

# Furniture and Woodwork in Surrey Churches

Saturday 26th April

A mixed day, weather-wise, but a remarkable day for members of the Regional Furniture Society who visited four churches in east and west Surrey. Superbly organized by Diana Halliwell and Christopher Claxton Stevens, although originally scheduled for last year, the postponement turned out to be fortuitous, as at our first venue, St Andrew's in Gatton, church guide Steve Robinson was able to be with us and share his knowledge.

First impressions of St Andrew's indicated an early 19th-century Gothic building. The church underwent two significant periods of restoration, first by Capability Brown in the 1760s under the patronage of Sir James Colebrook who then owned Gatton Hall. The second, and more easily identifiable period of restoration and renovation was under the auspices of John, 5th Lord Monson, son of the Countess of Warwick (d. 1841). An ardent fan of the early 19th-century romantic revival, Lord Monson – with the assistance of the architect E. Webb – embellished St Andrew's with panels and church fittings sourced on his Grand Tour. While many are aware of the trade in rooms from aristocratic estates, an equally astonishing trade in church furnishings, including stained glass, occurred between 1810 and 1840. St Andrew's features an array of church furniture that began life elsewhere.

We looked at several signed works from the Antwerp workshop of Jan Gruntz. The mark for Antwerp, a tiny signature of a hand (easily mistaken for a series of chisel marks) was noted on the altar. The carving on the pulpit is part of the same scene, depicting the descent from the cross; dated c. 1530, it is believed that it was originally part



Fig. 1 Early 16th-century Flemish parchment panels at Gatton St Andrew, Surrey

of a reredos. Also in the chancel is a traceried altar rail thought to be late 15th century and removed from Tongres in Belgium. This rail presumably began life as part of a screen. We saw a wide selection of oak panelling throughout the Church including early 16th-century work from Burgundy and Flanders (Fig. 1).

In the nave are baroque stalls dating from about 1700, with the arms carved à la Grinling Gibbons with cherub heads, the misericords with faces and foliage. The stalls are believed to have originally graced a Benedictine monastery in Ghent. The panelling above – with traceried heads and a cornice with a Gothic inscription and the date 1555 – was removed from Our Lady's Church at Aurschot in Brabant. The stalls are still in the church in Aurschot, but the entire complex was made for St Nicholas' Convent and moved between 1586 and 1597.

There was little in the way of moveable furniture in the church besides an early 18th-century carved table, but the stained glass was quite interesting. Steve told us about the current HLF plans to restore the 15th-century window. While the conservation team was in situ, it was determined that another window, with the arms of Henry VII, is early 16th century and not a later revival copy. A very interesting church indeed (see Charles Tracy's *Continental Church Furniture in England: A Traffic in Piety* (Antique Collectors' Club, 2001)).

Our second visit was to Chaldon and the Church of St Peter and St Paul. Like St Andrew and the parish of Gatton, there is no village but only scattered farms and houses. The current church is believed to date to the late 11th century. There are numerous traces of the early church, but the most important element to survive is a wall painting dating from 1170–1200 depicting 'The Ladder of the Salvation of the Human Soul, and the Road to Heaven'. Perhaps painted by a travelling artist monk with an extensive knowledge of Greek ecclesiastical art, the work was whitewashed over in the 17th century and rediscovered during a restoration in 1870. Painted in tempera in thin dark red outline, the background of the figures was rubbed in afterwards with a paler red.

Considering that all of the fittings of the church are new – with the exception of the oak pulpit (Fig. 2) – the painting is a remarkable survival. The pulpit bears the inscription 'Patience Lambert 1657', the relict of William Lambert, of Tullsworth Manor, whose tomb is in the nave (Fig. 3). The pulpit was carved with guilloche and other patterns and retains its period iron brackets. An interesting survival in the churchyard was a wooden bedhead tombstone. Resembling a headboard of a bed, these markers rarely survive as they literally disintegrate and are very difficult to date. It was thought that this example may be from the 19th century.





Fig. 2 Oak Cromwellian pulpit, St Peter and St Paul, Surrey



Fig. 3 The donors name and date on the pulpit, St Peter and St Paul, Surrey

Adjacent to the Church of St Peter and St Paul is Chaldon Court, a manor farm that has been restored over the last 30 plus years by Sean and Madeline Maskey. Probably the oldest manor farm in the county, dendrochronology dated the earliest section to 1366 (Fig. 4). Sean and Madeline welcomed us to their remarkable home where we had a very convivial lunch. After an overview of the history of the house we had a tour looking at everything from Tudor stone fireplaces, witches and carpenter's marks, medieval construction and reuse of materials to contemporary objects commissioned from turners and furniture-makers. A truly remarkable survival and an ongoing restoration project that we were privileged to visit.

