

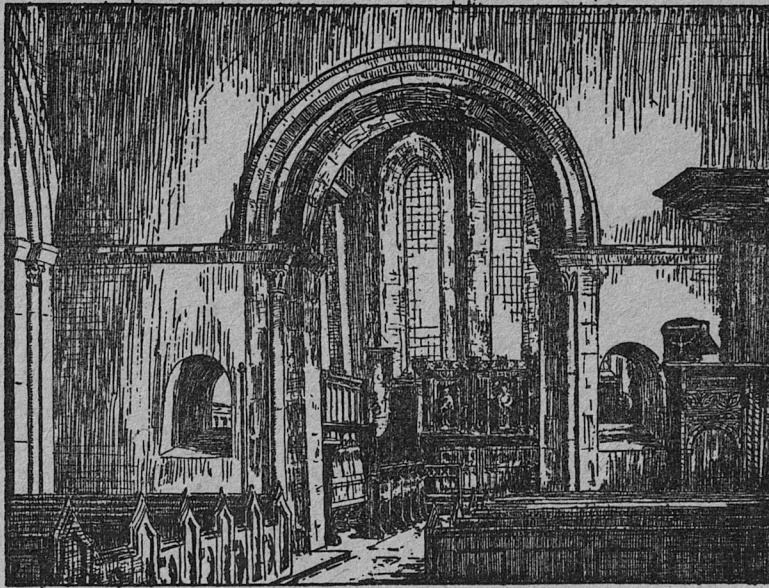
The Story of  
The Parish Church  
Westfield

Price 15p

For the Restoration Fund

## The Story of Westfield Parish Church

The Church of St. John the Baptist, in the ancient Manor of Westfield, stands on the site of a much earlier Saxon place of worship. This Saxon building was probably little more than a squat stone tower, with a small wooden nave and chancel adjoining—the framework being built against the tower, since there is no evidence of bonding discernible internally or externally. According to early records, the lower portion of the Tower dates back to pre-Conquest times.



Between 1954–1957 extensive work on the roof timbers was carried out to repair the ravages of Death Watch Beetle and decay, as well as some restoration on the Church interior. The cost, over £1,000, was very largely met by the congregation and local community.

In 1961 even more extensive repairs were necessary to the Church roof, which cost three times the previous amount. In common with many other Churches, the cost of this urgent work was beyond the means of the Church members and a heavy debt was incurred. A Restoration Fund was formed and gradually the debt was repaid, but this is a very old and lovely Church, and repairs are constantly needed. In 1978 a further heavy expense has been found necessary, to bring the electric supply up to date as well as redecorations. Your purchase of this booklet is helping to meet this immense bill—will you please help still further by a gift to the Restoration Fund? This will assist the local efforts to maintain this ancient and historic House of God and keep it in good repair.



After the Conquest when, according to the record in Domesday Book, the Manor of “Westwell” was given to the Count of Eu (who built and lived in the first castle at Hastings) the Norman urge to extend or rebuild existing churches caused Westfield Church tower to be raised to its present height, necessitating the provision of the two massive buttresses on the N.W. and S.W. angles to support the extra thrust.

At the same time the timber building was replaced by a nave and short chancel of stone which, however, still abutted the tower instead of being bonded into it. That nave is the nave proper as it exists today, terminating at the entrance to the chancel in a really fine Norman arch, the carved capitals to the small engaged columns of which are of simple foliation based on the Roman acanthus.

In A.D. 1251 the monks of St. Martin’s Abbey at Battle (the Conqueror’s foundation) were given the tithes of the Parish of



Westfield by St. Richard, who was then Bishop of Chichester. About that time the chancel was extended eastward by some 13 or 14 feet. It was lighted by four lancet windows and a new "Priest's Door" was cut eastward of the original Norman entry which was filled in. An arched cavity in the east wall was probably used as a reliquary though no reference exists regarding any sacred treasure it might have contained. Consequent upon the eastward extension of the sanctuary it was found that the celebrant standing at the altar was out of sight of worshippers near the nave walls. Two "squints" or hagioscopes were then cut through the chancel arch wall to enable them to witness the Elevation of the Host and do reverence accordingly.

During the course of the next century (circa 1250-1350) the upper half of the west side of the tower was resurfaced, a new West door inserted with a small lancet above it and a two-light louvre to the belfry above that. This probably replaced an earlier but smaller one and matched those on the north and south sides. At the same time a substantial buttress was built against the S.E. corner of the tower and a south porch built, the doorway probably being altered to correspond. There is a votive cross incised in the right jamb. To the right of this door there was a holy water stoup of Cotswold stone, but its projecting basin was long ago sawn off flush with the wall.



High in the nave wall, one on each side of the Porch, are windows with depressed circular heads. These are thought to be originally Norman windows which were enlarged in the 17th century. The

window to the east of these is of two trefoiled lights with a top light of 14th century tracery. There is a sundial over the Porch arch and a stone panel inscribed 1624 I.B.R.R. over the Western buttress. The panelled oak South porch door bears the date 1542 in iron figures near the top. It is hung on a pair of 'wrot' iron strap hinges with a ring latch. The oak cased lock suffered from beetle damage and parts were cut away. Beyond this appears another shoring buttress, deemed necessary in the 17th century. It marks the east end of the early 12th century nave wall.

The structure then remained substantially unaltered for some two hundred years, but it should be noted that the very beautiful Pulpit and Font cover are Jacobean and the Sounding Board over the Pulpit is of noteworthy Restoration design.

