

# **A guide and history of The Parish Church of St John the Evangelist, Crowborough**

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## **AN OVERVIEW**

The Church of St John the Evangelist is located on the edge of the Ashdown Forest on the edge of the growing town of Crowborough in East Sussex - seven miles from Tunbridge Wells, and was built in 1839 by the De La Warr family as a Chapel of Ease within the Parish of Withyham, to serve the small hamlet of Crowborough (known later as Old Town or St John's). The Revd Thomas Charlton (Vicar 1926-1931) stated in 1939, on the centenary of the foundation, that it was Elizabeth Countess De La Warr who "*considered the responsibility laid upon her family to provide for the spiritual needs of those who lived in this corner of their great domains*". Fourteen acres of virgin forest-land were enclosed and as well as the church, there was a small house as the residence for a priest. A year later the house was enlarged to incorporate a school and a schoolhouse for the head teacher. The church was known locally as Crowborough Chapel, and was served by the Curate from the mother parish of Withyham, St Michael and All Angels, three miles to the north, beside the family estate at Old Buckhurst - the former residence of the Sackville family, Dukes of Dorset, before they were granted Knole by their cousin, Queen Elizabeth I. . The first Duke of Dorset was Chancellor of the Exchequer and a cousin of Elizabeth I through Anne Boleyn and after his move to Sevenoaks Old Buckhurst passed on through female line to the Earls of De La Warr who were also Barons Buckhurst, a title which by tradition is passed on to the eldest son of the family before he inherits the title of Earl De La Warr.

Originally the church consisted of the nave only, and followed the design of John Henry Newman's Church at Littlemore, near Oxford (see below). It was 60 feet by 25 feet, and 43 feet high, with a grouped triplet of three lancet windows at the east end and lancets in the side walls, and a window with simple tracery above the west door. The west front was surmounted by a bellcote. The church was, in essence, a simple plain design. Of Littlemore the Revd Henry Wilberforce, a friend of Newman, wrote in 1839 "the whole interior ... is really something beyond description so solemn and Catholic". The stone for St John's was quarried locally. There is a story regarding the site which was at first selected, further into the Forest, at Friar's Gate by the Five Hundred Acre Wood. The building

materials had already been assembled there, but were later found where the present building now stands. The De La Warr family built the church where the materials ended up.

The Story of Crowborough (1933) describes the impressive ceremonies performed at the consecration of the church on 31 July 1839 by Dr William Otter, Bishop of Chichester. "A great day indeed! It must have been a picturesque and stirring scene: the cannon booming from the battery in front of the great house of Buckhurst, as they did on all great occasions; the Earl and Countess with the Lord Bishop setting out in their carriage with outriders, a numerous company of the nobility and gentry following, and, at last, in the new little stone building perched on the flank of Crowborough Beacon, the apostolic words were spoken and the acts performed which made it none other but the House of God and the Gate of Heaven".

Within a year, in 1840, St John's "National" School opened. It was enlarged in 1873. In 1879, the number of children on roll was 80. Children attended until they were 14 or 15 years of age, up until the mid-1950s, after which the school focused solely on primary education. With the population increase in Crowborough numbers grew to over 300 in the 1980s but have now settled around 220.

In 1850 Lady Elizabeth Sackville, Countess De La Warr, daughter of John Sackville, 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Dorset, built new almshouses in memory of her son, George John Frederick West, Viscount Cantelupe, who died aged 36. He was 5<sup>th</sup> Earl De La War - the eldest son of George Sackville-West and the Countess. The almshouses were "for the reception of six poor persons of the Parish of Withyham, of whom two shall be men and four women. The said six poor persons shall be unmarried or widowers or widows of honest report, members of the Church of England and of the age of fifty and upwards..." Each received £12 per annum, together with house and garden. The matron was also required to act as a nurse in the parish in cases where such assistance was needed. The 1867 Post Office Directory listed that most of the residents were in land-related occupations, apart from a few shopkeepers. "Crowborough is a hamlet, partly in this parish, three miles south from the church, where there is a chapel of ease (St John the Evangelist), with parsonage and school house adjoining, near to which are almshouses. In 1974 new almshouses were built by Anne Rachel, Countess De La Warr, behind the Dorset Arms in Withyham; the original St John's almshouses are now a private residence alongside the graveyard.

In 1865 the Revd Thomas Rudston Read became Rector of Withyham, where he was incumbent for 26 years. He was an enthusiastic priest who demonstrated considerable drive and dedication to the church and education, to try and contain the rise of non-conformist churches. He used his considerable talent and persuasiveness in introducing services and a church in Blackham (originally called the iron church), at the northern end of the parish and he had built the church and school of St Thomas in (New) Groombridge. It was he who initiated the setting up of the independent ecclesiastical parish of Withyham St John's, through Order in Council, in 1871. The mother church, St Michael and All Angels Withyham, paid £60 a year to endow the parish of Withyham St John and its first Vicar was the previous Priest in Charge, the Revd Edward Herbert. The Revd Read's successor, the Revd Charles Sutton, states in his Short History that "It was a source of the greatest comfort to him, in the closing years of his life, to think of each of the distant districts of Withyham being duly provided with churches and services".

