

CHURCHES IN ASHTEAD

The main Churches in Ashtead are:

- a) The Parish Church of St Giles (C of E)
- b) St Georges Church (C of E)
- c) St Michael the Archangel (R.C.)

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. GILES



St Giles Church is situated on, or near a former Roman site, east of the village and near the site of the Mediaeval Manor house. Indications are that the church was built about 1125 as a private chapel by Lawrence of Rouen, the Norman Lord of the Manor of Ashtead (1110 – 1130). Over the centuries the church has been extensively rebuilt and extended. The earliest parts of the church are known to contain Roman tiles and there are many fragments of Roman building materials found intermixed with the flint walls. It is concluded that the Norman builders of the Church used materials quarried from demolished Roman buildings close by, as was common practice at that time.

From the early 12th century an Advowson for Leatherhead area was held by Colchester Abbey. A Chapel at Ashtead was added to the endowment that was recorded in the Charter of William Gifford, Bishop of Winchester (1107 – 1129). It was also recorded that, by agreement, Abbot Gilbert of Colchester (c.1105 – 1125) relinquished the Church of Leatherhead, with all appurtenances, except the Chapel at Ashtead, to Osbern, the Priest.

During re-build some features disappeared i.e. a small Norman window on the north side which was destroyed when the northeast chapel was built in 1862. The early construction of the south wall was built of flint mixed with Roman tiles and dressed stones, although the sandstone cornerstones appeared to be of Victorian addition,

evident by the presence of mortar joints. Notes made in 1857 stated that the Chancel is of early English origin with 3 lancets (arches) on the north. The windows on the south side were added later. But also built into the east end, and visible externally, is a typical 12th to 13th century pilaster buttress. The east wall is of flint with lumps of stone and tiles inter-mixed.

What emerges is a small simple Church, which can probably be identified with Lawrence's original chapel. But the re-building of the Chancel by Colchester Abbey on a larger scale during the 13th century may be connected with the elevation of Ashted from Chapelry of Leatherhead to an independent Rectory. Very little alterations were carried out during the 14th – 15th centuries, except for replacement windows, because the Parish of Ashted was considered too poor for the Church to be extended.

The most important work in late mediaeval times was the rebuilding and remodelling of the tower that began after a bequest in 1503 for repairs to the bell-tower. Victorian refurbishing saw the removal of earlier fittings, and the only fitting of note that remained was the late 15th century octagonal font.

The Reformation in mid-16th century destroyed many religious traditions and Ashted fared no better. In 1549 an inventory of goods was made but most items were either sold or stolen. But in 1553 a 14oz Chalice, the hearse cloth and a green silk for the Communion table were returned to the Churchwardens. The Wardens also reported that there was no money in the Church boxes.

Between the Reformation and the 19th century there is little evidence of documentary or structural history of the Church buildings. However, there were illustrations, paintings and photographs indicating various changes. Sadly, neglect of the fabric of the buildings was the most damaging, and an account written in 1873 vividly depicts the state of the buildings.

The first serious restoration work took place about 1831, funded at the expense of Colonel & Mrs Howard, when the north porch and part of the nave wall was demolished to make way for a new north transept. The nave roof and the roof of the Chancel were also repaired or replaced. It was also during this time that the 16th century east window, depicting the Crucifixion, was acquired. The glass was from the dismantled Flemish Abbey of Herkenade, obtained for Mrs Howard by Sir Charles Bagot, then British Ambassador at The Hague. William Legge, the Rector from 1826 until his death in 1872, was responsible for the impetus to repair and rebuild the Church during that period.

The Organ was a gift of Mary Greville Howard in 1861. In 1873 the six-bells of 1725, to replace the three previously in use, were recast as a peel of eight bells in honour of Mary Howard. The tower was also refaced and the hood-mould with corbels representing William Legge and Mary Howard were placed over the west door. The Vestry and Organ chambers were built in 1891.

During the late Victorian period the Church acquired an assortment of stained glass windows, pews and other fittings, including an attractive raised sanctuary in 1883. There are three notable monuments in the Church, John Browne and his wife Edith (1590), Elizabeth Bodley (1591) and Dorothy, wife of Rector Robert Quinell (1640). There are also various tablets on the walls of the Church.

Prepared by: L Anderson, May 2009
Update: October 2013.
