

PRICE 6D

St. PETER'S CHURCH,
TITCHFIELD

A GUIDE

AUGUST, 1946

HISTORY.

In the river valleys primitive man made his home. Many thousands of years ago folk lived in this valley. Their stone tools have been found here. As the centuries passed, other peoples found their way up the east seaward approach. Settlers, traders, pirates, sailed into the Solent, and came up on the tide to Titchfield.

When the legions were withdrawn to shorten the frontiers of the Roman Empire, this valley was invaded and settled by Jutes. The newcomers were known as the Meonwara - hence the name of the river Meon and several places along its banks. With the West Saxons on one side and the South Saxons on the other, the Meonwara were an isolated people who lived rigidly to themselves. With the lapse of many centuries there is still a certain tension between the Jutish people of Titchfield and their neighbours in Fareham.

It may be that the Meonwara began to accept Christianity through the work of St. Wilfred, exiled from his see of York (c. 681). We may guess that by the beginning of the Eighth Century an altar was made here and that the crude barn of beams and wattles which housed it was the first parish church. There may have been more than one such building in Titchfield, because the early date and size of the present nave suggest that it replaced a fairly large structure.

Titchfield is, of course, in Domesday Book. Thereafter, with a port, a market and an abbey followed by great house, it was a typical, a copybook English township.

The times of the Wars of the Roses and of the Tudors were prosperous. An early map ranks

Portsmouth, Titchfield, Hamble, and Southampton as the principal ports of the county, capable of taking in and letting out ships of great draught. The Haven was once a fleet anchorage.

The river-mouth was closed in the reign of Charles II. The Dutchmen who were employed on this work brought the tiles still to be found in some of our houses. The eighteenth century squire moved to Fareham and left Place House a ruin. The market was closed. The railway came near but skirted the town. Farming decayed. Factories killed the local crafts. Lastly, came the buses, still further to drain away the life of the place. But the corporate sense, the feeling of parish, dies hard, where roots go down so deep into the soil of English history.

The church registers date from 1589, and show that many of the present parishioners are the descendants of those whose bodies rest in and around the church.

Titchfield was once a very large parish, but an increasing and scattered population has made it necessary to form six parishes out of the original one. Sarisbury, Warsash, Locks Heath, Crofton and Lee have hived off.

The wealth of a country used to be its soil. That here the soil is poor has given this church its unusual character, and perhaps to the people their name, Meonwara, or meondwellers. There has not been enough money to pull down and rebuild, but only to add.

To take one example: our great churches were built out of the profits of the wool industry after the Black Death. But here only a north aisle was then added. Our one large-scale pulling down and

rebuilding was done last century with money brought into the place by people who had made it elsewhere. Alas, in this restoration a Norman south aisle with square Tudor windows, a renaissance porch and a fine ceiling gave place to a streaky-bacon Victorian Gothic. At the same time panelled pews were exchanged for these benches: tiles replaced paving stones: the plaster covering the rafters was taken off to give the 'oldie worldie' black and white effect with its fussy and tangled restlessness: limewash was raked from the stonework. In this restoration perished a Perpendicular font, Jacobean altar rails and panelling, and a fine pulpit. Yet how much is left! We will try to give you a half-hour's circuit of the building.

WEST PORCH.

Stand 15 yards outside the porch. Look at the corner stones. This is pre-long-and-short Saxon. What archaic work! The beds between the stones are very deep and the stones themselves, gathered from Roman ruins, were cut from different quarries. There was no attempt to group them because the Saxons plastered and limewashed. The springers of the arch are not shaped, but cocked up to begin the semi-circle. Above this, by way of primitive decoration, is a row of Roman bricks. The corner stones above the bricks still shew the chips to hold the plaster. The beds above are narrower, for this is later work. Now look upwards and inwards from these same corner stones and you will still see the shape of the gable of the Saxon porch. (Inside the church on the west wall above the picture [d.1888] is a ventilator, which may have been part of the west window looking over the porch.) Standing outside you can pic-

ture how the entrance once looked-white walls cut by the line of red below the gable, and above and beyond, the west wall of the nave with its window and the high-pitched roof: the whole building white, and thatched with reeds from the river.

THE TOWER.

When the people of Titchfield wanted bells, west towers were in fashion. What were they to do? Time out of mind the porch had stood; money was not plentiful, but the walls did not look too safe. So they made the tower as short as it could be, and capped it with a light spire of wood. Even so, the lower part has had to be girded with iron.

The first church was probably raised above the level of the Hard, to keep out the tide. Now we have four steps to go down.

The stout lattice gates bear the date 1651.

WEST DOOR.

