

History of St Martin's Church

The church is the focus for the school's worshipping community and services take place here at 10.00am every Sunday during term time.

St Martin's used to be the parish church of Bryanston village but in 1978 the Salisbury Diocese decided that it should be made redundant. The parish was amalgamated with the village of Durweston. The church building was then bought from the diocese by the school on the basis that the school community would use it for worship and concerts. This is an arrangement that still stands today.

The building of the church started in 1897 and it was consecrated the following year. It stands on the site of the 18th century Wyatt house which was demolished when Norman Shaw's impressive French Renaissance-style mansion which is now Bryanston School was created. The Portman family had decided to build a church for use by the villagers of Bryanston. The stone and timbers of the old manor house were used in the construction of the new church. There was therefore an abundance of materials available. An air of comparative antiquity has always enhanced the church's appearance, since all its outside surfaces were arranged to retain the 120 years of weathering of the ashlar walls from the Wyatt House which used to be on this site. Even the interior wooden roof that can be seen was recycled from the old ballroom floor.

Lord Portman engaged the services of a notable ecclesiastical architect, E P Warren, whose design has proved to be an attractive exercise.

In the Pevsner's Dorset volume "Buildings of England" it states:
"...a large church with a view to the East. The style, Decorated to Perpendicular, clearly inspired by G F Bodley (1827 – 1907). It has a fine stately West tower with two-light bell openings each side. Inside, South, arcade of piers whose arches die into them. The interior has a number of calculated contrasts of South against North."

The layout of the church as we see it today is in the round – with the altar being in centre of the congregation. This creates a unique atmosphere, shared by staff, parents, pupils and friends in equal measure. The fact that pupil attendance is voluntary is fundamental to the experience of church at Bryanston. It is immensely moving to see the altar surrounded by confirmed and unconfirmed alike. Sometimes full, sometimes thinly populated, the church witnesses the communion of a family during term time. A rhythm of prayer and worship has been established which is greatly valued by regular worshippers and visitors alike.

The church building itself physically helps remind the community of the importance of spiritual continuity. Memorials recall the village's war dead and the service of Arthur George Courtney, for forty-one years verger of the church. There are names of great figures from the school community, David Jones and Geoff Udall. The organ bears witness to the work of Peter Lattimer, for thirty years director of music, and in windows and inscriptions the Portman family are recalled.