

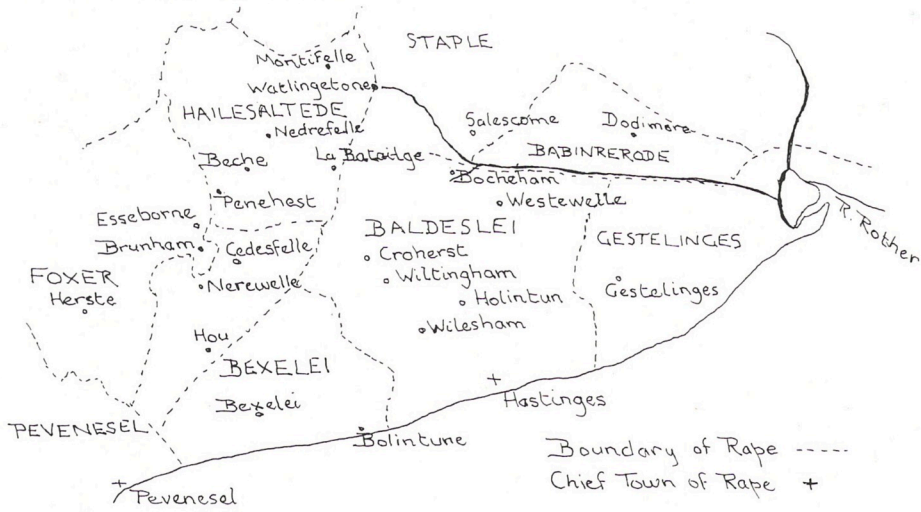
# St. JOHN THE BAPTIST WESTFIELD



A Thousand Years  
of  
Praise and Prayer

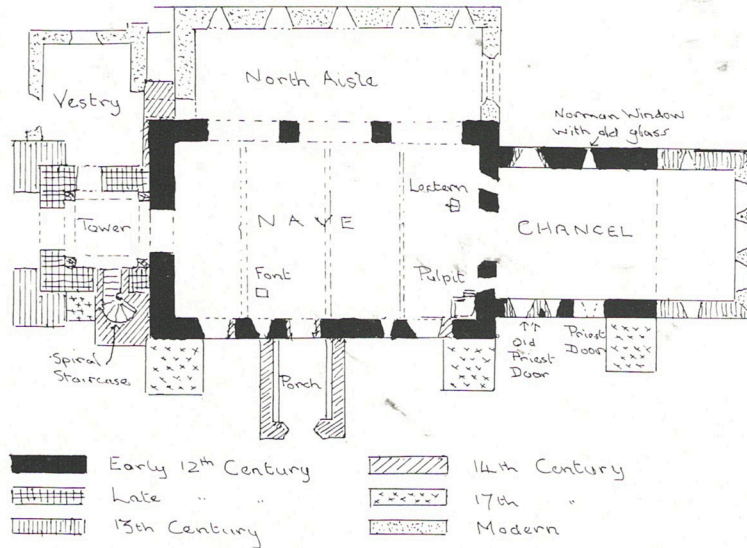
In aid of Church Funds

Part of Domesday map of Sussex

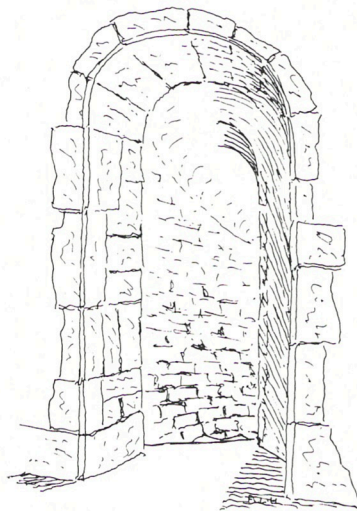


The last of the old stone roof tiles

£1.50



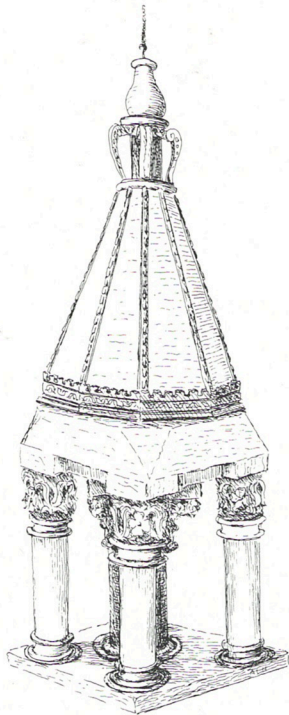
Church plan



Entrance to spiral staircase from the bell ringers' chamber. Closed in 17th century and re-opened 1904.

