

Welcome to Cudham Church

The exact date when a church came into existence at Cudham is not known, but there is a record of a payment of 7d for oil in the year AD 953, indicating that Cudham had a priest and a font, and in a Saxon script reference is made to a church here in AD 982. In the Domesday Survey, compiled in 1086, it is recorded that "Gilbert Maminot holds of the bishop Codeham ... a church is there". The Bishop referred to was Odo, Bishop of Bayeaux, and a half brother of William the Conqueror.

It is possible that the footprint of the Saxon church was that of the current south chapel, perhaps with a tower at the west end. Did the Normans demolish the existing church? The two small windows, one by the current entrance door and the other opposite it, date the nave as early Norman, though its high proportions are Saxon. There would have been no seats; worshippers stood or knelt on the earthen floor, men at one side, women at the other. By 1487 the roof needed attention, and 20 shillings were left "to ye making of the Church roffe".

The door to the Norman church is in the west end; the current porch may not have been added until after the Reformation, for it is thought that the king post in the roof beam above the internal door is from the rood screen, which would have been removed during these times of change. On the wall to the left of the west window in the porch there is a roughly-carved script, now largely lost having been painted over, and under it a scratched dial, which is thought to show the times of mass. The benches are typical of a porch of this time, which was the place for discussing parish affairs, and for holding parts of the baptism and marriage services.

The age of the font, which is situated to the west of the door from the porch, is not known; it may be 15C, it may be from the original church. It was moved to its current position, from the other side of

the nave, in 1977, but prior to that had been where it is now!

Indeed, the font is likely to have been moved several times. In the north wall of the nave, opposite the entrance, is what appears to be a blocked up doorway. The mediaeval rite of baptism began with the exorcism of the devil, which left the baby via the north door for the nether regions, the abode of all evil. However, this alcove may have been a cupboard for the keeping of staves and banners for ceremonial occasions, or it may even have housed a fire of some kind, for there is a flue in the thickness of the wall above.

The St. Katherine chapel was added to the church in 1350 and dedicated to the Christian princess, the story of whose martyrdom the Crusaders brought back from Egypt in the 13C. It was the chapel for the Aperfield estate, one of the two large estates of the Biggin Hill area, and part of Cudham Parish at that time. The chapel was transformed into an open area in 1971 and before the new floor was laid investigations were carried out to try to establish the truth of a tale that has a tunnel running from the church to exit on Church Hill. Sadly nothing was found!

In the north-west corner of this chapel is a small window, often described, though erroneously, as a 'leper' window. Note also the ledge by the east window, which would have held an icon, and the piscine to the right, which would have been by the altar of the chapel. Below the piscine part of an old altar stone is set in the wall, bearing 3 of its 5 consecration crosses, which represented the Wounds of Christ. During the Reformation stone altars were replaced by wooden Communion tables.

The three small shields in this east window are, on the left the arms of the Waleys family, in the centre the Royal Arms of England (14C) and on the right a fine specimen of old glass, the arms of Valens, Earl of Pembroke. Hasted's "History of Kent", written in 1747, refers to a fourth shield.

In the threshold to the chancel, but now hidden by the wooden steps, is a memorial brass which is inscribed, "here lyeth Alys Waleys sometyme wyf unto Walter Waleys of this village ... which Alys decessed the xi day of July in the year of our Lord MD and iii ...". Walter is buried in the porch.

To either side of the chancel arch are the lectern and the pulpit, both given to the church by former owners of Cudham Hall (further south along Cudham Lane). The lectern was the gift of Messrs JH and C Worsley in 1878 and Edward Augustus Rucker, who lived at the Hall between 1892 and 1915, gifted the pulpit.

Above the arch is what appears to be a blocked up window. It is surmised that this was actually the door to a priest's room, or 'solar', a room lit only by sunlight. This is referred to in a document of 1468 but all evidence of it is now lost. To the left of the arch is a stone corbel, which it is assumed provided support for a rood gallery above the rood screen, which would have closed off the sacred chancel from the people in the centuries before the Reformation.

The chancel dates from around 1250, and a conical stone bracket adjacent to the arch, to the north, gives credence to the theory that it replaced a typical semi-circular Norman apse. The east window is a memorial to those of the Parish who fell in the 2 World War of the 20C, the original window blown out by a bomb which landed in the recreation ground on 21 July 1944. It was partly funded by monies collected to provide a Village Hall, as a War Memorial, which never came to fruition. A plaque detailing the shields in this window hangs on the north wall, along with one, executed in 2007, which honours the several servicemen who lost their lives in the two wars and who are buried in the churchyard.

