

The Church of St. Mary and St. Giles, Buckerell



The Early History of Buckerell

Before 1066 the area now known as Buckerell did not have a distinctive name and up to 1231 many names were in use.

As Old Owlescombe it was one of the manors of Ralph de Pomeroy, one of the knights in William the Conqueror's army. He was richly rewarded for his service to the king and received from him the gift of six manors in Devon. Being the Lord of the Manor, and also a wealthy man, it would have been expected of him to provide a place of worship for his few tenants. It is not known for certain whether such a place existed prior to this period. The Saxons were Christians but they were not builders of stone edifices, using mainly timber instead, and it is possible that they might have had a prayer station where they assembled in the open. They disliked being shut in.

The new Norman Lords usually erected simple wattle and daub buildings with thatched roofs and it is likely that the first place of worship built by them in Buckerell was of this construction. These simple structures were not strong and soon perished, so no record of them exists. Later the Normans built short stone chancels and short naves and some of these remain incorporated into later buildings.

In 1198 William, Lord Brewer, the founder of Dunkeswell Abbey, Torre Abbey and Polslow Priory, bought 'Owlescombe' from Henry de la Pomeroy and may have built a church at Buckerell. However it is more likely that his nephew, also William, did so. William the younger was Lord Bishop of Exeter from 1224 to 1244 and is said to have "appropriated the rectory and advowson to the Dean and Chapter of Canons of Exeter", having inherited his uncle's property in Buckerell. Both William Lord Brewer and his nephew were known to be great church builders and it is probable that it was at this time that Buckerell got her cruciform church with a squat central tower.

In 1258 Walter Bronscombe was elected Bishop of Exeter. He appropriated the church of 'Bockerel' to his chapter and appointed two chaplains to administer the offices of the church. Each was paid twenty shillings a quarter and following the Bishop's death in 1280 were required to say prayers for his soul. By 1408 the cost of paying two chaplains appears to have been too great and only one was employed thereafter. Bishop Walter began the registers of his time which remain the oldest still in existence in the diocese.

The origin of the name of the village is difficult to establish with any accuracy as there are conflicting opinions. According to Victoria County History, “Ralf de Pomaria has a manor called Old Owlescombe, now in the village of Buckerell”. But according to Risdon the name ‘did not appear until 1231’ when it was called after Andrew Bokerel. It is possible that Bokerel was a tenant of de Pomeroy’s, and as was the custom, the place he occupied was given his name rather than that of the Lord of the Manor. Andrew Bokerel was also Lord Mayor of London seven times.

The Church of St. Mary and St. Giles

Buckerell church is dedicated to St. Mary and St. Giles. The dedication is said to have been on November 23rd 1319, with the “revel” being held on the first Sunday in September, being St. Giles day. Thus the Patron Saint is St. Giles and the Dedication Saint is St. Mary. St. Giles was the saint of the afflicted, the cripple and the leper and it is possible that there is a “hagioscope”*, that has been plastered over, on the chancel wall near the credence. It is certain that there were lepers in the district at the time and St. Margaret’s Chapel, near Honiton was built for leprous persons before 1374. The date of the ‘dedication’ is however in doubt because the church was known to be in a ruinous condition in 1330.

In 1330 a visitation by the commissioners of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter reports as follows; “Buckerell, 11th July 1330 – the chancel is ruinous in its gable and in the greater part, with the whole church and the bell turret, which stands for the greater part over the chancel, is also ruinous. A canopy is wanting over the high altar, all the books are badly bound and some decayed and almost worn out. The vicar has to bear one shilling and threepence, the cost of maintaining the matins books and the Dean and Chapter two shillings and threepence. The parishioners say that the vicar bears himself very well in all the duties of the cure of souls”.

