

Clophill through the years

Old Clophill Church through the ages

The Old Church is in a sad state at the moment but it didn't always look like this.

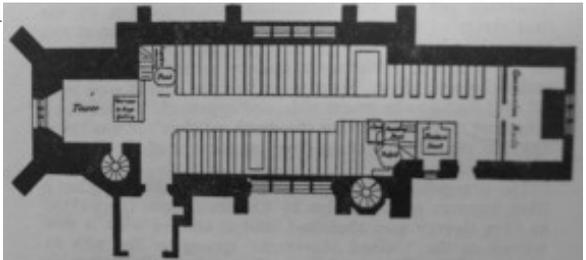
The sketch on the cover of Mary Phillips' book *The Clophill Story* is an early representation of the church. It was built of local sandstone (Iron stone) which is quarried in the Greensand Ridge area



As Nicolaus Pevsner said in *The Buildings of England* 'A strange building, very unconventional in that it has in the nave just one large five-light S and one large five-light N window and no others'

The church consisted of the standard layout of a nave with a tower at the west end, a chancel at the east end and a south porch.

Two large windows were in the perpendicular Gothic style. This style spanned the period from the mid 14th until the early 16th century and was characterised by strong vertical lines, seen most



markedly in window tracery and wall panelling. There are buttresses to strengthen the wall, required because of the large window openings.

The parapets at the top of the nave walls and the tower were crenellated giving the church an impressive appearance.

The belfry housed three bells and has four bell louvres, the window-like openings at the top of the tower, that would have had angled overlapping slats to provide protection from the weather while not impeding the sound of the bells.

The chancel at the east end of the nave appears to have been a simple structure with a half-hipped roof. In the east wall was a large window

with plain rectangular glass in three lights constructed of wood describe as an 'ugly window'.

There is a marked difference between the magnificent appearance of the nave and the tower and the simple appearance of the chancel and the porch.

The lych gate, which once stood at the entrance to the graveyard, was moved to the new church in the High Street where it can still be seen. This lych gate bears the inscription "In the Glory of God and in memory of Mary Ann Crouch wife of Edward Crouch of Cainhoe". Mary Ann Crouch died in 1905, aged 83. She was the wife of Edward Crouch, farmer, of Cainhoe Farm, who died in 1915, aged 91.

There seem to be no surviving photos of the inside of the old church before 1956, when lead was stolen from the roof of the nave and the decline of the church started.

The sketch gives an impression of how the interior of the church may have looked in 1844, just before the old church was abandoned and the new church was built on the High Street. It is typical of a Victorian church interior with wooden pews, a raised pulpit, and a chancel with a communion rail at the altar.



The presence of benches in the chancel are unusual. (Most chancels would have had inward-facing stalls for the choir). Perhaps this is because of the increasing size of the congregation which led to the building of a larger church.

At the west end of the nave were two galleries which were another measure to accommodate an expanding congregation. The lower gallery was accessed by a staircase in the north west corner of the nave, where stood the font, and was used by the men. Above it was a smaller gallery used by the boys and accessed by another staircase in the tower arch.

The spiral staircase in the tower led up to the belfry, which contained three bells, and the roof.

The roof beam, seen in the sketch, had a vine carved on it and has been preserved and installed in the new church where it can be seen.

Before the Reformation (16th C) the interior of the church would have looked quite different. The nave would have been an empty space with no pews but there may have been benches around the walls. The chancel may have been separated from the nave by a Rood Screen.

The interior walls would have been covered with wall paintings depicting biblical events. When most people were illiterate the wall paintings served as illustrations for religious study. The photo shows a mural of a castle which was on the interior wall above the south door. Although there is a fine view across the valley to Cainhoe Castle it is nothing to do with



that. It is probably part of the background to a religious mural depicting something like St Christopher or St George. There would also have been twelve Consecration Crosses painted on the walls.

In the south wall of the nave near the pulpit is shown a spiral staircase which appears to be blocked off as it is now. This staircase gave access to the Rood Beam which spanned the chancel arch and supported the Great Rood. The Great Rood was a carved and painted crucifix erected on a pedestal on the Rood Beam and flanked by the figures of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist.

During the Reformation the Great Roods were ordered to be removed and the walls whitewashed to cover the wall paintings.

As the Rev W.A.M. Grant says in *The Cleft in the Hills* 'It is probable that our county came under the Christian influence of the old Celtic Church of Britain. It was their custom to raise a stone cross on rising ground to the north-east of a township or village and later to build a small church upon the site

The site has a long history and the current developments will, hopefully, preserve the site for future generations to enjoy.