



For God, for one another, for the world



Annie Ridd ©

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The church is situated at the heart of Grayswood village, about 1½ miles north of Haslemere, alongside the A286 and opposite the beautiful village green. It was built in 1901 and consecrated in 1902. It is unusual as it is the only Swedish Gothic church in Surrey and it is recognised as one of the prettiest village churches. It is floodlit for a few hours every evening, making it a spectacular feature of the village and a welcoming gateway to Haslemere.

The area now known as Grayswood was a hamlet in the parish of Witley. The parish church was All Saints Witley, which was a long way for people from Grayswood to travel for services, so care of Grayswood was handed over to Haslemere. Although St. Bartholomew's Church, Haslemere, was closer than Witley, it was barely large enough for its own congregation; discussions therefore took place about building a new church in Grayswood and creating a new parish.

A local benefactor generously offered to fund and endow a church and vicarage on condition that Grayswood would be formed into a separate parish. So a new parish was formed from parts of the four parishes of Witley, Chiddingfold, Haslemere and Thursley. Lord Derby donated a plot of an acre and a half of land on the main road.

Axel Haig, a distinguished Victorian artist who had been trained as a naval architect, was a neighbour of the benefactor. He changed from naval work to other forms of architecture and worked with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, gaining considerable knowledge of Gothic detail.

Description of the church

The Church is built of local sand-coloured Bargate stone in early Gothic style. The dressings and the roof are in red tiles. The wood-shingled tower is of typical Swedish design.

The Church contains many Swedish features which were immediately recognised by Bishop Bjorn Bjerstedt of Visby when he came, together with the Bishop of Guildford, to sign a twinning accord between the dioceses of Visby and Guildford.

At the porch, the finials to the lintel over the door are the carved heads of a bishop and a king, representing church and state. They have been identified as likenesses of King Oscar II of Sweden (and Norway) and Bishop Gezelius von Scheele of Visby. These likenesses recur in several carvings in the church.

In the nave the fine timber roof is thought to be reminiscent of the hull of an upturned ship, and it makes for excellent acoustics. The floor, which is original, is made of hard, light-coloured Baltic pine.

The stained glass is all of high quality. The memorial windows were installed between 1903 and 1925 and were made by James Powell & Sons (renamed the Whitefriars Glass Company in 1921).

The decorations at the East Wall were all the result of a faculty applied for soon after the church was built. They include the magnificent stained glass window of the Ascension and the ancillary murals of Moses and David. These are the work of Carl Almquist, a Swedish artist trained in theology, who was a friend of Axel Haig. Haig himself carved the marble reredos. He probably carried out most, if not all, of the carvings in wood and stone. Certainly he carved the deep relief panel of the Adoration of the Magi, which is in the sanctuary. In the north transept there is a window of the Resurrection, which is also by Carl Almquist.

At the west end of the church there is a window by Charles Eamer Kempe, who was a foremost Victorian stained glass artist and a devout Christian. This window and the Almquist murals were restored in 2002 following a centenary appeal.

One of the interesting memorial tablets is for men of the RAF who died in World War II. This was commended by the Guildford Diocesan Advisory Committee.

The organ was built in 1925 by Will. Hill and Son and Norman Baird. It was restored in 1993/4 following an appeal to the congregation.

The clock in the tower used to be wound manually, but in 1967 relatives of a former Churchwarden, Mrs Mary Mort, paid for an electric winding mechanism to be installed in her memory.

The churchyard includes the graves of many local families. The most distinctive memorial stone is that for Axel Haig, which he designed himself in the shape of a Nordic rune stone. It was presented by the Society of Berserkers and Vikings, of which he had been President.

The church and the community

The church building is part of the fabric of the village and is held in affection by most villagers, who see it as 'their' church and would feel its loss or its unavailability keenly. It is freely available to any village organisation which wishes to hold a service - at Christmas, for example. It is kept open during the day for anyone to visit and spend a quiet time if they wish. The church office is now housed within the church.

The building is used regularly for small group meetings and by the local primary school. The whole school comes into the church for a service at the end of each term, as well as celebrating other festivals such as harvest and Pentecost. The church is used for prayer stations at least once a year. Individual classes also come over to cover topics such as baptism, weddings and the Eucharist. The Nursery School visits occasionally and holds their Nativity service in the church.

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