

ST LUKE'S CHURCH

Chiddingstone Causeway



Brief Notes for Visitors

50p

St. Luke's Church

**Chiddingstone Causeway
Nr. Ton bridge, Kent**

BRIEF NOTES FOR VISITORS

In the year 1873, owing to the development of the cricket bat and ball industry carried on by Messrs. Duke & Sons at their factory in the village, Miss Nellie Hills, daughter of Frank Clarke Hills of Redleaf in the parish, feeling concern for the spiritual welfare of people in the district, thought it desirable to start a simple Evening Service in the newly-erected schoolroom.

Large congregations very soon justified her action, and very quickly it became evident to her that a proper church for the immediate district and neighbourhood was needed. Accordingly, an iron structure was erected by the side of the road, which forms the east boundary of the churchyard, and this was dedicated to St Saviour.

In this corrugated iron building regular services were held for the space of fourteen years and the usual parochial agencies and organisations came into being. The Priest-in-charge for the greater part of this period was the Reverend W.J. Salt.

When, in due course, Frank Clarke Hills and his wife died, soon to be followed by their first and second sons F.E. and E.H. Hills, the surviving members of the family, together with the widows of these two eldest sons, decided they could set up a no more fitting or lasting memorial than a permanent church.

John Bentley, designer of Westminster Roman Catholic Cathedral ("That stranger among English Cathedrals"), was commissioned as architect, and under his capable direction the present building -a perfect specimen of a village church in the late Gothic style -was constructed, and later dedicated by the Bishop of Dover, on St Luke's Day, in 1898.

The original church, known as St Saviour, was dismantled and re-erected in the centre of the village for parochial purposes. It can still be seen as an adjunct to the Village Hall.

During the next seven years the work, centred in the new building continued to prosper and it eventually became clear that the time had come for the creation of a definite new parish. This was duly effected, and a new parish formed by incorporating a portion from each of the neighbouring ancient ecclesiastical parishes of St Mary, Chiddingstone; St John, Penshurst; and St Mary, Leigh. On November 29th 1905 the new church was formally consecrated by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese.

St Luke's, Chiddingstone Causeway, although unable to lay claim to antiquity like many other village churches, is nevertheless a church of excellent design which stands very well situated on rising ground near Penshurst Station.

The surrounding churchyard was consecrated in December 1907 by the Bishop of Rochester, the land being generously given by the late Arnold Hills Esq., whose remains lie buried within its precincts. The first committal took place in 1909 when John May was buried at the age of 82, having served on the Redleaf Estate for over 40 years.

Just inside the churchyard gate stands a War Memorial dedicated to the memory of the 18 men from the parish who died in the 1914-18 war. This memorial takes the form of an obelisk fashioned in Portland stone, which rises to a height of 9 feet (2.7m) mounted on its die. Professor Abercrombie, of Liverpool University, designed it. The work was undertaken by the firm of Stephen Spickett & Co of Tonbridge. The unveiling of the Memorial was performed by General Sir George Fowke, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., and was dedicated by the Bishop of the Diocese, John Harmer D.D. The inscription reads: "For those who died for us". It is worthy of note that the fence surrounding the churchyard was paid for by public subscription, and was erected in the marvellously short time of three days! A spectator is reported to have said, "he never saw men work like that before in his life."

The spacious car park was constructed in 1983, after the congregation of St Mary's, Chiddingstone joined the congregation of St Luke's for services during the winter months.

The church itself is very well constructed in Bath stone, supplemented with good brickwork in strong "English bond" Some of the stone blocks used weighed as much as 8 tonnes each, which the stonemasons were obliged to cut in the rail trucks by which they were delivered through lack of suitable hauling and lifting gear. An interesting point is the moving of the position of the building after the work had progressed so that the whole structure would be sited within the boundary of the then parish of St Mary, Chiddingstone.

The handsome tower, rising to a height of 45 feet 3 inches (13.8m) from the floor of the nave to the top of the battlements, is 22 feet 3 inches (6.8m) square on the outside. A commanding view of the surrounding district may be obtained from the top. In the basement stands the central heating boiler, which was installed in February 1984. Above this is the Clergy and Choir vestry, and on the second floor may be found the ringing chamber, which is approached by a short spiral staircase. At present the church possesses one bell only though there is room for a peal. Plenty of space has been left in the bell chamber for the hanging of additional bells at some future time.

The main entrance is situated in the Northwest corner of the building, which consists of a covered porch with a window and a stone seat on both sides. Handsomely sculptured on the outside face of the porch may be seen a winged bull, the emblem of St. Luke to whom the church is dedicated. The iron hand rails on the steps were donated in memory of Hilda Day who died in July 1982.