This booklet has been compiled from various sources with special acknowledgement to the first "Story of Westfield Parish Church" compiled and prepared by a former vicar, the Rev. R. A. Leonard. Some of the illustrations have been done by the Westfield Art Group, but the main research and instigation came from the Rev. Edwin Wilkinson, vicar from 1979 to 1987.

The cover photo by courtesy of Mary Fraser  
 The back cover painting by Hilary Jacob



*14th century font with  
17th century cover*

Welcome to this lovely old church.

As you stand just inside the south door, you are in part of the oldest portion of the Church. These walls date from early 12th century. For a moment try to imagine over 800 years of villagers, old and young, who have praised and given thanks here. Spend a short moment in giving thanks for the blessings you have received.

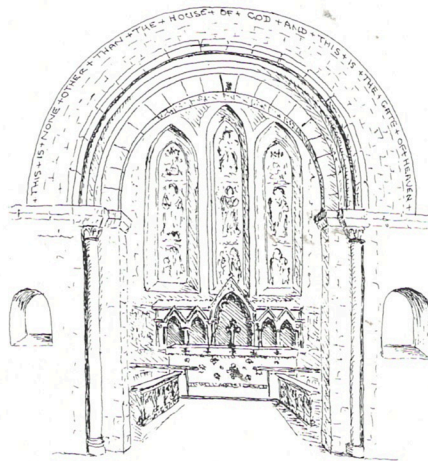
With the aid of the plan, which pulls out from the cover, let us roam around the church.

On your left is the font – not in itself one of the most beautiful, but very old, being placed here during the 14th century. Look at the counter-balanced cover, which is late 17th century, with an open-work top.

In the wall are two windows. The first, set high, has a round depressed head and is 12th century Norman, but probably extended in the 17th century. The second is a two-light window with trefoil head and top light with 14th century tracery. They are paired with two on the pulpit side of the door, although the 14th century window is slightly different.

On the wall above the tower door is a list of vicars from 1250, and above that a carved set of modern Royal Arms. Higher still is a blocked up window which once gave a view of the body of the church from the bell ringers' chamber at those periods when, as now, there was no plastered ceiling.

The doorway to the tower is normally only open when services are being held. This opening was probably made at the same time as the outer west door, 14th century, but was closed off, possibly when the vestry was built and access made from it to the north aisle. The window which replaced it was removed in 1904 and the present doors erected. Inside the doorway on the left is the door leading to the bell ringers' chamber. This was rediscovered and opened up in 1904. The massive squared oak beams, standing on the stone plinths, and strengthened by criss-cross beams were built within the tower walls to support the bell in the 14th century and may have come from the earlier Saxon building. In the top right corner is the trap door through which, for centuries, access to the tower was by wooden ladder. One still exists from that floor to the bell chamber.



*The tiled Norman arch and hagioscopes – old reredos  
and stained glass windows*

Looking back up the nave you can admire the lovely old Norman arch which, until 1935, was surrounded by a text on tiles: "This is none other than the House of God and this is the Gate of Heaven." The outer line can still be discerned, and comparison made with the illustration above.

On each side of the arch is a hagioscope, or squint window, cut through the 32in. thick walls to enable the priest to be seen when the chancel was lengthened in 1251.

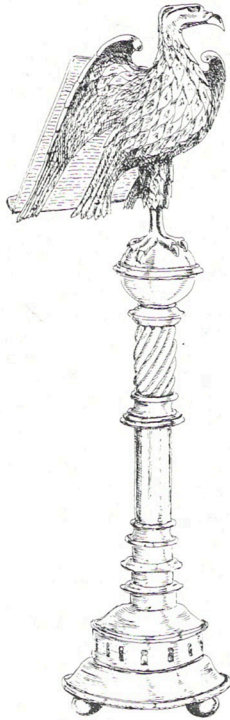
The north aisle was formed in 1861 by the removal of the old nave wall, to be replaced by the arcade of three arches. The aisle has five single-light, round-headed windows, and a circular stained glass window at the east end. This is the Cheeswright Memorial, which replaced the original wheel window with plain glass, but it is architecturally unique. It was presented on 10th May, 1935. It was destroyed by enemy action and replaced by the present window in 1955. A translation of the Latin is: "And the Glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

In 1969 this corner was re-designed to create a small chapel in memory of former worshippers: Fred White, Harold Rendle, Roy Saunders and Susan Rose, a choirgirl who sadly died at an early age.

