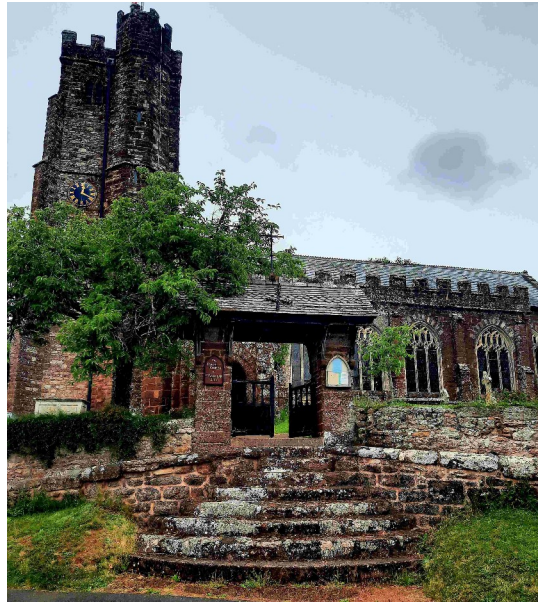


Members of Honiton u3a are  
DISCOVERING....

# Devon's Historic Churches



St Andrew's Church  
Kenn

13<sup>th</sup> June 2024

## St Andrew's Church, Kenn



The earliest record is a charter in the reign of King Stephen which refers to St, Andrew's, Kenn and the only physical evidence of this is the font. The next major change was around 1300 when the tower was built. The masonry of the tower contains a lot of limestone and some flint, unlike the later construction which is largely Heavitree stone. It has small two-light belfry windows on each face and now houses the organ and bells



The original west doorway of the tower is now the archway forming part of the bier house in the top corner of the churchyard. The archway is all that remains of the original building but a later building behind the arch now houses the lawn mower and other tools!

There are a number of other features in the churchyard, one of which is the **ancient yew tree** which is certainly 1000 years old and may pre-date Christianity. One expert has said it could be 2000 years old. An indication of its age is its girth, and that is now hollowed out.



A board beside the tree says that *Taxus baccata* is often found in medieval churchyards and there is a theory that they mark pre-Christian holy sites that were adopted by the early church in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Superstitions about witchcraft, death and life everlasting have long been associated with them. It was sacred to the Romans, and to the



ancient druids it was a sacred tree and intrinsic to their belief in reincarnation. Branches touching the ground can regenerate into a new tree, one of the reasons the tree was associated with death and resurrection to Celtic people. Right up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a belief that roots of the yew would grow through the eyes of the dead and prevent them from returning to the living world. More recent

stories suggest that a number of members of the local community were conceived in the shelter of the hollow yew!

The wood is yellow, wrapped around a dark brown centre. Timber cut longitudinally to include both parts is very flexible. This springiness made the yew a very important commodity in medieval times as it was ideal for making long bows, a very powerful weapon. In 1066, King Harold was killed by an arrow shot from a longbow; they were crucial for the English soldiers in the medieval wars against France, and during the Wars of the Roses. Severe shortages of yew trees in the 15<sup>th</sup> century led Edward IV in 1472 to impose an import tax: a statute was passed requiring a tax of four bow staves for every ton of cargo arriving at English ports.

All parts of the plant contain taxine alkaloids. These are highly toxic to humans and larger mammals paralysing the heart. Possibly, they were planted in the safe enclosed area of a churchyard to prevent farm animals from grazing and accidentally eating the poisonous berries. However, for small mammals such as squirrels and dormice, and birds, especially goldcrests, and thrushes, they are a favourite food. Recently, taxine has been used in chemotherapy against cancer.

Originally the area round the church, known as '**God's Acre**' was an old grassland. A large part of it has been allowed to revert to a meadow and so, over the year, a variety of wild flowers can be found. On its many old gravestones there is a big variety of lichens. In 2018 it was runner-up in Devon's Best Churchyard competition.

First to flower is the **snowdrop**, (*Galanthus*) an introduction from Europe probably brought by the Romans. It has long been regarded as symbolic of the Feast of Candlemas. The **primrose** (*Primula vulgaris*) is often called '*Lent Rose*' in Devon. Children from Kenn would go out on Good Friday to pick bunches of them with which to decorate the church for Easter. The wild **daffodil** (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) or '*Lent Lily*' is now rare across much of England. These in the churchyard may be remnants from a wild population from when the churchyard was a meadow, or may have naturalised from plantings on graves. In Greek mythology they grew in the meadows of the underworld

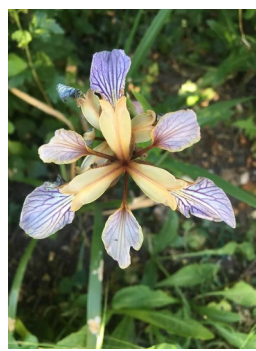
**Ladies Bedstraw** (*Gallium verum*) contains coumarin which gives off the scent of new-mown hay as the plants are cut and dried. It was used to stuff mattresses; also it was hung in places of prayer as it was said the Virgin Mary lay on Lady's Bedstraw during the nativity and the plants blossomed at the moment Christ was born with a myriad of flowers changing from white to gold. In medieval times it was believed that inclusion in a mattress would make childbirth easier. It has also been used in cheese making as it curdles milk. As a member of the Madder family it yields a red dye used to colour wool, and as a pigment for watercolours.



