

THE HISTORY AND BASIC INFORMATION ON ST. PETERS, CHURCH, WEST LISS AND ITS SITING

St. Peters being Grade II* listed, is on the first statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest compiled for this part of East Hampshire on 16th March 1954. A building in this category represents just 4.4 per cent of the total number of listed buildings in the district, thus meaning this area has only a small percentage of these very special buildings). It stands alone in the village as a building of outstanding historic, architectural and archaeological interest in the National context. St. Peters is in an area of outstanding natural beauty and contained within a conservation area. These are both proposed to be included in the new South Downs National Park which will be one of the largest in the UK. The present church as it stands is believed to be the oldest building in the parish of Liss (including Lyss Place).

St Peter's was probably one of two churches held by two priests of the manor of Odiham, at the time of the Domesday Survey. This was given, and granted by King Stephen, with the churches of Bentworth and Odiham for use of the Master of the cathedral, whose duty it was to superintend the Schools of the chapter. Later on Liss was directly attached to Odiham and although some way away was served by a curate until 1867, when the benefice was declared a rectory in gift of the Bishop of Winchester. Although Liss is now in the Diocese of Portsmouth, the chancel is the property of Winchester Cathedral which is responsible for its upkeep.

EARLY SETTLEMENTS

* West Lyss (Liss) – 1st nuclear settlement in the parish was here. The Bowl Barrows in 'Berrygrove' (next to the church) suggest a community of people established themselves here in the late Bronze Age, Roman and from thence onward.

* The village was originally split in two, Lyss Abbas and Lyss Turney. These names existed in legal documents until 1900. Lyss Abbas was granted in 900AD by King Alfred to the Nunna Mynstre in Winchester, in whose hands it remained until the dissolution of monastic establishments producing less than £200. Pa in 1536. Lyss Place traces its origins to that time.

* St Peter's Church, although later structurally altered would undoubtedly have been founded after 900AD, and was probably a timber church. Its replacement in 1320 would have been necessary after the five successive wet summers from 1315, which would have made the 300 year old structure unusable. In addition to these factors, a tower may have existed before 1320, in fact the middle of the 12th Century, possibly before this. There would have been a campanile with a single bell.

SAXON

* The main body of the church lies from west to east, from the west tower (which is believed to have Saxon footings or foundations) and was no doubt centrally set to a nave then existing. The doorway opened directly into the nave, and at present into a typical arrangement of a Saxon church, thus proving that there was another building on this site.

POST SAXON

* Present – A tower was built in the 12th Century, but the present tower dates from the first half of the 13th Century. (As from previous history, it is believed to have footings and or foundations from the Saxon era.

13th Century (1200's)

* After the tower was built, the main part of the nave and chancel was built of three bays.

* A significant amount of 13th Century glass still remains, including several located in the tower.

* The main doorway was created on the north side as the main part of the settlement of West Liss was then to the north. There was also a south doorway created after the erection of the south isle, which was constructed by piercing the nave wall in the latter part of the Century, due to population changes.

14th Century (1300's)

* One of the remaining Yew trees to the North East was planted near the old entrance path to the North door, which was then the main Lyss settlement.

15th Century (1400's)

* The main nave was widened by pulling down the north wall and rebuilding it some feet to the north. (What lies beneath this ancient extension, and why it was done remains a question).

* This now confirms the main builds and siting of the village.

* A significant Font with quatre-foils in each face of the bowl, and the octagonal stem and moulded base.

16th Century (1500's)

* Liss's Births, deaths and marriages records began under the act created by Elizabeth I. Some of these are attributed to have been buried in wool.

17th Century (1600's)

* The late 13th Century doorway leads out of the south aisle into the 1639 porch, which was a gift of Henry Haines, who was born in Liss, and at that time lived in a dwelling called Sparthams house.

* Parts of the fabric of the church date from this time, maybe due to the description below.

