



www.stmarysfetcham.org.uk/history

The history of Fetcham goes back a long time. St Mary's Church has signs of Saxon men at work, but they were using Roman tiles in their flint building. In the west wall of the nave Roman tiles have been used in the quoins (corners) of the early church. This nave was about the width of the present central nave, before the aisles were added. The south-west quoin is still partially defined as a vertical line of thin red Roman tiles, though the north-west one is less clear owing to repairs. The west window is a much later insertion in the old wall. This nave would have had a small chancel, probably in the space between the present transept and tower, possibly with a curved east wall.

A south aisle was added in about 1150, though this became ruinous in the late 18C, and the present one was rebuilt in 1877. The **tower** followed in about 1180, and its Norman work is still to be seen in the lower ground floor stage, with narrow round headed windows. The top stages of the tower were built, or rebuilt, in the 17C or 18C, with red brick quoins and frames to the belfry openings. High up on the south wall are diamond patterns in brick, with another pattern in the north parapet, above the clock dated 1760. The tower is in an unusual position to the south of the probable original chancel, at the east end of the south aisle, and has three bells, cast in 1588, 1613 and 1665.

The next addition appears to have been the north transept, added in about 1220 to form a chapel, and probably at the same time a new longer chancel was built to the east of the earlier one. The north aisle came later, and was built about 1250.

The Victorians added the vestry north of the chancel and the north porch in 1872, before rebuilding the whole south aisle, with its narrow double windows.

Entering the Church through the Early English north doorway, much of the evidence of the different building programmes can be discerned inside. The south arcade has two sturdy round **Norman pillars**, with large square capitals, and three round-headed arches. High in the wall above the eastern pillar is an **earlier window**, from the time before the arches were put through this wall and the aisle was added. This window is framed with Roman tiles, and is typical of Saxon work. Because transporting large stone was difficult, Saxons used whatever materials could be found nearby. In the case of this church, basically flints from the surrounding land, but they were also happy to use an old Roman site as a quarry to provide materials for quoins and window frames. Glass was difficult to obtain, so windows were high in the wall and narrow, with a wide splay on the inside to allow the maximum of light, but the least of the weather, to enter through a small aperture. The outer side of this window in its early wall can be seen from inside the aisle.



It is likely that the original nave was separated from its chancel by a narrow arch. There is part of a **low Norman arch**, to the north of the present much larger chancel arch, and there could have been a similar arch on the south side. These blank arches could have been to form backdrops for side altars in the nave.

By the time the 13C north transept was added the pointed arch had come into use, and its east wall has two pointed lancet windows, either side of a blank arch, decorated with dog-tooth carving, all typical of the Early English style. A triangular-headed piscina arch, with a wooden credence shelf above the basin with its drain, is nearby in the south wall.

When the north aisle was added it needed just one slender octagonal pillar and two wide pointed arches for the arcade.

The chancel was extended eastwards around 1300, and possibly again later. It is now longer than the nave, which is unusual. Its east and south-east windows were made larger at a later time. Many of the fittings at the east end are Victorian. There is a large rectangular niche holding the piscina, the basin used to cleanse the Mass chalice and paten, with its own drain straight into the ground. Nearby are the **sedilia**, three seats divided by black marble pillars, for the Priest, the Deacon and sub-Deacon to use during the Service while awaiting their turn. On the opposite side of the sanctuary there is a double aumbry, two cupboards formerly used to store the Mass vessels, though now there are no doors.

Behind the high altar is an elaborate Victorian **marble reredos**, showing the figures of the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (the younger man on the left). The marble panelling continues to the north with Moses and the brazen serpent (Numbers 21, vv8-9) and Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22, vv1-14) on the south. There are fine brass altar rails.



There are two grand **memorials**, with elaborate stone frames and heraldry, on the walls of the sanctuary, both for deaths in 1631. The one to the north, with a long inscription, is for Anthony Rous of Polesden Lacey. At the bottom of this memorial is a gruesome skeleton in a shroud! The one to the south is for Henry Vincent of Stoke D'Abernon, and shows the demi-figure of a man with his hands together in prayer.

At the west end of the chancel on the south side is a Victorian arch, presumably made when the fine organ, believed to be made by Father Willis, was placed below the tower in 1875. Nearby is the earlier feature of the **Rood stairs** to access the loft on top of the Rood screen (long gone!). Opposite is the pointed arch opening into the north transept. The central recess in its east wall used to be filled with a

wall painting of the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Now it has a new painting of the Trinity, the Three in One.

The west chancel floor has been raised and the space re-arranged, completed in 2014, and now has a modern altar and seating for the Priest and choir, with new altar rails to kneel at near the chancel arch and in the arch to the north transept. To-day's services take place much closer to the congregation! With all the modern technology of projectors and sound systems, there is no excuse for anyone in the congregation not to feel to be part of the Service!

Returning to the nave, the pews are Victorian, but the small font, now positioned at the east end of the north aisle, dates from 1632. It is octagonal with plain sides to the bowl and stands on a square plinth. For a time it was replaced by a Victorian marble one, but this old one came back into the Church in 1983. The Victorian one stood at the west end of the north aisle until it was moved out in 2010.

At the east end of the south aisle is a set of Royal Arms for Charles II, dated 1660. These Stuart Arms include the fleurs-de-lys, as the Monarch still claimed to be King of France!



All the windows contain coloured glass from Victorian times or just into the 1900s. The many lancets mostly have depictions of Saints or figures from the Old Testament. In the chancel, the east window has the **Crucifixion**, with the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John on either side; to the south is the raising of Lazarus from the dead.



In the transept the north facing window has the Presentation in the Temple, Christ as a Child with the Doctors, Christ the Carpenter and Suffer little Children.

The west nave window shows **Acts of Mercy**, (Matthew 25, vv35-40), feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving drink to the thirsty, visiting the sick, welcoming the stranger and visiting the prisoner.

'Lyn Stilgoe, 2017