DID YOU KNOW.................

Lych Gate - English

Lych is derived from the late 15th century old English word 'lich', meaning corpse. They were meeting places and shelters for the party bringing a corpse for burial, and for the priest to receive the corpse.

Although it is thought that there were some constructions as far back as the 7th century, the 1549 Prayer Book required the priest to meet the corpse at the churchyard entrance. So the lych gate was traditionally the place where the corpse bearers carried the body of a deceased person on a communal bier (cart) from the village to the church. The priest would then carry out the first part of a burial ceremony under the shelter of the lych gate roof. Over time, bench seats were added inside the shelter and this provided comfort for the arrival of the funeral party prior to the service in the church.

Lych gates were usually of made of timber and so were subject to decay. For that reason most lych gates are now modern reconstructions of much older timber styled covered gateways. They are traditionally roofed with wooden, slate or clay tiles, or thatch.

It is thought that the oldest surviving gate in England is the 13th century lych gate at St. George's Parish Church in Beckenham, Kent. Renovations had to be carried out on the base timber structure earlier in the 20th century, but the roof is 700 years old.

ST. GEORGE'S MAGILL LYCH GATE -

By comparison, the lych gate at St. George's Magill is purely decorative.

It was given to the Parish by the descendants of Dr. Christopher Rawson Penfold, the founder of Penfolds Winery, as a memorial to him. Dr. Penfold's father had been a Rector at St. Andrew's Church, Steyning Village for forty years. The gate was built of wood, stone and slate and was blessed on 11th April, 1952. It had been modelled on the one in the Churchyard at Steyning in Sussex, England. Originally, it had entrance gates but as they deteriorated over the years, they were removed and not replaced.

The church entrance prior to 1952