

THE CHURCH OF ST. PETER, LIMPSFIELD SURREY

BY
KAY PERCY

HIGH above the road at the north end of the village of Limpsfield stands the Church of St. Peter. Built of ironstone and sandstone rubble, roofed part tile and part Horsham stone, with a squat shingled tower, it sits serenely above the ancient stone wall which borders the High Street (Plates I(a) and (b)). A flight of stone steps and an ironstone path take the visitor through the lychgate, probably ancient, though much restored in 1891, to the sixteenth-century south porch, where one enters the church.

The first record of a church in Limpsfield is in the Domesday Survey of 1086. Nothing remains of this church; it may have been of timber, but most probably it was built of local stone, for Domesday Book records two stone quarries in the manor.¹ The church and manor, once belonging to King Harold, were given by William I to the Abbey of Battle as part of William's thank-offering for his victory.² The Abbey, however, did not appropriate the living as happened in so many manors. This meant that the Abbey appointed the rector but the tithes and offerings remained the property of the incumbent.

The oldest remaining part of the present church is the tower c. 1180. This twelfth-century church consisted of a chancel, nave and tower placed, unusually, to the south of the chancel. The nave has never been completely rebuilt, but all four walls are pierced by later work and nothing of its original character remains.

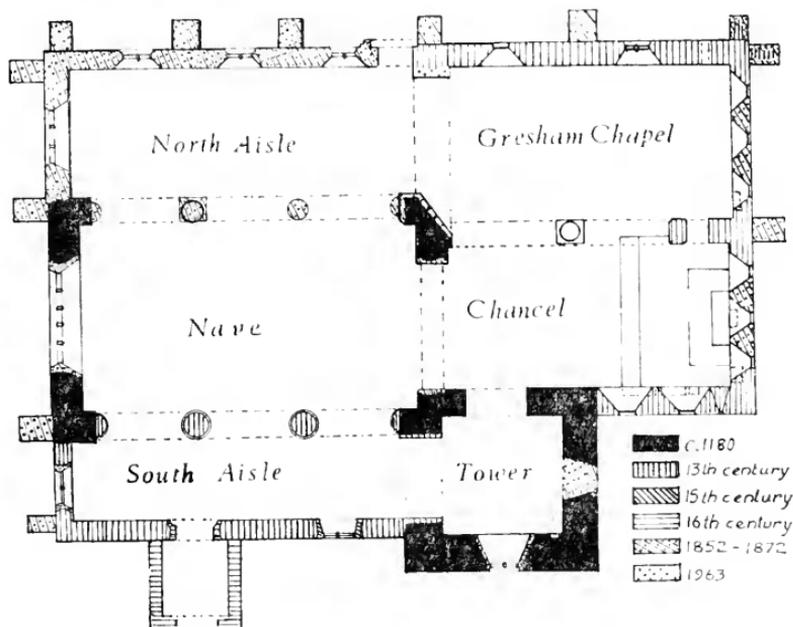
The **CHANCEL** (Plan and Plates II(a) and III(a)) was rebuilt and probably lengthened to the east in the first quarter of the thirteenth century; the east part of the south wall butts against the tower but is not bonded into it. The three lancets in the east wall are modern reconstructions of the original windows, which had been replaced by a single window of three lights in the early sixteenth century.³ When the church was 'restored' in 1871-2 the whole of the upper part of the east wall was rebuilt and the sills and outer jambs of the original windows were discovered *in situ*. Below the window the remains of a stone reredos, probably of the fifteenth century, were found but these have not been preserved.

¹ Domesday Book, f. 34a, col. 1.

² Lowther, M. A., *The Chronicle of Battle Abbey* (1851), 26, and British Museum Cotton Charter, XVI, 28.

³ Evidence from wills of 1536. Surrey Archdeaconry Court. Pykman, f. 194. Mychell, f. 153.

