

THE CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE CROWHURST, SURREY

BY

R. W. McDOWALL, O.B.E., F.S.A.

CROWHURST is not mentioned in Domesday Book. The earliest documentary reference to the church is in a taxation return of 1291 when the church of St. George at Crowhurst was taxed 100 shillings. Henry de Guldeford granted the advowson of the church to the Prior and Convent of Tandridge and the appropriation of the rectory is recorded in June 1304. A vicarage was not however established until 1868. The priory was founded as a hospital for three priests, and lay brethren. They maintained a house near the church which has survived as a range of four tenements known as Altar Cottages. The parish registers date from 1567.

The church consists of Chancel, Nave, South Aisle and South Porch, and a timber Steeple. The south aisle was added towards the end of the twelfth century. The original church, dedicated to St. George, may have been built soon after the miraculous intervention of St. George in aid of the Crusaders at Antioch in 1098. The chancel was reconstructed with new lancet windows early in the thirteenth century and the east end of it was again rebuilt in the early fifteenth century. The timber steeple was also built in the fifteenth century over the west end of the nave, but it had to be completely rebuilt after a fire in 1947.

The parish register records that in 1652, on 20, 21 and 22 January, part of the church was repaired 'which had lien in heaps a long time.' It has been suggested that this was the repair of damage done in a Civil War skirmish a few years previously and the finding of a cannon ball in the yew tree in the churchyard supports this theory. There is now no division between nave and chancel but when the chancel arch was removed is not known. The east wall of the chancel was decorated in 1882 in memory of the Third Earl of Cottenham by his widow Theodosia Selina.

The Chancel. The rebuilding carried out in the early fifteenth century is defined by a substantial plinth reaching six or seven feet along the north and south walls, and by the use of larger squared stone which contrasts with the smaller random masonry of the earlier work. The east window, with perpendicular tracery, and the eastern window in the south wall, with four lights in a square head, are of the fifteenth century. The eastern window on the north side is of similar size to that opposite, but of three lights only, and is of sixteenth-century date. In the western part of the chancel are thirteenth-century lancet windows, one to the north partly restored and one to the south renewed after having been blocked. There are also traces of former lancet windows further east.

The Nave has three windows to the north, a late fourteenth-century window of two lights under a segmental head between two modern lancets in thirteenth-century style. That to the east replaces a window of two square-headed lights shown in a drawing by Hassell,¹ dated 1823. Traces of the west jamb of this window remain on the outside. A patch of rebuilding in the lower part of the wall suggests a former north doorway and this is shown still surviving in a sketch by Hassell, dated 1824. The original south-east corner of the nave appears externally where the dressed stones of the corner remain in the upper part of the wall. The archway to the south aisle was made when the aisle was added at the end of the twelfth century. High up in the wall to the east of the arch is a recess which may represent access to a former rood-loft. Now only a single beam spans the junction of nave and chancel. The doorway to the porch has a pointed arch built below the lofty semicircular rear-arch of the original doorway. The west window is of the fifteenth century and

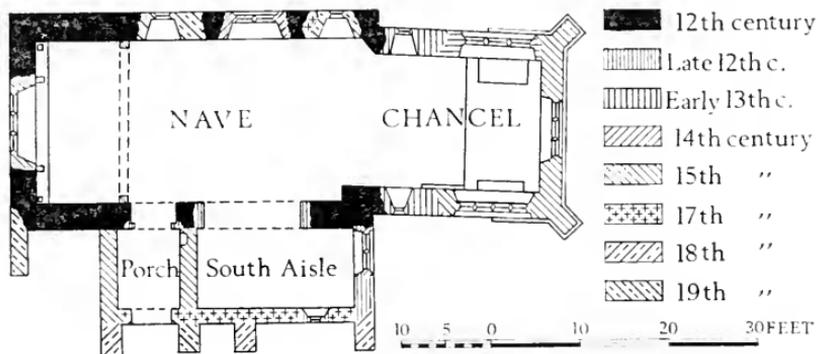


FIG. 1.—PLAN.

part of the wall above it has been rebuilt, but the thickening in the upper part of the wall reproduces an old feature evidently designed to carry a bell-cote before the fifteenth-century steeple was built.

