

**THE ENGLISH VILLAGE
CHURCH: EXTERIORS AND
INTERIORS; 112 PLATES**

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The English Village Church: Exteriors and Interiors; 112 Plates by Alfred Hopkins

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CHURCH: EXTERIORS AND
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FRONTISPIECE



CHURCH AT BERKSHIRE

THE ENGLISH VILLAGE CHURCH

· EXTERIORS *and* INTERIORS ·

By

ALFRED HOPKINS

112 PLATES



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IT was during a recent trip through Oxfordshire, not in the fast going motor car, but on a bicycle, which method of transportation the author heartily commends to every lover of rural England, that he saw a very few of the village churches of that important county. He was so attracted by their almost invariably beautiful setting and their great variety of architectural expression that he set about to find a more competent photographer than himself and was directed to the interesting workshop of Mr. H. W. Taunt on the Cowley Road just outside of Oxford. Mr. Taunt, who has taken some five thousand pictures of English village architecture, from which these plates have been selected, knows every nook and corner of his beloved Oxon. He is no mean antiquarian and a delightful enthusiast over every subject of his work and I recall that during the selection I was making of the following plates, he put before me a photograph of a church with a beautiful east window, drawing my attention to its detail and its graceful proportion.

"Yes," I replied, "but the tower and transept are bad."

"Ah!" quoth he, "but you must not expect to find *everything* in one church." And the rebuke was a just one; and it is in this friendly appreciation of every part of the village church that the selection of subjects has been made and not by any means with the idea of presenting in each case a perfect ensemble. While many are perfection, yet others were chosen for any bit of outline or proportion or arrangement which seemed agreeable or suggestive.

Even the casual observer who spends a holiday in the English country must be impressed with the number and excellence of these small churches, and every one is so rich with ancient history that it makes its appeal quite as strongly to the stranger as to those who have grown up under its benign influence. To the practical and to the sometimes unpoetical American mind may come the casual query as to why there are so many of them and how the smallest hamlet could afford to spend so much money on a seemingly large and expensive building. The answer is primarily because of the real need of the church not only in the spiritual but in the practical life of the community.

During the middle ages, the parish church was not only the center of those religious devotions for which it was consecrated, but it led also the community life in its various aspects. It served the purpose now supplied by the



church institute, the community house and even the club room itself. The holding of fairs and the sale of merchandise within, or around churchyards, occasionally encroached on the porches of the very building itself and while such proceedings were deemed improper by ecclesiastical pronouncement, yet the church was the influence which dominated to a great degree the playing and the bargaining of the parishioners. In certain churches dancing in the nave undoubtedly took place at rare festival seasons and in the troublous times or when fires occurred, the parishioners were allowed to store wool and grain or chests of valuables and even household goods within the church, paying, of course, a small amount for the privilege. The church sometimes became the place of safety for valuable papers and records or deeds, these being stored in the strong chest, and in those fierce days when limbs were lopped off and life taken for comparatively trivial offences by a cruelly severe state, the church on the contrary bore perpetual witness to the spirit of mercy by insisting on all her consecrated churches and churchyards being regarded as hallowed ground and a safe sanctuary, under defined limits, for all wrong-doers, and Doctor Cox in his very interesting and instructive book, "The English Parish Church," from which the above is paraphrased, goes on to say, "there was probably not a single parish church in the whole length and breadth of England which has not exercised at some time or another in its history, the privilege of sheltering a fugitive and in eventually substituting banishment from the realm in the place of loss of life or limb."

From the foregoing very brief outline, it will be seen why it was that the village church was the pre-eminent influence in every community, why it was beloved by all, revered by all and supported by all. That this early affection and devotion to a religious idea shou'd change with time and alter with circumstances, anyone with small knowledge of history and human nature will readily understand, but fortunately for those who are interested in building, a great quantity of these ancient fabrics remain, delightful examples and ingratiating histories of an early day. Nor can anyone interested in architectural design look at these little buildings without being conscious of the straightforward, earnest artistry which produced them. They ought to be seen with the loving eye through which a connoisseur regards a perfect piece of old furniture. Many have been hurt by improper restorations and additions of a less appre-