Here is good Norman work. There is a curious head on the left capital with foliage coming out of its mouth (Jack o' the Green?) There are several consecration crosses.

Now enter and you will find that this arch is decorated only on the outside. Did money run out? Or would the thinness of a Saxon wall not accommodate Norman mouldings on both sides?

CHANCEL ARCH.

The wall above is Saxon, the pillars Norman. There was little money for these as they have no

decoration. There would seem to have been few funds later when the opening was enlarged by a pointed arch. For they did an unusual thing - they re-used the pillars, made the arch quite plain and only chamfered to take plaster.

THE CHANCEL.

That there was once an Early English chancel is certain from the sedilia. But the present windows are three hundred years later.

Before we examine the sanctuary, it is, perhaps, wise to make a digression about the 'English Altar.' Traditionally, the Christian altar stands beneath a canopy, or ciborium, supported on four posts. Between the posts hang ample curtains, which can be drawn or withdrawn as occasion demands. With the introduction of the great east window the canopy is raised to the roof. The posts are retained to carry the curtains, and, not to look decapitated, are surmounted by the candles formerly on the canopy. A version of this appeared with tedious monotony between the wars in churches all over the country - four posts and meagre curtains box in the table like a draughtproof bed; and the canopy, which is the decent and traditional covering, has gone. (The arrangement in Portsmouth Cathedral is interesting. There the canopy is not raised to the roof, but hung on chains a few feet above the posts.)

We are now in the position to examine the splendid conception of the designer of this sanctuary. Pleased with the arrangement of the Lady Altar (N. Aisle), he raised two tiers of niches on either side of a great window. Above these, he planned a great canopy against a white plaster

ceiling, with a vessel for the Blessed Sacrament hanging from it. The whole, canopy, niches, figures of saints, splendid with colour, and framing a window of the fairest glass. All this to crown the altar.

The scheme was never completed. Even the roof is some feet too low and cuts the tops of the niches. Was it again the failure of funds? Or was the undertaking cut short by the Reformation?

Beneath the altar is the vault of the squires who held Place House after the Earls of Southampton. It has raised the level of the sanctuary by eight inches, so that our dossal curtain now overlaps the string-course. But what are we to do? From the church, the curtain and frontal are in proportion, and pleasing to the eye. To restore the proper levels would involve lowering the sedilia and even the carved heads on the doorway to the south chapel, which were intended as the finals of the dripstone.

In this doorway you will notice that stones from different quarries are used. The builders were not particular, because they whitewashed the whole into one entity.

Look beneath the dripstone and you see a new patch. Directly opposite in the north wall is a staple. Across the sanctuary was hung in Lent a veil of white linen. Drawn at various points in the mass, it symbolised the purification and seclusion of the season, and gave contrast, by its removal, to the victory of Passiontide and the glory of Easter.

If you wish to see the various arrangements of the sanctuary during the past 100 years, you will find pictures on the N.W. wall of the church.

The present altar is of Titchfield design and craftsmanship. The hangings were made in the village. The candlesticks were displaced by brass from some Italian church. Here they have displaced brass from a multiple factory. Why are there four and not two or six? A dissertation on altar lights would be too lengthy. Suffice it to say that there have been one, three, five, seven lights on the altar, as well as even numbers. We have four, because two would look meagre, and six would overcrowd. We trust that you agree with the sweet reasonableness of our answer. "They look right."

You will notice the decent length of the fair linen. The lace came from Greece.

The Book of Common Prayer orders "that such Ornaments of the Church, and of the Ministers thereof, at all Times of their Ministration, shall be retained, and be in use, as were in this Church of England, by the Authority of Parliament, in the Second Year of the Reign of King Edward the Sixth." Four years after that date an inventory of Titchfield Church property shewed that there were 2 chalices gilt on the inside: 15 vestments or sets of vestments, of Damaske, Satten, Bawdaken or Sylke, in red and white and black and green: 4 copes to match: a funeral pall: 4 great bells. To-day we have lovely seventeenth century silver, and six bells; but our vestments are not nearly so splendid.

We have kept you, Christian and Christiana, a long time before the altar. But then you know that this church was built to house the altar.

Before you leave the chancel, note the fine monument to William Chamberlain (d. 1608) on

he north wall. It was executed by an unknown artist of the Anglo-Flemish school.

SOUTH CHAPEL.

This is Decorated architecture; but how undecorative! The chapel is larger than the chancel, but its size and dignity are concealed by the overcrowding.