Between 1395 and 1419, during the episcopate of Bishop Stafford, many of the parish churches in Devon were rebuilt and it is probable that Buckerell was one of them. A stone inscribed ‘Henrius Rex MCCCCIII’ and the credence in the chancel bear the same date. The usual plan for these churches was a West tower, a nave and a chancel. This plan applies to Buckerell with the exception of the transepts that probably belong to an earlier cruciform church. There were no seats or benches in these early churches except in the chancel, and the stone floors were strewn with rushes upon which the people knelt to pray. Later stools or small benches were provided for the women and later still movable seats, then finally pews.

* a ‘hagioscope’ is a small opening in the chancel wall to allow a view of the altar

Buckerell Church Today

Buckerell Church is a very charming example of vernacular architecture. It is a simple structure, not built in any one of the three styles of English Gothic, that is to say, Early English, Decorated and Perpendicular. The building is earlier than the Perpendicular period, the windows and door surrounds are all Decorated with the exception of the two large windows in the transepts which are Perpendicular and of a much later date. The essential difference between Decorated and Perpendicular is that in the former the mullions, or main vertical members, rise to the level of the springing of the arch and then branch into a decorative pattern of tracery. In Perpendicular windows the mullions continue right up to the head arch and the tracery is fitted in between the mullions and the arch. If Buckerell Church had been one of those rebuilt by Bishop Stafford (1395-1419) all the windows would have been Perpendicular but, as they are not, it is more likely that the main structure, as seen now, dates back to a period around 1319. The tower is later and was built to replace a bell turret, probably of oak, which stood over the central crossing. The West tower has three stages and an embattled parapet and was given a new roof in 1966. The nave has a wagon roof with bosses and the chancel has been refitted.

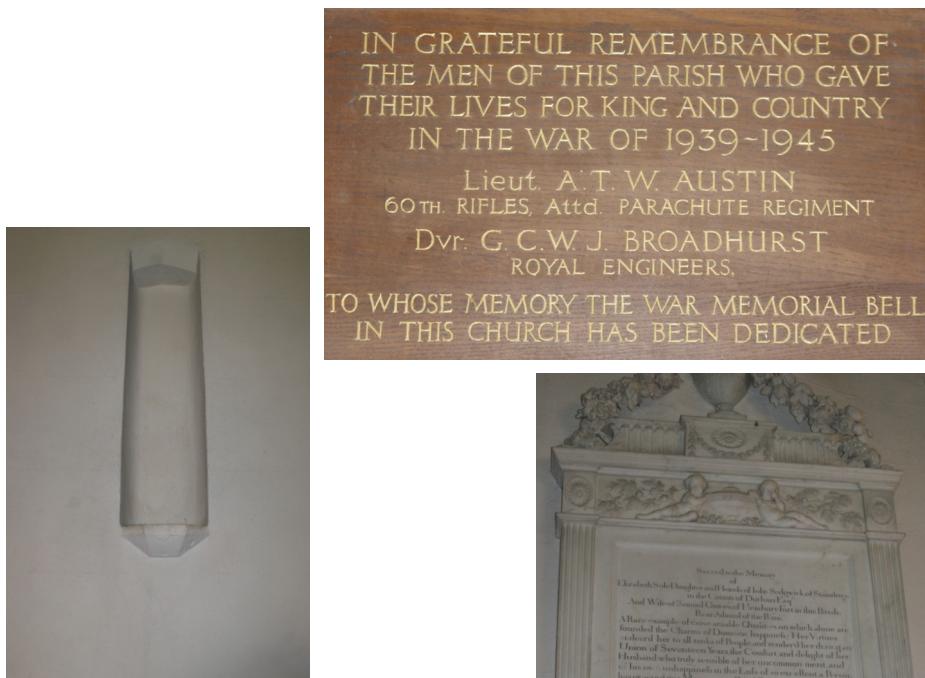
As you enter the church through the West door, a few steps bring you to the font which is a modern replacement for a much older one. On either side of the nave are box pews, with a few near the rear of the church bearing the inscription 'free sitting'.

