.

<http://www.iow.uk.com/whippingham-church/index.htm>

13. St Mary & St David, Kilpeck, Herefordshire.***

On everyone's list probably, this church has Saxon foundations, but is mostly 12c. The riot of very early carvings is the great attraction, and the setting is charming.

<http://www.herefordwebpages.co.uk/kilpeck.shtml>

14. St Saviour's, St Albans, Hertfordshire. **

A nice church, but a spectacular Martin Travers altar.
<http://www.ssaviours.org/>

15. St Agnes', Toxteth Park, Liverpool, Lancs. ***

Pearson, 1883. Enormous red brick basilica. Glowing gilded reredos, impressive prospects on every turn walking round.

<http://www.stagnes.org.uk/index.htm>

16. St John the Baptist, Tue Brook, Liverpool, Lancs. ****

Bodley, 1871. Decorated style, sumptuous interior, Morris, Kempe and Burne-Jones glass. Every inch polychromed.

17. St Luke's, Southport, Lancs.**

Interesting though not distinguished building, solid and attractive. The real appeal is that it incarnates the Anglo-Catholicism that appealed so strongly to the masses in the early 20c. Very fine reredos.

http://www.christians.co.uk/s_luke1.html

18. All Saints, Lincoln, Lincolnshire.**

1903, Decorated, fine Comper glass.

19. St Martin's, Stamford, Lincolnshire.**

A beautiful Perpendicular church in one of England's most beautiful towns. Ca. 1480, tombs of the Cecil family, incl. Lord Burghley himself.

<http://www.stamfordchurches.co.uk/st-martins.shtml>

20. St Bartholomew the Great, Smithfield, City of London.***

Great Norman church, with 17c brick tower, splendid bells. Ancient gate house survives, curiously quiet churchyard.

<http://www.greatstbarts.com/>

21. Holy Redeemer, Exmouth Market, Clerkenwell, London E1.***

Sedding's essay in Italianate Renaissance. Strong exterior in market setting, interior aglow with shrines, baldacchino with famous "diving" Christ, and unique atmosphere.

<http://www.holyredeemer.co.uk/>

22. St Cuthbert's, Philbeach Gardens, Earls Court, London SW5. ****

Ordinary 1884 Gothic red-brick church filled with the most appealing jewels, carving, pictures and inlay work on every available inch. Almost untouched in the last 100 yrs, giving it a unique period feel.

23. Holy Innocents, Paddenswick Road, Hammersmith, W6.*

Brooks 1887. Simple red-brick church, fine reredos by Spooner and Geldart. Very austere appealing.

24. All Hallows, Savernake Road, Gospel Oak, NW3.**

Brooks 1881. Towerless but many-buttressed, finished by Sir G. G. Scott in 1913. Light, simple, excellent proportions with perfect acoustic.

25. St Augustine's, Archway Road, Highgate. **

Sedding 1880, completed by Wilson 1916. Exquisite furnishings.

<http://www.saintaugustine.org.uk/>

26. St Augustine's, Queens Gate, Kensington SW7.***

Butterfield 1865. A dull shell is the setting for Martin Travers' luminous Latin American retablo reredos and beautiful shrines and decorations.

<http://www.st-augustine-london.com/>

27. Holy Trinity, Prince Consort Road, Kensington, SW7.**

Bodley 1902. Plain stone church. Extremely fine reredos and fittings by Bodley, gorgeous pulpit.