The South Aisle was presumably the chapel of the Holy Rood in which John Harlynge, in his will of 1504, wished to be buried. In the east wall is a window with an original late twelfth-century semicircular rear-arch springing from side shafts, with the remains of carved leaf capitals, but the window itself is of the late fourteenth century, with two lights and a tracery quatrefoil under a segmental head. In the south wall is a window of one very small light with a later trefoiled head. Two buttresses to the south wall were probably added early in the eighteenth century.

¹ A series of water-colour sketches by Hassell are bound into a copy of Manning and Bray's *History of the Antiquities of the County of Surrey* (1814), in the British Museum. All are dated in the eighteen twenties.

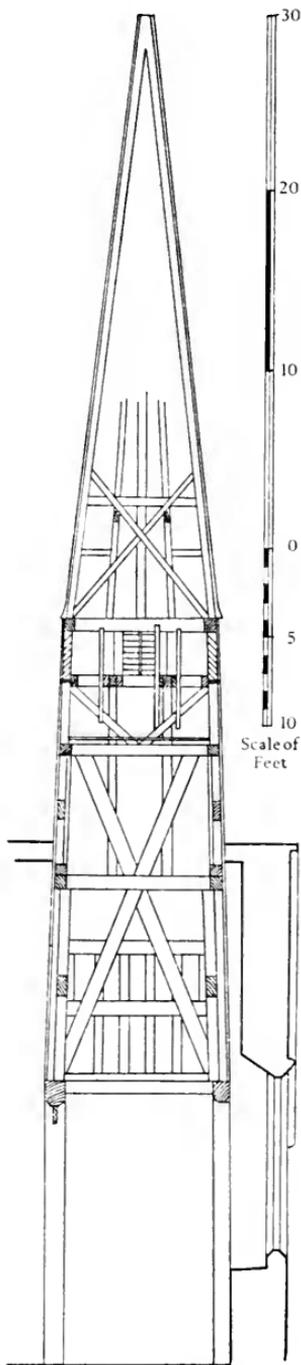


FIG. 2.—THE OLD STEEPLE, re-drawn from a survey by E. E. Bowden, dated 1905.

The South Porch is structurally a continuation of the aisle. It is entered by a simple pointed arch between two buttresses, that to the west of the late eighteenth century, that to the east probably added in the restoration of 1852.

The Steeple is entirely modern, but two of the timber posts on which it stands, together with a moulded beam against the west wall, survive from the original structure. A measured drawing showing the steeple was prepared in 1905 (Fig. 2). The three old bells were all recast and a fourth added after the fire of 1947.

The Roofs of the chancel and nave are of simple trussed-rafter construction with moulded wall-plates. Differences in the mouldings between nave and chancel and the slightly larger size of the timbers in the nave suggest that the nave roof is the earlier. The chancel roof was probably erected in the early fifteenth-century restoration

The Gainsford Family is commemorated by several interesting monuments. The first John Gainsford to acquire land in Crowhurst was a Judge of the High Court in the reign of Edward III; he married Margery de la Poyle who brought him land in Crowhurst, and he made several further purchases of land in the parish between 1331 and 1348. In 1418 his grandson John (III) acquired the manor and Crowhurst Place. His son John (IV) sat in Parliament in 1430 as Knight of the Shire of Surrey and died in 1450, leaving instructions that he should be buried in front of the statue of St. George. His tomb is on the north side of the chancel. His son John (V) died in 1460 and is buried with his wife Anne (Wakehurst) in the canopied tomb on the south side of the chancel. Their grandson John (VII) was knighted and served as sheriff of the county and was married six times. His third wife was Anne Fiennes and a floor-slab now in the south aisle bears a brass plate recording that she was the daughter of Lord Dacre.