Between the windows of the north aisle hang the Georgian panels of the Decalogue, the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, moved from above the chancel arch and restored in 1954 by a donation from Lady Newton.

There is a communion table, strikingly designed, presented in memory of John De Looze, the church treasurer from 1966 to 1981, and dedicated on the 29th May, 1983. The family also donated a new carpet and curtains. The beautiful optima medium lettering was carved by Mr. Michael Renton of Icklesham, a well-known artist and craftsman.

The memorial stones in the floor by the chancel arch were removed from the churchyard and placed here in 1949.



*Lectern*

The brass lectern referred to by old villagers as "Polly" was presented by Sir Harry and Lady Newton of Westfield Place. It had been in the Mission Church at Westfield Place, but this was dismantled in 1936 and re-erected on the cricket ground as a pavilion. In 1984 it was decided to renovate the rather dull brass of the lectern as a memorial to Arthur World, churchwarden, who had died recently. "Polly" returned in sparkling splendour, only to be stolen a month later. Subsequently she was found beside a railway line and returned, but without the base, some two months later. After a new base had been made the lectern was re-dedicated on Mothering Sunday in March, 1985

The chancel was built in 1120, but extended some 13½ft. eastwards in 1251, making necessary the squint windows beside the arch. The priest door was also moved from behind the arch to its present position further east adjacent to the Sanctuary. The stonework on the right shows evidence of the alterations which included the 13th century lancet windows. The remaining two small Norman windows, one each side, have greenish white glass, which may be the original glazing.

The small bracket organ between the 13th century and Norman windows was rebuilt in 1958 in memory of Ruth Rickman thanks to a generous donor.

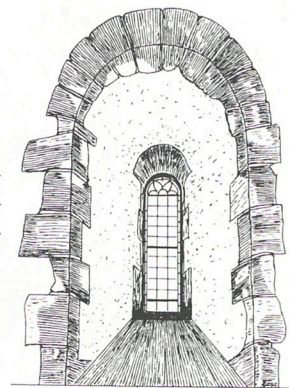
The changed character of the walls where the communion rail stands delineates the 1251 extension.

The east wall was rebuilt from about 6ft. above ground level in 1820 with large sandstone blocks, and has three splay lancet windows. The stained glass was blown out during the 1939-45 war and replaced with clear glass. The limed oak panelling in the sanctuary was fitted in 1933 in memory of the Rev. Henry Vernon, vicar of Westfield for 45 years.

The communion table was presented in 1936 by Major General Beale Brown and bears the text which translates to: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

The stone and marble reredos seen in illustration on page 4 was replaced in 1935 by the present carved wooden panels made of Sussex timber and by Sussex craftsmen and showing the figures of St. Gabriel, Christ the King and St. George. Above the figure of Christ the King is a circular medallion with a copy of the Brienze carving of the "Face of the Suffering Christ." The centre panel is hinged and covers an old Norman aumbrey. The crucifix seen on the altar in the illustration is now mounted and used as the processional cross.

The roof of the chancel is seven canted (has seven planes) with two tie beams and the decoration dates from 1888, restored in 1954.



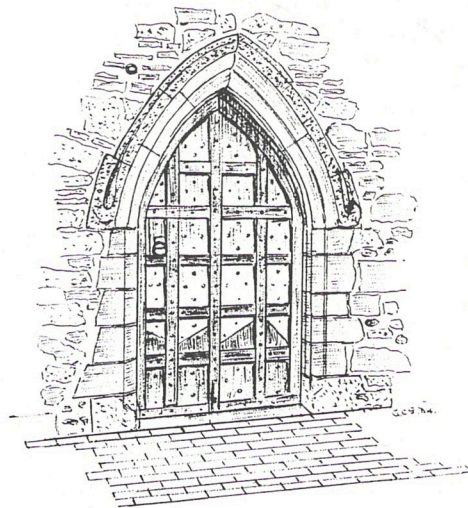
*13th century window*

Go along the path beyond the tower and look back. A characteristic of Westfield Church is the enormous amount of buttressing. Arthur Mee in the Sussex Volume of his "The King's England" writes: "We do not remember seeing a church so heavily buttressed; quite 20ft. round some of the buttresses seen." Truly it seems to cling to the ground rather than aspire to Heaven!

