

The Church of St. Mary and St. Benedict, Buckland Brewer

A church has existed here since Norman times (probably about 1100). The south (main) doorway is the only relic of the first Norman church and is an excellent specimen of Norman work. The holy water stoup on the south side of the porch is 14th century.

The living formerly belonged to Torre Abbey. It was seized by Henry VIII in 1539 and since then has remained in the gift of the reigning sovereign. The first recorded incumbent, Sir Walter de Denetone was appointed in 1279 (see list of Incumbents on the West wall near the belfry) and in 1979 a weekend of celebrations marked the 700years anniversary of this event. (See high days and holidays).

The church is built of local sandstone and the site is 530 feet above sea level, which may account for the chequered history of the various churches that have stood here. Succeeding churches have been:
a) Destroyed by fire in 1390, b) struck by lightning and almost

Destroyed in 1769, (some pillars of this church still remain near the Orleigh chapel) c) struck by severe storms in 1877; after this catastrophe the present structure was completed in 1880. It is listed as a Grade 2* building and is said to be a good example of a Victorian restoration of an ancient church building.

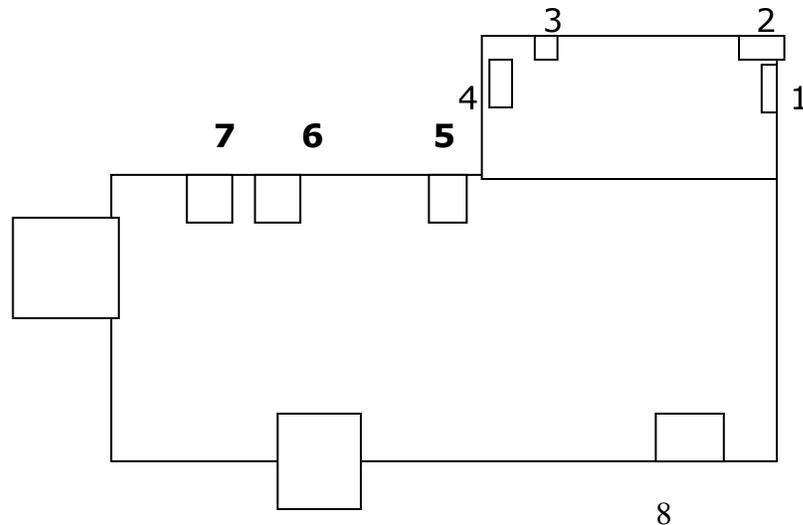
The tower is 76 feet high and there is a peal of six bells recast in 1825 by William and John Taylor (sons of John Taylor of Oxford) in Buckland Brewer and again in 1899 by J. Taylor of Loughborough, grandson of the original John Taylor of Oxford. These bells are renowned in the field of Campanology and many visiting teams of Bell Ringers from all over the country come on regular visits to ring them.

The font was carved in local stone by Thomas Jewell in 1771 for the sum of £1. 7. 0

The pulpit contains 8 oak panels from a previous three-decker pulpit.

The doorway leading to the vestry is late Gothic. Beyond is the Church Room, which also has a separate entrance and is traditionally stated to have been a chapel of St. Stephen. It housed a Church school until the Board School was built in 1875. It may also have been the residence of monks when they visited the village. It continues to be used for some services but it is also the venue for meetings and social and educational events.

Memorials



No. 1 Site of silver coffin plate of Charles Davie Esq., of Penheal who died 30th Aug 1770. Placed here during 1880 restoration, stolen
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No. 2 Dennis Memorial. Anthony Dennis died 16th June 1641 and is seen here with his second wife Gertrude. Beneath them are figures of his eleven children, 8 kneeling and three lying down, indicating their deaths in infancy. Tablet erected 1643.

No. 3 Vening Memorial. The boy Phillip, son of Phillip and Elizabeth Vening, died on 10th August 1658, aged 6. He is seen leaning his head on his right hand, the right elbow being supported by a skull.

No. 4 Large and ornate memorial to John and Mary Davie of Orleigh Court. He died 7th October 1710 and she died 4th April 1709. The lower inscription records the death of Juliana Davie (daughter-in-law) who died 5th February 1720 of smallpox.

No. 5 In memory of Edward Lee Esq., of Orleigh Court. He died 17th January 1811. The figure is that of a female weeping over an urn.

No. 6 A bell-metal plaque to the memory of John William Taylor, Bell-founder of Loughborough, born at Buckland Brewer April 8th 1827 and died at Loughborough 20th November 1906. He was one of the greatest bell-founders and cast 'Great Paul' (weight 16 tons) the

largest bell in the British Empire-now in the S.W. tower of St. Paul's cathedral.

No. 7 Passmore Memorial. Peter Passmore died 8th December 1808 and his wife Mary died 29th September 1817. The small marble shield was erected by their only son.

No. 8 and 9. Above. Caddy family of Bowden memorial.
Below. Relates to a gallant act in which Midshipman William Caddy lost his life on 4th December 1823 in his 26th year.

In the south-east corner of the church there are memorials to those of the village that were lost in the first and second World Wars. The annual Remembrance service is usually held at the cenotaph at the Lych gate when the names of the dead are recited and wreaths are laid.

Buckland Carol

There is evidence of a local tune to "While Shepherds watched their flocks by night" which ought to have a violin accompaniment that was used for many years in Buckland Brewer church. A different score with six verses of the carol and including a chorus of 12 bars called 'Sweet Christmas Bells' also exists.

Heating

Over recent years the heating system has been renewed and the building is now heated by several fan heaters using Calor gas.

(In 2014 new electric oil filled radiators were installed in the schoolroom)

Churchyard

In 1961 a proposal was made to clear the gravestones on the Western side of the graveyard and the gravestones were then placed against the surrounding hedge. In 1980 new gates were installed in the Lych gate and in 1984 25 new lime trees were planted to replace decayed ones.

Vicarage

There is no longer a clergy house in the village. The last one, together with some of its gardens was sold in 1975 when a new Benefice of Alwington, Buckland Brewer and Parkham and was formed and the incumbent was then housed at Parkham. In 1976 the Diocese took control of the glebe from the parishes. Later, in 1985, Abbotsham joined the Benefice and more recently a "Mission Community" called 'The Hartland Coast Mission Community' has been formed incorporating the parishes of Hartland, Welcombe, Woolfardisworthy, Clovelly and Bucks Mills but not including Abbotsham. Thus 8 parishes are now (2010) in the care of two full time priests, one being resident in Hartland and the other at Woolfardisworthy. These parishes remain in the Archdeaconry of Barnstaple, which is part of the Diocese of Exeter.

The sale of the remainder of the Vicarage garden was agreed in 1989 and planning approval was received on this, together with land on the north side of the church.

Village Hall.

In 1964 efforts began to transfer the trusteeship of the village hall to a parish committee; the transfer deed was signed by the PCC in October 1967. In January 1985 it was agreed in principle to sell the village hall to the Trustees and this was valued and the sale completed in May 1990 for the sum of £7,500. However, in September 1990 the Charity Commissioners insisted that a notional loss £20,000 must be made good by the PCC over the next 30 years. This continues to exercise the PCC! Plans are in hand to replace the old village hall with a new one situated near the village school in the near future.

Records.

Few old records are stored in the Parish Church. More are held at the Records Office in Barnstaple but the Parish is immensely grateful to Mrs. Marjorie Snetzler who transcribed the registers and presented copies of the transcription to the Church in 1993.

The early history of this church included in the booklet "Buckland Brewer" by W.H. Rogers is recommended to serious students of church history. We are grateful for being allowed to use some of the information contained therein.

EBB revised Oct. 2014