***FHMA Churches around Bromyard with Tim Bridges***

***Wednesday, 6 April 2022
Anne Harbour***

**St Peters Church, Withington**

The group was given a warm welcome by members of congregation, who provided coffee, tea, & homemade cake. Liz Hill greeted us with organisation of the day and introduced Tim Bridges, knowledgeable about churches of Herefordshire, church architecture, and church furnishings from Saxon to modern times.

Tim gave an overview of details to watch for, then let us take a closer look. St Peter is noted for its tall, slender spire, probably early 14th c., recessed in the late 13th-c. tower. Restoration in 1858 added timber south porch and nave window. Late Norman nave doorway blocked. 16th-c. lychgate.

More recent work during the pandemic moved the screen between tower and nave forward, creating a kitchen and loo. These make it possible to offer coffee mornings and other activities.

**St Lawrence Church, Stretton Grandison**

Standing near a Roman road, Stretton Grandison probably existed as a settlement from Roman times. A church existed in 1066, probably built of wood; it was replaced in stone during 12th and 13th c. The present stone church, chancel, nave, and tower date from the 14th c. – ‘a fine, complete, small Decorated church, the only earlier detail being a moulding around the priest’s door in the south wall of the chancel.’ It was restored in 1852 – 1853 and again in 1910. The 14th-c. font is the only hexagonal one in Herefordshire, with decorated wooden cover. A rood stair and door survive, the rood screen probably removed during the Reformation. Some mediaeval glass pieces have been reset high in the west window of tower. The chancel screen of 1912 copies detail from the pulpit. 14th-c. wall painting of lady holding flower (?) over south doorway. Beautiful church kneelers were made as part of the Millennium project.

A Roman fort on the south bank of the R. Frome was identified in 1969 from aerial photos, and remains from the Roman cemetery dating to 2nd to 4th c. AD. were excavated in 2007.

St Lawrence has also recently added a kitchen and loo between the tower and nave, a successful addition expanding use of the church.

**St Mary the Virgin, Bishops Frome**

14th- and 15th-c. tower, Neo-Norman nave. Heavily restored by Kempson 1860 – 1861, adding north aisle with four-bay arcade that contains 15th-c. screen from Avenbury setting off the Munderfield Chapel.

Monument in SE recess of nave, decorated with ballflowers, contains 14-th c. stone effigy of knight with coif and large shield.

**St Peter, Bromyard**

On the site of the Saxon minster, St Peter’s is Norman cruciform. With 14th-c. crossing tower. Our visit was limited to the chancel, the whole of the nave being filled with scaffolding to repair the covered plaster ceilings installed in 1805. These were water damaged before the roof was repaired a few years ago, the damage appearing only later. The church having frugally saved money over the years, none of the repairs qualified for grants; the high costs of roof and ceilings leave the small congregation with greatly reduced resources. However, the skilled plasterer is nearly done, and the church should re-open for funerals and other services in about three weeks. From what we could glimpse, it is well worth returning to Bromyard to see St Peter properly.

**St Peter and St Paul, Stoke Lacy**

The chancel of 1846, Early English in style; nave, south porch, and west tower are all by Kempson, 1863 – 1864, whose father was rector here. The Norman chancel arch survives. Font ca. 1300. Good screen, ca. 1500. Two small porch windows commemorate Morgan cars, built by his son in the Old Rectory garage when HG Morgan was rector. He served Stoke Lacy for fifty years, 1887 – 1937. Graves of Morgan family in burial ground.

Members of the tiny congregation served delicious cakes and tea/coffee. The light-filled church, with kitchen and loos, is an active community centre.

**St Mary the Virgin, Much Cowarne**

St Mary is a large mediaeval church standing in open countryside, the once sizable town granted a market in 1255 and an annual fair in 1281 having largely vanished. The church originally had two aisles; the north aisle was demolished, probably in 16th c., but three-bay early 13th-c. arcade can be seen on the outside. The three-bay south arcade is in later style, the south aisle widened ca. 1300. Tower struck by lightning in 1840, the church was partially restored 1841 – 1842 and underwent major restoration by Nicholson in 1873 – 1879. Fine stone effigy of a knight, ca. 1300, and tomb-chest 1617 with Edmund Foxe and wife Anne.

Members of the congregation had prepared tea, coffee, and tempting cakes. Homemade jelly & jam and young plants were for sale, an opportunity seized by some of the group.

Overall, the day was a great success. Besides visiting important examples of church architecture, often repaired and restored in the 19th century, we had excellent examples of small congregations defying the odds to make their churches vibrant centres of rural community life.

How long can ever-smaller congregations maintain the buildings, pay the rising electricity bills, and make ever-larger contributions to the central church bureaucracy of Canterbury and London?