

# St. LEONARD'S CHESHAM BOIS

**Founded 1215 A.D., the year of Magna Carta**

## CHURCH GUIDE

### Foreword

ANYONE who cares to visit the beautiful village churches scattered up and down our country finds something of interest everywhere. This short guide has been compiled to help those who wish to explore the many features of interest, both ancient and modern, that are to be found in what was once known as “The Chapelle of Boyes.”

Those who know and love this village church are aware not only of its historic treasures; we value it above all as a place sacred to the worship of the One Father who seeks for all men everywhere to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Our modern world needs to recapture the art of worship. Many people regard worship as a hobby indulged in by religiously minded men and women. But worship is not just the special pursuit of a few pious people who happen to like this kind of thing. It is the down-to-earth regular necessity of people who want to enjoy life at its best, discovering from the God Who made them how they can choose the right way of life, and find its deepest and richest joys.

It would be difficult to improve on Archbishop Temple's well known definition of worship. Worship, he said, is “quickening the conscience by the holiness of God: feeding the mind with the truth of God; purging the imagination by the beauty of God; opening the heart to the love of God: devoting the will to the purpose of God.” Such worship is the greatest activity in which any man or woman can engage.

As you enjoy the quiet and peace of this village church, remember how much past generations of worshippers have done to create this atmosphere. When you stand by the font, think of the hundreds of children who have been admitted here into the membership of Christ's Church. As you approach the Lord's Table, remember the men and women who in every generation have there received Christ's special blessing.

We invite you to share with us in this rich heritage of faith and worship. If you live in this neighbourhood and do not attend another church, why not join our congregation? You will find to be very friendly. Even if you cannot—or do not wish to become a regular attender, you will be welcome whenever you come; and if there is anything we can do to help you in any way, please let us know.

### A QUICK LOOK AT THE PAST

Founded in 1215 A.D.—the year of Magna Carta—this church was the private chapel for the manor house of Chesham Bois which accounts for its secluded position on this wooded hillside near the site of the now demolished residence.

The original 13th century chapel has become the chancel of the present church. In the restored east window of three lights may be seen most of the beautiful 14th and 15th century glass of this church together with three inserted contemporary Flemish panels,

The south side of the nave as far as the south doorway dates from the 14th century when the chapel was enlarged as a parish church. This wall, like those of the chancel, is battered, i.e. wider internally at the base, which obviated the use of buttresses in small buildings.

The stone corbels of the chancel (which are painted) and of the eastern part of the nave date from the 15th century as do the moulded arch trusses. The nave has been lengthened at various times. The north aisle was added in 1881 when a small 17th century western tower was taken down and replaced by the present south porch and tower. A large gallery was removed at the same time.

As you look round the church, your eye will be caught by the early Jacobean pulpit (now with its canopy serving as a base), Jacobean Communion rails, Queen Anne period Holy Table, two 15th century priests' seats and a handsome 17th century studded leather chair, also the 17th century iron hourglass holder beside the pulpit and some medieval floor tiles in the sanctuary.

The parish registers date from 1562—twenty-four years after the keeping of registers was decreed by Thomas Cromwell—and the first marriage entry is of John Cheyne to his second wife, Joice, daughter of Sir Anthony Lee. John Cheyne's tomb, set on the north side of the sanctuary, has a top of Verona marble and its sides of clunch display panelwork and family coats-of-arms.

On the chancel floor are the brasses of Elizabeth and Robert Cheyne which are of interest because they show the contrast between pre-Reformation and post-Reformation styles. Of even greater interest is the tiny and rare brass of a chrysom child, Benedict Lee (circa 1542), which is believed to be the only such brass in existence with the word "chrysom" on the inscription.

A marble tablet on the south wall of the chancel commemorates the Rev. Thomas Clarke, Rector of Chesham Bois from 1766 to 1793, who trained at the rectory many of the younger leaders of the Evangelical Revival,

### OUR PARISH CHURCH SOME FEATURES OF INTEREST

The small original church, constructed of local flints with clunch (chalk) dressings, is now the chancel. It measures 20 feet by 14 feet. The present chancel arch replaces a very much smaller 13th century one, the stones of which can be seen at the churchyard entrance and along the car park.

