

Worcester Deanery

Deanery Church of the Month: Dec – 2021

Lower Sapey (**actually the hamlet of Harpley**)

St Bartholomew (feast day – August 24th)

Benefice Name: The Worcestershire

West Rural Team Ministry **W5-P058**



It doesn't take too much to confuse me and you should therefore also excuse 'The Diocese' for still thinking that this church is in Lower Sapey

when it moved (with the then Bishop's permission) in 1877 to the village of Harpley because as stated in one document it "being a more convenient location".

The Herefordshire boundary erupts like a mushroom into Worcestershire near here and this Church is only 6/10ths of a mile in a straight line from the border which is on the main B4203 'High Lane'

between Great Witley and Bromyard. I pondered at any cross-fertilisation with Hereford Diocese parishes close by but was told that there is none.

St Bartholomew, one of the twelve apostles, is said to have been martyred for having converted Polymius, King of Armenia. He was skinned alive and beheaded. He is often depicted in iconography holding his flayed skin or with the curved flensing knife with which he was skinned) and he is the patron saint of leather workers. The crest on the board in this church listing the Churchwardens ably demonstrating the three knives commonly

displayed in pictures. He is also the patron for plasterers which is apt as this church has unfortunately suffered a ceiling collapse and at the warm welcome given to me



for my visit, I was warned that it was now a 'hard-hat' area. The church interior photo is from the internet. I was generously shown around the church, and I recommend to you that next year, in the warmer weather, when some of the works will hopefully have been completed, that you also travel out to this delightful church on the hill which is about a mile from the old St Bartholomew. Walking between the two churches across fields is not far and a nice round trip can be made.

My reference books suggest that the windows were deliberately set at irregular distances to give an impression of 'age' and certainly the church appears on first glance to be a traditional English village church rather than a Victorian one.

Some of the stonework touches are excellent and show not only a pride in the mason's art but also that cost was not skimped. I would especially bring to your attention the enigma of the chancel window. Whilst on the one hand it looks unexceptional, with Mary and child at the adoration, a closer inspection of the 'Three Kings' shows an anomaly of two Kings and a 'black?' Queen.

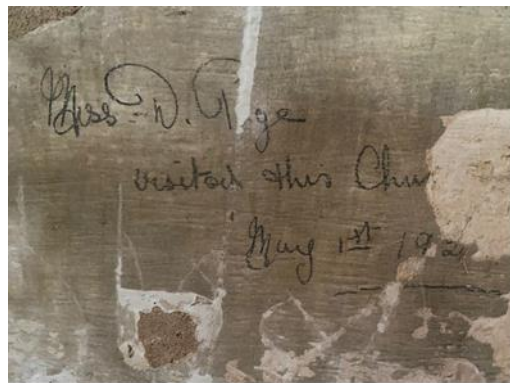
The Pevensey Worcestershire guide states the window is by Hardman C.1925. A reference to the Queen of Sheba perhaps? The round bowl font is probably C.13th



and that it was brought from the old church gives a lovely link to all the generations. It has now been placed on a new base.

(Old) St Bartholomew, Lower Sapey.

This church simply should not be here anymore as it was supposed to have been reduced to a mere shell with walls lower than six feet high! Agricultural buildings though, being useful things, the building survived in a dilapidated state until according to one writer it was not even fit for hens to live in. Some of the photographs that I have seen of it show it looking in a very sorry state but hopefully that is now all forgotten as it is in the care of the



Churches Conservation Trust. Now Covid has temporarily eased, it is again open to visitors. Parking on the roadway by the farm and leaving room for the farm should not cause any problems. Hope

Lane is certainly not for faster traffic!
 I was assured that one reason for the church being here was because it was on an ancient trackway between Shrewsbury and Tewkesbury, and I drove home romantically thinking of a 'Cadfael' type monk in the 12thC sneaking up a secret pathway. Searching the maps and footpath descriptions did not help me find any such routes and it seems the reason for this little church's survival is that *"it is tucked away in a deep and remote little valley...and the fact that the road to it leads*

nowhere". The guide booklet provided upon a modest payment, states that Sapey is first mentioned in a deed of 781, it is in the Domesday of 1086, and a skeleton discovered after a landslip was of a Christian burial (facing East and with arms crossed) and that person dated as living in the 730's AD. During re-interment of the skeleton a rubble floor was found which could have been part of a free-standing belltower or a pre-Conquest church.

Paintings inside the church have been found, and one, a Royal Coat of Arms had been overpainted four times. I didn't find any paintings or consecration marks, but I did find quite an amount of graffiti demonstrating that the building has been on the 'tourist trail' for quite some time.



The base of the font is still here but that and the 18thC.

communion table were moved to Harpley. In recent years, since introduced in 1984, services have been held in the church on the last Sunday in August.

So, two lovely churches to visit at the western edge of our Deanery.

Happy exploring and please remember the Harpley ceiling in your prayers.
 Paul Fulbrook (Worcester Area Deanery Secretary).