<http://www.htsk.co.uk/HomeBottomForm.htm>

28. St Silas', St Silas Place & Prince of Wales Road, Kentish Town, NW5.**
Shearman 1912. Simple brick Gothic on a budget, but filled with every manner of attractive, interesting and sensitively placed fittings. The feeling of breathing devotion is absolute.
<http://www.saintsilas.org.uk/>
29. St Augustine's, Kilburn Park Road, NW6. ***
Pearson 1870. Huge red-brick cruciform Early English church. Chapel by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. Must see though hard to gain entrance.
http://www.london.anglican.org/ChurchShow_0202
30. All Saints, Talbot Road, Notting Hill, W11.***
White, 1850. Nice tower, fittings by Cecil Hare, Martin Travers and Sir Ninian Comper. The effect is rich and stunning.
<http://www.allsaintsnottinghill.org.uk/>
31. St Mary Magdalene, Woodchester Square, W2.*****
Street 1868. Evocative and well known tower. Fabulous mediaeval crypt chapel by Comper, superlative Travers fittings upstairs. Ugly modern chairs detract slightly, but overall very appealing. Adjacent to Grand Union Canal. Massive war damage to parish but church spared. **Exceedingly** difficult to see outside service times.
32. St Barnabas', St Barnabas' Street, Pimlico, SW1. ***
Cundy 1847. Chapel & Sacrament House by Comper, Reredos by Bodley, Shrines and Altars by Kempe and Tower, glass by Travers and Comper.
http://www.london.anglican.org/ChurchShow_0312
33. St Mary the Virgin, Bourne Street, SW1. Withers 1874. ***
Red brick mission church. Breathtaking Travers High Altar in drawing room setting. Several exceedingly attractive shrines.
<http://www.stmarythevirgin.org.uk/>
34. St Mary Magdalene, Munster Square, NW1. **
Carpenter 1849. Middle Pointed. Pugin glass. Strangely compelling. Spire never built.
<http://www.mary-mags.org.uk/home.html>
35. All Saints, Margaret Street, W1. Butterfield, 1849. ***
Ingenious use of a cramped space, muscular streaky bacon brick. Comper side altar. Sumptuous chancel.
<http://www.allsaintsmargaretstreet.org.uk/>
36. Annunciation, Bryanston Street, W1. ****

- Tapper 1912. Huge imposing brick church just off Oxford Street. Excellent carved reredos, unique rood loft used by choir. Lovely glass, beautiful shrines and fittings by John de Mars. Undeservedly little known. Go!
<http://www.annunciationmarblearch.org/>
37. St Cyprian's, Clarence Gate, Glentworth Street, NW1, Sir Ninian Comper, 1902.*****
Ordinary brick church in late Victorian neighbourhood near Baker St. tube station, yields gold and polychromy everywhere. The first vista takes one's breath away, and it never stops. Comper was responsible for everything here, altars, shrines, glass, lecterns, even the gold parquet floor. I heard a Low Mass in the Lady Chapel once and the force of the beauty all round almost palpably suggested heaven on earth.
<http://www.stcyprians.org.uk/>
38. St Chad's, Nicholas Square, Haggerston, E1. Brooks 1868.**
Strong, impressive red brick basilica for slum Anglo-Catholicism. Impressive but not fussy.
<http://www.jameswestcott.talktalk.net/index.html>
39. St Peter's, Streatham. **
Really lovely church with exquisite fittings. Somewhat fallen on hard times.
<http://www.stpeters-streatham.org/>
40. Grosvenor Chapel. *
Odd American colonial church by the Dorchester Hotel, with lovely Comper fittings. Many American connexions.
<http://www.grosvenorchapel.org.uk/>
41. St Stephen's, Gloucester Road, Kensington. **
Very fine church with gorgeous carved wood reredos. The church of T. S. Eliot. The Guild of All Souls' London church.
42. St Dunstan's, Cranford. Near Heathrow Airport. ***
15c church, nave rebuilt after fire 1710. Fascinating and lovely tablets and effigies. Fittings by Martin Travers 1935.
<http://www.saintdunstan.org.uk/>
43. Christ the Saviour, New Broadway, Ealing. Scott 1852. **
Second Pointed, with carving everywhere. Bodley fittings.
<http://www.christthesaviour.com/>
44. St Peter, Great Walsingham, Norfolk.**
14c Decorated church, lovely glass, poppy end pews.
45. St Mary, Little Walsingham, Norfolk.**
Parish church for the famous shrine town. 14c, rebuilt after fire 1961.
46. Shrine Church, Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.*****

Often derided by experts, always loved by pilgrims. 1930s brick, gorgeous and unique fittings both purpose built and antiquities from the Continent. The atmosphere is unrivalled.

