

ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, MARGARETTING

The present Church is predominately fifteenth century. From this period date most of the fabric, the font and the two most notable features, the Tree of Jesse in the East Window and the timber West Tower.

The earliest parts of the Church are Norman in origin, though it has been suggested that there was a Saxon chapel on the site and to the left of the North Porch, by which you enter, there are Roman tiles in the wall, itself dated about 1130. The first recorded vicar came in 1328.

The Normal Church was smaller than the present Church. Towards the end of the XIVth century extensions were begun in every direction - the North Porch, a new and larger Chancel to replace the small round Norman Apse, a new South Aisle, a westward extension to the Nave (starting from the piece of wall adjoining the pillar by the Font) and the erection of the Tower.

Of the Tower, Professor Nikolaus Pevsner in "The Buildings of Essex" (Penguin, 1st edition 1954) writes, "The Church should be visited by all for the splendid XVth Century timber West Tower, on ten posts". The ground floor of the Tower is used as the Vestry; a separate small Vestry on the south side of the Chancel had become ruinous by 1870. In the Bell Chamber above, before the Tower narrows into a Broach Spire, the four bells are distinguished for all being pre-Reformation. It may thus be true that, being recent in Henry VIII's reign, they rang, as one account says, "for all the weddings of our Royal Bluebeard". One, ascribed to Robert Burford about 1400, is said to be the oldest bell in Essex.

The North Porch is very early XVth century, contemporary with the Tower and preserves much of the original work. It has the distinction of being one of the very few Porches which The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (1921) and the Professor Pevsner (1954) both selects as an illustration. A line drawing of it appears in Buckler's "Twenty-two Churches of Essex" (1856) and it is the frontispiece of M. Barnard's small "History of Margarettng Church and Parish" (1901). The oaken door is of the same period, though partly restored.

Above this door, within, is the alabaster Tanfield Memorial, moved here from north of the East Window of the 1870 restoration. Three sons kneel behind their father, four daughters behind their mother; all well illustrate the fashionable dress of the period. (A summary of the detailed description in the "Essex Review" of 1944 is available as a separate leaflet.) John Tanfield, of Coptfold Hall in the Parish, died in 1625. His cousin, Sir Lawrence Tanfield, Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer, who died in the same year, has a similar but much larger and more elaborate memorial in Burford Church, Oxfordshire. The complex quarterings of the Coat of Arms reveal to how many landed families the Tanfields owed their descent and their wealth.

The lower part of the carved oak Rood Screen, separating Chancel from Nave, is also XVth century work. The present upper part is a memorial to the men of Margarettng who fell in the 1914-18 War. The Rood-Loft above was removed at the 1870 restoration. The Doorway behind the Pulpit, now bricked up, led to the Rood Stairway.

The Chancel is dominated by the Jesse Window, entirely of XVth Century Flemish glass and illustrated among "Treasures of Britain" in the Automobile Association volume with that title. It shows the lineage of the House of David, son of Jesse, culminating in the Virgin and Our Lord, as given in the

first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel. This glass was in the North Wall until the restoration of 1870. Probably it once filled at least five windows, but by 1850 the remaining pieces had been gathered in one, where in 1877 it was replaced by the present rather entertaining depiction of the Prodigal Son and the swine he tended. St. Matthew traces the lineage back to Abraham, fourteen generations before Jesse, and gives forty-two names before Our Lord. The window portrays twenty-five, including Our Lord, in random order and with five who lived before Jesse. No doubt the glazier did his best to fit together all the surviving pieces. As there are only nine other Jesse windows in the whole country, any defect in that now before you does not deserve emphasis.

The pargeting on the East Wall is well worth a second glance, as is also the representation of the Feeding of the Multitude (from the sixth chapter of St. Mark's Gospel) serving as the reredos of the Altar; it dates from 1678; its dado was worked by eleven members of the village carving class between November 1893 and May 1896.

The brasses on the wall to the left of the Altar were originally on the floor near the South Porch. They represent Robert Gedge, his wife Margaret Bardefield and their children, who lived early in the XVth Century in the north end of the parish in the moated Tudor house now known as Killigrews, formerly Shenfields (scen-feld = pleasant field).

As you move into the South Aisle, past the admirable modern lectern, a "pelican in her piety", the gift of a parishioner, notice the rectangular niche to the left of the side altar thought to be the remains of a hagioscope or "squint" to enable persons in this aisle to see the main altar. It had been proposed to use this niche to display the notable silver cup, dated 1563, which is the chief item of the Church plate, but the cost of adequately protecting it would be considerable. The stand-by electronic organ is another very generous recent gift. To the right of the side altar is a piscina for washing sacred vessels. The large hatchments on the walls show the Arms of the Long and Benyon families, no doubt given to the Church when the fashion of displaying them at funerals died out. The South Porch dates from 1891, replacing an earlier porch then decayed. The Font, however, is good XVth Century work and its various carvings - mitre, mason's sign, grotesque head and so on - are worth examining.

The Nave Roof is a fine piece of construction and the supporting corbels of the principal rafters are carved with the symbols of the four Evangelists (St. Matthew, angel; St. Mark, lion; St. Luke, ox; St. John, eagle) and the heads of angels and demons.

A more detailed account of the Church is in the Central Essex volume of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments Survey (1921), but even that is a summary of all that is known as well as inevitably rather out-of-date and the Parochial Church Council hope in due course to publish a fuller account.

People frequently ask why the Church was sited so far from the natural centre of the village round the crossroads on the original Roman road to Colchester, the main road to East Anglia until 1973. No authoritative answer can be given, but the Church of St. Giles in nearby Mountnessing, in origin XIIIth Century, is even more remote from the natural centre of its parish and one can think of motives, in troubled times, for building well away from a frequented highway and possible passing looters.

THE TANFIELD MEMORIAL

The most recent stage in the Parochial Church Council's long campaign to make Margarettling Church a building of which the whole village can be proud has been the restoration last June of its most notable memorial. The Tanfield Memorial, originally in the Chancel, was moved to its present position above the North door at the 1870 restoration of the Church. Consequently, rather few people seem to notice it till they are leaving, and until recently a thick coat of grime and dust covered its many interesting details of costume and design.

Francis W. Steer, County Archivist of West Sussex and formerly in the Essex Record Office, thought it worthy of considerable research and a six page article in the Essex Review of October 1944. The specialist should consult that article, but the chief points are summarised below.

The memorial depicts John Tanfield of Coptfold Hall in the parish and Catherine his wife, kneeling on either side of a prayer desk. Behind him kneel three sons; behind her kneel four daughters. All are dressed in the best attire of the early Jacobean period; the daughters wear caps in contrast to their mother's bonnet; the sons have black beards and moustaches, but their father is white-headed as becomes his age and dignity.

Above and below these figures are elaborate coats of arms, now gaily coloured again in all their complicated splendour. For the exact interpretation of their significance the curious are referred to Mr. Steer's article; to the layman their main interest lies in the number of separate quarterings indicating the many landed families to whom the Tanfields owed their descent and their wealth; they include two families still well-known in Essex, Heron and Neville.

The precise date of the monument is not fixed, but must be soon after John Tanfield's death in 1625. There are other fine memorials of the same period to his cousins in Gayton Church, Northamptonshire, and Burford Church, Oxfordshire. The latter, particularly distinguished for its size, commemorates Sir Laurence Tanfield, Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer under Queen Elizabeth and King James the First, the most notable bearer of the name.

August 1989