

# THE NORMAN CHURCHES OF NORTH-WEST SURREY

Iain Wakeford © 2014

Like Pyrford Church, Wisley Church is thought to date from the early 12<sup>th</sup> century.



Although not mentioned in the Domesday Survey, the little church of St Nicholas at Pyrford is probably not too dissimilar to the older wooden churches that undoubtedly existed at Woking, Byfleet, Wisley and Chobham at that time.

**I** mentioned in the article on the Domesday Book that the only buildings recorded in the survey were the churches and mills. But it is known that not every church or mill that was extant at the time of the survey was recorded (although in Woking it does seem that the survey was complete).

As has been noted previously, Woking's church was probably the successor to the 8<sup>th</sup> century monastery of St Peter (last recorded in the 9<sup>th</sup> century), and is probably on the site of the present parish church in Old Woking. The earliest part of its structure is thought to date from about 1180-90 and although it is possible that the church mentioned in Domesday was also built of stone, it seems more likely that it (and the original monastery) were of simple wooden construction.

I didn't mention Wisley last week, but it too had its church recorded in Domesday (and a mill valued at 10s – almost as much as Woking's), and whilst its little church is probably not too dissimilar to the early Saxon churches, with just a small chancel and a simple nave to hold the congregation, it is thought that the present structure was not built until the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century – at about the same time as St Nicholas' at Pyrford (which in 1086 did not have a church recorded).

The interesting thing about Pyrford Church (apart from the very early wall paintings inside)

is its churchyard which is almost circular – a sign some believe that the site may have been a place of worship in Pagan times when there could have been a stone circle or ancient burial ground on this prominent hill overlooking the wide valley of the Wey and Bourne streams.

Horsell, as discussed last week, was part of Pyrford and the earliest part of its church is probably 13<sup>th</sup> century, but Chobham was in the interesting situation of having both a church and a chapel listed in the Domesday Survey.

Most historians believe that Bisley (which is not listed in the survey) was included in the Chobham entry and that one of the religious houses was on the site of the present St John the Baptist Church, with St Lawrence's Church the other – but which was the chapel and which was the church? Your opinion probably depends on which village you come from.

The oldest part of Byfleet's church is thought to be early 14<sup>th</sup> century, but again it probably stands on the site of the earlier wooden



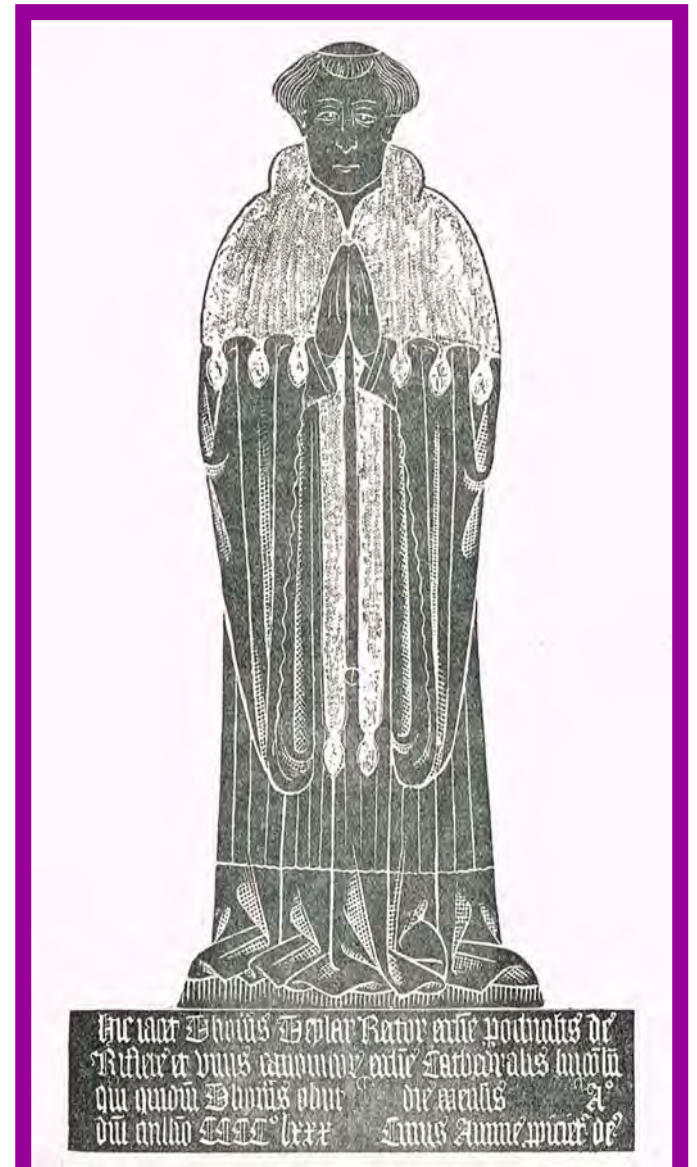
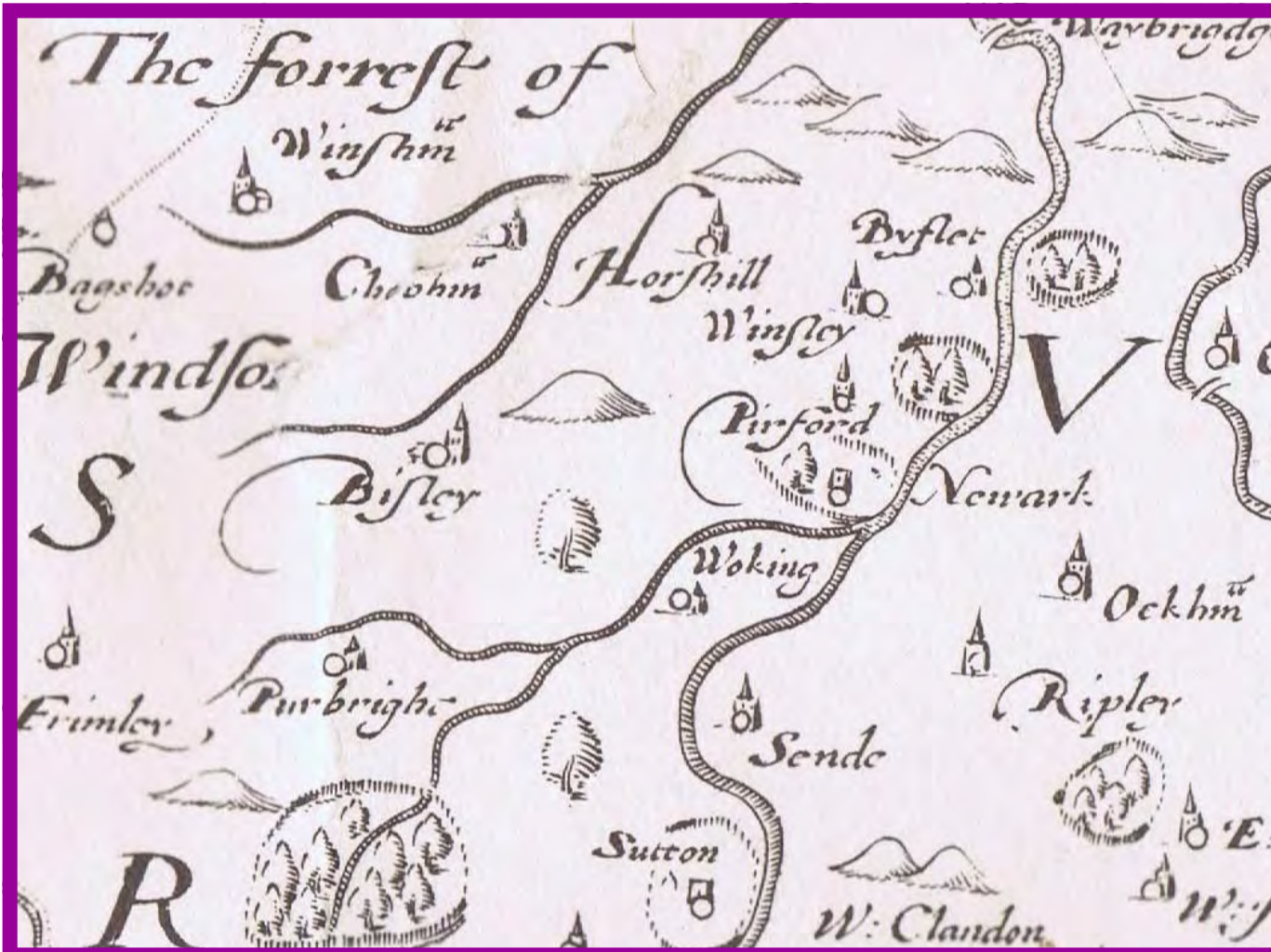
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Domesday structure, as does Send's lovely little church at Send Grove. The earliest part of the present structure is thought to date from about 1220 when the chancel was built of stone with four plain lancet windows inserted. The Nave probably was probably also built of stone at this time, but it was rebuilt in 1475 when the tower was also constructed and the chancel roof replaced.