St John's, therefore, was Crowborough's first parish church; the church of All Saints on Chapel Green became an ecclesiastical parish in 1880 (before that, it had been a Chapel of Ease to St Denys in Rotherfield). The parish continued to be called Withyham St John's until July 1999, when the title of the benefice was altered to St John the Evangelist, Crowborough, to establish clear affiliation with the growing town of Crowborough.

In 1870 the chancel was added, funded again by the patron, Elizabeth, Countess De La Warr, the year in which she died. In 1888 a vestry was created at the west end of the church, where the font now stands, and above it a gallery was erected and an organ located there. Two years afterwards the latter was moved to an organ-chamber built in the north side of the chancel, where the Sacristy is now...

In the 1890s the church was further beautified with the most glorious stained glass and reredos, behind the Altar. Most of the stained glass was designed by Charles Eamer Kempe, who was also responsible for designing the reredos, which was carved by Oberammergau woodcarvers in Bavaria.

In the early 1900s things began to change. The development of the Warren began and many new houses were built in Crowborough. E V Lucas described the area in his *Highways and Byways of Sussex* (1904), as "Never was a fine remote hill so be-villa'd. The east slope is all scaffold poles and heaps of bricks, new churches and chapels are sprouting, and many hoardings announce that Follies, Pierrots, or conjurers are continually imminent. Crowborough itself has shops that would not disgrace Croydon, and a hotel where a Lord Mayor might feel at home. Houses in their own grounds are commoner than cottages". Estate agents described the neighbourhood as "Scotland in Sussex". It is also interesting that the population of Crowborough Town (Withyham St John's) was in 716 in 1891 and 1089 in 1931.

During both World Wars Ashdown Forest was used for training purposes; Warren Camp and that at St John's were used by both British and Canadian troops. The St John's Camp was originally in tents and later became permanent and hatted, where the Horder Centre now stands.

In 1971, in the incumbency of Fr. Edward Kerr, a number of refurbishments took place in celebration of the centenary of the ecclesiastical parish. On his death the parishioners funded a Lady Altar in his memory; this is now used as the forward-facing altar in the chancel.

In recent years there have been extensions made to the School, and significant improvements made to the fabric of the church and organ, as well as the churchyard, with plans well in hand to create a Church Hall on the north side of the church.

## **THE ANGLO-CATHOLIC TRADITION AT ST JOHN'S**

St John's is an almost exact copy of the church of St Mary and St Nicholas at Littlemore, south of Oxford, and was certainly among the earliest of the Tractarian churches. The Littlemore design was admired by the architect and designer Augustus Pugin, and the church was reviewed in *The Ecclesiologist* in 1845 as 'being in itself the first unqualified step to better things that England has long witnessed: the first building for many a long year erected, showing itself to be not so much a sermon-house, as a temple of the MOST HIGH ...'. The ground-plan for Littlemore was by HJ Underwood of Bath who used the same ground-plan as Holy Trinity Lower Beeding, West Sussex. Drawings of the interior of the church at Littlemore show the same hammerwood-style beams above the nave, and the exterior view is identical with that of St John's. The local architect who oversaw the building of St John's was W L Lambert.

Littlemore is, of course, associated with the Revd Dr J H Newman (now Blessed John Henry Newman). John Henry Newman was a key figure in the Oxford Movement, when, as Vicar

of St Mary's Oxford he produced a series of "Tracts for the Times" (hence the term Tractarianism), in which he emphasised the historical continuity between the Anglican and the Early Christian Churches. The Movement developed into Anglo-Catholicism which continues to focus on traditional Catholic doctrine, sacraments and ritual, maintaining the beauty of holiness in worship. He founded a community at Littlemore, but in 1845 converted to Roman Catholicism, later becoming a Cardinal. There is no doubt that St John's was at the cutting-edge of the Catholic Revival in the Church of England in the late 1830s with strong links to the key figures in the Oxford Movement, being a church designed to emulate the views of the day and one of the first Anglican churches to be furnished with a stone Altar.