The title of Lord Dacre was granted to Sir Richard Fiennes in 1459 and passed to the family of Lennard on the death of Gregory Fiennes in 1594. Anne had no children but his other wives bore John twenty children. One of his grandchildren, Anne, married William Forster and is commemorated by the remarkable cast-iron slab in the chancel floor. Another grandchild, Erasmus, married Johanna, daughter of the Richard Cholmley, who is commemorated by a brass set in a slab in the floor of the chancel. The male line of Gainsford of Crowhurst failed at the end of the seventeenth century and the heiresses sold Crowhurst Place in 1724 to the first Duchess of Marlborough.

There were two other branches of the Gainsford family in Surrey and Nicholas Gainsford, commemorated on the north wall of the nave, belonged to the Carshalton family.

The Gainsford Tombs. The tomb of John (IV) on the north side of the chancel consists of a stone chest with panelled sides containing plain shields within quatrefoils. Set in the forest marble top are three brasses: a figure in full plate armour, a shield-of-arms of Gainsford quartering de la Poyle, and an inscription plate. Above the tomb a length of timber cornice, moulded and embattled, is fixed to the sill of the window. The tomb of John (V) opposite has a similar chest set under an arched canopy. The arch is decorated with the Gainsford badge of a grapnel, and various grotesques, including human faces surrounded by grapes and by leaves, suggesting the wild man of the woods (the woodhouse) and other rural superstitions. The shields of the tomb-chest are carved with the arms of Gainsford, Gainsford quartering de la Poyle, and Wakehurst. On the top of the tomb-chest are brasses. The inscription plate records John's death on the feast of the Translation of St. Thomas the Martyr 1460. A shield bears the arms of Gainsford quartering de la Poyle impaling Fiennes quartering Dacre, showing that this shield belongs to the floor-slab of Anne Gainsford in the south aisle. The main brass shows a figure in plate armour but with no helmet. The armour is of gothic character in contrast with the Italianate armour of John (IV). John (V) has a gusset of chain mail at the right armpit where the plate leaves room for the lance to be held. There is a further gusset of chain between the tassets which cover the thighs. The lowest plate of each tasset is unusual in being attached with a buckle. John (IV) has a reinforced breast plate with no allowance for the lance and instead of tassets a full skirt which, on horseback, would necessitate the use of a special high saddle, the skirt making a seat on an ordinary saddle impossible.

The floor-slab of Anne has a broken inscription plate. For a long time half this plate was missing but it was replaced c. 1961. There are indents for two shields, one of which is now fixed to the tomb of John Gainsford (V).

The iron floor-slab to Anne Forster has some of the letters reversed. As well as the inscription, there is a figure enveloped in a shroud between panels showing Anne's two sons under the initials WR and

her five daughters; there are also shields-of-arms of Gainsford and of Forster. Duplicates of this casting have been used as firebacks, one being recorded as far away as Norfolk (*Gentleman's Magazine* for December 1788).

The monuments to Nicholas Gainsford and his wife are of painted canvas, like miniature hatchments. Hassell's drawings show that the church formerly contained a number of hatchments now destroyed.

The Angell Monuments. The Angells came to Crowhurst early in the seventeenth century and occupied the Mansion House standing across the road from the church. In the chancel are two fine black marble floor-slabs. One is to John Angell, died 1670, who was 'caterer' at Windsor Castle to James I, Charles I and II, with a shield-of-arms of Angell impaling Edolph. The other is to William Angell, died 1674, the son of John, with achievement-of-arms of Angell impaling Gosson. On the south wall of the chancel is a monument with side scrolls and broken pediment to Justinian, fifth son of John; he died 1680. On the north wall is a monument with flanking columns and broken scrolled pediment to Thomasina, daughter of John Angell and wife of Richard Marryott.

Other Monuments. A table-tomb on the north side of the chancel, with cusped panelled chest and a canopy, has no inscription or other means of identification (fifteenth-century). In the nave is a wall-tablet to Margaret Donovan, 1826, and James Donovan, 1831, of Chellows Park.

Glass. In the tracery of the east window are fragments of fifteenth-century glass, including three angels whose appearance was probably inspired by the feathered costumes worn for miracle plays, and a figure of the Virgin from an Annunciation scene. Fragments of heraldic glass of the sixteenth century remain in the main lights of the east window and in the middle window on the north side of the nave.