Both the **Lesser** (*Centaurea nigra*) and **Greater Knapweed** grows here. Culpepper recommended it for bruises, ruptures and sores. **Red Valerian** (*Centranthus ruber*) native to the Mediterranean, has strong roots which penetrate so its old name is '*The Mason's Friend*'. The seeds develop hairy parachutes so are easily blown for distribution. **Lady's-smock** (*Cardamine praetensis*) is associated with young milkmaids' smocks and represents purity and sensuality. Locally it has several names: *Milky Maidens*, *Meadow Pride*, *Milkmaids*. It is also called the *Cuckoo Flower* as it blooms just as the cuckoos are arriving in Spring. In folklore it was believed to be sacred to the fairies and so was not to be brought indoors, or used in May Day garlands. It is the food plant of the orange tip butterfly.



The **Field Scabious** (*Knautia arvensis*), known in Devon as *Pin Cushion*, *Batchelor's Buttons* was used to cure skin complaints, also to relieve sores and snake bites. Its seeds are spread by ants. The **Birds-foot Trefoil** (*Lotus corniculatus*) is the plant food of the common blue butterfly. Its Devon names include *Eggs and Bacon*, *Cats Claw*, *Devil's Fingers*, *Fingers and Thumbs*. **Gladdon** or **Stinking Iris** (*Iris foetidissima*) is widely naturalised in churchyards in south-west England. Its brilliant orange-red seeds lie in rows like peas in a pod. The seed heads are frequently included in grave-top bouquets and church flowers. The name refers to slight smell of raw beef given off when the leaves are crushed hence the Devon name *The Roast Beef* plant. Gladdon comes from an old English word for sword linked to Latin; gladiolus means little sword which describes the dagger-shaped leaves. Flowers are 'dragon-like in shape with faint lead blue or purple veins hence its other Devon name '*Dragon Flowers*.'



Ant hills found in the northern, older part of the churchyard are home to the **Yellow Meadow Ant** which is quite rare and their colonisation indicates ancient grassland. Inside are chambers and tunnels. The queen lays the eggs in a central chamber which are then moved by worker ants to warmer chambers where the larvae are first fed liquid food then a diet of aphids. The ants 'farm' aphids. Other chambers

are used to store food. One of the chores of the worker ants is construction and repair of the hill

The most unusual plant in the churchyard, the **Araucaria araucana** or *Monkey Puzzle Tree* was planted in Victorian times. It comes from South America and is named after a native tribe. The name refers to difficulty of climbing it with its sharp spiky close-set leaves. It was introduced by Archibald Menzies who was served its seeds as a dessert on his way home and he decided to see if they would grow. They did!



Once past the yew tree, the main entrance to the Church is through the door to the south porch. It is probably Norman, but one of the interesting features is an example of the old saying “dead as a doornail” The nails which were used to construct the door would have been very valuable and to prevent theft, they were “killed” by being bent over on the inside of the door in order to make them impossible to remove – hence the expression “dead as a doornail”

The **Rood screen**, which dates to around 1500, is still surmounted by a statue of Christ on the cross, with the Virgin Mary and St John on either side. The present statues were carved about 1885 in Oberammergau.

Across the bottom of the screen are a series of paintings of male and, unusually, **female saints** which survived the Reformation. Christianity has used symbolism from its beginnings. The use of a symbol or attribute in a work of art depicting a saint reminds people who is being shown and their story.



Some of the female saints we've been able to identify from the attributes include:



**St Brigid of Sweden** - A crowned abbess writing on a scroll, inspired by the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove.

**St Ursula** - holding an arrow and sheltering her handmaidens under a large cape

**St Genevieve**- a patron saint of Paris, holding a lighted candle with an angel protecting the flame from a devil



**St Sidwell**- an 8th C Christian living in Exeter. She took food to villagers in the fields outside the City walls. She was beheaded by corn reapers hired by her jealous stepmother. On that place water sprang up. The spring

became the well of St Sidwell and was a place of pilgrimage. The well can be seen inside the building of No3 Well St. She is shown as a cephalophore , carrying her own severed head.

**St Ann** with the young Mary

**St Helena** with a wooden cross

**St Mary of Egypt**- She was a 5th C harlot at Alexandria. She repented and lived a life of penitence in the desert, taking 3 loaves with her.