St John's has always been loyal to its Anglo-Catholic heritage, and from the start there were lighted candles, the Blessed Sacrament was reserved, incense was used and the priests wore Eucharistic vestments and used traditional Catholic ceremonial. For many years during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in other parts of the country, priests were prosecuted for using the "mixed Chalice" and using other religious ceremonial. Earl George De La Warr was personally not keen on the Catholic Revival but his wife, Elizabeth, Countess De La Warr, was, as indeed was their son Charles the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl. George, allowed his wife and eldest son to follow the Catholic ways at St John's but maintained the traditional Church of England worship at St Michael's Withyham. Their younger son, the Revd Reginald Sackville-West, was Rector of Withyham from 1841 - 1865 and later became the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl De La Warr. He was a chaplain to Queen Victoria and was her Lord Chamberlain, and, according to the Revd Charles Sutton's historical notes of Withyham, Hartfield and Ashdown Forest (1902) "for many years took a keen interest in the services at St John's, and in all matters relating to the church".

These developments were supported by, among others, the great hymn-writer, Revd Dr John Mason Neale who was Warden of Sackville College, East Grinstead (a position still occupied today and still appointed by the holder of the De La Warr title), and later founded the Convent of St Margaret's there and who had set up the Camden Society to reform church architecture and revive ritual arrangements. In 1849, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the consecration of St John's, there were seventeen visiting clergy, including the Revd Dr John Mason Neale, and the Revd Thomas Helmore (Priest-in-Ordinary to Her Majesty and Master of the Boys of the Chapel Royal). The same journal states that the church is "on the slope of a hill in a most wild region" and that "the musical arrangements were quite elaborate, local choirs being augmented by the choristers of the Chapel Royal. After there was a Solemn Celebration of the Holy Eucharist and that all things were done with the most perfect decorum and obedience to rubrical direction".

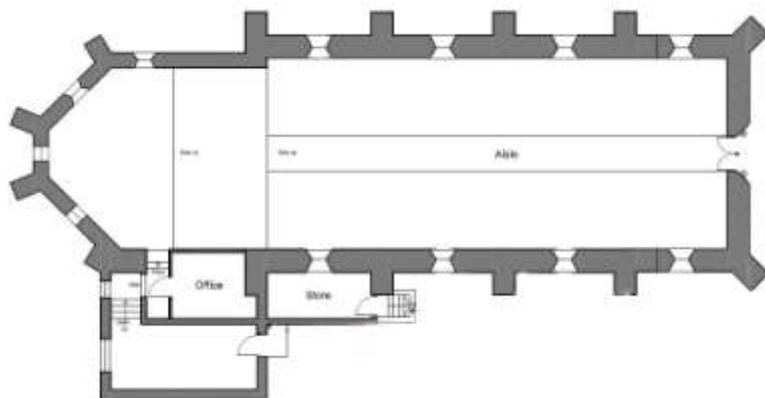
The founders of the Oxford Movement were not afraid of being unpopular; they did what they thought was right. In their ministries, in their lives and in their churches can be seen a beauty, a genius, and a depth of spiritual power. Many visitors are struck by the extraordinary beauty of this little church, hidden on the edge of Ashdown Forest, and what it stands for. Amongst St John's regular worshippers was Dorothy Kerin (1890 - 1963), regarded by many as a modern day Christian saint, known for her pioneering work in Christian healing and who founded Burrswood in 1948 in nearby Groombridge.

St John's is indebted to its founders and many benefactors. It has a unique and outstanding range of memorials, metalwork, woodwork, textiles, windows and other church furnishings, mostly as gifts or in memoriam. However, it was Elizabeth, Countess De La Warr, who made the greatest impact; for she it was who initiated the foundation and the building of the church at St John's, and continued to endow it through to her death. We are also indebted to the Ramsbotham family of Old Mill, in Crowborough Warren, for much of the stained glass and the reredos.

## ST JOHN'S TODAY

St John's is not merely a historical building. It is a Church of England parish in the Catholic tradition in the Diocese of Chichester under the patronage of the Guild of All Souls, a devotional Anglo-Catholic society. After a period of uncertainty in the 1980s and 90s the Bishop of Lewes decided to suspend the parish, meaning that we could no longer have a stipendiary priest. This situation continued for around fifteen years, and we are grateful for the strong leadership and pastoral care given by Fr Peter Naylor and Fr Robert Norbury who became non-stipendiary Priests-In-Charge during this period. The parish was reinstated with its own Vicar, Fr Robert Norbury, in 2013. St John's is a vibrant, inclusive parish church in the Catholic tradition and on Sundays Mass is celebrated in both established and modern styles, using the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship rites respectively. Sunday Club is held each week in the School. St John's celebrates the Catholic Faith as the Church of England has received it, teaching the practice of Christianity throughout the ages, rooted in the scripture and teachings of the early Church. St John's adheres strongly to doctrine such as the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Significant stress is placed on the sacraments, especially the Mass, and through the liturgy and worship – performed to maintain the beauty of holiness, which is intended to appeal to one's whole person – to heart as well as head, to senses as well as to intellect. The observance of Lent, Holy Week and Easter, as well as the other feasts in the cycle of the Church's calendar.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH



### THE NAVE

#### The Font

To the left of the west door, on the north side of the church is the Font – used for the Sacrament of Baptism, using water to initiate believers into the Christian Church. It is lined with lead

and was donated by the Baden-Powell family, who lived in Speldhurst. This baptistery area was originally a vestry. In the corner is a small statue of Our Lady of Walsingham. There is a wooden War Memorial and Roll of Honour

### Stations of the Cross

These fourteen paintings located on the panelling of the nave depict Christ's final route to Golgotha and Crucifixion, and are used especially as a form of devotion during Lent and Holy Week. The sequence starts near the choir stalls on the north side, and follows round to the fourteenth station by the pulpit. Each painting, on metal, is framed in a polished oak barbed quatrefoil; the inner edge of the frame is gilded, with a fleurée cross above. They are believed to be Flemish, and represent the following:

- I Pilate washing his hands while Christ is led away
- II Christ receiving the Cross from two men
- III Christ falls for the first time

IV Christ carrying the Cross and meeting His mother, Mary

V Simon of Cyrene lifting the Cross from Christ

VI Veronica offers Christ a cloth

VII Christ falls for the second time

VIII Christ carrying his Cross meets three women of Jerusalem "wailing and lamenting"

IX Christ falls for the third time. In the background are the two thieves, a Roman soldier and man carrying a ladder.

X Two men strip Christ of His outer garments

XI Christ being nailed to the Cross

XII Christ on the Cross. On the left is His Mother the Virgin Mary, St John and on the right is the kneeling figure of Mary Magdalene with Joseph of Arimathea standing behind

XIII Christ is removed from the Cross by the Virgin Mary assisted by St John. Also portrayed are Mary Magdalene and Joseph of Arimathea.

XIV Christ being placed in His tomb by the Virgin Mary, St John and Joseph of Arimathea.



## Paintings

### Painting of "St Christopher carrying the Infant Christ across river"

This large oil on canvas painting of St Christopher carrying the Infant Christ across a river, dated 1911 and signed "WF" (artist's identity unknown). This was donated by the Canadian Grenadier Guards who worshipped here when they were stationed in Crowborough in 1943 - 44. They were stationed in Crowborough at St John's and Warren Camps which were across the road from the church.

### Painting of "St John the Baptist depicted as a child shepherd"

St John the Baptist is depicted as a child shepherd, standing under a tree. This is a copy of a copy of a copy of an original painting by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617 - 82) which is now lost.

## Memorials

As can be seen, the majority of these memorials on the walls of the nave are in memory of young men who died in the Great War of 1914 - 18. Two major local families and benefactors of the church, the Ramsbothams and the Sterns, are also well-represented both in terms of tablets but also in other artefacts (e.g. the reredos and windows).

## The Roof

The chancel roof has six ribs decorated with black and gold chevrons supported on corbels. The wooden roof is painted red and decorated with gold stars.

The elaborate ornamental roof over the nave is without tie beams and is light and steeply pitched. The nave roof is a double hammerbeam, with four hammerbeams supported on stone corbels. The Shields in the nave roof carry the arms of the Diocese of Chichester, England, the County of Sussex, the Sackville family, St John and the Church of England Province of Canterbury

## The Annunciation Carving above the Chancel Arch

There are three panels, resembling a triptych, with a kneeling angel on each side facing the Annunciation scene in the centre panel. The date and provenance of this carving is not known for certain, but it probably dates from the late nineteenth century.

The Archangel Gabriel is on the left, wearing a very elaborately decorated golden cloak over a red robe, with a large golden ring nimbus, gold crown and wings, and carrying a staff with a scroll bearing the words "Ave Mar' Deo". His right hand is raised in blessing. On the right, bearing a large ring nimbus, the figure of Mary wears a blue and gold cloak over a red gown, with slippered feet. Her right hand is on her heart and she holds an open book. Between the figures is, at the top, the Holy Spirit as a dove, facing downwards, and with thick golden rays extending down. At the foot is a gold vase with four lilies, which symbolise chastity and purity and are associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary.

## Pulpit

This consists of a nine sided drum in oak on a stone plinth and is made up of carved panels from the old private chapel at Buckhurst Park at Withyham, the principal seat of the founders, the De La Warr family. It was given to St John's in about 1870. The panels represent the following scenes (left to right): St Peter holding a large key and a book, St John the Evangelist holding the Chalice with the snake on top; this is an emblem for St John, a Nativity scene with Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child, with an ass, ox and an angel below a stylised roof, and St Thomas holding a spear and a book in each hand.