Behind the present Communion Table there is a cupboard, rebated to take a door, perhaps intended for some sacred relic. South of this is a second recess measuring 22 by 18½ inches and 16 inches in depth which has a flue, 6 inches in diameter, built into the top. So much of the wall has been rebuilt that there is now no exit for the flue, but there is no doubt that it was an oven for baking the communion bread or Hosts. This task, both before and after the Reformation, was carried out with due reverence and ritual in a place set aside for it.⁴ This is a comparatively rare survival, only four others being



(Scale: approximately 24 ft. to 1 inch.)

PLAN OF LIMPSFIELD CHURCH.

recorded in Surrey. Low down at the east end of the south wall is a narrow window with wide splays which lights the area in front of the oven and it seems probable that it was so placed for this purpose.

In the south wall also is a *piscina* with a simple chamfered two-centred head and a second recess, probably a *sedile* or priest's seat, of similar shape. The original purpose of the third recess with segmental head is not known, although between 1823 and 1872 it was used as a door to a vestry, built in the angle between the tower and chancel.⁵

The two widely splayed lancets above the moulded string-course have external glass rebates and showed, until recent years, remains of simple painted stone-jointing and rosettes dated c. 1230 on the

⁴ Crawley, J. M., and Bloxam, R. N., 'Church Wafer Ovens,' *The Amateur Historian*, VII (1967), No. 5.

⁵ Limpsfield Parish Register, No. VI, pp. 137, 160.

internal splays.⁶ The present modern glass of SS. Peter and Andrew is the work of Mr. F. Powell in memory of Canon Edward Rhys-Jones, 1870–1900. The west part of the south wall is formed by the tower in which there is a plain flat-soffited arch of the twelfth century. The chancel arch of thirteenth-century form was considerably raised in 1851.⁷

The north wall has a doorway and an arcade of two bays opening to the Gresham Chapel. These are all of the thirteenth century but the circular pier between the arches has a modern capital.

The **GRESHAM CHAPEL**, north of the chancel, takes its present name from the Gresham family who acquired the manor of Limpsfield and the advowson of the church in 1538.⁸ It was built towards the middle of the thirteenth century, perhaps by Ralph, who was Abbot of Battle from 1235 to 1260 and it was, presumably, the Lady Chapel referred to in the will of Alys Bysset 1488.⁹

The three modern lancets in thirteenth-century style in the east wall replace a fourteenth-century window of three lights. In the north wall is a fifteenth-century window of two lights, containing fragments of sixteenth-century glass under a square head, and further west is an original lancet heavily restored. Towards the east end one jamb of a blocked doorway remains.

The little spray of sculptured foliage set in the east wall is of uncertain date but probably fourteenth-century. There is also a rectangular recess rebated for a door. In the wall, south of the present organ arch, remains of a doorhead can be seen which apparently led diagonally through the wall to the blocked doorway in the nave, north of the chancel arch.

The **NAVE** (Plates II(a) and (b)) retains its original twelfth-century size. To the north is an arcade of three arches built in 1851 when the north aisle was added. The south arcade was pierced through the twelfth-century wall in the first half of the thirteenth century when the narrow south aisle was built. Above this arcade, at the east end of the south wall, is a blocked doorway with rebated jambs which once led to the rood-loft mentioned as 'newe' in the will of 1488. The west window is modern, replacing a fifteenth-century window of five lights; it was inserted sometime between 1828 and 1851, possibly when the extension of the west gallery which ran along the west end of the north wall was removed. The west gallery itself was finally removed in 1871.¹⁰

The **SOUTH AISLE** arcade is of three bays with circular columns and half round responds, all with moulded capitals and bases. There is a modern (1851) west window of two lights replacing a single light. The west wall of the tower, within the aisle, shows the

⁶ Johnston, P. M., *Surrey Archæological Collections*, 'Low side windows in Surrey churches,' XIV (1899), 104.

⁷ Limpsfield Parish File. Incorporated Church Building Society, 7 Queen Anne's Gate, S.W.1.