The painted stone corbels in the chancel were probably a memorial to Elizabeth, wife of Robert Cheyne, who died in 1516: as their shields, supported by angels, are seen on each side of the chancel. Of the others, those at the south-east and south-west corners are heads of bishops, that in the north-east corner is of a monk, and that in the north-west corner is a bearded head. It may be that of the chaplain, or rector, or may even be intended to represent St. Leonard to whom the church is dedicated,

A similar head, covered, is again shown on the first corbel on the north side of the nave. The other old corbels in the nave bear angels carrying shields; those west of the tower are modern. The roofs of the chancel and nave have curved wind braces and moulded arched trusses supported by the stone corbels dating from the 15th century. The roof boarding of deal replaces the original of oak. The exterior is now tiled.

The organ chamber at the east end of the north side was formerly the vestry, the 14th century window of which can be seen from outside the church, as well as the now-blocked north-east chancel window. The present vestry to the north of the organ chamber was built in 1911 and further vestry additions have been made in recent years.

The modern font, a memorial gift, replaces an old damaged marble one said to have come from St. Mary's, Amersham. The oak lectern is also modern. The early Jacobean oak pulpit, removed to its present position from the north side in 1884 when the church was reseated, now stands upon its canopy. It is hexagonal and ornamented with strapwork and openwork. The Carved oak back panel which connected the canopy to the pulpit now serves as the back for the rector's stall. It is made of oak from the original 15th century pews.

In the chancel are two 15th century oak sedilia, or priests seats, with moulded standards, the heads of which were mutilated by iconoclasts and later fitted with modern caps. The Communion rails are Jacobean and have twisted balusters and poppyhead ends. These were formerly in the old west gallery. The beautiful late 17th century Holy Table is of oak and has five supports twisted in clusters of four and apparently carved out of the solid. Set in the sanctuary floor in front of this are some medieval encaustic tiles. The panelling across the east wall of the sanctuary was put up in 1967 in memory of Catherine Lister Farrar.

### OUR CHURCH WINDOWS

The east window with its three pointed lancets has been much restored, and the original glass, some dating from the 14th century was damaged during two air raids in October, 1940. The present window, restored to the design of the late Martin Travers, A.R.C.A. is made up of some of the original glass in floral and other patterns probably six hundred years old, with shields and other 15th century remnants. Some new glass is also incorporated in this 1946 restoration. The panel representing the Crucifixion, believe to be of Flemish origin, and some of the late 15th century glass were given by members of the Salmond family.

Martin Travers also designed the present west window which depicts our Lord's appearances after His resurrection. It was given in memory of A. W. Rich by his sister in 1947. Of three cinquefoil lights under a four-centred head, it now contains very little of its original 15th century tracery.

The three small windows in the chancel retain their Early English (13th century) arches. One on the south side portrays Ruth and the Sower in modern glass. The other two are also filled with modern glass except for the four shields of the Cheyne family two in each window, which were formerly in the east window. It will be seen that these shields are suspended from a cord held by a hand. The initials and dates shown are those of this family. The quatrefoils of these two windows contain (south) the initials XC and (north) IC, being the Greek and Latin abbreviations respectively for Jesus Christ. All these windows formed part of the 1941 restoration.

Of the five windows along the south wall of the nave, three are similar to those in the chancel although that nearest the pulpit is different from the others having more splayed tracery. It portray St. Birinus and St. Frideswide with the Oxford coat-of-arms above. The centre window, given in 1946, features St. Cecilia and St. George, and the Scout badge here should be noticed. The other window is of Mary and Phebe and was given in 1908.

The two westernmost windows were completed in 1911 in the 14th century style. In 1949 they were filled with the figures of the four Evangelists with their emblems.

In the north aisle are four original 14th century window similar to, but smaller than, those between the south doorway and the pulpit. These were removed from the former north wall and reset when the church was enlarged and the north aisle added. The quatrefoils contain the Implements of the Crucifixion, given by Mr. E H. Blankley in 1950. The west window of the north aisle has modern glass depicting St. Leonard, the patron saint of our church, and St. Hugh of Lincoln, as Chesham Bois was originally in the diocese of Lincoln.

### THE RECTORS OF CHESHAM BOIS

A List of Incumbents from the year 1215 will be found attached to the south wall of the nave. The first incumbent was one William de Risenberga, probably a monk from Monks Risborough. The list is complete except for the period from 1418 to 1521. It will be observed that during the Civil War a Mr. Whitby took the place of John Howe, the rightful rector. It is thought that Mr. Whitby was probably a Presbyterian or Independent minister placed by Cromwell's officers in charge of the parish.