Pulpit. The pulpit drawn by Hassell has disappeared and the present pulpit is made of sixteenth-century panelling, probably of secular origin.

The Font has a not very elegant bowl, square at the bottom, brought to an octagonal top by broached corners and standing on an octagonal drum and four smaller shafts. It is probably of the thirteenth century.

The Stoup, in the east wall of the porch, is a broken medieval fragment, recently uncovered.

The old door with medieval ironwork, mentioned in earlier descriptions of the church, has been replaced by a modern door.

The Churchyard contains several old head-stones near the east end of the church, conspicuous for their great thickness. Most are probably of the late seventeenth century but the earliest legible date is 1709. Table-tombs include two good late eighteenth-century tombs with moulded ends, and others enclosed by cast-iron grilles with phoenix standards. Memorials consisting of wooden boards between posts at the ends of the grave are of nineteenth-century dates. Two monuments of similar design, but made of stone, are of 1743 and 1753, and a third is dated 1900.

The yew tree near the east end of the church is of remarkable size. The hollowed trunk was fitted with seats early in the nineteenth century. The seats and a doorway into the tree are shown in Hassell's drawings.

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Gaynsford Cartulary, Brit. Mus. Harleian MS., 392.

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O. Manning and W. Bray, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey* (1814).

Somerset House Wills. P.C.C. 12 Rous, 12 Alenger, 27 Holgrave.

Unpublished notes by R. N. Gillespie in possession of the Vicar of Crowhurst.



[*National Monuments Record.*

CROWHURST CHURCH FROM THE SOUTH-EAST.



[National Monuments Record.]

CROWHURST CHURCH INTERIOR.



[National Monuments Record.

(b) BRASS OF JOHN GAINSFORD (V),
1460



(c) BRASS OF JOHN GAINSFORD (IV),
1450.



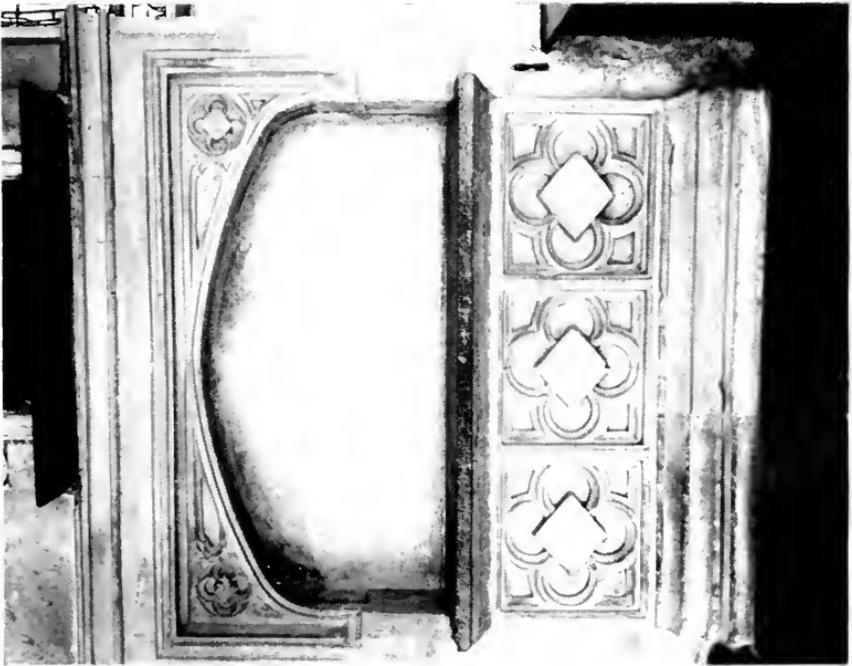
[*National Monuments Record.*

(c) EAST WINDOW IN SOUTH AISLE.



National Monuments Record.

(b) TOMB OF JOHN GAINSFORD (V).



(c) ANONYMOUS TOMB.