**St Apollonia**- she was reportedly struck in the face many times, her teeth being knocked out. Her emblem is a forceps gripping a tooth. There is a dental practice in Sidmouth called Apollonia.

**St Juliana** - 4th C saint of Nicomedia. She holds a devil in one hand and has a scourge in the other.

**St Veronica**- she has an image of Christ on her veil.



The **font** is made of Purbeck marble which is a very hard stone from East Dorset and the amount of labour involved in its production must have been enormous.

The circular basin has been carved from a square block of stone with a simple decoration; two sides show six arches with the other two having a pair of inverted semi circles. The corner columns are black and highly polished and the plinth below the base is modern. The 17th century oak font cover is for some reason located on the top of the north end of the screen

In 1869, when the **Reverend Porter** embarked on his project to embellish the church in the Gothic Revival style beloved of the Oxford High Church movement, he wished to show the life of Christ in stained glass starting with the colourful Annunciation window by the entrance. He used the Birmingham firm John Hardman & Co. The company had been founded in 1838 to manufacture ecclesiastical metalwork but benefited from the prolific renovation of churches at that time and they began producing stained glass.

The famous architect Pugin encouraged the change and used the firm for new Catholic churches and cathedrals and to make windows for the Houses of Parliament. Their windows can be found not only in Britain but in many Commonwealth countries. The firm closed in 2008.

The Rev Porter saw all the windows completed thanks to several wealthy local people paying for them as memorials. For example the Ascension window is in memory of Francis Baring Short. The Barings and Short families owned a lot of land in the area and were linked to Barings Bank.

Rose Aylmer Porter on the Crucifixion window seems to have lived at Winslade House, Clyst St Mary. She was born in India and had 10 children by Henry Porter. His death certificate shows that his will was proved by his eldest son, Reginald who was Rector of the Church at the time and her daughter Gertrude was married in Kenn in 1867. Constance Porter (Entombment window)



was another relative. The Utermarcks (Resurrection window) also seemed to live in Clyst St Mary.

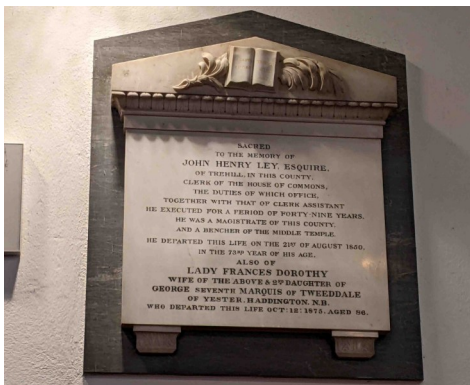
As you enter the church via the porch, one of the first things you notice before you is the beautiful stained glass window depicting Our Lord in the carpenters shop at Nazareth. This scene was controversial at the time however, as it showed Christ helping in the shop, though this and other windows were described as 'unforgettable' by art historian Nikolaus Pevsner in his guide *'The Buildings of England'*. They are typical of the High Church Oxford Movement. As you continue your walk around the Nave you will note that this is just one of 7 beautiful windows, each one depicting incidents from the New Testament.

The series goes clockwise round the church, starting with the two small oblong windows in the west wall either side of the tower arch.

South side of the arch – The Annunciation, and north side - The Nativity.

The series include: 1. Our Lord in the carpenter's shop 2. Our Lord led out by Pilate. 3. The Crucifixion, 4. Our Lord in the Tomb. 5. The Resurrection. 6. The Ascension. 7. The Descent of the Holy Ghost.

The east window above the altar was also designed as part of the series – Our Lord as Great High Priest



**John Henry Ley** was the son of Henry Ley and Mary Smith. He had one sister Mary and a younger brother William. His family had settled in Kenn for several generations and his early ancestors were the Earls of Marlborough. John was educated at Westminster School which led to Trinity college Cambridge, but he transferred to Christ Church. Upon leaving university he studied law then became Student of Middle Temple. He was appointed Clerk of the House of Commons

and served in this role until his death in 1850. At the time of his death the Clerk Assistant was his younger brother William and Second Clerk was his son Henry. In October 1809 he married Lady Dorothea Francis Hay (daughter of 7th Marquis of Tweeddale). He made their home Trehill House in Kenn. They had 5 sons and 1 daughter. 1. John Henry 1812-1885 married to Henrietta Porter from Clyst St. Mary. 2. Francis Dorothy died 1885. married Rev. Villiers Henry Plantagenet Somerset son of 5th Duke of Beaufort and Elizabeth Courtney (daughter of William Courtney). 3. George Thomas born 1815. Through his daughter Francis he was Grandfather of two Granddaughters neither married, and two Grandsons - Rev Henry Rector and Rural Dean at Crickhowell, and John. Through his son he was Grandfather to John Henry (1847-1930) who married Mary Coat Charley of Warcop House Westmorland. John died in 1850 aged 73 years Dorothea Francis died in 1875 aged 86years.

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