In 1287 Bishop Quivil of Exeter wrote that the parishioners were quarrelling over seats, referring to the seats and benches then used and not the pews that did not appear until about 1550. Quarrels persisted throughout the centuries however, prompting one of the Bishops to draw up a seating plan for the church. When Mr. Parr was sexton he discovered one such plan for Buckerell Church, dated 1773 and bearing the seal of the Chancellor of Exeter Cathedral, which is inscribed – 'A sketch of the interior part of Buckerell Church as it is intended to be seated in the Year MDCCCLXXIII'.



The plan is interesting in itself, but also for a drawing of the original font that must have been removed in the nineteenth-century. It is an outline drawing of a twelfth or thirteenth century font. In the illustration, at the West end of the nave are 'seats for poor women' far removed from those seats reserved for 'poor men' that are to be found in the North transept. Husbands and wives were carefully separated in church, as was customary, with the women at the back. In addition to the seating plan the illustration shows the South entrance that was in existence in 1825 but has since been either blocked in, or has fallen down. Described as a 'beautiful doorway' traces of it can still be seen.

Continuing down the aisle on the left there is a plaque to the dead of the 1939-45 war and a picture of the memorial bell cast and dedicated to their memory. Immediately to the left of this is a small niche without an image.



On the opposite wall there is a large marble memorial to Elizabeth, wife of Admiral Graves whose own memorial is in the North transept.



North and South Transepts

Both transepts are fitted with similar box pews to those found in the nave. On the left wall of the North transept is a fine memorial to the memory of Admiral Graves of Hembury Fort, executed by the sculptor John Bacon RA. The Admiral was commander in Chief of the North American Station when he enforced the Boston Port Bill, one of the chief causes of the War of Independence, perhaps better known as the Boston Tea Party.



Another interesting memorial is that dedicated to Edward Arthur Parry, who died in 1946, because it was in his memory that electric power first came to Buckerell



The small window on the right hand side of the North transept was placed there, in 1904, by W. A. Lindsay Esq. K.C. of Deer Park in memory of his son, Michael, who was killed in the South African war, the subject being St. Michael and the dragon. To the left of this window is a memorial to The Right Honourable Lady Isabella, wife of William Meade Smythe of Deer Park, who died in 1840 and whose remains are buried in a vault under the seat. Also in the vault are the remains of her husband and three daughters. Immediately to the left of the lectern and on the same wall is a memorial plaque to the dead of the 1914-1918 war.

The South transept contains several memorial plaques notably one to a former vicar Alfred W. Ford who died in 1904.

To the left of the chancel steps stands the lectern, made of carved oak. It was presented to the church in memory of William Star Riding in 1911. The flower holder on the wall near the lectern was placed there by Parishioners of Buckerell in affectionate memory of four and a half year old Dominic Whitaker, younger son of the then Rector, The Reverend David Whitaker and Mrs Whitaker, who drowned when on a boating holiday with his parents.



The pulpit to the right of the steps was presented by the Rector, the Reverend Edward Ravenscroft, in 1910. This pulpit replaced a fine old pulpit from which three panels were incorporated into the new one. A register entry regarding the installation reads as follows. "On March 28th 1912, the new pulpit and lectern were dedicated by the Archdeacon of Exeter. The work of removing the old pulpit and two seats, also the old prayer desk, putting down a new floor of stone slabs, making the new pulpit, incorporating in it three ancient panels from the old one and making the new lectern, was finished" – Signed Edward



Ravenscroft, Vicar, Frederick Horsefield and John Wilmington, Churchwardens.

The Chancel

The rood screen separating the nave from the chancel was not made for Buckerell church but brought from elsewhere and fitted later. In 1892 the Reverend William Ford wrote in the register; “ The rood screen has been badly treated in the past – it was evidently brought here from some other church. I am thankful to be able to replace the mullions, may my successor be able to restore the screen more perfectly and to restore the cresting and place it in its proper position. 1st. September 1892, St. Giles day.” A later entry reads “ The rood screen has this day been placed on the steps at the entrance to the chancel as the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have restored the chancel.”



