

Church Stories

St. Laurence, Upwey



The story of this church has been taken from a number of sources and is, by collective assumption, reasonably accurate.

The story is not definitive however and is always open to critique, correction and addition. All contributions welcome.

The account below includes extracts from Wikipedia, the guide written by Edmund Scott in 1994 as well as documents provided by Chris Carter. Photography is generally by Adrian Wood. Other specific references are not provided at this time. Further research for those wishing to explore the history of Upwey is readily available online. A good place to begin would be www.upweybroadweyhistory.co.uk

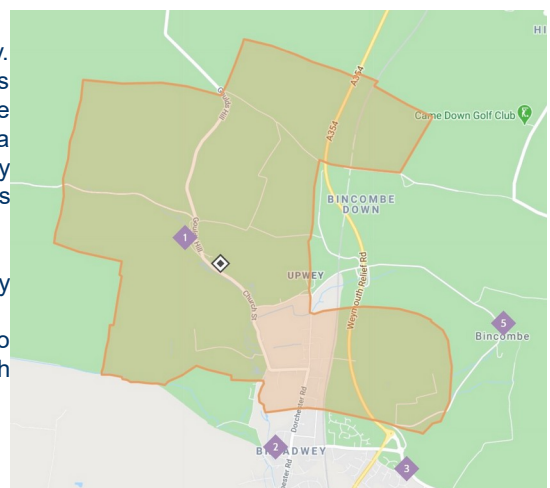
All photography C. A Wood

The Parish of Upwey

Upwey is four miles north of Weymouth at the foot of the Ridgeway, part of the Dorset Downs. The river Wey emerges from the springs along the chalk base. Streams feed into the bigger river fed by the Wey spring in the gardens of the Upwey Wishing Well. The well has a significant history more recently as a visitor attraction enjoyed by visitors up from Weymouth. The whole river to the mouth in the town is only approximately four miles long.

There is reference to Upwey from Thomas Hardy, notably in his story Trumpet Major and a poem he wrote about Upwey Station.

There is also a recorded connection with an American family who claim ties back to the original crossings to the 'New World' in the 17th Century.





Upwey Looking along the Ridgeway and church area among the trees



Upwey Elwell Street

The Church

It is thought that the well was a place of worship long before a Christian site was developed. The earliest reference found so far is 1201 when the building was probably no more than a thatched chapel. Recorded mention is made of an Alan de Bayeaux coming to St Laurence on the Wey in 1243 where a small chantry was made by his son John Bayous.

The current building is a mixture of styles and ages with going back to 13th and 14th centuries. The church is often referred to as 12th century but there is little evidence for that assumption. Parts of the nave, north aisle, west tower and north porch date from the 1400s. A west Gallery was added in 1685. North and south galleries were added in 1834. The south aisle and arcade were added in 1838 and the clerestory in 1841.

In 1891, general repairs: new flooring and removal of the galleries and the installation of new pews were carried out at a cost of £890 with further work in 1906 to build a new chancel, vestry and organ chamber and a new organ replacing the previous organ of 1685 and recasted bells installed. The work, which also saw the moving of the 14th century chancel arch to the east end of the south aisle cost over £1000 and church dedicated by the Bishop of Salisbury in 1907.

The St. Laurence Story

What follows is a combination of notes and relevant photographs. The guide was written to be used as reference on a physical tour of the church. This is available as described although there may be some copies available for sale in the church.

We have used the general structure of the guide here:

Entering the church

The Porch (Poor Church) was used for the first part of marriage and baptism services; hence the benches along the sides.

The porch roof is rough stone slabs.

The studded door is thought to be over 500 years old, made oak and elm with iron strap hinges.

An oak inner door has been added to help keep the church warmer during services.



The Pulpit

The pulpit was made and installed in the 1600s: date unknown. It was originally across the other side of the chancel. It is Jacobean and once stood on a panelled base with carvings that are now on the walls; one of St Philip above the lectern and two either side of the bell ringing room at the base of the tower.



The Chancel



The current chancel was built in 1906 as an enlargement project funded by the rector Gildea who also carved the ends of the choir stalls. The Squint was added to allow a view of the altar from the north aisle



The East Window

The panels were donated by the Reverend George Gould of Fleet in 1840. Around the edges are fragments of glass smashed during the Civil War.



The central panel is a copy of a Durer drawing. All the windows in the church were restored and repaired between 2008 and 2011. Read more in the guide.

The Organ

The original organ was installed in 1685 in the gallery and moved to the south aisle in 1891. Having served the church for 206 years, the organ was replaced with the present organ and moved to its location in the organ chamber in the chancel.



The Nave

The main part of the church where the congregation sit has seen many changes. Before 1841, there were galleries for musicians against the wall at the west end and also the wall to the north before the north aisle was built later. The roof was lower and the floor was not tiled. Work was carried out to raise the roof and add the clerestory windows, to remove the galleries and replace the floor. Also, the high pews were removed. There were spaces under the floor; the vaults. These were filled in. There was a serious flood in 1955 in which a local lad was unfortunately drowned. The church was flooded to the mark on the end of all the pews.