⁸ Letters and Papers of Henry VIII, II, 191.

⁹ Surrey Archdeaconry, Ct. Spage 284. Surrey Record Society, XVII, 82.

¹⁰ Limpsfield Parish Register, No. VI, p. 159.

thirteenth-century roof line well below the present roof. The aisle roof was raised probably in the fifteenth century when the present square-headed window of two lights was inserted. Remains of an earlier window can be seen beneath this window in the outside wall.

The **TOWER** (Plates I(a) and (b)), built in the late twelfth century, has small windows to the belfry, each of two lights with modern heads. In the north wall a plain archway of a single two-centred order springing from chamfered imposts communicates with the chancel. In the east wall is the arch of a blocked fifteenth-century window and above it, spanning the full width of the tower, a second arch which may have covered a recess for the altar which once stood here; a *piscina* in the south wall is evidence that the tower was used as a chapel, probably the chapel of St. Katherine referred to in wills. In the west wall there is a thirteenth-century arch with boldly moulded capitals to the responds; there are indications of a former screen between tower and south aisle.

The modern **NORTH AISLE** has three two-light windows in the north wall and a three-light window in the west wall; at the east end, next to the Gresham Chapel, is a doorway. Below the west window is the board mentioned by Aubrey in the early eighteenth century,¹¹ listing the benefactors of the parish. The modern organ, which is built above the newly formed arch between north aisle and chapel, is the fourth organ at St. Peter's. The first was subscribed for in 1822, 'in consequence of the Church Singers having left off singing'¹² and erected in the west gallery. In 1872 Arthur Leveson Gower, Esq., presented an organ which was erected in the chancel; this was replaced in 1948 by a Compton Electronic Organ. The present organ was given in memory of R. H. Aisher in 1963.

The trussed-rafter roof of the Gresham Chapel may be original, of the thirteenth century; the chancel roof, now boarded, is of the same period, though some timbers have been renewed. The nave roof of lower pitch is a good example of cradle form. The south aisle has a fifteenth-century lean-to roof.

The **FONT** is thirteenth century but has been recut. It consists of a simple square stone hollowed with a circular basin. This is supported on a fluted pillar, probably part of the original font recut in Jacobean times, but the four corner shafts and base were renewed in 1871-2.¹³

The **PULPIT** (Plate III(b)), once much taller with a sounding board and clerk's seat,¹⁴ was the gift of Samuel Savage, Esq., in 1764. It was cut down and now stands on a stone base. The **CHURCH PLATE** includes nine pieces of silver and silver gilt also given by Mr. Savage in 1765, and a silver gilt cup and paten of

¹¹ Aubrey, John, *Natural History and Antiquities of Surrey*, III (1710). 8.

¹² Vestry Minute Book. 1822-26. Parish Clerk's Office, Limpsfield.

¹³ Limpsfield Parish Register, No. VI, p. 160.

¹⁴ See Plates. Manning and Bray, *History and Topography of Surrey*, XI, contains a series of water colours by J. Hassell painted between 1821-1828. British Museum North Library, Press Mark Crack 1, tab. 1, b. 1.

1888 in memory of Mary, the wife of the Rector, Edward Rhys-Jones.

Until 1877 there were only four **BELLS**, but in that year two were recast and two more added. The six bells bear the following inscriptions:—

- No. 1 D Cast by J. Warner & Sons 1877 and weighing 594 lbs.
'Fiat voluntas tua.' E. Atkinson } Church Wardens
 J. Eliot }
 R. Ridley Clerk.
- No. 2 C Cast by J. Warner & Sons 1877 and weighing 684 lbs.
'To the Glory of God.'
- No. 3 B *'Sancta Margareta Ora Pro Nobis'* T.H.
 This is an ancient bell probably made by Thomas Hillman, a bell founder of Canterbury between 1350 and 1400.
- No. 4 A *'Bryan Eldridge made mee 1619,'* weighing 964 lbs.
 The inscription has a heart between each word. Bryan Eldridge was a well-known founder of Surrey and Sussex bells.
- No. 5 C *'In multis annis Resonet Campana Johannis,'*
 weighing 1,456 lbs. It was recast in 1877; the original was probably a fourteenth-century bell.
- No. 6 F *'Sum Rosa Pulsata Mundi Maria Vocate,'* weighing 1,626 lbs. A large bell recast in 1877 by John Warner, from the original which was thought to date from c. 1500.