Wall tablets in the chancel commemorate the ministries of the Rev. Thomas Clarke (1767 to 1793) and the Rev. James Stevens (1839 to 1843). The Rev. Thomas Clarke is buried in the churchyard, as is also the Rev. Charles Blackman (1843 to 1868). The Honourable Lowther Barrington (1830 to 1839), who in later years became a Canon of Durham Cathedral, was a nephew of the Duke of Bedford who built the present Rectory in 1833. It was built on the Common, close to the site of the former Rectory, an engraving of which can be seen in Dr. Romsey's *Reminiscences of a Schoolboy*. The chimneys of the new Rectory were copied from the chimneys of the Duke's Manor House at Chenies.

The Church Room in Bois Moor Road was built during the incumbency of the Rev. Joseph Matthews (1868 to 1892). He was also responsible for the restoration and enlargement of the church in 1884. The church was again enlarged in 1911 during the incumbency of the Rev. Thomas Fitzpatrick (1906 to 1923) who followed the Rev. George Roworth (1892 to 1906). Mr. Fitzpatrick is amongst those commemorated in the three chancel windows which were repaired and restored after bomb damage in 1944.

In 1923 he exchanged livings with the Rev. George Henry Lawrence (1923 to 1945) who was responsible for the building of St. Leonard's Hall in 1937. This hall was built on land adjacent to the Rectory and took the place of a wooden hut which had been given to the parish by Mr. Fitzpatrick's mother. The handsome oak doors under the tower were given in memory of the Rev. G. H. Lawrence. His ashes, and the ashes of his predecessor, are interred on the north west side of the church.

In 1969 a new room was built on to the small clergy vestry to commemorate the ministry of the Rev. Alvan Birkett (1945 to 1964). This room took the place of a much smaller room that had been erected in the nineteen fifties. It contains a striking representation of the Last Supper, presented by a church officer in memory of his relations. This room is used for prayer meetings, study groups, and many other purposes.

Since the Rev. L. Hickin arrived in 1964 the church has been greatly beautified by the hassocks, pulpit falls and other furnishings so skilfully worked by members of the Church Sewing Group. Amongst the designs on the hassocks will be seen the lying-in-state of Sir Winston Churchill, the Star of Bethlehem, the beech leaves of Bucks and a number of armorial bearings.

### LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

TWO houses close to the church, "Chesham Bois House" and "The Warren", are situated near the site of the old Manor of the de Bois family, of which St. Leonard's Church was originally private chapel. William de Bois became the first patron of the church c. 1216, and as patron appointed the incumbents and kept the chancel in repair. The Cheynes made the Manor their home c. 1430 after it had passed through the Chesham and Winslow families. It is thought that the original chapel was built c. 1200: it was appurtenant to that half of Chesham Parish Church appropriated to the Abbot of St. Mary Pre, Leicester. After a disagreement with the Abbot of Leicester in 1213 an arrangement was made which deprived him of all real authority, William de Bois and his successors obtaining the right to nominate the Chaplain, subject to the Abbot's approval. There was no further trouble, and the advowson was exercised by the Lords of Chesham Bois Manor until between 1877 and 1888, when it was passed over to the Peache Trustees, and is now in their gift. During the 14th and 15th centuries the Chapel acquired the right of burial, and became almost independent of the mother church of St. Mary's, Chesham. It was first referred to as the parish church of Chesham Bois in 1470. By the beginning of the 19th century the last vestige of dependence on St. Mary's, Chesham, had vanished. The Chapel, assessed at 106 shillings and eightpence in 1535, was endowed by tithes by the Abbot of Leicester, and was always regarded as a donative of peculiar jurisdiction: that is, the incumbent was not subject

to the authority of the Bishop or other Ecclesiastics, and the patron not only had the right of presentation but also that of induction to the living. St. Leonard's Church has many interesting links with the past. Our link with the Lollards through the Cheyne family, and later with the Reformation martyrs through the same family, reminds us of those brave men who gave their lives that we might have the gospel in its purity and simplicity. Through Thomas Clarke, the Rector commemorated in the chancel, we have a link with that Evangelical Revival of the 18th century which transformed the life of our country and laid the foundations of her greatness in the following century. The gospel proclaimed by the reformers and the leaders of the 18th century revival is still the power of God unto salvation. : that gospel continues to be preached in this church, so the church will go on doing the work that matters most. The doubting will find faith and the anxious encouragement. The tempted will find strength and the sorrowful comfort. The aged will find hope and the young will be inspired. And with those who have worshipped here all through the centuries we too "shall enter into His courts with praise. be thankful unto Him and speak good of His name. For the Lord is gracious, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endureth from generation to generation".

Anthony Victor Knight July 2014