The Nave from the pulpit

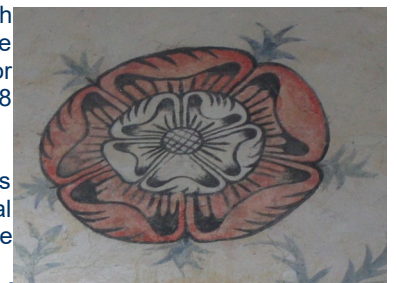


The Aisles

These are the two areas along the side of the nave through the arches - the colonnades

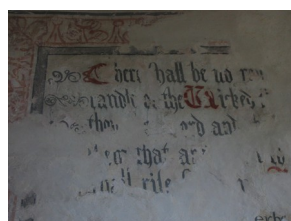
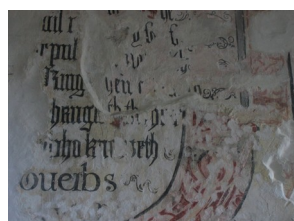
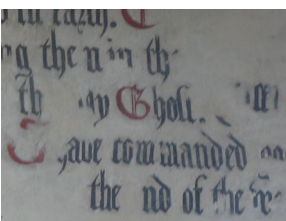
The North Aisle The Roses and Texts

Added to church some time between 1480 and 1520. Still on the nave side of the arches are two Tudor Roses that were probably part of more general illustrations and decorations that were painted on the church walls as messages and prayers although mostly, these were covered up as people were able to read scriptures or at least have more easy access to the written word. The Tudor Roses were known to be there from the records and were revealed by conservators in 1988 having been painted some time around 1486 as a part of the original decoration.



On the north wall, either side of the doorway are two layers of bible texts or the remains thereof. Deepest into the wall at bottom right is almost illegible text dating to the original construction. On top of that is text from the Authorised Bible of 1611: three verses from the Book of Proverbs.

In the middle is text from the time of the Civil War in favour of King Charles 1st. In view of the prevailing political situation and the diametrically opposed ideologies between the local Parliamentarians and Royalists, the texts were quickly covered over once the Royalists were beaten and the King was condemned to execution.



The Old Font

There is a 12-13th Century Font Bowl at the foot of a pillar to the north aisle near the back of the church. It is thought that this is unique in England.

Baptismal rights were given to churches and when the font was replaced the old one was normally kept elsewhere in the church; usually in the nave. This was to ensure that the Rights were preserved forever. Baptism was the essential entry into the early church.

Prior to 1471, there were two fonts in the church. One was stationary and permanently set and the other was moveable.

Historical Context and why the old font is at the base of a column

The current political climate of the time is referenced below through various links to what will prove to be a very interesting historical understanding of the 100 Years War with France and the particular reigns of Henry V and Henry VI. Where Henry V was a strong and powerful leader and warrior who died of dysentery in his 30s, his successor who was only 9 months old when he took the throne, turned out to be weak and as an adult, an inept king with many enemies both domestic and foreign. In effect, he lost the gains made by his predecessors in the 100 Years War. It was his wife Margaret of Anjou that tried to run the country to protect her son Edward as heir to the throne but this was contested by Richard Duke of York which sparked the wars between the houses of Lancaster and York. Margaret of Anjou returned to England from France in 1471 via Weymouth; the same year that Henry VI died, and was met by Cardinal Morton who held interests in this area. The plan was for Margaret to be escorted to St Laurence church to pray before moving on the Cerne. In the event, the record shows that she did stop but only for refreshments before leaving again. This is really only important to the church because it is said that Cardinal Morton had the moveable font 'dressed' or decorated and made into a new permanent font in order to impress Margaret. This improved font replacing the original which was put to one side and later used as a base for one of the columns in 1486.

Historical reference links that will hopefully remain are as follows:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_VI_of_England

<https://www.historyhit.com/facts-about-margaret-of-anjou/>

<https://www.ecclesiasticallawassociation.org.uk/images/fonts1992.pdf>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptismal_font

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wars_of_the_Roses

Particularly interesting:

