



Patcham U3A

Sussex

History

through its

Churches

St Nicolas's Church, Shoreham

## Old Shoreham: Origins



There has been a harbour on the estuary of the River Adur since pre-Roman times. After the Romans left the area was inhabited by the South Saxons and in 477AD it became the kingdom of the Saxon Warrior Queen Ella. The area was eventually converted to Christianity by St. Wilfrid in 681AD. The name Shoreham comes from the Saxon 'ham' meaning home or dwelling

place near the shore.

The focal point became St. Nicolas's Church on the left bank of the river. However, towards the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century the river began to silt up and the old port was abandoned in favour of the settlement of New Shoreham which was built at the new river mouth around 1100AD. For many years after that the river could only be crossed by horsemen or by a small ferry boat.



Old Shoreham was sited at a point where north/south travellers following the river valley crossed the east/west route across the coastal plain. In Roman times the Adur Estuary stretched several miles across what is now occupied by Shoreham Airport. The estuary narrowed inland becoming two channels. One lead to Sompting Church but as it did not go into the Downs it was no problem for east/west traffic. However the other channel cut through the Downs and extended into the Weald, providing a major obstacle to east/west traffic.

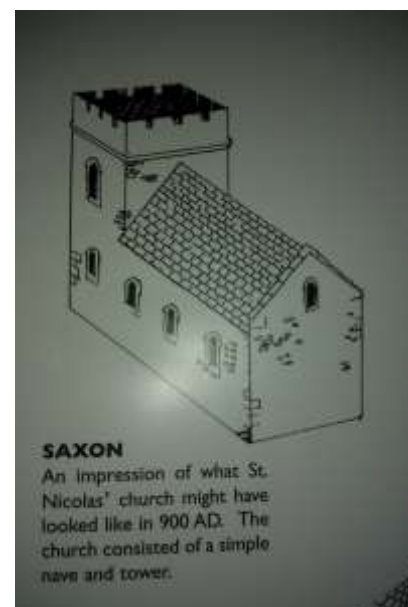
## St Nicolas's Church: Old Shoreham

The Church is situated next to the River Adur estuary adjacent to the wooden Toll bridge that replaced the original Ferry boat service across the river, and carried the Brighton to Portsmouth road, and is next to the Red Lion pub.



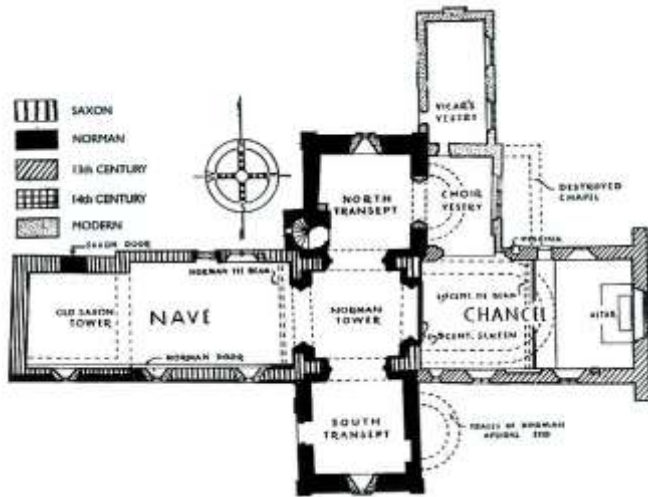
The present church still contains parts of the original stone Saxon building, built before 900AD, mainly in the

nave and north wall and was later updated and expanded by its Norman owners in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. They demolished the Saxon tower and remodelled the church, with an unusual central tower, north and south transepts and Eastern chancel making a cruciform shape. The church was later restored and updated in the Victorian times, but much of the older building remains.



In Norman times the DeBraose family owned this church and manor and also one at Domfront, Normandy, and much of the Norman alterations including the beautiful Norman doorway in the West wall is of Caen Stone and local flint. There is apparently a great similarity between the features of the two churches and probably they were built using the same craftsmen.

The Church roof is of local Horsham "Slate" or stone. There is a low window on the side of the church which may suggest that there was originally an anchorite cell attached. A spiral stair on the outside of the tower with a hole through the original wall provides access to the ringing floor.



The unusual and beautiful feature of the church is the central square tower, with its 4 Norman arches leading to the 4 areas of the church. They are made of beautifully carved stone with decorative figures at the base of each arch.



These include those of King Stephen, Matilda, a cat, a Green Man,(see below), and on one side of the arch towards the East end is a “Sheila Gigue”, a lady sitting with her knees wide apart who has been chopped away – possible for modesty – below the waist!



The Rood screen was carved in about 1300. It and the chancel were restored in 1840, and the attractive painted chestnut Victorian ceiling is above an early 13<sup>th</sup> century tie beam which is moulded and decorated with dogtooth carving.



The East Window, created by Lavers and Barrow was displayed in the Great Exhibition of 1851, and contains pictures of: St Wilfred, Apostle of Sussex; Mary, Mother of Jesus; St Nicolas, 4<sup>th</sup> Century Bishop of Myra, from whom the legend of Santa Claus arose; and St Richard, 13<sup>th</sup> Century Bishop of Chichester.

Among the memorials in the Church are those of the Lords of the Manor of Buckingham, the Coleville family, whose crest contains a crab. The Crab Tree pub next to Shoreham Station may be a nod to them. Other memorials in what is known as the Sea Corner of the Sanctuary include that of Richard Poole and his son Thomas. Richard sailed his ship from Shoreham against the Spanish Armada in 1588



There is a piscina set in the south wall of the Sanctuary and to the right of the altar

steps there is a set of brass plaques commemorating the Head family. Among them is that of Christopher who drowned in the Titanic, while another, Bernard was killed in Gallipoli, 1915.



The new stained-glass window on the south side of the nave was designed to commemorate the millennium – and 2000 years of Christianity. The design shows a river which represents the water of life. The Cross represents the salvation of the world through the death and resurrection of Christ.