Send parish at that time covered quite an area, and in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century the Priory of Newark was established in the meadows

between what became Ripley and Pyrford. Ripley as a village did not exist, but by 1160 what is now the chancel of St Mary Magdalen's Church had been built, leading some to speculate that this may have been the original road-side hospice or chapel of the monks of 'Aldbury' before their 'new work' was built.

The church at Worplesdon (also recorded in Domesday) is mainly 13<sup>th</sup> century with the tower added in the 15<sup>th</sup> century – a stone set in the wall proclaiming that 'Richarde Exford made xiv fote of yis touer'.



This 15<sup>th</sup> century brass in Byfleet Church of Thomas Teylor, one time Rector of Byfleet and Canon of Lincoln Cathedral, is unusual in that it is dated '148\_' – the final digit being left out, presumably as it was made before he died and not properly finished afterwards!

Although dating from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, this map nicely illustrates the earlier established medieval churches of our area – although the scale and topography of the map may be a little suspect!

### Byfleet's Mysterious Monarch

**T**he oldest part of the present church at Byfleet is thought to date from about 1310 with the wall paintings above the entrance being contemporary with that date. According to Byfleet historian, Howard

Cook, 'just inside the north door is a consecration cross and over the door are the remains of some interesting mural paintings revealed in 1864. These are thought to date from the building of the church but what is

depicted is uncertain; some think it is Our Lord, others King David and still others Edward II. It is thought that there may be further paintings not yet revealed.'



## The Unique Wall Paintings of Pyrford

The early medieval wall paintings in St Nicholas' Church, Pyrford, show how colourful all our local churches would have been originally.

Some were found during restoration in Victorian times, but when these were again examined in 1967 it was discovered that there were others beneath, probably painted when the church was first built in 1140.

The younger paintings (from about 1200) show the 'Lord's Passion' – a scene that can often be found repeated on other wall-paintings throughout the country - but the earlier ones in solid colours features what appears to be a battle scene, presumably the battle between good and evil. Its unique feature is a row of seven figures about eight inches high carrying staves and wearing conical caps and narrow-waisted 'skirts'. They are possibly pilgrims or maybe Norman foot soldiers, but why the monks of Westminster Abbey (who presumably built the church and commissioned the paintings) would have chosen such a scene will probably always remain a mystery.

The wall paintings at St Nicholas' were first discovered during restoration work in Victorian times, but more were uncovered when these were examined in 1967.

