

THE CHURCH OF SS PETER AND PAUL, CLARE.

THE ORIGIN of the church is unknown. There are no traces of the earlier Saxon and Norman churches which were on this site.

MAIN DATES OF THE PRESENT CHURCH. The tower's lower stages are 13th century, the upper ones 14th century, and the main west window 15th century. Changes were made to the body of the church around 1300, when the south porch with its adjacent chapel, and the north porch were added. Major changes came between 1400-1520 when the nave was made higher, aisles were added, the west window and a clerestory (top row of windows) were inserted, and the chancel was enlarged. In 1617 the chancel was virtually rebuilt.

NOTABLE EXTERIOR FEATURES.

The 13th century west doorway with its dogtooth and nailhead carvings, used on special occasions, and in former years by the guilds as they processed from the Guildhall opposite.

The fine 15th century west window with a carved frieze below.

The two crocketed 'peppercorn' turrets at the top of the stairs leading to the roof.

Gargoyles and other figures, some courses of Roman brick, the priest's door (further along the south side of the church) with signs indicating it may once have been taller.

THE SOUTH PORCH. This, the usual entrance, is 14th century. Parts of the vaulting and of one window were cut off when the church was widened by the addition of aisles in the 15th century. The central face in the ceiling vaulting may be of Jesus, and the face above the doorway (part of which was cut off when the porch was widened) may be a Green Woman, which is a rarity. The faces around the doorway include figures which some see as being examples of the Green Man, although this is uncertain. Small panels about two metres above ground level each side of the door show the keys of St Peter and the sword of St Paul. The Clare chevron arms also appear here.

THE SOUTH AISLE.

THE FONT, which is early 15th century, has defaced heraldic arms and a traceried shaft.

THE GALLERY PEW which stands to the right inside the church door is 17th century and was used by families of Clare Priory while this was a private house between its loss to the Austin friars in 1538 under the dissolution of monasteries and its restoration to them in 1953. Features from the Barnardiston family cresting appear among other carvings at the top which include a monk's head looking through a crescent moon. This gallery was removed in 1883 because of its deterioration, and returned in 1914 after repairs.

The arch to **THE CHAPEL BEHIND THE GALLERY** was reconstructed during the major changes in the 14th century, the stones of the old arch being re-used in the new position. The nativity window was installed in 1885 while the gallery pew which now obscures it was absent. At the top three of the Evangelists are shown carrying their gospels, while St John is portrayed, as he often is, holding a cup containing a serpent - a scene based on the gospel saying that the disciples of Jesus would be able to handle snakes or drink poison without coming to harm. Another window shows the resurrection scene, surmounted by angels singing from unrolled scrolls of music. A window high in the wall indicates the existence of a room above the porch. Such rooms were often used by the vicar, sometimes as schoolrooms. There is a family vault and ossuary below this area. Two 19th century hatchments (funeral arms) hang above the entrance to the chapel. These, and many of the tablets and other features found in this chapel, are associated with the Barker family, owners of the Priory for many years. The medieval chest is where the church records and treasures were formerly kept. A nearby window depicts Faith, Hope and Charity.

THE CHANTRY CHAPEL has been moved from its original position elsewhere, as indicated through its lack of an independent east end. The fact that it was a chantry chapel seems to be verified by its having marks from snuffed candles where a lectern would have been situated, and marks where a seat was once fixed. Notched shields in the panels suggest a

date from the 14th century onwards. The crowned monogram contains the letters M.A.R.I.A, for Mary Queen of Heaven – a badge common in East Anglia but adapted for its use in Clare by the insertion in its left side of the 3-fold chevron of the Clare lords. A different badge appears at the left end of the carving.

The RINGERS' GOTH or beer jug near the chantry has a pun in its inscription 'The bells ring in harmony'. It links together several factors - the bell-ringers, the Bell hotel or Six bells inn (their likely meeting places) and the vicar at the time, the Revd Matthew Bell.

THE NAVE (the main area of the church) has 14th century pillars which were made longer by adding new bases and capitals and then re-used to cope with the increased height of the nave in the 15th century. Traces of the earlier roof line are visible in the tower wall at the back of the church. The window high in this west wall was presumably used during mass to time the ringing of a sanctus bell in the wooden structure on top of the tower. The string-course high up in the wall has angels with their arms in different postures of worship, heraldic lions, and fleurons (flowers). Bosses between the arches depict the heads of dignitaries – perhaps royalty, patrons or others. The fourth roof beam from the front is carved with the names of churchwardens and a carpenter of 1804.