<https://www.history.com/topics/british-history/wars-of-the-roses>



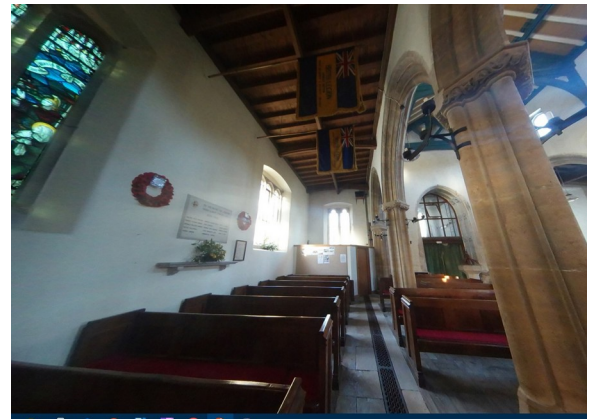
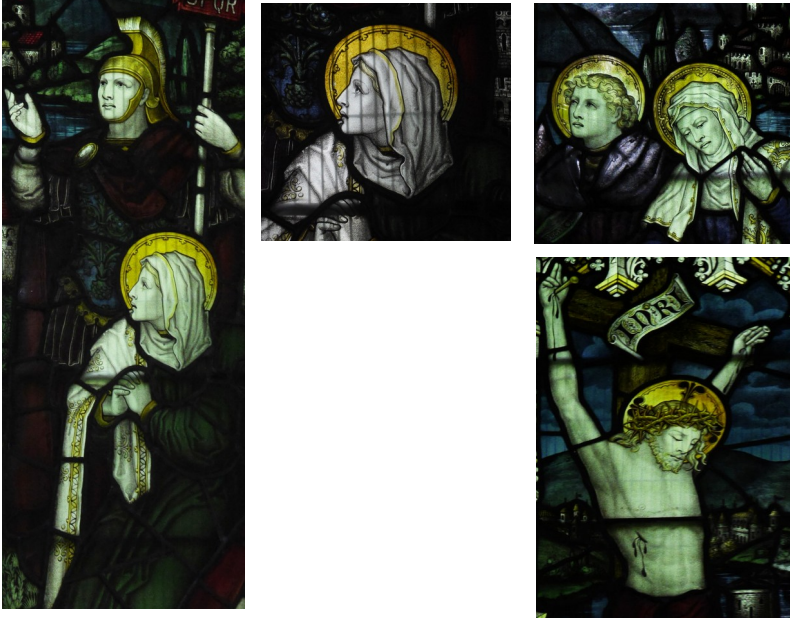
The Old Font



The present font with the cover removed showing the lead lined basin.

The South Aisle

This was added as a copy of the north aisle in 1838. The window is thought to have once been on the south wall of the church as it contains some older glass.



The Tower

The church tower was described by Hutchins (Don't know who he was or why he was doing the describing:) as 'embattled and of moderate height'. The tower had four stone pinnacles at the corners in 1774, and inside were four bells. One of the pinnacles was dated 1697. At some point in the late 1700s one of the pinnacles was said to be unsafe and all four were removed.

The tower is said to be Perpendicular in style and the belfry has six bells. Bells 3 and 4 were made by a George Purdue in 1617 and were recast in 1912. Bell number five was made by a James Smith in 1767 with the legend 'soli Deo Detur gloria' cast into the bell - To God alone be glory given'. The remaining two bells were given; one by the Sprague family in America and the other, also in 1912, by the family of Reverend Canon W. Gildea on his Golden Wedding anniversary.

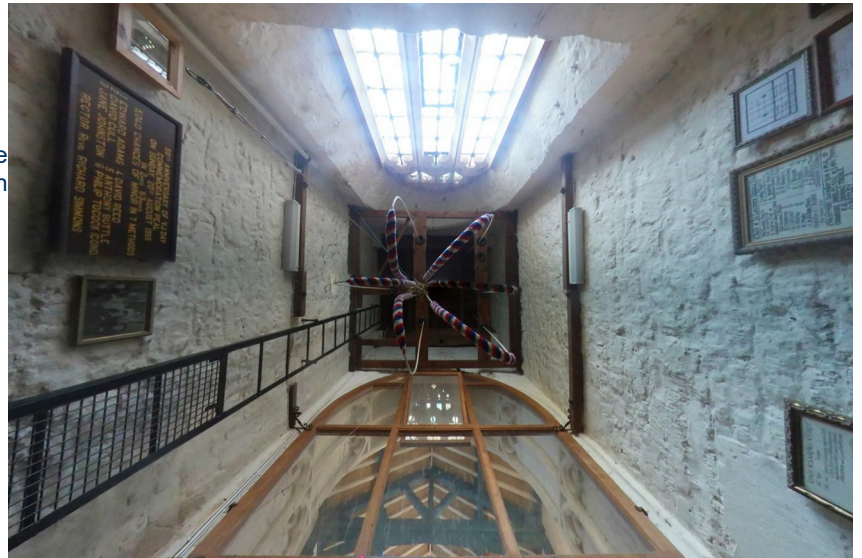
There is a gargoyle up at the top of the tower and three hunkypunks - These are design features that serve no practical function and are found on many churches although the name is said to come from Somerset and the West Country churches. They are normally grotesque carvings, similar to gargoyles which are water drains where the run of spews from the mouth of the carved creature. The term hunkypunk is thought to be a dialect description using old English terms; 'hunkers'; meaning haunches and 'punchy'; meaning short legged. These carvings can be seen on may Late Gothic churches in the south and south west.

There are other carvings along the sides of the church.



The battlements are a later addition to the tower top. There is a gutter to collect rain water from the roof so the carving to the left is not a gargoyle. The one on the right is also a hunkypunk.

Inside the tower where the bells are rung. The ladder goes up to the belfry and also the church clock.



The battlements are a later addition to the tower; date unknown.