The bells were last tuned and rehung by Gillet & Johnston in 1948.

The **CHURCHYARD**, enlarged in 1862, 1893 and 1934, is the resting place of several notable people, including Florence Barclay the authoress and Frederick Delius the composer. Near to the south porch are some good early eighteenth-century grave stones bearing names of families still living in the village.

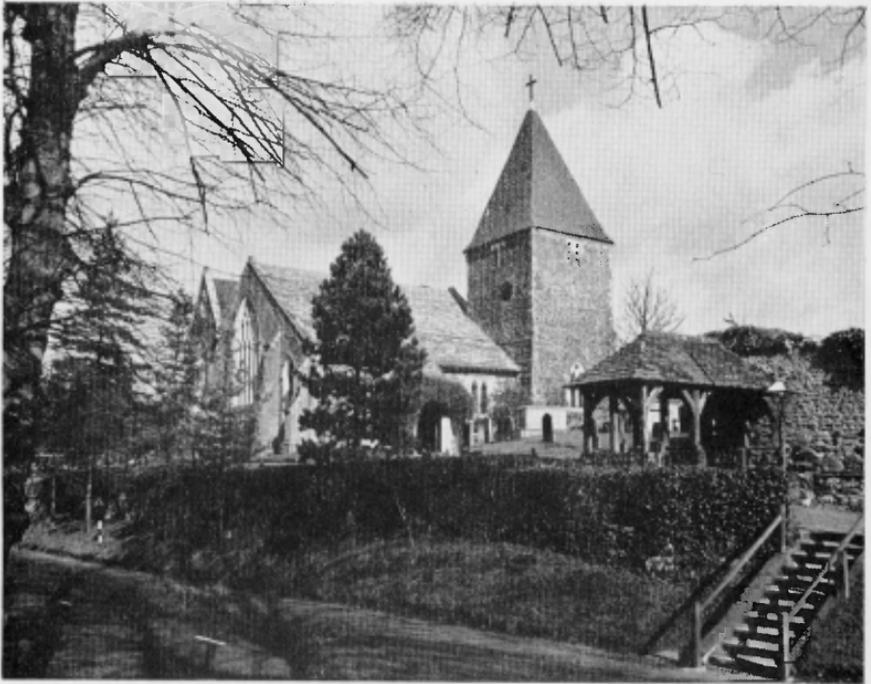
The registers are very well preserved; they run from 1539 to the present day with few gaps; the earliest register was transcribed in 1600. They are deposited in the County Record Office at Kingston upon Thames. Those up to 1837 have recently been transcribed and typed copies are kept at the Rectory.

I am indebted to Mr. R. W. McDowall, M.A., F.S.A., for his kindness in advising me on architectural detail and the presentation of this description.