Various floor and wall TABLETS to prominent families are found throughout the church, but old brasses which one existed have now gone.

THE NORTH PORCH, built around 1400, lacks the stone vaulting and range of heads found in the south porch. It has a disfigured stone image and a niche which doubtless held another one.

THE NORTH AISLE.

A WALL BRASS near the north porch door is to Prince Leopold, fourth son of Queen Victoria. He was Grand Master of the local freemasons. His title 'Earl of Clarence' is a reminder of royal; links with Clare which go back to Norman days.

The ROYAL ARMS incorporate some German states and Charlemagne's crown, indicating one of the early Hanoverian kings, George I, II, or III.

The MAIN WINDOW IN THIS AISLE is a 1914-1918 war memorial. Entitled The Fountain of Life, it shows blood from the wounds of Jesus flowing into an open tomb. The cross is in the form of a tree in which a Pelican in her Piety is nesting. This figure is based on a legend that the pelican fed its young with her own blood, a legend used as a symbol of Christ's giving of his life-blood for mankind. Also included are Saints George and Michael, fighters against evil and patron saints of soldiers. A round window shows some of the traditional Instruments of the Passion (objects relating to the crucifixion). At the top are heraldic arms. From left to right these are the Duchy of Lancaster, the diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich, East Anglia, the Haberdashers' Company, Clare, and the Crown.

At the east end of the north aisle is the LADY CHAPEL, which once held a window picturing the Assumption (Ascension) of Mary. At the time of writing (2004) the altar cover here bears the fish symbol the early Christians, while the carpet contains other symbols found in the church. The coped sepulchral slab or sarcophagus with a prominent cross which is in this area may be 13th century.

THE CROSSING (the area between the nave and the chancel).

The PULPIT is modern. In front of the chancel is the GRAVE SLAB of Robert de Godewyk, provincial (head) of the Augustinian friars in the year 1450, probably moved here from Clare priory. The 16th century brass eagle LECTERN is an excellent example of its type.

Remnants of the 15th century ROOD SCREEN can be seen in their original positions, near the organ and now forming the east end of the chantry chapel. The former ROOD LOFT was approached through doors in the pillar by the pulpit and in the pillar opposite. These doors lead to stairs to the position of the loft and on up to the roof. Upper doors reveal that the rood loft was exceptionally high. This would have borne an image of the crucifixion and the space

behind would have been filled with a large Doom picture (a scene of the Day of Judgement) or The Harrowing of Hell (Jesus leading people out from the place of the dead).

THE CHANCEL (the area with the choir stalls and sanctuary). This was rebuilt in 1617, the older window tracery being altered and re-used in places. Most furnishings are of the same date, possibly incorporating earlier panels. One sanctuary chair bears the date 1569. A choir ledge on the north side has graffiti by 18th century choirboys. Ten wooden shields in the roof presumably held angels or coats of arms or depicted the Instruments of the Passion.

The **EAST WINDOW** contains the arms of 17th century benefactors. Remnants of 14th and 15th century glass and a cracked sun and moon bear witness to the damage done by Puritans during the visit of William Dowsing in 1643. He said 'At Clare we brake down one thousand pictures superstitious'. The **ALTAR** was enlarged in 1946 and the feet of its new riddell posts (the posts carrying the curtains) bear the names of servicemen who died in the second world war. There is a squint to the altar from the **SECOND SOUTH CHAPEL** – the area beyond the organ. Heads of royalty or other nobility appear at the ends of beams in the roof each side of the organ.

Former altars in the church included dedications to a St Nicholas and St Katherine. There are two saints with these names who had links with the Clare and the Augustinian friars. The canonisation of both of these was just before Clare church was enlarged, which would have provided a good reason for their inclusion and suggests another link with Clare Priory.

There is a peal of eight **BELLS**, the heaviest in Suffolk. The oldest was cast in 1400. **FLOODLIGHTING** of the church, installed in 1991, makes a return visit during the hours of darkness well worthwhile. To bring a visit to the church to a conclusion, a **SUNDIAL** above the south porch invites the visitor 'Go about your business'.