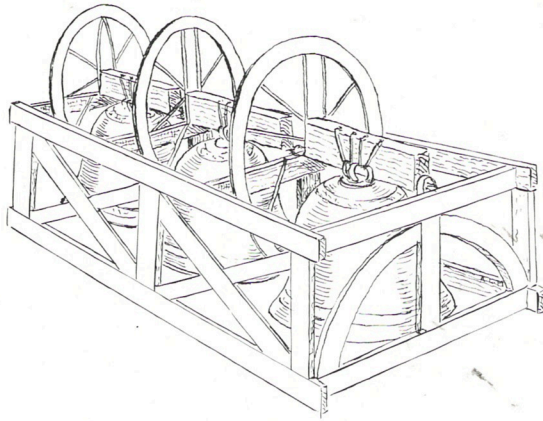
These buttresses must be considered with the tower itself. According to ancient records the lower part of the tower dates back to pre-conquest times. There was a Saxon place of worship with a simple wooden nave and a stone tower. The Norman urge to build churches, or extend them, was satisfied by demolishing the wooden section and building, in 1180, a stone nave and chancel, and raising the tower to its present height, with probably a simple cap, now termed "A Sussex Cap." It is important to think of the Norman thrust on an already existing tower, if we are to understand the reasons for such heavy buttressing (the dominant feature externally). The squat Saxon tower was only 9ft. 3in. square in its interior measurements. The base was used by the Normans without enlargement, so the height of the tower in relation to the new nave was excessive, and had to be supported by the large "clasp buttresses" added in the early 13th century and now presenting such an attractive feature.

In 1350 a bell was installed and a spiral staircase within a buttress built to allow access to the upper portions – you can see the slit window in it. In 1617 it was intended to add two more bells and in preparation the heavy oaken internal frame was strengthened (it bears the date 1617). The tower was weakest at the spiral staircase and the large buttress beside it, with the date 1624, provided the strength. The spiral staircase was closed off and rediscovered in 1904. The space between the corner buttress and the spiral staircase was also filled in about this time, and the buttresses at the south east corner of the nave, and just beyond the priest door of the chancel, were built probably to support the heavy weight of stone roofing tiles. Those of the tower were depleted by enemy action.

The 14th century west doorway has a moulded pointed arch and a scroll hood moulding with curled stops. The upper wall has been refaced with large sandstone blocks and has a narrow lancet window. The belfry stage has a louvre of two lights in the north, west and south walls.



*St. John the Baptist. Westfield  
door in west wall*



*Bell frame*

The bells are of great interest, but because of access difficulties and extremely limited space, cannot be viewed. They have preservation orders on them and Westfield has the earliest dated frame in Sussex – 1617. The M type frame is simply an L frame with a long head substituted for the short one, and without the brace ties. These account for 5% of the frames in the county. The Westfield frame has been altered to fit the tower and, it seems, is older than the tower that contains it.

The earliest bell was cast and hung in 1350. It has a diameter of 35 $\frac{7}{8}$ in., weighs 8 cwt. and was probably cast by William Burford. It bears the inscription: "Sit nomen domini benedictum" (Blessed be the name of the Lord.) The second, dated 1698, has a diameter of 37 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., weighs 9 cwt. and was cast by John Wood. The inscription reads: "Fili Dei Miserere Mei. Io. Wither, Vicar, I. Dien, L. Eavrey, R. Thomas, I. Paker, Wardnes, 1698. (O Son of God have mercy on me", John Wither, vicar . . . followed by the names of the wardens and the date.) This bell also has 18 coins sunk in its surface. The third, dated 1699, diameter 40 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., weight 10cwt., records "Iohn Wood fecet IB. RT. 1699 Deo Gloria." (John Wood made me 1699. Glory be to God.)

John Wood was one of those whose usual method was to dig a casting pit in the churchyard where the bell was to be made. These last two bells were made within the bounds of our churchyard as transportation was very difficult and it was easier to bring the material to the site than to move the finished bell.