## The Image of Our Lady

To the left of the chancel arch hangs the impressive figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as Queen of Heaven with the Christ Child. The figures are three-dimensional, within a gilded oval rayed mandorla, each ray separated by a star. The Virgin Mary is standing on a silver coloured crescent moon. Mary has a gold crown over a white head covering, blue gown and gilded over-

gown with red and gold decorated border. She holds the Christ Child who is dressed in a gilded robe with blue and gold decorated border. The subject of the carving and decoration is based on the biblical text from the Revelations 12: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars".

This was designed by Sir Ninian Comper, (1864 - 1960) the gifted 20<sup>th</sup> century church architect and designer, who created a vast body of work in Anglican and Catholic churches worldwide. It was carved by A G Massini, of Barnehurst, Kent, and decorated by W J Butchart of Croydon.

The figure of Our Lady was given in 1943 in memory of Amy Driberg by her sons, John, James and Thomas (the MP, who was William Hickey in the Daily Express, later Lord Bradwell). The plaque beneath in Latin reads (in part): "To the Greater Glory of God this image of the venerable Blessed Virgin Mary in pious memory of the most beloved mother Amy Mary Driberg who in this church worshipped God, the best and greatest, for many years, and who died in the year 1939".

## THE CHANCEL

The chancel was added in 1870, as a gift by the patron, Elizabeth, Countess De La Warr. On entering St John's the eye focuses immediately on the remarkable High Altar with its glowing reredos.

### High Altar and Reredos

The Altar table is stone, and dates from 1839, and was re-located when the chancel was built in 1870. It is ornamented with three cusped panels on the front and one on each side. At the dedication the stone altar was consecrated with the church at the express desire of the founders. Stone altars were considered by staunch Protestants to be associated with the (to them) heretical doctrine of the repeated sacrifice, and to be forbidden by the Prayer Book rubric which referred to '*the table*'. Until the chancel was added in 1870, there was behind the altar a carved stone cross in the central recess underneath the three windows at the east end.



The magnificent reredos – the decorated screen behind the Altar itself - was added to the Altar in 1895, and was designed by Charles Eamer Kempe, who also designed and made most of the stained glass windows. It was made in wood by Norman and Burt, a joinery firm in Burgess Hill, and the figures were carved to Kempe's designs in Oberammergau in Bavaria. The carvers were probably either Sebastian Zwink or Anton Lang.

It is a free-standing structure and is divided into three sections; the central being the largest. There is a band of brattishing on top of all the sections. All sections have pierced, bowed out, projecting canopies and painted in gold, red and green. The left section shows St James the Great (of Compostela), standing on a pedestal and holding a pilgrim's staff and flask. He was the brother of St John the Evangelist. The right-hand section shows St John the Evangelist, standing on a pedestal with his emblems - an eagle (the bird has the association with divine contemplation and transcendence making it an emblem for St John the Evangelist and his gospel which concentrates on the divine and eternal nature of Jesus) and a scroll, showing his writing of scripture. The scroll states "Verbu caro factu est" (translation: "the Word was made flesh" from the first chapter of his gospel - John 1; v14). It is interesting that the depiction of the saint matches that of the same saint in the stained glass window in the south wall of the chancel.

The central section shows a three-dimensional Nativity scene depicting the Adoration of the Shepherds, showing the Virgin Mary with Child, three shepherds, three Angels and one other figure, probably by his raiment one of the magi, as well as the heads of an ass and an ox.

A tabernacle occupies a central position below the central section. This is used to reserve the Blessed Sacrament, the consecrated bread from the Mass, the sacramental Body of Christ. It has a crenelated top and is set into the reredos. There is a brass door decorated with a Pelican in her Piety within a mandorla, a cherub's head in each spandrel. There is a grape and vine border, and all decoration is in repoussé work.

The reredos was given by Jane Ramsbotham in memory of her husband, James Ramsbotham, of Old Mill, Crowborough Warren in 1895. On the right hand end of the main structure there is a brass plate with a memorial inscription in Latin (translated as: "In honour of the holy Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and in devoted memory of James Ramsbotham his wife Jane (Joan) dedicates this work in the year of our Lord 1895").

## **THE STAINED GLASS WINDOWS**

The church is endowed with intrinsically beautiful Victorian stained-glass. Most of the stained and painted glass has been designed and made by the famous Victorian designer Charles Eamer Kempe (1837 - 1907) in his studio, who evolved a distinctive style and was unmatched in the detail and quality of his work. The insignia of Kempe, from about 1895 until his death in 1907 was a wheat sheaf, from his family's coat of arms; look out for this in the windows.

Brought up by a devout mother at the time of the Tractarian revival in the Church of England, Kempe hoped to become a clergyman but, as an undergraduate at Pembroke College, Oxford he realised his severe speech impediment would prevent him from passing on the Christian message by word of mouth. He decided that *"if he was not permitted to minister in the Sanctuary he would use his talents to adorn it."*

### **North side windows (left)**

The upper parts of these three nave windows are related to historical aspects of the Diocese of Chichester. The lower parts relate to the early Christian story of the Incarnation.