As you enter the chancel, simple choir stalls are to the left and right with memorial plaques above, on the left, to Christopher Kingston, Edwin Coleridge and Edward Coleridge, former incumbents; on the right hand side is a memorial to Robert Northcote and his wife. At the end of the choir stalls, nearest the altar, there are two fine churchwardens' staves, presented by Mrs. Simmons in 1969 in memory of her late husband Major D. Simmons.

The restoration of the old English lettering, over the chancel arch, was carried out by Mr. Parr in 1949, as the gift of Lieutenant Colonel W.M.M. Duncan of Buckerell House. A Rector's chair given in memory of Jack Trefusis stands beneath the pulpit to the right of the Chancel steps.



On the floor between the choir stalls is a large stone slab bearing a coat of arms and inscribed to the memory of Mary, wife of Henry Fry of Deer Park. Some of the lettering has worn away, but 'Here lyeth Mary wife of Henry Fry Esq' is still readable, as is the date 1669.

The communion rails are Victorian and made from oak and the communion table or altar is modern. The reredos behind the altar, which masks the East wall of the chancel, is of dark oak in the Jacobean style with modern gilding.



The window in the East wall is fitted with coloured glass in a conventional Victorian design and was executed to the memory of the Northcote family. The window on the right of the chancel is dedicated to the memory of Eleanor Northcote who died in 1848 aged 21 years, whilst on the left is a window commemorating the life of Edward Coleridge, Vicar for thirty years, who died in 1843 aged 83 years, and also his wife Ann.

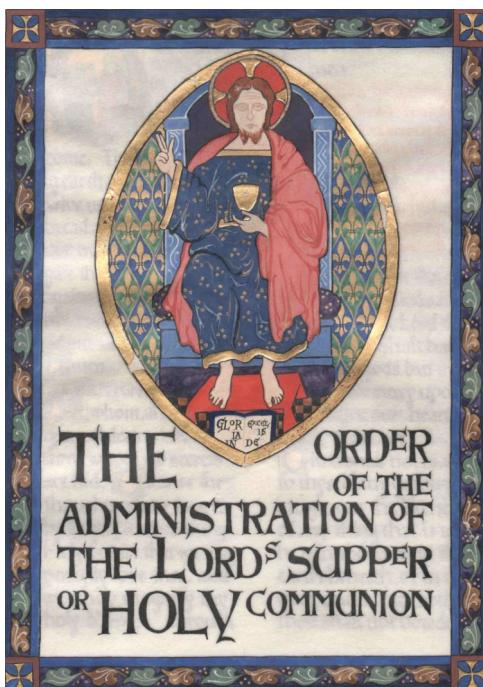


The two altar vases were presented in 1962 by Mrs. Graham in memory of her parents Eileen and Stanley Bourne.

To the right of the altar in the South wall can be found the credence with the year MCCCCIII carved into the stone at the bottom. The credence is for storing the elements of the Eucharist before consecration.



The altar candlesticks commemorate the life of Matthew Rodney Wood, M.C. Captain 18th Lancashire Fusiliers, who was killed in action in 1917 aged twenty one years. In addition a beautifully hand-printed book to his memory, and presented by his sister Ruth Mary Wood, is kept in the vestry.