Note the well proportioned sedilia. Yes, this was a complete church equipped for the full rite, and shut off from the rest of the building. (The west arch was opened last century and the arcade on the north is of a later date than the chapel.) If you examine the low wall in the righthand arch you will see that it is new. It was cut away for an organ placed here 100 years ago. The capitals and bases of these pillars are interesting. They shew where a wall was introduced to shut off the chapel. This was done in the eighteenth century, perhaps to make a vestry and store room. A crude doorway was then made in the south wall to give entrance to the priest from the door in the vicarage garden opposite. This closing of the chapel saved the monument from the knives of initial cutters. It may have been a fall of plaster that damaged some of the hands, which have been repaired, but not by a master craftsman. Some of the points of the crowns have been removed by souvenir hunters. Let us hope that this old English and English-speaking custom is disappearing.

THE MONUMENTS.

At the Dissolution the king granted the Praemonstratensian Abbey of Titchfield to Sir Henry Wriothesly, the Lord Chancellor, later the Earl of

Southampton. He made the minster into a palace of a house. If you say that in broad Hampshire it becomes 'Place House.'

The Earls took this chapel as the family mortuary. A vault was made in the place once reserved for the relics of the saints: below the altar. There and not under the monument are the remains of four earls pickled in honey. The third earl is thought by many to have been Shakespeare's patron.

You may find the monument a trifle ostentatious. The trouble is that you cannot see it properly here nor get its proportions. The chapel spoils the monument, and the monument spoils the chapel. If only you could see from above you would be delighted by three works of art, three beautiful recumbent figures.

In his will dated 29 June, 1581, the second earl ordered two monuments, one to be set up in Titchfield for "my Lorde my Father and my Ladye my Mother, the other for mee, with portratures of white alabaster or such lyke upon the said monuments." The deed of covenant for this monument was signed May 6, 1594. The sculptor was Gerad Johnson (d. 1612) a Flemish refugee from the Alva persecutions, who settled in Southwark in 1567. His younger son, who did not inherit his father's genius, made the Shakespeare monument at Stratford.

There is a charming monument on the south wall to the Lady Mary Wriothesley (d. 1605). This was executed by Epiphanius Evesham, the fourteenth son of a Hereford squire who learned his art with the Anglo-Flemish sculptors of Southwark.

Above this are funeral regalia. Beneath your feet is the matrix of a looted brass.

The marble figure of a woman on the north wall of the chapel is by Sir Francis Chantry R. A. The other monuments were mostly brought in here when the church was restored last century.

Under the west arch are various remains, and among them the capital of a Norman pier, taken down in 1866, and since recovered from the vicarage garden. Another bit of a capital found in the same rockery, has recently been built into the church at Locks Heath, a daughter church.

The wooden lectern is worth your notice.

NORTH AISLE.

Stone carvers were few after the Black Death. But the science of building had advanced. In this style, Perpendicular (XIV and XV centuries), the pillars are more slender and the window spaces wider. Buildings of this period were made beautiful by their fair glass framed by white walls. Here only one piece of old glass escaped the stone-throwers of the Reformation. As you face the north wall look at the top of the right hand window. Above again is our only ceiling that has not had the plaster torn from it.

The altar in this aisle is an off-the-peg affair from a furnisher's catalogue. The pulpit is much the same. The niche behind was made for the figure of our Lady, for this is her altar. Please go up the steps and examine the carving of the canopy. The acorns are rather fun.

The arrangements of the niches on either side of the altar are difficult to trace, but their wounds

plead for healing. The height of the window suggests that a canopy once graced this table.

WEST END.

In 1866, the minstrels gallery was removed. Stand where the celebrant stands at baptism, and look at the nearest pillar. About 12 feet up you will see where a singer has cut his initials. He dated his pastime. In 1831 the sermon was long and the parson could not see behind that pillar.

Yes. You are right. This arrangement of the font is not worthy of so great a sacrament.

Standing with your back to the west door, you notice that the chancel is not in line with the nave. Is this a weep? It usually goes to the left, is more pronounced, and is in churches dedicated to the Mother of God. It looks as if the builders just failed to get this chancel straight with the Saxon nave.

In 1866 splendid candelabra were removed. Electric light is not kind to old buildings.

At the great feasts we put on the altar the XVII Century silver-gilt chalices, flagons, patens and basins. They blend with the candle sticks. Imagine it is the First Mass of Christmas, and the old church is lit by candle light. It glitters on the silver and dimly shews the forms of many worshippers. Through the still air rings the greatest of all the Gospels. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was - and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Bethlehem is extended to us.

And now, gentle Visitor, before you leave us, will you, of your charity, say a prayer for this

parish. The first collect for Good Friday will give you words.

"Almighty God, we beseech thee graciously to behold this thy family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross, who now liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.- Amen."

DOMINUS VOBISCUM.

VALE