#### **A. Bishop Lancelot Andrewes and the Annunciation**

The top half depicts Bishop Lancelot Andrewes. Lancelot Andrewes was Bishop of Winchester from 1555 - 1626, a scholarly writer and master of English prose, who helped to produce the King James translation of the Bible, probably contributing more than any single person. Before becoming Bishop of Winchester he was Bishop of Chichester and of Ely.

The figure of the Bishop has a scroll above his head which read "Lancelot Andrewes, Eps Winton" (Bishop of Winchester). He wears a Bishop Andrewes' cap in red, a red cassock, white rochet and ruff, a blue cope with long yellow tasselled cord, and yellow buckskins on his feet. He displays the Order of the Garter on his left chest and holds a bishop's crozier in his right hand and a book labelled "*PRECES PRIVATÆ*" (Private Prayers) in his left.

The bottom section includes two flowering lilies representing the Annunciation (the moment when the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive the Son of God). The Angel Gabriel stands on the left side looking down. He has a yellow halo and diadem and wears a white alb with yellow apparel, a yellow and red decorated tunic, a white cloak, patterned yellow, with large decorated yellow morse (clasp). He has bare feet; his right hand holds a yellow rose and is raised in blessing and in his left hand is a sceptre with scroll inscribed "AVE MARIA". At his feet is a dark red pot with two flowering lilies, representing that Mary was a pure virgin.

Mary kneels on the right at a prie-dieu with her left hand resting on a book. She has long flowing yellow hair. She has a yellow halo and diadem and wears a red robe and blue cloak with white clasp. Above her head is a white dove with yellow rays and nimbus (halo), symbol of the Holy Spirit. In the background is a view of a city, with trees and sky. The maker's mark, a wheat sheaf, is at the bottom left to the left of the pot of lilies. The window

is dated 1901 and is "in token and gratitude for the long and happy reign of Victoria of blessed memory".

### **B. St Richard of Chichester and the Visitation**

The top section depicts St Richard of Chichester, patron saint of the Diocese of Chichester.

The figure of St Richard stands below a scroll which reads "*Studs Ricardus Cicestr*" (St Richard of Chichester) He has a halo and wears a mitre decorated in yellow and white. He is dressed in Mass vestments with jewelled gloves with apparel visible at the hem of the alb, and yellow buckskins on his feet. He holds in his right hand a crozier and in his left an ornately bound book. On the blue background are four monograms of the letter R crowned randomly placed. A large yellow ewer with stopper and an inscription "OLEUM SANCTUM" (*holy oil*) is placed by his right foot. To the left of this ewer is the maker's mark, a wheatsheaf.

The lower section shows the Visitation, when the Blessed Virgin Mary is greeted by her cousin St Elizabeth. A bearded third figure, probably Zachariah holding a staff, greets a fourth, also bearded, who could represent Joachim. All four are nimbed and stand on a pebbled surface. Both Mary and Elizabeth wear white and yellow decorated headdresses and cloaks, both ermine trimmed. A substantial building, probably the Temple, partly roofed but mainly towered stands against a background of foliage with blue sky above.

The window is dated 1900 and the inscription in Latin translates as "Remember in the Lord, Emma Stern aged 58 who died on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the month of December 1899. A husband mourning a beloved wife". The Stern family lived at Fernbank, a substantial house, located off the High Street in Crowborough.

### **C. St Wilfrid and the Adoration of the Shepherd**

The top half shows the founder of the Diocese, St Wilfrid, standing below a scroll which reads "S Wilfred Eps" (St Wilfred Bishop, note the misspelling of Wilfrid). He has a halo and wears a mitre decorated in yellow and white. He wears a white cope, with decorative border, held at the neck by a beaded yellow clasp. A white alb shows beneath a deep red chasuble, revealing a buckskin on his foot. He is wearing a mitre and is attired in Mass vestments, holding a model of Chichester Cathedral with a scroll with the words "Ecclesia Cicestrens". His left hand supports a yellow pastoral cross, comprised of five beaded squares in the shape of a cross. On the blue background are four monograms of the letter W crowned and randomly placed.

The lower part shows three shepherds before the Virgin Mary, the Infant Jesus and Joseph at stable of the Nativity. At the top of the scene, are a pastoral background and a city in miniature in the distance. To the left, the Virgin Mary is seated holding the Christ Child on her knee. Mary, with yellow halo, with white head covering, wears a dark blue full length gown, with a white yellow patterned cloak, and brown shoes. The Christ Child, with cruciform nimbus, lies unclothed on a white and yellow swaddling cloth which is gathered in Mary's left hand. Joseph stands behind Mary, hands raised and clasped together, grey hair and beard, yellow nimbus, and deep red cloak.

