

A Short Guide

to

St John The Evangelist Church Merrow



HISTORY

Several theories exist about the origin of the name Merrow. It could have derived from the name mere [a lake or pool, of which there were several on the lower slopes of Merrow, sheep on Merrow Downs (ewe was the Saxon word for sheep), near-reaw (a boundary row or ridge - the North Downs perhaps?) and mere-way (the way across the moor).

At the time of the Domesday Book Merrow was part of the lordship of Stoke which was in the King's Park (the Forest of Windsor).

The first church is believed to have been built in the 12th century during the reign of King John (1199-1216). It would have consisted merely of a chancel and a nave. Added at the beginning of the 13th century were a south aisle and chapel. The arcade of this aisle still stands together with part of the walls of the chapel.

Sadly by the 1830s, the church was in a ruinous state but an unknown lady resident gave the money to restore to the original plan and this work was completed in 1843. A brass plaque in Latin in the choir vestry (at the west end of the nave) records this.

In 1881 the north aisle was added and the present proportions of the church have remained unchanged since then. The church is built of flints without and rock chalk within.

THE PORCH

Entering the porch, pass under the 14th century carved Barge Board which is in the Decorated English style and outstanding enough to be noted by Rickman in his famous book on Gothic Architecture of 1841. The roof of the porch is covered with Horsham slabs as was, at one time, the church roof.

NORTH DOOR ARCHWAY

As you enter the church, notice the Norman arch with its well preserved chevron of dogs tooth pattern carving. This arch was brought forward from the old church when the north aisle was added in 1881.

NORTH AISLE

Inside the church turn left and stand in the north aisle. The roof above is supported by king posts rising from substantial oak tie beams. The windows are modern and are memorials.

THE MEMORIAL CHAPEL

At the east end of the north aisle is the chapel built by Lord Daryngton in memory his son, Ronald Pease, who was killed in France in 1916 during the 1914- 1918 war. The son's wooden, battlefield cross is on the north wall of the chapel.

Lord Daryngton was Liberal MP for Darlington and Assistant Postmaster General and was raised to the peerage in 1923. He was also President of the Church Army and lived in Merrow until 1925.

The chapel and alter were erected by the Wareham Guild. The alter reredos has the figures of the patron saints of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

Before the chapel was built part of the space was used as a vestry but most was occupied by the organ until 1921 when it was moved to its present position.

On the north wall oak panelling are the names of those from the parish who were killed in the wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945.

At the rear of the chapel is the clergy vestry in which are two small columns set in the east wall. These came from the old Norman font which was broken up during the rebuilding of the church in 1841-43. A drawing of this font is in the reception area - on the west wall of the north aisle.

NAVE

Moving forward from the west door to the nave, notice, on the right, the organ built into, what was, the gallery, this could seat 20 people. Below this is the present choir vestry. Behind the organ is a rose window containing some fine coloured glass. Sadly, this window can only be seen now from the organ loft, or from outside the church.

Ahead to the south you will see the modern font. Notice the Victorian carved wooden canopy over it which has doors with locks which protected holy water from theft. Turn left to face the chancel.

LECTERN

At the east end of the nave, on the right, notice the wooden Lectern. this was given to the church in 1886 and, from the style of the carving, is believed to date from the 16th or 17th century. The scene of classical Greek mythology carved on one of the panels suggests that it is unlikely to have been made for use in a Christian church.

PULPIT

This was given to the church in 1910 in memory of Miss Thrupp who lived in Merrow House. She loved the Church, cared much for the welfare of the local people and, from before 1879 until 1908, when she died, she took a very close and personal interest in Merrow Street Church of England School and each one of its pupils.

Above the chancel arch is a painted shield of the Royal Arms of Edward 111. After the Reformation these were placed in churches to serve as a reminder to all that the monarch was the Supreme Governor on earth of the Church of England and Defender of the Faith, and not the Pope.

CHANCEL AND SANCTUARY

The old stone altar beneath the altar table has the original ball flower decoration, probable 15th century.

