

[Copied from a framed display in 1963 by Revd R Smith Vicar]

SOME NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS', EAST MEON.

The original Church was in the shape of a cross, and consisted of the nave, transepts, and tower, all in the Norman style; its length being 110 feet, and breadth 36 feet (61 feet across the transepts). It was built somewhere between the years 1075 and 1150 - perhaps by Walklyn, Bishop of Winchester - and is, therefore, some 800 years old. The work of this period is noticeable by its round, or semi-circular arches. For instance, on entering the Church one is struck at once by the fine Norman chancel-arch, repeated towards each transept and towards the altar. The west wall of the nave, too, has the original Norman doorway, and the northern wall one of the original windows.

The splendid tower is a fine specimen of French-Norman work, and resembles the great tower of Winchester Cathedral built by Bishop Walklyn. Its ornamentation being more profuse, and therefore later than that of the chancel arches, would suggest that the Church was some years in building.

At some time in the thirteenth century - probably about 1230 A.D., the Church was enlarged, the Ladye Chapel being built out from the chancel. By this time Church architects had given up the round Norman arch for the pointed arch (Early English) supported by lighter pillars. The two arches opening out from the chancel into the chapel are beautiful specimens of this new style.

About the same time the south aisle was added to the nave, the outside wall being pierced for the arcades which now separate the nave from the aisle; above one of these newly-cut arches will be seen some remains of one of the earlier Norman windows. The Norman south door, originally opening out into the nave, was now moved back to its position, opening into the aisle.

Patches of colour will be noticed on different parts of the pillars in the nave. There is no doubt that the whole interior of the Church was once richly decorated with wall-paintings. Some of these may have been destroyed by bigots during the Reformation or in Cromwellian times, but some have faded away only in memory of the living. Old inhabitants of East Meon tell us that they can remember a "Doom" (i.e., a painting of the Last Judgment) above the chancel arch; and in the Vicar's possession are some notes made in the year 1838 which describe a large figure painted "on the south side of the singing gallery" - which was above the west door- supporting another figure upon its shoulder, and supposed by some to have been a figure of St. Christopher carrying the infant Christ. Except blotches of reddish colour here and there, little of these wall-paintings now remain; but on the eastern respond of the northern transept (between

the choir stalls and the organ) are the faint remains of a figure of the crucified Saviour; whilst on the southern respond opposite are traces of a crowned head. Except the peculiar pointed window in the lower part of the south transept wall and that near to the pulpit, we know of no fabric additions and alterations to the Church until we come to the time of Bishop Langton, who died in 1501. His Arms are to be found in conjunction with the Arms of the See of Winchester on the outside of the east wall of the Church, and it is plainly evident that a restoration of the chancel and Ladye chapel took place about that time, for the character of the windows in the chapel and the style of the chancel roof removed in 1870 point to this. In this latter year there was a very thorough restoration.

The present poorly-designed roofs were inserted, the doorway into the chapel and the porch arch were built, a stone pulpit (assigned to the reign of Henry VII.), the ancient altar of the chapel, and a sanctus bell (which hung in one of the lower windows of the tower) disappeared, as did also some singers' galleries.

An organ was placed in the westernmost of the two arches dividing the high chancel from the chapel, a small altar against the east wall, singers' stalls on either side the chancel, and a stone pulpit of poor design against the northern respond of the western chancel arch with a priest's stall opposite. An ill-proportioned unsuitable east window (removed in 1912) was placed in the high chancel, the present oak pews were added and the floor space between the pews was paved with Minton tiles.

The most satisfactory work which was done at this time appears to have been the re-roofing of the Church and spire with lead, and the reclaiming of the northern transept from its use as a Day School.

In the Gentleman's Magazine of October, 1819, an article mentions the fact that a School was held in the northern transept, and that 160 children assembled there for religious instruction. In the year 1890 the belfry floor was built, the six bells were re-hung, and the treble and number two were added, thus forming the beautiful peal we now possess.

In 1906 under the direction of Mr. J. N. Comper the interior of the Church was remodelled. The floor levels, except that in the Ladye Chapel, were lowered, with the result that the dignified proportions of the arches are now seen, the 1870 oak benches were retained except in the northern transept where they gave place to the organ and vestry for the singers, and a number of tombstones were found under the boards were placed in the floor of the north transept. Wood blocks took the place of the decayed boards under the seats, Hopton wood stone was substituted for the Minton red tile paving in the passage ways and a "Grundy" hot air warming apparatus was added.

Other structural additions and alterations include the new doorway on the west side of the north transept, the oak screens and tracery dividing the Ladye Chapel from the high chancel and south transept, the insertion of two piscinas, the erection of the Priests' stalls, the removal of the singers' seats from the chancel to the central tower and the replacing of the altar footpace and step in the Ladye Chapel. The new high chancel altar was placed some 12 feet from the east wall and the space behind made into a Priests' vestry by means of some old oak panels set in a new frame; these panels came out of a cottage, probably the Priest's dwelling house, which was taken down when the churchyard was enlarged eastwards in 1904.

The small 1870 altar was placed inside the new altar which now stands in the Ladye Chapel.

The glass memory of Mrs. It is the work as amongst his in the east window of the chapel, placed there in 1907 to the Forbes, the Foundress of the Almshouses, deserves special mention. of Mr. J. N. Comper, and is regarded by those who know his glass most successful windows.

The subject is the Annunciation in the two central lower lights and the Salutation in the small upper lights. On either side of the lower central lights are the figures of S. Anne and S. Agnes, the former represented as teaching the Blessed Virgin to read. The angels in the upper lights are carrying the Arms of the Forbes families and those of the donor.

The pulpit, presented by the Rev. E. M. Tomlinson, who resigned the Incumbency in 1901, has an interest of its own in that it formerly stood in the Church of the Holy Trinity, Minories, London. When that Church was pulled down Mr. Tomlinson, at one time the Incumbent there, obtained the pulpit, and in 1906 he placed it on a new oak base and presented it to the Church. It is of inlaid oak and dates from 1706.

In 1911 was added the beautiful Reredos in the chapel to the memory of Mrs. Ada Mary Hayward. The work is of English alabaster and carved out of four separate blocks. The four panels reading from north to south represent the Betrothal of the Blessed Virgin, The Nativity, the Visit of the Three Kings and the presentation of Our Blessed Lord in the Temple. It is set in a richly carved and decorated oak frame and was designed by Mr. J. N. Comper.

The small stone under the southernmost arch of the tower with the words "Amen's Plenty" inscribed upon it, was found during the 1870 restoration over a vault in the east side of the south transept. The vault contained une skulls of four men placed back to back who had,

as the remains evidently showed, been buried upright. The meaning of the inscription is not clear, but local tradition ascribes it to a hurried burial service said over the bodies of some of Sir William Waller's soldiers who fell in a skirmish a few days before the battle of Cheriton, April, 1644 when the Royalist Army under Lord Hopton suffered a severe defeat. The stone seat at the entrance to the south transept may be a fragment of an old altar.

September, 1912. T.H.M.

[Revd. Thomas Heywood Masters was Vicar of East Meon from 1902 – 1922.]