

Churches: St Lawrence's, Folke, Holy Trinity Leweston and St Mary's, Cerne Abbas

Saturday morning, 16 July

We awoke to persistent rain which, while not damping our spirits, did force a change of plan. Access to St. Lawrence's Church, Folke was dependent on a mini-coach, in addition to the coach, taking some of the group down a typically narrow Dorset lane while the rest of us walked. Time did not allow for the whole group to be transported thus, and Polly made the wise decision to abort the visit. She does however highly commend the church, rebuilt in 1628 and fully furnished at the time, particularly as Michael thought we would really enjoy the rosary beads carved by the Reverend Mr Mayo.

The rain eased up as we arrived at Holy Trinity Chapel, Leweston, built in 1616 for Sir John Fitzjames. The house that went with the chapel is long since gone, and the chapel now stands beside the palladian mansion built in the late 18th century for William Gordon, with a west wing added in the mid-19th century. It has been a school since 1948. Here the rain worked in our favour as, instead of a tour of the garden, we were given unexpected access to many rooms on the ground floor. The house was largely remodelled c.1930 by the architect Maxwell Ayrton, for Mr. & Mrs. Rose of lime juice fame and mining interests in Canada, and we found ourselves surrounded by a grade II* interior, an art deco masterpiece.

The entrance hall with low marble fireplace surround, surmounted by a mural of the estate by George Sheringham (1884-1937), incorporating clock and weathervane dial, awoke our senses. Mural paintings of Persian hunting scenes, ceiling paintings of the zodiac, and a circular entrance lobby to the former dining room designed as a parrot's cage with bronze grilles and open dome, all backed with mural paintings painted by George Sheringham, were a delight. The main stairs and landing with its bronze balustrade and ribbed emerald green glass handrail will be one to look for in the cinema, as the school is looking to

make the building available to the world of film. The school trophy cupboard in the hall, overmantel mirror and floor-standing mirror all looked to be of the period. This last minute act of great generosity to view the interior did not include close study of the furniture, but there were many features of interest.

To walk the short distance to the chapel of 1616 was time-warp at its best. Of single cell design with no structural chancel, there was however a west porch accessible from the south which housed the 13th century circular font with moulded base. The distinctive late gothic windows, a triplet of stepped lights under uncusped depressed arches with hood moulds stepping up and down, housed new glass, the latest restoration work completed in 2003. Only a small section of the north window was original, but the building was wonderfully light. The east window was a pointed arch of three lights with perpendicular tracery. The chapel retains its original furnishings of 1616, namely a splendid two-decker pulpit with canopy (the triple-decker being more common at this time); a set of benches with rounded tops and a different geometric design in each roundel; hat pegs to each pew, and the panelling around the walls. The altar was put together in the early 20th century, incorporating some of the original panelling. The initials ER and RR appear on the base of the altar and at the west end, and belong to Mr & Mrs Rose who bought Leweston in 1928 and did much to restore the chapel. The woodwork may have been refinished then but has since mellowed.

The wagon roof was pointed with moulded ribs and carved bosses, plastered between the rafters. The walls were plastered. We had our fill of ornamental pilasters, moulded cappings, reeding, carving and strapwork

ornament. I particularly liked the visible foot on the pulpit which seemed none the worse for the green algae on the surrounding stone floor.

There is today little trace of the important Benedictine Abbey of Cerne, and we were there to see the church dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin by the monks in the early 1300s. It was a delight to see the original early English lancet windows in the chancel which had been exposed during restorations in the late 1990s. The 15th century east window may have been salvaged from the Abbey. The most dominant feature was the stone screen. Another two-tier pulpit with tester, this one dated 1640, and the tower screen dated 1749, yet still 17th century looking, were wonderful examples of fixed woodwork. The box pews had been removed due to an infestation of woodworm, but were still in place in 1860.

We were given a most informative and lively history of the furnishing of the church with many illuminating references to the numerous extant records.

A chest having had three locks and with a variation of

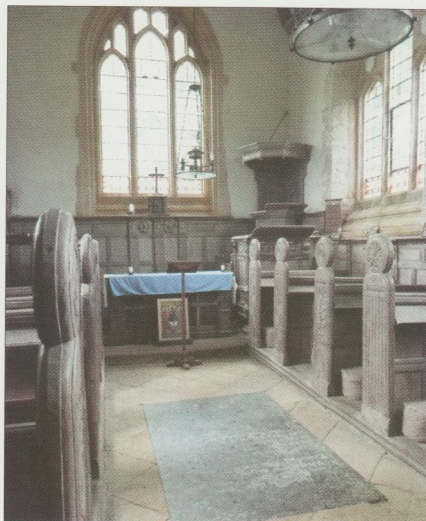
Holy Trinity chapel, Leweston



Cupboard in the hall at Leweston



Chapel at Leweston



Foot on pulpit at Leweston



the 'paper-clip' design for decoration was of interest; two 'bishop's throne' chairs were studied at length to detect any old carving among the Victorian; an altar table of oak inscribed DK 1638 WS with good detail, and carving on the legs, was appreciated as a rare example of a piece recorded as made for a church. It was also carved on all sides from the days when communion was taken all round the table. A deeply cut bible box was crisp and well executed. Medieval wall paintings, a little side table, memorials and many unusual features were studied in this light and open church which had surely benefited from its recent major restorations.

Opposite the church with its prominent perpendicular tower were a delightful range of timber-fronted houses, originally forming a continuous row of seven, two-storied with an overhang. We walked the length of Abbey Street and turned to follow the river path to enjoy a delicious lunch at the village hall, followed by an excellent lecture from Bob Machin on *'Old Dorset Farmhouses'*.

Valentine Butler

The tower screen, 1749, Cerne Abbas



Detail of the pulpit at Leweston



Detail of house at Cerne Abbas



Altar table at Cerne Abbas dated 1638