The east window is modern (1881) but of Gothic, flamboyant design. The window on the north wall depicts two events in the life of St John the Evangelist, the patron saint of this church. The first, in the right hand window, is the call of St. John and he leading the Blessed Virgin to his home. The second is at the bottom of the left hand window showing a chalice and a dragon. These relate to an ancient legend that St John's enemies tried to kill him in Rome by putting poison in the sacramental chalice. When, however, St John administered the cup the poison went out in the form of a serpent. The people received the cup without harm while the man who put the poison in the chalice fell dead. This story is repeated in the right hand mural on the east wall of the sanctuary. The eagle at the bottom of the right hand window in the north wall is the emblem of St. John .

SOUTH AISLE

Returning to the west end of the nave go past the font to the south aisle. The roof here is supported by scissor beams. At the west end of this aisle is the sidemen's vestry and on its north wall is the only remaining mural tablet pre the 1842 church. It is to Mary Harbroe, the wife of a Ripley surgeon. She died in 1771. Separating the aisle from the nave are Norman pillars and arches. On two of the columns are pilgrim crosses which may have originated from the time of the pilgrimages to Canterbury.

The arcade and the arch to the chapel are all that remain of the church before the 1841 rebuild. The latter until 1959 had traces of a 13th century red ochre painting in the form of a double comma or interlaced crescent. Unfortunately, this was lime-washed over when the church was extensively redecorated at that date.

THE ONSLOW CHAPEL

Go under the pointed arch to this chapel which may originally have been a chantry chapel (part of the church endowed for the maintenance of a priest or priests to sing daily masses for the souls of a departed benefactor or holy person). In the 17th century it was converted into a burial vault for the Onslow family who moved to nearby Clandon Park in 1641 and who provided three Speakers of the House of Commons. The two pointed arches, to the south aisle and to the chancel, were walled up. the bodies of Arthur Onslow (d. 1768), the third Speaker in the family who held that office for 30 years and was known as the Great Speaker, and his wife were removed from Thames Ditton and interred here. It was Arthur's son, George, who was created First Earl in 1801. There are four Onslow memorial brasses in this chapel.

In 1871 the Fourth Earl and his mother agreed to give this part of the building back to the church. The bodies from it were re-interred in a vault built in the churchyard near the east wall of the chancel.

In 1872 the two walled up arches to the chapel were reopened and the north arch raised to make the chapel more open to the chancel.

In the lancet windows are portrayed the six holy women, The Blessed Virgin Mary, St Mary of Behtany, St Martha, St Anne, St Mary Magdalene and St Elizabeth.

There is an undecorated piscina in the south wall of the chapel behind the pine pews.

THE TOWER AND BELLS

The masonry of the tower was substantially altered during the 1842 church rebuild. The spire which is clad with Canadian cedar shingles rises 40 feet above the tower.

The bell tower has a peal of six bells and these date from 1898, commemorating Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee of 1897. The metal from the three original bells, (two are dated 1616 and 1650) was melted down and used in the new castings. The inscription and founder's mark of the 1616 bell was faithfully reproduced on the new fourth. The largest or tenor bell has the inscription:

*To the glory of God this peal of bells
was given by the parishioners to commemorate the
diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria*

On one side is the royal crown with: *Victoria AD 1837*

and on the other: *R.I. 1897 - for God the Church and Queen*

The clock was made by Thwaites and Reed of Clerkenwell, London in 1843. It sounds the hours but has no chime.

THE CHURCHYARD

Other than the Onslow vault with burials dating from 1688 the oldest gravestone (C21) is for John Ward, aged 13, who died in 1740. One notable gravestone is the first on the left on the path from the porch to the hall, is for Sarah Battey who lived all her life in Merrow and who died in 1799, aged 103. Unfortunately, due to pollution and erosion, the inscription is now barely readable but the words are:

*By St David's rule, our ages then
Were numbered threescore years and ten;
But if to fourscore years we gain
Our labours then both grief and pain.
At ninety years I do depend
To make a good and Holy end:
But at one hundred year and three
The grave the bed that best suits me.*