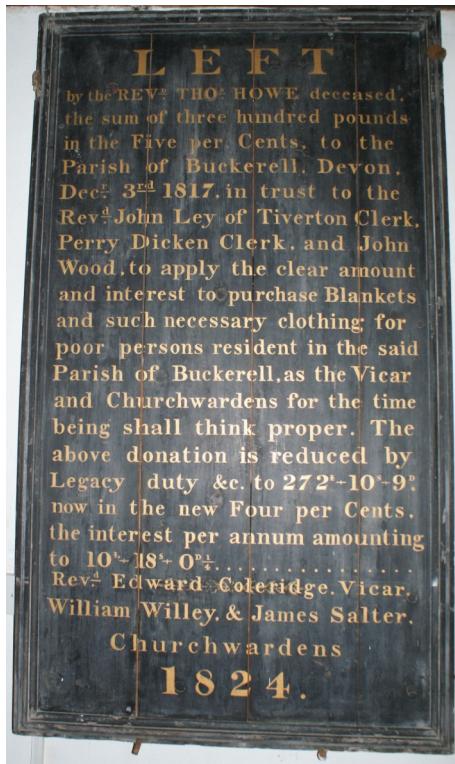


John Rosewell made the ironwork flower pedestals which were donated to the church by him and his wife Ann in memory of Ann's parents, Mr. and Mrs. F. Parr. The kneelers were embroidered by the ladies of the parish.

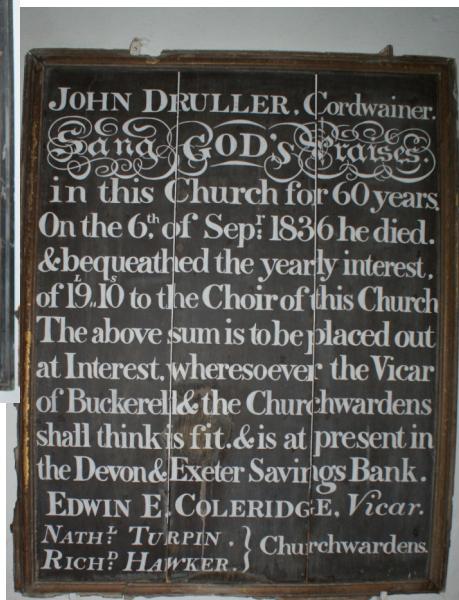
The Vestry

In the vestry, on the wall, are two boards giving details of monies left to the church.

The first by 'The Rev. Thos. Howe, deceased Dec. 3rd 1817' who left 'the sum of three hundred pounds in the five per cents to the Parish of Buckerell Devon in trustto purchase blankets and such necessary clothing for the poor people resident in the said Parish of Buckerell'.



The second board bears the name 'John Druller, Cordwainer sang God's praises in this church for 60 years. On 6th of Sept. 1836 he died and bequeathed the yearly interest of £19,10s to the choir of the church'.



Returning to the nave from the chancel one can see, above the West door, the organ by Hele and Co. of Exeter. It is mounted on a gallery, especially built for the purpose in 1907, across the West end of the nave.



Above the organ in the tower, reached from outside, are the bells. According to a document in the Public Record Office dated 1553 the number of bells at Buckerell was then three, two of which were cast in the village in 1410. There are now six and three of the original five were recast with the sixth being added as a memorial, as already mentioned. The picture below shows the bells at the foundry after they have been recast and retuned in 1949. The bells are now acknowledged to form a peal equal to any in the country.



The church clock is very interesting. Situated on the North side of the tower, it is driven by weights and hemp ropes. Originally it was a one-hand clock showing only the hours but was later converted. The maker is unknown as is the actual date. In 2001 a light was placed in the churchyard to shine on the clock at night. This was given in memory of Edward Summers who was a Churchwarden and Captain of bell ringers for many years.



Church Plate

Of all the church plate belonging to Buckerell in earlier times only one item remains, an Elizabethan chalice bearing the date, 1576. The chalice has the Exeter hallmark and was made by John Jones. It is complete with its cover, which is used as a paten and is a particularly fine specimen. The rest of the plate is of modern mediaeval style dating from 1738 and includes a George II Flagon. A modern silver wafer box was presented to the church during the 1970's in memory of Joyce Snell.