In a group on the right are three shepherds, two standing, one is kneeling. The taller shepherd on the right is wearing a grey tunic and blue cloak and holds a flute in his right hand. The second shepherd wears a green tunic and hooded red cloak. His left hand holds a yellow pole supporting a lantern. The third kneeling, bearded, shepherd with grey hair, wears a mauve tunic and deep red cloak. He has a yellow sheathed dagger beneath his left arm, and his left hand holds a broad brimmed grey hat. Behind the shepherds, the dark

grey head of a donkey and partially shown head of a brown ox with single horn are visible. At the bottom right of this scene is the maker's mark, a sheaf of wheat.

At the bottom right hand corner is a memorial inscription on a scroll in Latin, painted in gothic lettering, translated as: "Remember in the Lord, Catherine Constance Lang who died on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of January 1887. A sister mourning a beloved sister".

## **Stained-glass Windows in the Chancel**

### **D. St George – left apse**

The figure of St George is framed within pillars which spring from a pedestal to a double elaborately pinnacled and crocketed canopy. The background to the light is a red seaweed design on which are three monograms of the letter G crowned, placed randomly around the figure.

St George, with yellow halo, wears a suit of armour, with stylised yellow cross on breastplate, and a laurel wreath on his gilded helmet. His right hand holds a lance encircled by a laurel wreath, his left hand clasps a red shield with three gold lions passant guardant (the Arms of England). His left foot stands on part of a blue dragon.

### **E. The Crucifixion – East Window**

Surmounting the bowed head of Christ is the Crown of Thorns and a red and yellow cruciform halo. The head is bowed, the eyes closed and the right foot nailed superimposed on the left. The nailed hands are clenched and the wound in Christ's side is visible. The titulus, *INRI* in gothic capital letters, is on a scroll nailed to the centre of the crossbar above Christ's head. The scroll behind the foot of the cross is lettered: "*Rex Gloriæ*" (King of Glory). The cross, which has retained bark and the members of which are rounded not flat, is staked into the grassy mound. Against the lower, blue seaweed background are five examples of the crowned Sacred Monogram, "ihc" (the first three letters of the Greek word for Jesus).

### **F. St Elizabeth and St John the Baptist – right apse**

The figures of St Elizabeth and the child St John the Baptist stand on green vegetation and are framed within pillars with a crocketed canopy. The background to the light is a red seaweed design on which are six monograms of the letter E crowned appearing randomly around the figures. Her haloed head is veiled and her white cloak fastened with a morse is worn over a blue belted gown. The child, wearing a camelhair tunic, holds a pointed staff in his right hand with a patée cross finial; his left arm is entwined with a scroll inscribed "*Ecce agnus dei*". (Behold the Lamb of God)

All the above windows are dated 1898 and are in memory of "George Earl De La Warr and Elizabeth his wife, the founders of the chapel and all the benefactors of the same" see memorial inscription on a scroll in Latin). George, 5th Earl De La Warr (1791 - 1869) married Lady Elizabeth Sackville, daughter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Dorset in 1813. The Dorset title became extinct in 1843 without a male heir. George John West, Earl De La Warr, then assumed, by Royal licence, the Sackville name and the title of Lord Buckhurst, being the earliest Sackville title.



### G. St John the Evangelist – south wall (right)

The patron saint of the church wears a red robe and white cloak, and holds a quill pen and an open book, on which is written "*In principio erat verbu*" (in the beginning was the Word), the first words of his Gospel.

The figure of St John the Evangelist is framed within pillars decorated with crocketed pinnacles. The background to the light is a blue seaweed design on which are six monograms of the letter I (for J) crowned appearing randomly around the figure. The window was made in 1898 and is in memory of "Frances Dunlop who fell asleep in the Lord 22<sup>nd</sup> September AD 1893. A beloved son to a beloved mother" (inscription on a scroll in Latin).

### Windows in the south wall (right) of the nave

#### H. St Peter and his release from prison

**St Peter** - In the top part St Peter has a cleft beard and a yellow decorated halo. Behind his head is a white and black scroll on which is written "S'tus Petrus" (St Peter). He wears a deep blue garment under a white robe, with a decorative border and embroidered with cross keys, and lined in dark green. In his right hand he holds an open book which reads in Latin "I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven". In his left hand he holds two large yellow keys. On the red seaweed background are six monograms of the letter P, crowned, randomly placed, sometimes partly obscured. The maker's mark of a wheat sheaf is on the right near the bottom of St Peter's robe.