After lunch we progressed to St Nicholas in Charlwood, now under the flight path at Gatwick. From the pulpit with its late medieval linenfold panels, Jacobean strap work and pierced panels with texts (did it start life like this?) Christopher Claxton Stevens enlightened us about the history of the church which used to be deep in the Wealden forest. From the south door of the church, dating to circa 1280, to the reredos in the 19th-century style put

up in 1938, the church held an astonishing array of artefacts (Fig. 5). Essentially an early Norman building with a central tower and retaining the chancel arch with cushion capitals of c. 1080 and two Norman windows, it was enlarged with a south aisle about 1280. The De Gatwyck family, the remains of whose manor house now lie beneath the North terminal, possibly undertook this alteration! The most recent alterations, c. 1858, were the work of William Burges (1827–1881). The decision was then taken to re-order the church, so that the south aisle became the nave and chancel as seen today and the original chancel became the vestry. Another series of wall paintings – depicting the Story of St Margaret of Antioch and the Story of St Nicholas – dating to c. 1300 are a rare survival. They were also rediscovered during restoration after being covered up during the Reformation. A later 15th-century depiction of St Edmund also survives.

The screen that divides the chantry chapel has double doors and a row of plain panels beneath columns and pointed arches. An ornate carved vine cornice prominently displays the initials 'RS' for Richard Saunders who died in 1480 at the age of 30. His mother and widow paid for the





Fig. 4 The massive 14th-century oak roof brace in one of the upper rooms, Chaldon Court, Surrey



Fig. 5 A detail of the late medieval screen, c. 1480, and repainted in the 1850s, St Nicholas, Charlewood, Surrey

screen and chantry chapel. This is the only sizable piece of medieval carving known to survive in Surrey. Whether the polychrome decoration is original is debateable as William Burges restored the top section and that has since been repainted. It may have originally formed part of the fittings surrounding Richard Saunders' tomb. Pevsner suggests that the screen may be the work of a distinct, possibly local, school of carving of which this is a rare survival. In the graveyard were three more wooden 'bedhead' tombstones – but in a sorry state of deterioration.

The last visit of the day, but certainly not the least, was St Nicholas in Compton. The oldest parts of this church are 11th century and pre-Conquest, including the tower, part of the west wall and the long chancel walls. Unique in Britain are the Romanesque additions made to the chancel in the late Norman period of c. 1160–80. Their purpose is still debated, but it was probably always intended to be a chapel. Few additions have been made to the church since 1200 and the Victorian restoration undertaken by a pupil of William Butterfield, Henry Woodyer (1816–1896), was quite sensitive.

Inside the church several decorative features, including the unusual crimped and incised plasterwork round and beneath the arches, and the trompe d'oeil red ochre cube design above the chancel arch are noteworthy (Fig. 6). In

Fig. 6 (below) Interior of the two-storey chancel at the church of St Nicholas, Compton, Surrey. Note the fine carving of the chancel arch and the very early wooden balustrade behind.





Fig. 7 Detail of the altar rail, c. 1620, St Nicholas, Compton, Surrey

the later 12th century the extraordinary and unique two-storey sanctuary was built, fitted into the existing structure of the chancel. The timber balustrade to the upper sanctuary chapel, from about 1180, is believed to be the oldest decorative timberwork surviving in Britain. About the same time, the nave was greatly enlarged, with new aisles. The font dates to the same period. Around 1620, the altar rails, a seven-sided pulpit with sounding board, and the screen with double central doors were installed (Fig. 7). The screen has moved around the church over the years. The Church Warden, Rosalind Lawson, fortuitously arrived during our visit so we were very privileged to see the screen, which now resides in a private area in the back of the church. Her arrival and interest in the group meant that we were able to see and hold a chalice cup made during the reign of Elizabeth I and also the silver commissioned from Omar Ramsden (1873–1939) in the 1920s for St Nicholas. She also pulled out four 17th-century joint stools and we looked at a communion table dating to c. 1680. It was a remarkable visit and a fitting ending to a very informative day.

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