

The importance of St Mary's Binsted

In June this year I applied to Historic England for the listing of St Mary's Church to be changed from Grade II to Grade II*. They were interested, but said they couldn't visit at present because of Covid. The application included a brilliant article supporting the change by historian Martin Jones. Here are some highlights:

'For a small single cell church, St Mary's punches well above its weight. Historically, it holds unusual evidence of the violence of the Reformation and Victorian industrial technology. Architecturally, its Romanesque font and wall painting fragments are important in their own right while the complex influences they illustrate add additional significance.'

The sawn-off Rood Screen

The 'unusual evidence' of the violence of the Reformation is the sawn-off ends of the 14th-century Rood Screen. 'Binsted allows us to glimpse first-hand the dramatic physical changes that the Reformation forced on England's parish churches.'



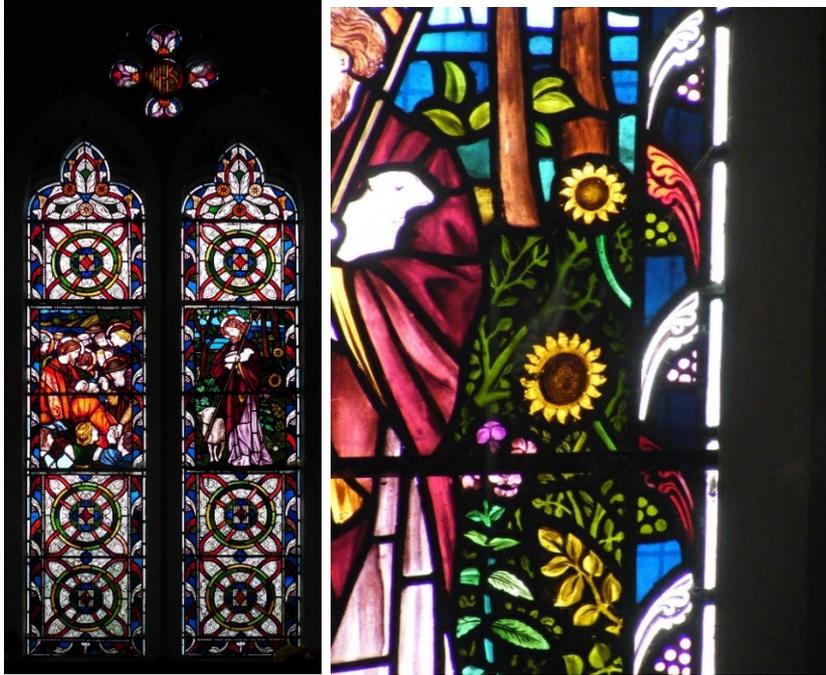
The Victorian restoration

'The 1867-1869 restoration encapsulates perfectly the ideas of Sir Thomas Graham ("Oxford") Jackson RA (1835-1924), a major later Victorian / Edwardian architect whose work is now increasingly being appreciated,' in particular his 'Ruskin-influenced working credo that architects are artists, that the arts must be reunited and that craftsmanship must be revived. Everything was a bespoke design by Jackson and, apart from a chancel screen, everything survives intact.'

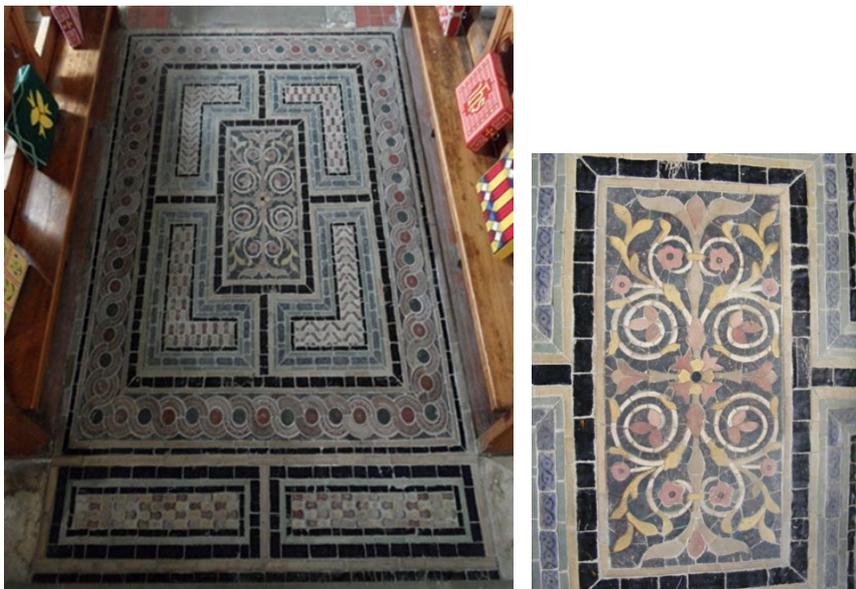
'Key elements were innovative architecturally (the vernacular chancel arch), artistically (the sunflowers in the East window stained glass) and technically (the glass chancel pavement).'

The chancel arch is minimal and recalls the timbers of a barn – enhancing visibility and an early example of relaxing the 'Gothic' style.

'The 'Good Shepherd' panel in the East window contains an extremely early depiction of sunflowers for either the Arts & Crafts Movement or the Aesthetic Movement. This is five years earlier than the date usually given for **their** first appearance.'



'The glass chancel pavement speaks of the love for industrial innovation so central to the Victorian world view. ...Jackson was among its earliest champions and at Binsted in 1869 was the first to use it as flooring.'



Conclusion

‘St Mary’s is not the very ordinary small rural parish church of West Sussex it may seem. Historically and architecturally, it is an undervalued heritage asset that provides material evidence for significant parts of England’s history. In turn, the way these tie this church into the narrative of England’s past establishes valuable meaning for the local community. St Mary’s Binsted is special.’

St Mary’s and the bypass

5.131 of the National Policy Statement for National Networks states:

‘Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II Listed Building ...should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated assets of the highest significance, including ... grade I and II* Listed Buildings, should be wholly exceptional.’

The Grey route would cause St Mary’s substantial harm – passing 10m from the churchyard wall. If the listing is changed to II*, Highways England must argue that the need for this particular route of the Arundel bypass, passing close to the church, is ‘wholly exceptional’.

Emma Tristram