47. St John Baptist, Timberhill, Norwich, Norfolk. ***

Oberammergau road, Travers shrine, 15c German brass chandelier. Usually open for visits.

<http://www.norwichanglocatholic.org/>

48. St Mary Magdalene, Sandringham, Norfolk.***

Almost unbelievably richly decorated little church, earliest part ca. 1500, mostly Teulon 1857, and Blomfield 1890. Famous silver Wanamaker altar (duplicate of Philadelphia installation at St Mark's Locust Street). Monuments to members of the Royal Family esp. Edward VII and Queen Alexandra.

<http://www.sandringhamestate.co.uk/Section.asp?p=45&s=2&v=1>

49. Assumption of Our Lady, South Creake, Norfolk.***

14c church, famous Norfolk angel roof, 15c pulpit, beautiful altars and shrines. One can feel that the Reformation never happened praying in this little gem.

<http://www.norfolkchurches.co.uk/southcreake/southcreake.htm>

50. Wymondham Abbey, Wymondham, Norfolk. ***

Ex-Benedictine abbey, much of it Norman. Perpendicular clerestory, angel roof, lovely mediaeval font. Comper reredos.

<http://www.wymondham-norfolk.co.uk/abbey/>

51. St Mary's, Knox Road, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire. ****

Comper 1906-1930. Tall Perpendicular. What can one say about this masterpiece? The lush effect is indescribable.

<http://www.stmarywellingborough.org.uk/>

52. Our Lady of Bloxham, Bloxham, Oxfordshire.**

Grand 13c church with doom painting, restored by Street. Lovely setting.

<http://www.britainexpress.com/counties/oxfordshire/Bloxham-St-Marys-interior.htm>

53. St John the Baptist, Burford, Oxfordshire.***

One of the most charming settings of any parish church in England, with its gentle stream running by. Largely 15c, lovely tower, many tombs and plaques both inside and in the churchyard.

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~engcots/BurfordPhotos.html>

<http://www.burfordchurch.org/friends.htm>

54. St Barnabas', Cardigan Street, Jericho, Oxford. ***

Blomfield 1869. Italian Romanesque basilica, fantastic baldacchino, evocative incense-laden interior.

<http://www.sbarnabas.org.uk/>

55. St John the Evangelist, Iffley Road, Cowley, Oxford. **

Bodley 1894. Lovely interior full of Bodley fittings, Kempe glass. Now chapel of St Stephen's House seminary.

http://www.ssho.ox.ac.uk/SSH_St_John's_Church.htm

56. St Mary Magdalene, Magdalen Street, Oxford. **
12-15c building. Perpendicular font. Wide town church. Nice shrines and fittings.
<http://www.stmarymagdalenoxford.org.uk/>
57. St Thomas', Becket Street, across from Oxford Railway Station, Oxford. ***
Lovely mediaeval church with stunning Continental Baroque fittings. A jewel.
<http://www.achurchnearyou.com/venue.php?V=214>
58. St Mary, Kettlebaston, Suffolk. ****
Small country church of great charm. Norman nave, square font, 14c windows and sedilia. Lovely Kettlebaston alabasters (copies – originals now in British Museum). A remote village but well worth a detour.
<http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/kettlebaston.htm>
59. All Saints', Carshalton, Surrey. ****
Charming 18c church added to by Blomfield in 1893 and 1914. Arts and Crafts interior, Kempe glass, fabulous Comper reredos.
<http://www.carshaltonallsaints.org.uk/>
60. St Michael and All Angels, Poplar Walk, Croydon. ****
Pearson 1880-3. Outside brick, inside stone. Gothic and Baroque fittings by Bodley, Comper and Hare. A huge and brilliant church.
<http://www.croydonstmichael.org.uk/>
61. St John the Evangelist, Upper Norwood, Surrey. ***
Pearson 1878. Glass and vestments by Comper, who was a parishioner. Lovely Lady Shrine by Travers.
<http://www.stjohn-uppernorwood.org.uk/>
62. St Nicholas', Arundel, Sussex. **
14c cruciform church. Private chapel inside owned by Dukes of Norfolk, 14c wall paintings. Mediaeval stone pulpit with canopy.
<http://www.stnicholas-arundel.co.uk/>
63. Annunciation, Washington Street, Brighton, Sussex. **
Dancy 1864. Burne-Jones window. Charming Baroque fittings in this simple church.
64. St Bartholomew, Ann Street, Brighton, Sussex. ****
1872, Edmund Scott. Baldacchino, silver side altar, pulpit, baptistry, all by Henry Wilson in weird Arts and Crafts/Byzantine mixed style. Appealing and unique.
<http://www.acny.org.uk/4807/>