* The 1600's obviously saw England in turmoil, due to the Civil war. New information has come to light over part of the church. Over the main aisle is an old tie-beam midway down with 1653 carved into it, which means the church could have been repaired from Civil war damage. As it is known, Cromwell was in the area and caused damage to the old Greatham church. Again, damage could have happened at Liss, although it is of the opinion that not a lot happened in East Hants during the war. Berrygrove house behind St Peter's was mentioned in despatches during the Civil war. Oliver Cromwell certainly knew about Royalists in the area. It is now known that he gave or sold the estate of Lyss Place, to a relative of the Cole family after dispossessing the previous owners, the Lewkeres of Trotton, who were Royalists. In the chancel there are many floor tablets with Cole family names on. The Cole family were moneyed and gave generously to the church and parish. (One of these trusts still exists to this day). It is now taken that the tie-beam could have, in fact, been paid for by them to repair the church, along with the other afore mentioned fabric

18th Century (1700's)

* The Cole family became long standing members in the parish and village. Charles Cole gave money for the bells. (Please see the relevant section). His youngest daughter Dorothea, died in 1725, left £400 in her will as an endowment for the apprenticeship of poor children in the parish. As we said, it still exists today, and is in the hands of trustees, helping children in their education.

19th Century (1800's)

* The church, which was honeycombed with vaults, was re-seated in 1869. Due to the now siting of the village, the north door was closed and heating installed soon after, powered by a beautiful Victorian tortoise stove.

* During the restoration in 1800, medieval coffins were removed from the chancel and placed in the churchyard adjacent to the chancel, which include tombstones with a floriated cross, which could mean it is the resting place of a Knight Templar or Crusader.

* The chancel was enlarged in 1864 to allow for a north vestry and organ.

* Kempe, Ward and Hughes stained glass windows were installed. (Examples of these makers are in major cathedrals and churches.

* 1880 the organ was purchased for £200.

* In 1893 the gallery, situated at the West end of the nave and aisle was removed, no reason is given, but it may have been unstable.

20th Century (1900's)

* St Mary's became the parish church of Liss in 1959.

The Churchyard

The church/graveyard is indeed a haven for the archaeologist, genealogist and historian. Elizabeth I brought in the registration of burials during her reign and Liss has records dating back to at least 1599. The early records are available at the Hampshire Records Office in Winchester. The churchyard and graves had burials in woollen for a period of one hundred years after that time. There are a good number of medieval coffin stones and monuments. There is also a flat tombstone with a floriated cross, which could mean it is the resting place of a Knight Templar or Crusader. Several Public Houses in the village hold titles that would indicate some form of reasoning behind this. The churchyard also contains some fine tree specimens including of course Yews. One of these is over 200 years old.

The Bells

The tower in which the bells are housed is known to be one of the most prevalent parts of the building. The bells in the tower date back as far as 1753, although it is known that there were three bells there before 1753. It can only be a matter of conjecture as to when these bells were placed there. They were probably acquired individually over a long period of time. In the church wardens accounts of 1709 it is recorded the purchase of three bell ropes for 7s, 6d. This bears out the fact that there is no mention of their inscriptions, founders or dates. The weights were recorded in the church warden's accounts to show their value in assessing the net cost of recasting them with additional metal to make a new ring of five bells, the tower having stood since the middle of the 12th Century. The cost of re-hanging and casting the five new bells was paid for from the bequest of Charles Cole of Lyss Place, who gave £100 and timber for a new frame. The present ring consists of the 1753 five which were cast by Lester and Pack in Whitechapel London. They started casting at their present site in 1752, when Thomas Lester took Thomas Pack (who was foreman at the time) into partnership. A new treble bell, having been added to the original five, all were re-hung in a new frame at the time of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, the money being raised by public subscription by Mears and Stainbank at Whitechapel. This bell was given as a 'Thank Offering by the Parishioners of Lyss for 60 YEARS OF QUEEN VICTORIAS REIGN'. The work on the

tower became necessary in 1926, when the tower was extensively repaired by replacing the old shingles with oak shingles, moulded cladding with plain boarding, which largely remains today.