The Churchyard

Every early church had a cross, erected near the South porch. These crosses were raised on a base of several steps and on Palm Sunday the crosses were decorated with palm and yew for the procession. Few of these crosses now remain. The yew branches that decorated them came from trees usually planted at the Southwest angle of the tower. At Buckerell they are planted at the West end where they protected the tower from storms. The yew is said to increase one foot in diameter in a century and was seen as an emblem of the resurrection and of immortality. It was also said to protect the church from evil spirits and thunder. The idea that the trees provided wood for bows may be a misconception. Bows were six feet long and it would have been impossible for church yews to have yielded sufficient wood for the number required. In 1588 every man under the age of sixty was expected to carry a bow and arrows so a great many trees would have been needed. All men of the parish were required to practise with the longbow every Sunday after church, hence the name of Butts Cottages which face the field where this took place.

The original stonework of the church building is no longer visible as the walls have been rough- cast but the stone would have come from Buckerell's own quarry, long since exhausted. The quarry provided the stone for the walls and possibly for the floor slabs. The tower at St. Michael's Church in Honiton is built of the same stone, quarried in Buckerell in the fifteenth century, and the stones have weathered well. On the outside South wall of the chancel, there still remains some Elizabethan lead guttering with grapevine pattern, which fortunately escaped the vandals of the Civil War.

The North entrance gates were dedicated to the memory of Amelia, Lady Monteath, in 1927. She was the wife of Sir James Monteath KCSI and the gates bear the inscription, 'This gate is dedicated to the glory of God and in loving memory of Amelia, Lady Monteath, who worshipped in this church 1913-1927, of Buckerell Lodge. Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation and thy gates praise; Isaiah LX18'.

There are several old gravestones and amongst them an interesting epitaph appears, to one John Hitchcock.

"Here lieth the body of John Hitchcock who departed this life the 11th day of February, 1753, in the 24th year of his age.

'Just in my prime death cropt my time
And here I lie in dust
My mother dear pray now prepare
For follow me you must.'

The lych gates at the East entrance were made by Mr. Parr and presented by Mr. Hollist of Deer Park Farm in 1949.

Buckerell Vicars since 1523

1523	James Fulford	1804	Edwards Coleridge BA
1556	John Sander	1829	Edwin Ellis Coleridge BA
1580	Richard Moore	1870	William Hocker BA
1617	Edmund Matthew	1876	Henry Shepherd Green MA
1670	George Mountjoy	1878	Thomas William Lemon
1704	Philip Prince	MADD	
1711	Thomas Cooke BA	1884	Alfred William Ford MA
1716	Peter Churchill BA	1904	Joseph Drape
1743	Richard Lewis BA	1910	Richard Medley Fulford
1776	William Hill BA	FRIBA	
1777	Richard Hole BCL	1911	Edward Ravenscroft
1800	James Bryett MA	2005	Allan Sheath
		2012	Jane E Lankester

Rectors

1918	Edward Ravenscroft
1939	Kenneth Maurice MA
1939	Amyas George Chappell MA
1953	Harold Edward Smith MA
1961	C.Reader Edmund Bussell AKC
1969	David E.A. Whitaker BA
1976	Richard K.R.Coath AKC
1985	Christopher Kingston BSc
1995	Robert John Gordon MA

On December 20th 1918, Mr. Ravenscroft (then Vicar) wrote: "By a deed this benefice was restored to the status of a rectory by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, under power which they hold – The Rectorial of Great Tithe having been purchased from them – as the completion of the augmentation of the benefice".

Following the departure of the Reverend Robert Gordon, the Parochial Church Council decided to ask to join the Honiton Team Benefice which comprises the parishes of Honiton with Monkton, Combe Raleigh, Awliscombe and Gittisham. This was approved by the Church Commissioners and Buckerell formally became part of the benefice on 1st December 2006.

Dedication

To F.H. Parr of Buckerell, Churchwarden for many years, who died in 1976.

This book was reprinted in 1984 in memory of his daughter, Mary Parr , who died as a result of an accident in 1984.

To commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, this booklet was updated and reprinted in 2003.

This latest version of the book was produced in 2013 in memory of Stephen Mear and Karen Denny who both died in 2012.