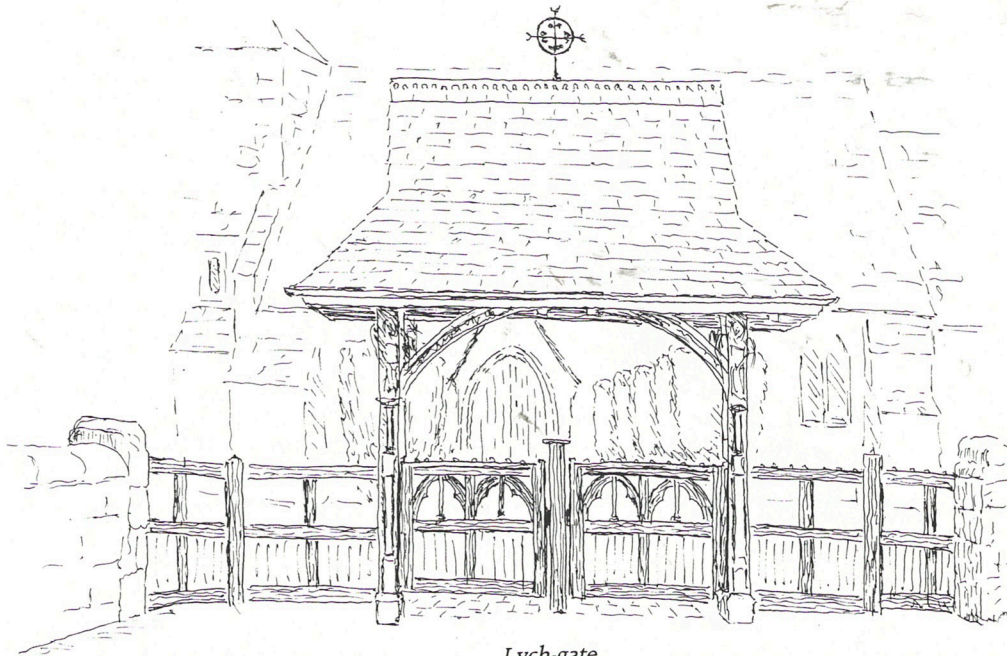
The frame and bells have suffered the ravages of time, and at the time of writing will require to be made safe, with just one available to be clocked (struck stationary.)

Now, continuing around the church, you come to an attractive Victorian addition which is the vestry, built in 1888. This had become permeated with damp and was thoroughly repaired, decorated and carpeted in 1987.

Rounding the corner and looking up between the vestry and the nave, you can see the remaining tower buttress and the extended north aisle with its lean-to roof continuing from the line of the nave roof.

The north wall of the chancel shows the line of the 13th century extension. The east wall rebuilt in 1820 we have commented on in the chancel notes.





*Lych-gate*

Finally we come to the south face. Behind yet another heavy buttress, which supported the corner of the original chancel is a priest's door with segmented head and jambs of re-used Caen stone. Below the 13th century window, about 3ft. from the next buttress, are traces of the original very narrow priest's door.

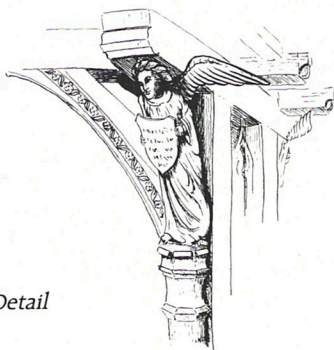
Do not miss the lych-gate which was provided in 1887 in memory of a deceased child, and is well worth a careful examination. Four carved angels bear inscribed shields recording the following:

"In heaven the angels do alway behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven."  
 "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."  
 "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive evermore."  
 "Who died for us that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with Him."

Also carved into the cross beams:

"Here I sleep not, pass and weep not here upon your child.  
 Angels calling from your brawling world are undefiled."

You may notice that the angels have lost parts of their noses. It is told that the damage was done by a young lad, and that the villagers much resented this desecration to the extent that the family eventually moved out of the village.



