



Why St. James'?

From the Abinger & Coldharbour Parish News archive

Extract from a paper by J. A. Gibbs circa 1935 (see Paper #1)

The patron saint of Abinger Church, St James, is always assumed to be St James the Great, the brother of St John. No record of the dedication is known, but it is very tempting to conjecture that St James - the pilgrim as he is represented in art - was chosen for Abinger as well as for the neighbouring Shere Church when the stream of pilgrims to St Thomas a Becket's shrine at Canterbury was flowing along the ancient track from the west of England, and from the Continent via Southampton and Winchester, through Farnham, Guildford, and Dorking. This track had come to be called the Pilgrims Way from the use made of it by Canterbury pilgrims and it's supposed course through both Shere and Abinger is shown in the 6 inch Ordnance Map.

Malden, in his History of Surrey (1900) states his belief that from Guildford to Dorking the ancient ways were two, an upper one on the Downs, and a lower one to the south of it. The latter he believes was the actual Pilgrims' Way to Canterbury, running from church to church and the old bridle way from Shere Church, past Abinger and Wotton Churches

to Dorking is held by Lord Farrer to be part of it. (Abinger Church was actually called the Pilgrim Church in an appeal made in 1935 through the Press for funds for its repair). Many books besides Malden's testify to the belief that the ancient route along the lines of the Downs was the Pilgrims' Way.

There were some who disputed that the Canterbury pilgrims used this route, and purport to discredit it completely. Even if these objectors should prove to be right the reason for the adoption of St James as patron of Shere and Abinger churches in the 13th Century may well have been that men's minds were turned to him to whose shrine at Compostella (Santiago) in Spain crowds were flocking from England as well as other countries, whom artists depicted as himself the Pilgrim, in Pilgrim dress with staff and script, so that it would seem appropriate when the great English shrine at Canterbury was also drawing crowds to it to dedicate or rededicate the newly extended churches of Abinger and Shere to him; and even if what is called the Pilgrims Way was not the regular route followed by the pilgrims from the Continent and west of England there may well have been actual contact with pilgrims which would suggest St James as the most appropriate saint to adopt at that time.

| [Abinger & Coldharbour Parish News, October 1999](#)