#### St Peter and his release from prison

The bottom part is St Peter, haloed, wearing similar garments as in the upper part of the window. An angel, wearing a decorative robe with embroidered collar and with green and red (peacock feather) wings, holds a lantern and points the way out from the prison to St Peter. The angel stands on steps leading from the prison. There is a sleeping guard in the background holding a spear above whom hangs a lamp.

The window is dated 1898 and is in memory of James and Jane Ramsbotham, given by their children. James Ramsbotham, a Lancashire mill-owner, was born in the Vale of Todmorden and married Jane Fielden. They had eleven children, some born in Lancashire and some in Sussex and lived at Old Mill, Crowborough Warren.

#### I. St James and Christ calling the disciples

**St James the Apostle** - The upper section depicts the standing figure of St James, bearded and has a blue halo. He wears a dark red robe with yellow quatrefoil motifs over which is a dark green cloak lined with white with a decorative yellow lozenge border. In his left hand he holds a book with an elaborate cover; in his right he holds a staff with a gourd water carrier. Below the figure are the words "SAINT JAMES" in stylised Roman capitals.

**Christ calling the disciples** - The lower section has a smaller architectural canopy supported by pillars framing a scene of Christ standing on a shore near three disciples in a brown wooden boat sailing on water in shades of blue and white. The barefoot, bearded, fair haired figure of Christ has a cruciform nimbus. He wears a dark red robe covered in a white and yellow lined cloak with a pattern of yellow stylised leaves.

Of the three men in the boat the figure on the left is holding the mast and wears a white garment, the next figure is St Peter in a dark blue robe and grey halo. He is reaching out to Christ with his right hand, and his left is holding the boat. The other figures are St James and St John, the sons of Zebedee. On the bank are white flowers and other vegetation. Below is an inscription "*They forsook all and followed Him*". (Luke 5, v 11).

The window dates from after 1887 with an appropriate subject "given by the children and grandchildren of James and Jane Ramsbotham to commemorate their fiftieth wedding day, 1837". Although similar in style to the other Kempe windows in the nave, this is from a different maker, and not such good quality.

### **J. St Paul and his beheading**

The maker of this window is unknown, but the quality is much poorer than the Kempe windows. This window is in three parts.

In the uppermost section there is an angel with red and white wings and wearing red, green and yellow robes, holding a scroll.

The main central section depicts St Paul. The nimbed, bearded saint holds a sword, point downwards in his left hand. He holds a scroll with the indistinct words "Sanctus ----s" (perhaps Paulus) in his right. He wears a yellow, green lined cloak over a red robe. Blue background; green vegetation beneath the saint's feet.

In the bottom section St Paul is kneeling, whilst behind a man wields a sword, in the act of beheading the saint. The nimbed, bearded saint wears a red cloak over a yellow and green robe. The executioner has a red cloak over a green tunic and red boots. There is an illegible inscription at the bottom

### **THE PIPE ORGAN**

In the early years there was no organ, but at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the organ was positioned within a specially-created arch on the north side of the chancel (where the sacristy is now). The coloured and gilded organ-case was carved in 1901 by John Dunlop, the son of the then Vicar, the Revd Henry Dunlop, who also created the panelling in the chancel. The organ was then later re-located in 1930 to the gallery, and re-built as part of the Centenary celebrations of the independent parish in 1971.

It was originally built by Nicholson and Lord of Walsall. By the 1960s there were problems with the organ, and in 1971 it was rebuilt by F H Browne & Sons of Canterbury, who added the Macbeth electric action and a new console. The recital to celebrate a century of the ecclesiastical parish and the dedication of the new organ on 26 October 1971 was by Allan Wicks, Organist and Master of the Choristers of Canterbury Cathedral. In 2006 the organ was cleaned and the electronic actions renewed by Brownes.

### **THE GATE OF HEAVEN**

The church of St John the Evangelist was created by our Victorian forbears to bring the Gospel and to bring the Catholic Faith to the people in this part of Sussex; it is – to quote from Genesis Chapter 28 – when Jacob exclaimed: "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven."

The following conclusion is taken from the Revd Thomas Charlton's Short Account of the Church of St John, Withyham (1939) and bears repeating:

This little account of a small and simple, yet beautiful, church has in the main been a history of its origin and building, and a description of its contents and surroundings. We cannot doubt but that Almighty God is pleased with the giving and the love, care and devotion which have gone to make it what it is. Nevertheless we know that its real story is written in the books of the Recording Angels: a record of the use to which St John's Church has been put; of quiet devoted work done by its priests; of the faith, hope, love and penitence of its people; and of much done for missions. Strangers coming into the little building will sometimes say it has an "atmosphere", meaning that they perceive something which is more, and other, than a mere earthly building can convey. Priests who have served St John's, and the many who have used this church as it is meant to be used, can tell them why.

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Michael Hewens  
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