



WELCOME to this ancient house of prayer where the Lord Jesus has been worshipped for 800 years.

ASCMERESWORTH - 10th. Century.

ESMERESWORDA, ESSHERESMERESWORTH - 13th. Century.

THE CHURCH is now dedicated to St. James but was originally dedicated to St. Nicholas. When the church was restored in 1899 some fragments of Roman urns and pottery were discovered. (See glass case by the Font). It is thought that the CHANCEL was part of a former Saxon Church but the NAVE dates from the early 12th. Century. The two windows in the NORTH (left) side of the CHANCEL are somewhat earlier than A.D. 1200. On the SOUTH (right) side is the head of a 12th. Century PILLAR PISCINA. The CHANCEL ARCH is very narrow as is usual in early churches. It is perfectly plain with no attempt at moulding or ornamentation. On either side are SQUINTS which do not seem to have been part of the original design but were made so that worshippers in the NAVE might have a view of the main COMMUNION TABLE which is of early GEORGIAN work as is also the PULPIT which was, originally, a "TWO-DECKER".

The windows in the NORTH side of the NAVE are of 17th. Century work. Below them is an original, but much damaged, doorway with a semi-circular head. It is now blocked and the outer arch seems to have been rebuilt, a relieving arch of tiles showing in the wall. In the SOUTH wall of the NAVE, near the EAST end, is a 14th. Century window of trefoiled lights. High up in the same wall is a small window of very early but uncertain date. The window in the WEST wall is comparatively modern.

Formerly there was a double gallery at the WEST end of the church, that on the SOUTH side being appropriated to the Earl of Portsmouth and that on the NORTH side to the Rector. It is still a mystery how these portly gentlemen and their families hoisted themselves aloft.!

THE WALL PAINTINGS. The most important area of the NAVE is the EAST wall, over and flanking the CHANCEL ARCH. Here there are, or were, paintings of four different dates - three mediaeval and one post-Reformation. The earliest, or basic scheme, is of the 13th. Century between double-line borders filled with elaborate scroll work. The main theme seems to have been a life of Christ or Passion Cycle.

The upper zone, almost entirely perished, must have been concerned with events leading up to, and perhaps including, the Crucifixion. In the lower zone, on the NORTH side, the first scene is too fragmentary to identify but might have been an entombment. The next shows the Descent into Hell. Christ stands on the left trampling on a Demon and holding the Vexillum (cross-staff and banner) in his right hand. With his left hand he reaches over to take Adam and Eve by the hand, who are shown in the front of the group of souls at the mouth of Hell.

To the SOUTH of the CHANCEL ARCH are two scenes, the first may be Mary and some of the Apostles at the tomb. While the other is clearly Pentecost, the group of Apostles looking up at the Dove which appears at the top of the roundel.

Occupying the middle is all that is left of the Stuart Royal Arms. All that now survives is the arms within the Garter with two paws of the Lion and the hooves of the Unicorn Supporters at the sides.

NORTH and SOUTH walls. The main survival is of the 16th. and 17th. Century texts in elaborate frames with which the mediaeval work was obliterated after the Reformation.

The murals on the NORTH wall of the CHANCEL are early to mid-14th. Century. The EAST side of the centre section shows the Virgin in an Annunciation scene with the Angel and the Dove. To the WEST of this are the remains of the Martyrdom of St. Thomas of Canterbury, the Priest Grim holding the Archbishop's staff, and the head of the Saint with fragments of the four Knights.

In the splays of the window are two scenes in the life of St. Nicholas together with ornamental scroll work. On the EAST splay are the remains of a Ship and an interceding figure which could either be the Shipwreck or the loss of the Golden Cup. The WEST splay shows the restoration of the cup.

THE FONT is an ancient one, the old hinges and lock for the Font Cover were removed in the 19th. Century.

THE ROOF of the NAVE seems to have been erected in the 13th. Century. The massive Tie Beams having curiously carved bosses on the under side. They are said to have been brought from the Cathedral at Winchester.