It is interesting to note numerous black marks on the outside of the building particularly on the facing of the North and Northwest walls. These were caused by the impact of hailstones, the size of old pennies, in a great storm on Ascension Day 1922.

This same storm, besides breaking many windows of houses in the locality, caused damage to the very beautiful East Window of the church. This window, as a tablet informs us on the South wall of the Sanctuary, was dedicated to the Glory of God and to the memory of Evan Wynne-Roberts and his wife Margaret Man, and is the gift of Mrs. Ernest Hills and Miss Wynne, daughters of the above. This window, as with the window of plain glass at the West end of the Nave, is of seven lights with tre-foiled heads, and was dedicated by the Vicar on Christmas Day 1906. It is the work of Mr Von Glehn.

The design represents the scene on Calvary, and recalls the chronological reference in the 23rd chapter of St. Luke's gospel, which is here depicted: "And it was about the sixth hour. And there came a darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour". Christ is seen on the Cross, with the two thieves who were hung with Him on either side. The robber seen on the left is the repentant thief. At the foot of the Cross, on the right side, is the Virgin Mother surrounded by a group of holy women. Mary Magdelene is pictured on the left, clinging to the Cross and gazing up at the Saviour. In the extreme left may be seen Joseph of Arimathea holding a vessel to receive the sacred Blood of our Lord. In the extreme right of the group, the Centurion kneels in armour, and above him, seated upon a white horse is Pontius Pilate surrounded by soldiers. In the central background lies Jerusalem, the Holy City, faintly appearing in the terrifying and unearthly gloom. This particular window not only adds to the dignity of the church but serves as a constant reminder to all who worship therein of the great cost of our redemption.

Two other windows of stained glass may be seen. The one on the South side of the Sanctuary in memory of Charles Horfield, who died at Redleaf on July 16th 1905. The other is the beautiful window by the pulpit, placed there in 1928 in memory of Mabel, wife of Herbert Maughan, the first Curate-in-charge of the church from 1890-1901.

Other notable features of the church interior include the fine oak Communion Table with tracery panels: the Communion rails of brass with panels of light wrought iron worked underneath: the carved oak-pannelled pulpit; and the very wide well-raised chancel, paved with Portland stone and edged with glazed tiles of varying patterns.

The bible upon the Lectern commemorates the Coronation of the late King George V. An altar prayer book was donated in memory of William Grayland, and the brass offering plate is in memory of Syd White, a churchwarden who died in 1978

The excellent organ of two manuals is by Messrs Hill Norman & Beard, and is electrically blown. The organ was cleaned and overhauled in 1970. The spacious barrel-vaulted roof lends itself well to the fine acoustic properties of the building.

The Font, which stands in the Southwest corner of the church, deserves special mention. It is a handsome piece of work by Messrs. Farmer & Brindley. The pedestal is of alabaster and stands elevated on a step of Portland stone. The top is composed of pure white marble, though the actual basin is of Cippolino marble - a beautiful green-streaked stone from the celebrated Cippolino quarries which until some years ago had not been worked for 1,400 years.

It has been remarked that in this church it can be seen how the architect worked in preparation for the final completion of the building at some later date, by the addition of such features as a beautiful Reredos, a Choir Screen, a clock for the tower and a peal of bells. The passing years, however, have never seen the addition of any of these valuable accessories, although in 1910 the old choir stalls incorporated from St Saviours were replaced by the present splendid stalls, and dedicated on April 14th of that year.

A flower festival was held in July 1973 to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the church and the centenary of Christian worship in the village.

In 1998 St Luke's Centenary was marked with celebrations including a competition to design a flag for the church. This resulted in many entries. The winning entry was made into the flag that may be seen flying from the tower on special church days. The two runners up designs were made into the banners which hang in the Redleaf Chapel and the remaining entries are being made into kneelers. A flower festival combined with a display of local historical photographs was held early in the Centenary Year. Adam Styles was commissioned to carve, from a piece of local oak, the beautiful bust of St Luke, which is displayed in the window behind the font. St Luke's Day was marked with a Eucharist service conducted by the Suffragan Bishop of Tonbridge. The Centenary Year closed with a reading of Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol, read by members of the Dickens Society, in a candlelit church - a fitting end to the Centenary Celebrations.

To mark the Millennium Nichola Kantorowicz was commissioned to design and make a stained glass hanging which depicts "A global sun and moon with a burst of light and creation". This was dedicated at a special service on 2nd January 2000, conducted by the Rev John Lee, Rector of St Luke's at the time of commissioning, and hangs in the window behind the Font

This booklet has been written not merely to welcome visitors but to stimulate interest in their church for all those who live within the borders of the parish. Proceeds from the sale of the booklet will be devoted towards the maintenance of the church and its services both now and in the future.

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