

Farnham Churchyard and Church Building

The graveyard is still in use at the western end and gravestones in the older part of the churchyard bear the names of the ancestors of people still living in the village. The grave maintained by the War Graves Commission is that of Private Herbert Charles Davidge, who is amongst those listed on the War Memorial inside the church.

Hutchins' History of Dorset (3rd edn.) states that "this church has been so much altered and modernized, that its ancient features are nearly obliterated". Nevertheless, visitors often regard this small church as a welcome sanctuary because of its simplicity.

A buttress on the west wall dates the oldest part of the church as from the 12th Century. The attractive 14th or 15th Century embattled and pinnacled tower has chequer board flint and green sandstone decoration. It houses two bells set to chime and an older, unused bell. One bell bears the Latin inscription "ora mente pia" – pray thou with a pious mind, and dates from the 14th Century. Another bell dates from 1732.

The 18th Century exterior door is of beaded vertical planks with strap hinges and indications are that it started life as a door to another building. In the church porch is a very small font. Its date and origins are a mystery. The font inside the main church is the one which is in use. It is medieval and has twelve sides.

On entering the church through the porch, which doubles as the bell tower, one steps down. It is fortunate that the building's elevated position stops it falling foul of the springs which rise in the main part of the village anytime between December and April. However, it is not an easy job to keep the interior walls dry when the floor level is lower inside than the ground outside!

The plain nave, originally built in the 12th Century, has a barrel vaulted ceiling, supported by two iron pillars. The north aisle was built in 1835 to accommodate extra seating and the chancel was rebuilt in 1886. The numerous 'refurbishments' have resulted in a variety of flooring.

To the left of the entrance door is a list of former incumbents, dating from 1291. There are three Rideouts. The first was instituted in 1741 and, on his death in 1763, was succeeded by his son. This second Philip Rideout resigned in favour of his son, Philip, in 1799. The pillar monument at the back of the main aisle and the tablet on the north wall are erected in memory of the Rideout families.

On the floor just inside the door there are monumental inscriptions in memory of members of the Potticary family, who were owners of Hookes Wood Farm in the 18th Century. An inscription on the floor of the aisle is virtually obliterated by the passage of many feet.

The earliest inscription is on a tablet to the right of the altar, telling us that Alexander Bower, who died in 1616, is buried here. He was a "preacher of God's word in this church", but does not appear on the list of former incumbents. The most recent tablet is in memory of Franklyn Wilkins who died in 1975. He was the village shopkeeper and Farnham Church was beneficiary of his will. Two other memorial tablets refer to the nearby burials of George Ker and William Thomas respectively.

The large memorial tablet in the chancel informs us that Philip Henry Lee, the rector at that time, rebuilt the chancel in 1886, in memory of his mother. A modest wooden notice in the church porch declares that, in 1908, The Incorporated Church Building Society granted 15 shillings towards re-seating on the condition that all the sittings are for the free use of parishioners.

The origins and purpose of the windowed niche in the west wall remain a mystery. The 18th Century painted cartouches on the west wall, dated 1733, are the only survivors of early decoration. Such inscriptions are commonly called 'the poor man's bible', as invariably they are scriptural texts.

During restoration work some years ago, a Medieval wall painting, reputed to be of the Lord's Prayer, was uncovered, high on the south wall, but what remained of it was not considered to be worth preserving.

The organ, which has just one keyboard, is by Vowles of Bristol 1876. The oak lectern is in memory of the Reverend Philip Henry Lee. The only stained glass window is in memory of Annie Adams who died 2 May 1916 and is buried in the churchyard.