THE BELLS, of which three are inscribed :-

1. GOD BE OUR GUYD. I. W. 1598.
2. SAMVELL KNIGHT OF READING MADE ME 1692.
3. R. WELLS ALDBOURNE. Fecit MCCCCLXXX
E. Rumbell. C. Warden.

CONSECRATION CROSSES. There still remains one on each side of the MAIN DOOR and one on the NORTH wall near the GALLERY. Originally there were twelve at intervals round the walls of the Church inside and there were, probably, another twelve outside. These crosses marked the points at which the church walls were anointed by the Bishop when the building was consecrated in the 12th. Century.

THE PARISH REGISTERS only date from 1810. In that year the cottage of the Parish Clerk was burned down and all the early records destroyed.

Only the originals of current church registers are held at the church. The others have been transferred to the Hampshire Record Office in Winchester (01962 846154) although photocopies of some may be inspected by prior arrangement.

ALTAR FRONTAL: This was designed by Mrs Jane Lemon, inspired by the consecration crosses on the walls of the church and the plants in the parish, and hand embroidered by the Sarum Guild to commemorate the new Millenium. We are most grateful to all those from the parish and elsewhere who contributed financially to this project.

GRAVESTONE INSCRIPTIONS. A list of these is available entitled "Monumental Inscriptions of St. James, Ashmansworth, 1738-1983". It is the work of the Hampshire Genealogical Society, 1984.

ROLL OF CLERGY. A new board, with the names of the clergy from 1546 A.D. to the present day, was given in 1988 in memory of Mr. Michael Barton, M.C. It is behind the FONT and was researched by Miss Diana Barton.

WINDOWS TO ENGLISH MUSIC AND IN MEMORY OF JOY FINZI. In 1975/76 Mrs Gerald Finzi offered to raise the necessary funds to provide a window designed by Sir Laurence Whistler, to be placed in the PORCH in celebration of English composers. This window has been engraved by Sir Laurence's son, Simon. Names of the composers were originally painted on the walls by Ann Heckle but deteriorated over the years and were replaced by engraved marble tablets.

The memorial stone outside was engraved by Reynolds Stone. In 1995 Sir Laurence designed a window in memory of Joy Finzi, Gerald's wife, which was installed on the east side of the porch. The design is an oval of words and music - the music being Gerald Finzi's setting of lines from a poem by Bridges. In the centre is a quotation from Wordsworth "to seem, here, as if spoken by Joy... The exclamation mark [after Gerald] is to show that Joy is speaking to her husband."

GENERAL: The Churches of ASHMANSWORTH and EAST WOODHAY were united sometime previous to the Reformation at which period they were separated. They were re-united early in the 18th. Century and once more separated in 1884 after which date ASHMANSWORTH remained a separate parish until 1921 when CRUX EASTON and WOODCOTT were joined to it. Then, in 1966 HIGHCLERE, ASHMANSWORTH and CRUX EASTON became a united benefice.

It is interesting to note that the following famous men were Rectors of EAST WOODHAY and ASHMANSWORTH :-

THOMAS KENT, Bishop of Bath & Wells 1685-1691

GEORGE HOOPER, Bishop of St. Asaph 1703

ROBERT LOWTH, Bishop of London 1777-1787.

THE MANOR OF ASHMANSWORTH was granted, as part of WHITCHURCH, to the Church of WINCHESTER by Earl Hemele for the maintenance of the monks there. It was subsequently appropriated by the Bishops of Winchester but was restored to the Church by Edward of Wessex in the year 909. In the year 934 KING ATHELSTAN confirmed the Church of Winchester in possession of "ten cassates of land at Ashmansworth" directing that this land should be under the direction of the Bishop. By the year 1202 the Prior and Convent had lost all their rights to the Manor, it being then in the Bishop's hands and his possession of it was confirmed in 1284 by KING EDWARD. It remained among the possessions of the Bishopric until 1649 when it was sold to Obadiah Sedgwick, Minister in Covent Garden, London for £655.4s.7d. In 1660 the Manor returned to the Bishop and passed, in the beginning of the 19th. Century, to the family of the Earl of Carnarvon.

We hope you have had an enjoyable and inspiring visit. If you can help us to maintain this lovely church, your contributions would be most gratefully received.