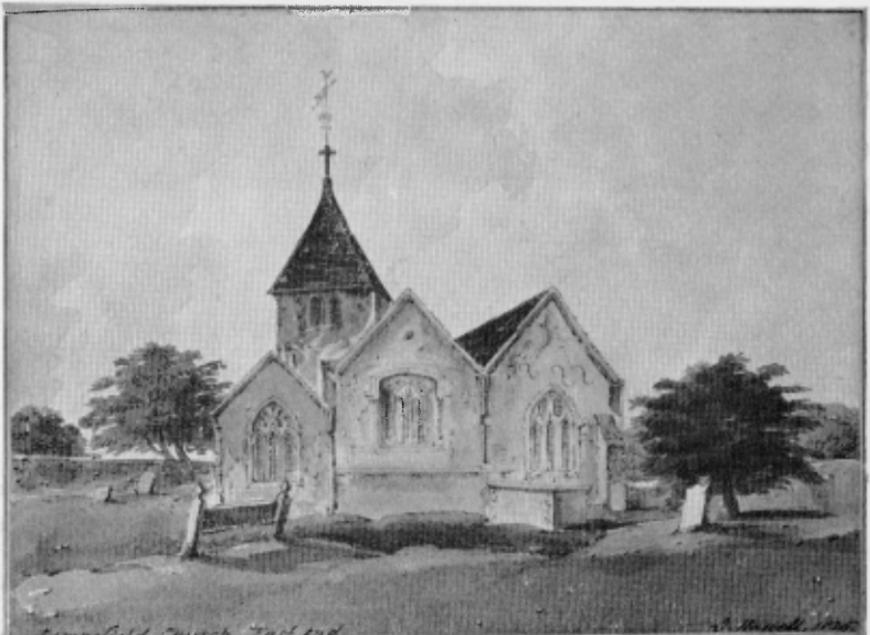
LIST OF KNOWN RECTORS

| | | | |
|---------------------------|------|------------------------|------|
| Roger le Brun | 1296 | Edmund Knight | 1546 |
| Nicholas de Taunton | 1333 | John Huntley | 1554 |
| William Goffe | 1335 | John Wilson | 1555 |
| Roger de Leighton | 1336 | William Danby | 1556 |
| Walter de Merstham | 1347 | Thomas Bell | 1572 |
| John Ketteringham | 1378 | John Rhodes | 1597 |
| John Ireland | 1378 | Patrick Balfour | 1617 |
| John Flamstede | 1394 | John Lorkin | 1618 |
| John Wodehall | 1394 | Edward Lorkin | 1655 |
| Thomas Roke, LL.B. | 1398 | John Campion | 1688 |
| REGISTER 1415/1446 lost. | | William Walker | 1700 |
| John Ingryth | 1450 | John Holman | 1728 |
| Gilbert Emworth | 1450 | George Lewis Jones | 1757 |
| John Hasard | 1459 | William Steed | 1775 |
| William Polman or Portman | 1459 | Legh Hoskins Master | 1781 |
| Robert More | 1461 | Robert Mayne | 1806 |
| William George | 1473 | Thomas Walpole | 1842 |
| John Shadewell | 1481 | James Haldane Stewart | 1846 |
| John Wyld | 1481 | Charles Baring | 1855 |
| Thomas Poyner | 1481 | Samuel Charlsworth | 1857 |
| Thomas Bowman | 1487 | Edward Rhys-Jones | 1870 |
| REGISTER 1492/1500 lost. | | Ernest Morrel Blackie | 1900 |
| John Wallysh* | 1488 | Gerald Gurney Richards | 1906 |
| John Goodwyn* | 1517 | Charles Sterr | 1928 |
| Roger Wylkynson* | 1521 | Paul R. Wansey | 1951 |
| Stephen Sythwarren | 1534 | | |

* Traced through Surrey Archdeaconry Wills.



(a) LIMPSFIELD CHURCH FROM SOUTH-WEST.



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(b) LIMPSFIELD CHURCH, EAST END. 1825.



(a) EAST END IN 1828, SHOWING ALTAR PIECE ERECTED IN 1713.



(b) WEST END IN 1828, SHOWING GALLERY AND ORGAN.



[Photo: Michael Wall.]

(a) CHANCEL FROM GRESHAM CHAPEL, LOOKING SOUTH-EAST.



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(b) LIMPSFIELD CHURCH IN 1825, SHOWING BOX PEWS ERECTED IN 1713 AND PULPIT WITH CLERK'S SEAT.