*Detail*

## GENERAL HISTORY

In the 900s warring factions between the former Danish invaders were being settled in the north-east, leaving Sussex and Kent free to prosper. The Saxons, who had been converted to Christianity by the zeal of the Augustinian Mission in 597 A.D., had made an agreement under Alfred, carried on by subsequent Saxon kings, that the Danes became Christians and be allowed to live in peace. Weakened Saxon policy and the Danegeld brought fresh waves of Danish attack, but the thrust was mainly through the Midlands to the south-west (Wessex). Canute brought unity and peace (1017-1035), but in 1042 the Witan chose a Saxon king again, Edward the Confessor. The disputed claim to the throne at his death, brought William the Conqueror to Pevensey in 1066 to overthrow Harold at Senlac Hill, Battle, and so, only 34 years after the invasion, Westfield Church (Westwelle in the Domesday Book) together with the unusual accessory of a pit for the ordeal of trial by water, was granted by Lord Wening of Westfield Manor to the care of Battle Abbey in 1100 A.D. The site of this pit is thought to have been part of the old moat around Church Farm which was, at one time, some form of ecclesiastical establishment. This would indicate that Westfield was a fully organised Parish, probably even before the invasion. The grant was confirmed by his overlord, William FitzHerbert. The monks of the Abbey pulled down the wooden parts of the church and built the stone nave and chancel.

In 1251, Richard, Bishop of Chichester, allowed the Abbey to appropriate the tithes of Westfield, the monks repaying the vicar 100s. annually, besides one pilch or furred garment, and decent clerical coats. This endowment was security for the monks of the Abbey. It was at this time that the chancel was extended.

The church in 1291 was valued at £5.6.8d (£5.34), the vicarage being worth £6.13.4d (£6.67). In 1350 the first of the bells was hung, and the massive internal timber frame and south porch added.

In 1535 the Abbot of Battle conveyed the rectory and advowson (right to income raised) to the King who, in 1544, granted them to Sir Richard Sackville. In 1551 a grant of the rectory was made to John, Bishop of Winchester. The crown however kept the advowson and Queen Elizabeth presented (sic) in 1583, 1589 and 1597.

At the beginning of the next century, however, the advowson was again in possession of the Sackvilles, held in chief, and the rectory also, held of the Bishop of Winchester. Richard, second Earl of Dorset, appears to have conveyed the advowson to the Bishops of Chichester, who have since held it.

The rectorial tithes in 1835 were leased to the parishioners for terms of 7, 14 and 21 years but were then transferred to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. They were abolished in 1936.

From 1624 to 1650 the south side of the tower was completely buttressed and the spiral staircase enclosed. This seems to have been in preparation for the two new bells. The existing bell frame bears the date 1617 and the two bells were hung in 1699. The delay may have been in part due to the upsets in connection with the Civil War of the time.

In 1820 the east wall was rebuilt and was given windows of stained glass. The north aisle extension was made in 1861 and in 1886 the plaster ceiling was removed from the nave. The restoration of the tower in 1904 revealed and opened up the spiral staircase to the bell ringers' chamber.

In 1932 electricity replaced the old oil lamps, and in 1935 the stone and marble reredos was replaced by the present wooden one.

War damage destroyed the stained glass windows and necessitated the removal of the stone tiles from the tower.

In 1935/6 the tiled text around the chancel arch was removed.

Extensive work was carried out in 1954/57 on the roof and its timbers, ravaged by death watch beetle and decay. In 1961 even more extensive repairs were required and in 1987 it was again completely retiled.

The great storm of 16 October, 1987 caused damage to the lych-gate and the recently re-tiled roof and tower. Many of the lovely old trees around the churchyard were blown down or had to be lopped to make them safe. It will be many decades before the beauty of this corner of Westfield will be regained.

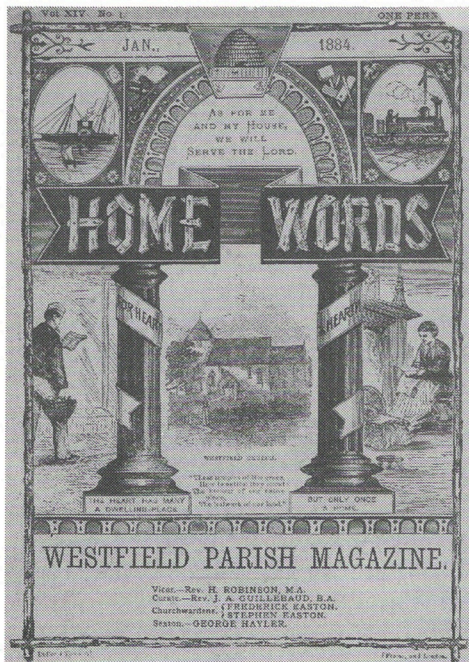
Repairs, sometimes demanding alterations, are required each year, and the cost of upkeep of this precious building makes heavy demands beyond the normal income of the church.

