

A SHORT GUIDE  
TO THE  
**Parish Church and Churchyard  
of Grasmere.**



The following Short Guide has been written by the Rector in the hope that it may be found useful to visitors to the ancient and interesting Church and Churchyard of Grasmere. He desires gratefully to acknowledge his indebtedness for much of the information which it contains to Miss Armitt (Rydal), Miss Eleanor F. Simpson (Grasmere), and Mr. George Middleton (Ambleside); also for valuable suggestions and revision to Professor de Selincourt, and for the drawing of the Church to Frank Bramley, R.A.

**Visitors are requested to take one and to place their offering  
in the box.**

A fuller Guide is in course of preparation.

*The Rectory,  
June, 1911.*

## The Entrances to the Churchyard.

In early days the Parish of Grasmere included the three townships of (1) Grasmere, (2) Langdale, and (3) Rydal, Loughrigg and Ambleside (Above Stock).\* To each a part of the Churchyard was assigned as a burial ground, and each had its separate gate. The North Gate (Lych-gate) was the Grasmere entrance; the West Gate (then opposite Church Stile) was the Langdale entrance; and the South Gate was the Rydal, Loughrigg and Ambleside (Above Stock) entrance.

### The Lych-gate.

This ancient and picturesque covered gateway is flanked on the East by an old building which, until 1854, was the village School-house. The door of the cottage, still traceable in outline in the wall, was under the Lych-gate roof, which served as its porch, and the small room opposite was found useful as a house of correction for unruly boys. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the Churchyard was almost devoid of gravestones, and the scholars used it as a playground.

### The Churchyard.

Eight of the yew trees in the Churchyard were planted by Wordsworth. Under the shadow of one of them, beside the river, is his grave, with the simple inscription, "William Wordsworth, 1850. Mary Wordsworth, 1859." The next grave (N.) is that of their daughter Dora, wife of Edward Quillinan, and the next but one (S.) is that of the Poet's sister Dorothy. W. of her grave lie the two children Catherine and Thomas, whose loss darkened Wordsworth's life in 1812. N.W. of these is the resting-place of Hartley Coleridge, specially chosen by Wordsworth. A few feet further in the same direction lies Anne Clough, and a recumbent stone above her grave bears a memorial inscription to her children — Arthur Hugh Clough, the poet, and his sister Anne Jemima Clough, first Principal of Newnham College. N.E. of this grave is that of the Rev. Jos. Sympson (*Excursion* vii., ll. 31-291); and a few feet N.E. of this again is that of the Lake artist, William Green, whose epitaph is supposed to have been written by Wordsworth.

W. of the Lych-gate, near the wall, is the grave of Sir John Richardson, the distinguished Arctic explorer. Between the Lych-gate and the E. end of the Church, with its back to the pathway, is the gravestone of Anthony Wilson, host of the Swan Inn, known to Sir Walter Scott. It bears an inscription said to have been written by Hartley Coleridge. A few feet nearer the Church is that of the Greens who "perished in the snow." Their sad story is told by both Wordsworth and De Quincey. A few yards N. of the Langdale Gate, under a yew tree, lies buried the artist William Hull.

\* Ambleside was divided into two parts by Stock Ghyll. Above Stock was in the Parish of Grasmere; Below Stock in that of Windermere.

## THE CHURCH.

The Church is dedicated to S. Oswald. In all probability a Church has stood here from Saxon times, and the oldest part of the present building dates from the 13th century. There are three entrances :—

1. The Chancel or Priest's Door. Note the inverted arrow cut in the stone jamb near the ground, said to be an ancient masonic mark.

2. The West Door by which the men entered in the days when men and women sat on opposite sides of the Church.

3. The South Door. On the W. wall of the Porch there is a small recess where stood in Pre-Reformation days the Holy Water Stoup.

The **Interior** of Grasmere Church is probably unique and certainly impressive. The main features of its "rude and antique majesty" have been described by Wordsworth in the Vth Book of the *Excursion*. Chief among them are the "pillars crowded" and the "naked rafters intricately crossed." This curious architectural feature may thus be explained :—

**The Tower, Nave and Chancel** were the original part of the present structure. Traces of the roof of this building are seen in the notches in the rafters which carried the bars to support it, and were also found under the roughcast on the outside (E.) of the Tower and the W. end of the North Aisle.

**The North Aisle** was added later (date unknown) and to connect it with the Nave, the outer (N.) wall of the old Church was not pulled down, but pierced at intervals. This explains the lower tier of arches. This North Aisle and the Nave had at first separate roofs : later, they were thrown into one, and a second tier of arches was built upon the lower tier of the central wall to support it. It is noteworthy that the columns of the upper arches rest upon the crowns of the lower. The Aisle is one yard narrower than the Nave, and its roof had consequently to be elbowed. This break is best seen from outside.

**The Floor**, until 1841, was considerably lower than its present level, and originally was earthen. The dead when buried in the Church were laid as near as possible to the pew in which their family worshipped.

**The Windows.** The only original window left is the small trefoil one in the S.W. corner. The stained glass throughout the Church is modern. The old glass windows in the Chancel were broken by Cromwell's soldiers when, in 1645, they came over Dunmail Raise to loot Rydal Hall.

## The Sanctuary.

The present Credence-table was formerly the Altar. In the S. wall is a Piscina which was found lower down in the wall (no doubt its original position) covered with plaster. It has been re-dressed. The Bishop's Chair is inscribed "T.L. 1677"; the chair on the S. side "M.B. 1703." The ancient burial place of the le Fleming family was underneath the Sanctuary floor. On the walls are hatchments and also brasses and tablets to various members of the family.

## The Chancel.

Beside the Chancel door is an old Alms Box bearing the date 1648. In the Chancel stands the "capacious pew of sculptured oak," and on the central wall opposite is the medallion portrait of Wordsworth by Woolner. The inscription is by Keble. The Litany Desk, Lectern and Pulpit are all modern.

## The Nave.

**The Texts** painted on framed panels were placed here in 1741. Wordsworth faithfully portrays the "admonitory texts" that were previously inscribed on the walls:

"Each, in its ornamental scroll, enclosed;  
Each also crowned with winged heads—a pair  
Of rudely-painted Cherubim."

Some of them were found when the S. wall was broken for the insertion of stained glass windows.

**The two Alms-dishes** hanging on the S. wall near the door were found a few years ago in the old Tithe Barn, now the Rectory Room.

**The Oak Block** of wood which bears the date 1635; near the Tower door, formed the end of one of the "oaken benches ranged in seemly rows" (*Excursion*, Book V.).

## The Tower.

The Tower is built of unhewn boulders probably taken from the bed of the stream and bound together by strong mortar in walls 3 to 4 feet thick. It was roughcast like the rest of the building, but in 1891 the roughcast was taken off and the Tower pointed, and the presence of pieces of freestone then found mixed with the native stone is said to support the tradition that this was the site of a Saxon Church. As the pointing proved inadequate to resist the rain, it became necessary again to roughcast the Tower.

## The Font.

The Font is ancient, but it is difficult to determine its date. There is a tradition that it was brought from Furness Abbey. It stood formerly near the door, but was moved here in 1881.