The oak reredos is believed to have been made with wood from the old rood screen, and the cross on the Communion table is made from palm wood. It was given to an army chaplain in the

Mesopotamian campaign of 1916 and was originally used on the altar in the south chapel. A beautiful beaten silver cross was stolen in the 1970s.

Of particular interest in the chancel is the 'Easter tomb', to the right of the Communion table. "On Good Friday, amid solemn ceremony, the Blessed Sacrament ... was laid in the Easter Sepulchre ... until the early hours of Easter Sunday when it was transferred to the High Altar". (From "The Mediaeval Parish Church" by G H Cook.) Such tombs are normally in the north side of a chapel. This tomb and the south chapel are also known as the Warrior tomb/chapel, though it is not known why.

Just when the south chapel was built is not known, nor whether, at the time, it replaced the old Saxon church. It seems to have been built to provide a chapel for Bertrey, the second large estate of Biggin Hill in the parish. Some time in the 1800s, after the lithograph and plan of the church, reproduced on the cover of this guide, were drawn it was opened up to the chancel. In 1920 it was re-dedicated as a War Memorial chapel, but now there are two meeting rooms in it, created in 1986, further enhancing a vestry created in 1960 with the oak screens to the chancel. Also in the chapel is the organ, which was installed in 1894 by W Sweetland of Bath.

To the right of the chancel arch, as viewed from the nave, is a buttress. It is assumed it was constructed to buttress the arches of the south chapel and maybe also the tower, for this has been raised since the lithograph of 1804 was drawn. However, an external buttress at the other end of the arches does not feature in photographs dated 1897.

The tower contains a peel of 10 bells, the oldest of which was cast in 1490 by Thos. Bollesdon and is inscribed "Ora pro nobis, Sancte Paul", "Pray for us, Saint Paul". An inventory of 1553 records there being 4 bells in the steeple, probably,

therefore, including a St Peter bell and 2 others which were replaced in 1661 by two cast by John Hodson. The peel was completed in 1931 with the addition of 3 bells, provided for in the bequest of a parishioner, one Rolla Richards. He also left money for the installation of the clock on the tower.

Lightning struck the weathervane on the spire just before Christmas 1989, and the charge tracked its way from the lightning conductor to the clock and the electrical system of the church. The Carol Service that year was only candle-lit!

The window of the Annunciation in the south wall of the nave, an orifice of decorative English style, was made by Charles Kempe in 1897. The last years of the 19C also saw extensive repairs and alterations to the whole church, overseen by the architect Ewan Christian, as recorded by the brass plaque on the wall opposite the entrance door.

Out in the churchyard are two ancient yew trees, both over 1000 years old, both with girths of over 10m. They bear witness to there being a church here before the Normans came, as it was the custom to plant yew trees in churchyards in ancient times. The one near the porch is the female, bearing the red arils in the autumn.

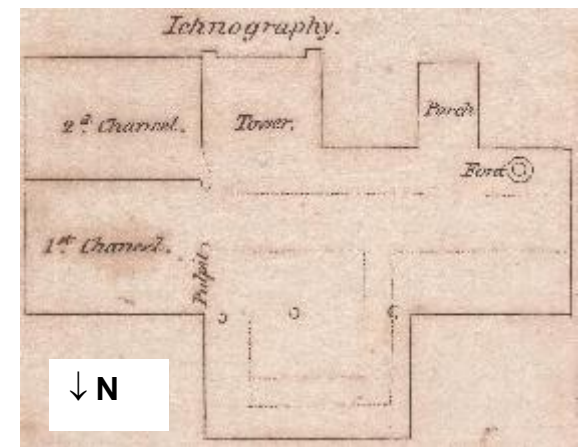
The church of St Peter and St Paul stands on the local high point; not the benchmark on the west buttress of the tower. Much altered from the original, it continues to bear witness to the Christian faith in the parish of Cudham. At the dawn of the third millennium the congregation erected a plaque on the north wall of the St Katharine chapel, making a statement of their faith in words from St John's Gospel. Made from Jerusalem limestone by stonemason Richard Kindersley, the plaque declares:

"I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father but through me." May you know God's blessing as you go from this church.

Guide compiled in June 2008; amended May 2009.

St Peter and St Paul Cudham

Church Guide



Images dated 1804