65. St Martin, Lewes Road, Brighton, Sussex. ***
Somers Clarke 1872. Famous 70 panels representing the Anglican Communion. Huge Baroque lectern.
66. St Paul's, Brighton, Sussex. ***
Well known Burne-Jones painting, fittings from many Continental churches.
<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/architecture/churches/42.html>
67. St Andrew's, Worthing, Sussex.**
Nice Blomfield church, 1885, but the real attraction is the treasure-trove of Kempe glass brought here from All Souls Brighton.
<http://www.acny.org.uk/venue.php?V=5248>
68. St Alban's, Bordesley, Birmingham, Warwickshire.**
Pearson 1879. Huge, large apsed church, red brick without, stone within.
<http://www.saintalban.co.uk/>
69. St Agatha's, Sparkbrook, Birmingham, Warwickshire.**
Bidlake 1899. Attractive baptistry. Bomb damage does not diminish its appeal.
<http://www.saintagathas.org.uk/>
70. St Thomas', Salisbury, Wiltshire.***
13c church, famous Doom painting, attractive chapels, including Swain family memorials (I'm prejudiced!).
71. All Saints, North Street, York. ***
13-15c. with mediaeval painted glass, 15c pulpit. Very atmospheric town church with full Catholic privileges.
<http://www.allsaints-northstreet.org.uk/>
72. St Olave, Marygate, York.**
Built by former mediaeval wall on site of ex-Abbey. 15c with attractive tower. Chancel and south chapel by Doyle 1908, gorgeous "English Use" fittings.
<http://www.stolave.org.uk/>
73. Holy Trinity, Shepherdess Walk, Hoxton. **
A very appealing church, light, airy, and well restored after war damage.
74. St Silas', Penton Street, Pentonville. **
Former slum church, attractive fittings, bright & airy.
<http://www.saint-silas.org.uk/>
75. St Agnes', Kennington Park, Kennington. **
Remains of famous church demolished after war. Some fine fittings remain.
<http://www.saintagnes.org.uk/>
76. St Luke, Ramsden Road, Battersea, London. **
Very nice Travers décor.

<http://www.stlukesonline.org.uk/about.asp>

77. St Saviour's, St George's Square, Pimlico, London SW1. **

Very attractive church with copy of Michelangelo's statue of Our Lady in Bruges. Charming.

http://www.london.anglican.org/ChurchShow_0319

78. SS Peter & Paul, Kettering, Northamptonshire. **

Very fine church, lovely fittings. Comper glass, chapel by Travers. Near Boughton House, seat of the Dukes of Buccleuch which is well worth a visit.

<http://www.peterandpaul.org.uk/people.htm>

79. St Peter's, Wapping, London Docks. ***

Muscular red brick Victorian stalwart slum church, no fittings of any great distinction, but the whole ensemble is very powerful.

<http://www.stpeterslondondocks.org.uk/>

80. St Alban's, Brooke Street, Holborn. **

Former Victorian temple of Anglo-Catholicism by Butterfield. Largely destroyed in the war. Mackonochie Chantry survives and is enchanting, post-war mural in church controversial but interesting. Beautiful shrines of St Alban and Our Lady.