### FROM THE RECORDS

#### DOMESDAY BOOK

Wenestan held Westwelle in the time of King Edward and could go where he pleased. Then as now it vouched for one hide and two rods. There is land for 3 ploughs. Wibert holds of the Earl and has a demesne 1 plough and a half, and 7 villeins and 1 cotter with 3 ploughs.

In the time of Edward it was worth 20 shillings and afterwards 70 shillings. Now 72 shillings. (Edward the Confessor).



Notice no Lych-gate

#### CHURCH REGISTERS

These commence in 1552 (Edward VI) but the early ones are much mutilated.

1556 – High Altar, November 10 "I bequeth to the high altar of the parish church of Westfield for my tithes and oblations forgotten and negligently witholden. My Myll in Westfield and all ye land and Mill pond belonging to the sayd Mill." John Awyck.

1556 – March 7th. Harry Patrycke. "And also I desire Myls Ryley, clerk and vicar of said Westfield, and Thomas Croche of the same parish as my trustys in them for to stay and as far as in them lyeth to see my goods and cattelles preserved."

1557 – August 16. "And if (it) fortune me to departe and dye at myn own howse then I bequethe my body to be buryed in the chancel of Westfield and after my buryall the hole flure of the sayd chancel to be paved from the stepes to the quere dore as welle as where my body doeth lye and I will thys to be done whether I depart ther or not." Miles Ryley, vicar.

1603 – "Westfield had 100 communicants, no recusants. All residents received the communion at Easter last."

1646 – Edward Lighbourne, vicar, was sequestered under the Parliamentary regime for drunkenness and malignancy. He was buried at London in 1660.

*People fined for not coming to church for 14 weeks*

Richard Coulstock and wife.  
Joseph Stonham and wife.  
Richard Spray and wife.  
Thomas Ringham and wife.  
John Jassell and wife.  
Frances Longley and wife.  
Edred Brett and wife.  
Anthony Amon and wife.

*People fined in 1675 for not paying Parish clerk* (Richard Dowle, clerk)

Richard Coulstock  
William Woodley.

John Cramp.

John Jassell.

Thomas Benskin (2 years same tyme due at 8 pence per annum).

The monthly magazine of 1884 records: "The most memorable event in the year 1883, as regards Westfield, was the great Confirmation held on April 23 when 142 persons of almost all ages from 14 to four score, knelt before the Bishop to receive his blessing and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Twelve of our parishioners, who could not be present, attended at Fairlight Church, these with the number confirmed in Westfield make a total of 154."

## THE CHURCH PLATE

Unfortunately this normally has to be deposited in the Bank Safe except on very special occasions.

1. A silver communion cup – 1735. Inscribed "Westfield Plate, Sussex 1736."
2. A silver communion cup – 1764. Inscribed "Westfield Parish."
3. A silver paten – 1735. Inscribed "Westfield Plate in Sussex. Richd. Nairn. Vicr. Peter Dulney, Richd. Thomas. Church-Wardens 1736."
4. A silver paten – 1761.
5. A silver flagon – 1735. Inscribed as on No. 3.

A silver cross was donated by the Newton family in memory of their son Jeremy who was killed in World War 2 and is in regular use on the communion table.

The oak inkstand in the vestry is made from wood taken out of the tower in 1904.

A small, very solid cast iron safe in the vestry and used for holding registers bears the date 1764 in the lock.

# GOD'S ACRE

In 1984 the W.I. conducted a survey and in this hallowed plot of Westfield they identified:

54 wild flowers                      15 trees  
12 lichens and mosses              7 shrubs

- 1 RED DEAD NETTLE
- 2 WOOD ANEMONE
- 3 BLUEBELL
- 4 CUCKOO PINT
- 4a LORDS AND LADIES
- 5 CELANDINE
- 6 IVY
- 7 PRIMROSE
- 8 MEADOW VETCH
- 9 COMMON CATSEAR
- 10 BARREN STRAWBERRY



Solomon in all his Glory was  
not arrayed like one of these