Then probably in the early years of the 19th century, the East wall of the Sanctuary was rebuilt from about six feet above ground level and three lancet windows of admirable proportions inserted. In 1861 a North aisle was added, suitably lighted by round headed windows in keeping with the general character of the developed building. The circular window in the extended East wall is well proportioned but perhaps not quite in harmony with the architectural growth of the main building.

There was a Victorian stained glass window behind the High Altar and another stained glass window in the South Wall (this being a memorial to the Coghill family). These were severely damaged by bomb blast in 1944 and have not been replaced. The present stained glass in the circular window in the extended East Wall was put in after the war—the original dating from 1934 having also been damaged by blast in 1944.

The capitals of the arcade piers raised when the old nave north wall was removed are much less happy in design, comparing disadvantageously with those of the Chancel arch, but the recent limed oak Altar, Reredos, Sanctuary panelling, Choir Stalls and Organ casing are all of excellent design.

Then in 1904, when the tower was restored, the old stone stairs giving access to its upper chamber were uncovered in the South wall. From this chamber a square window, now filled with stone, overlooked the nave and the altar. In 1967 an electric clock was installed on the outside of the tower—modern but in keeping with this fine old building.

Over the West door is an oak panel with carved and coloured Royal Arms and a list of Vicars starting with the name of William de Hamptenete, who held the cure in 1250. The record of his predecessors has been lost.

The Church possesses good 18th century silver Cups and Patens.

The registers still in existence begin with that of 1552, but the early ones have been mutilated.

There are three bells. One of them is inscribed:-  
**SIT NOMEN DOMINI BENEDICTUM**  
 (rough translation—"Blessed be the name of the Lord"). This bell is mediaeval.

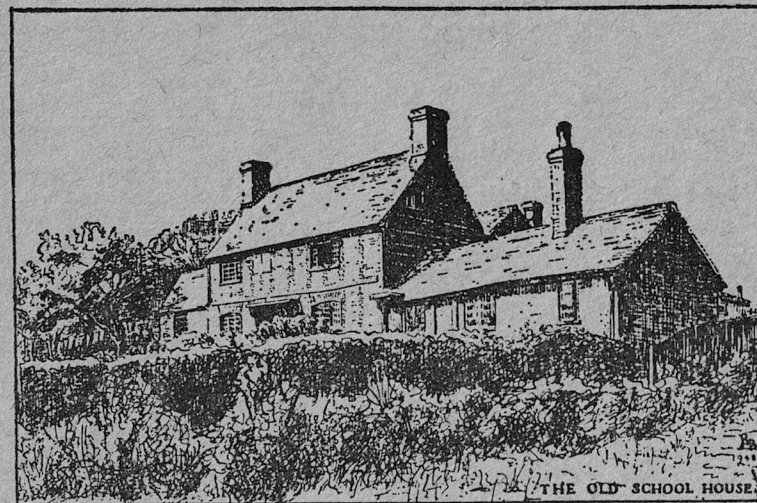
The second bears the inscription:-  
**Fili Dei Miserere Mei. Io. Wither, Vicar, I. Dien, L. Eavrey, R. Thomas, I. Paker, Wardnes, 1698.**  
 (rough translation—"O Son of God have mercy on me" John Wither, Vicar . . . followed by the names of the Wardens and the date).

The third bell is inscribed:-  
**John Wood fecit IB. RT. 1699. Deo Gloria.**  
 (rough translation—John Wood made me, 1699. "Glory be to God")

In August 1961, under the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947, the Church was designated a "Building of Special Architectural or Historic Interest" by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. A copy of this letter can be seen displayed in the Church Porch.

### PLACES OF LOCAL INTEREST

Visitors to Westfield may like to know that the early Victorian Vicarage shown in the photograph, was sold in 1950. It is said that, at one time, a tunnel extended from the Vicarage to the Church. Other tunnels are thought to have been in existence in other old houses but these are probably tales from the Smugglers who came into Fairlight. The new Vicarage, a modern building, was erected in 1968.



Two hundred years ago the word of God was taught at the Old School House. There is an inscription on the wall of this house which reads as follows:-

"All Peoples Children in or belonging to this Parish that cannot afford to Pay For Themselves may Be Sent Free to this School to learn to Read, Write and Digest the Word of God.

Paid for by John Hart. 1767".



This is another old historic building in the village.



## SUMMARY

1. The site has been a place of Christian worship for about 1,000 years.
2. **11th century.** (Possibly between A.D. 950 and 1020).  
Lower part of Tower built; nave and sanctuary of wood.
3. **12th century.** (About A.D. 1120)  
Nave and sanctuary of stone built by the Normans.
4. **12th century.** (About A.D. 1180)  
Tower raised to its present height.
5. **13th century.** (About A.D. 1251)  
Sanctuary extended eastwards; buttresses built against N.W. and S.W. corners of Tower; Priest's door moved eastwards; hagioscopes built.
6. **14th century.** (About A.D. 1350)  
South porch built; S.E. corner of Tower buttressed; West door with lancet above the belfry louvre.
7. **16th century.**  
Panelled oak South door (bearing date 1542). This was in the time of King Henry VIII.
8. **17th century.** (About 1650)  
South side of Tower completely buttressed by connecting those buttresses already existing.
9. **19th century.** (A.D. 1861)  
North aisles and arcade built.
10. **20th century.** (A.D. 1904)  
Tower restored; Norman stairway discovered.
11. Other recent additions and adornments are listed on the display boards in the Church Porch.