<http://www.stalbans-holborn.com/>

81. St Mary Magdalene, Sunderland. **

A very attractive Catholic parish. As at London Docks, no important fittings of great distinction, but a very prayerful and distinctive effect.

<http://www.st-marymagdalene.co.uk/>

St Mary's, Liss, Hampshire **

Lovely church in a lovely village. Travers was called in here too!

<http://www.petersfield.uk.com/lissstmary.htm>

83. SS Peter & St Paul, Wantage, Oxfordshire. **

Attractive church associated with Sir John Betjeman.

<http://groups.msn.com/parishofwantage>

84. St Matthew, Westminster, London. *

Not much left of the very distinguished church which was here, and has burnt twice in recent times. Very fine Travers altar and monument to Bishop Frank Weston of Zanzibar survives, though now unused and left high and dry.

<http://www.stmw.org/pages/article.asp?sec=7>

85. St Gabriel, Warwick Square, Pimlico, London, SW1. *

Nice stone church with attractive fittings. Associations with the novelist Barbara Pym.

<http://www.st-gabriels.com/>

86. St Michael, Ladbroke Grove, North Kensington, W10. *
Very solid attractive church with excellent and appealing fittings.

87. St Mary of Eton, Eastway ,Hackney Wick ,London E9. **
A really gorgeous church, attractive reredos. Difficult to find and to visit.
<http://www.stmaryofeton.freeuk.com/>

88. Christ Church, Isle of Dogs, London. *
A very attractive church, nice Victorian fittings.
<http://www.parishiod.org.uk/>

89. Holy Cross, Cromer Street, St Pancras, London. **
Dingy Victorian exterior belies the enchanting interior full of beautiful and evocative fittings. Very devotional atmosphere.

90. St Andrew's, Clewer, Berkshire. **
Important mediaeval church with many fine decorations. Canon Carter's church. Saxon font. Exquisite mediaeval chancel screen.
<http://www.standrewsclewer.org.uk/default.htm>

91. St John the Baptist, Holland Road, Kensington, London. ***
Magnificent French Gothic church by Brooks.
http://ship-of-fools.com/Mystery/mws_05/reports/1066.html

92. St Luke's, Kingston-upon-Thames. **
Massive Victorian red brick church. Splendid shrines.
<http://www.stlukeskingston.co.uk/>

93. Ascension, Lavender Hill, Battersea, London. Brooks, 1898. **
Attractive muscular slum church.
<http://www.southwark.anglican.org/parishes/143bl1.htm>

Lavenham Parish Church, Lavenham, Suffolk ***
This utterly charming wool town has a very stately church to go with it.
<http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/Lavenham.htm>

95. St Stephen's, Lewisham High Street, Lewisham London SE13. *
Sir George Gilbert Scott 1863. Attractive stone church with some nice fittings.
<http://www.southwark.anglican.org/parishes/154bp.htm>

96. St Peter's Vauxhall. *

Pearson 1860.

<http://www.stpeters-vauxhall.net/>

97. St George's, Hanover Square, London. **

Very attractive English baroque church. Almost unique. Connexions with Handel. Splendid organ.

<http://www.stgeorghanoversquare.org/>

98. St Giles', Wimborne St Giles, Dorset. **

Lovely Classical church in an attractive country town. Very fine Comper reredos.

<http://people.bath.ac.uk/lismd/dorset/churches/wimborne-st-giles.html>

99. St John, Stockcross, Berkshire. **

Very fine church of 1838, refurnished 1905. A riot of Comper furnishings & glass, including unique Spanish *riejo* (wrought iron screen).

Important church yard with many monuments of all vintages.

100. St Mary in the Baum, Wardleworth, Rochdale, Lancashire. ***

1908 stunner. The only church in the North for which Comper was entirely responsible. Still breathtaking.

<http://www.stmaryinthebaum.co.uk/>