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DISCOVERING....

Devon's Historic Churches



Parish Church of
St Cyr and St Julitta,
Newton St Cyres

August 2023

St. Cyr and St. Julitta, Newton St. Cyres

The Church has an unusual dedication to the **Saints Cyr and Julitta**. There are various accounts but basically they are remembered as early Christians martyred for standing up for their faith. In the early part of the 4th century Julitta, a Christian woman from modern day Turkey was being held and tortured to death by the Governor of Tarsus. Her 3 year old son Cyricus retaliated by slapping the Governor and he died from being thrown down the steps of the courtroom as a result.



This **triptych** is above the altar in the Lady Chapel. The 15th century original is in the Courtauld Institute Gallery in London. The saints are also commemorated in the East window which is also a memorial to the Quicke family. The third picture shows the window in the west wall in what is now the childrens corner.



The outside of the Church has a number of **dripstones** and **grotesques**, mostly extremely ugly! The **dripstones** have the specific purpose of directing rainwater away from doorways or windows, much like gargoyles. **Grotesques**, on the other hand, serve no useful purpose!



An unusual feature on the east wall of the tower is a **one handed clock**. Originally made in 1711 by Louis Pridholm of Crediton, it was reconstructed using the original parts in 1971. The face now visible was dedicated in 1985. The mechanism which operates the clock can be found in the church



The one handed clock on the tower



Clock face



Clock mechanism



The striking brightly painted wooden sundial dating from 1817 on the Tower wall has been well maintained. It shows the hours VI – VI divided into halves by lines each decorated with a fleur-de-lys, and the restorers have sensibly seen fit to perpetuate the mistaken evening VI which appears as IV. It was erected in memory of the Reverend GT Carwithen Vicar 1813-1817.

Finally the tower is home to an unusual 18th century wrought iron **weathercock**. The tower is the oldest part of the Church dating from the 13th and 14th century. Four of the eight bells were first hung in 1553



Stoup



Piscina

Once inside the Church, to the right of the door is a **stoup** the holy water from which would have been used by those entering to anoint themselves. The stoup has no drain hole and the water, which would have been mixed with a little salt, exorcised and blessed, would have been replenished regularly.

Another feature with a similar function is the 14th-century **piscina** in the Lady Chapel, at the east end of the north aisle. Traditionally constructed near the altar, or in the Sacristy, the purpose of a **piscina** or **sacrarium**, (with its drain directly into the ground) was to return to the earth water from the washing of the priest's hands, the paten and chalice used to celebrate the Mass, old baptismal water, holy oils, and leftover ashes from Ash Wednesday.



One quite unusual feature on the south wall of the nave is a **royal coat of arms to James II** and dated 1685, the beginning of his reign. It is extremely rare to find a James II coat of arms, partly because his reign was so short but also because he was the last Catholic monarch of England whose reign is now remembered primarily for conflicts over religious tolerance. Apparently the Arms were restored by Herbert Read in 1965 for £75! It proved impossible to decipher the traces of mural writing and paintings found on the plaster behind the board.



The pulpit is Georgian, dated 1769; its large sounding board is surmounted by a gilded dove that symbolises the Holy Spirit and the carved panels and mouldings are identical to those in the state rooms of Saltram House (*National Trust*), near Plymouth. It was originally designed as a 'triple-decker', with stalls for the clerk and priest below the pulpit itself.



On the south wall of the chancel there is a monument to **Sherland Short**, a student at Exeter College who died in 1632. The monument has an effigy of the deceased sitting at his study table, with lutes and a viola-da-gamba at his feet. He is shown with his books, a skull, and an hourglass to symbolise the ephemeral nature of his short life.

Two other local families have numerous memorials in the Church. One of these, the **Quicke** family, held the manor here for over 4 centuries. After the dissolution of the monasteries, by Henry VIII, some of the land was reallocated and Thomas Bidwell was allotted land near Newton St Cyres; it was when Richard Quicke married Thomas' daughter Elizabeth that the Quicke family became established in the parish and generation after generation farmed the ancient fields.

In 1686 Andrew Quicke married Dorothy **Northcote**, daughter of 2nd Baronet Arthur Northcote, thus joining together the two most important families in the parish. Through his marriage to Dorothy, Andrew was related to the influential Godolphin family, was involved in national affairs and politics and with connections to the Duke of Marlborough, who had played an important part in defeating the Monmouth rebellion and securing James II's place on the throne. Was it this connection that caused the church to be in possession of the Coat of Arms of James II? We do not know.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Quicques dabbled successfully in lead, silver and manganese mining in Newton St. Cyres. It was John Quicke who after marrying heiress Jane Hoblyn, daughter of a Bristol merchant and widow of a wealthy Cornish mine owner, brought Cornish miners to the village. The mining brought prosperity to Newton St. Cyres and funded a new Palladian mansion, a new vicarage, and newly repaired cottages for the tenants. Ultimately, however, competition from South Africa forced closure of the mines at Newton St. Cyres. In the late nineteenth century, as the Agricultural Depression began to bite and American wheat poured into Britain, farmers were forced to adapt and, because some of the fields were no longer worth farming, the Quicques planted many acres of acorns making Newton St. Cyres a beautiful wooded parish.

The Quicke family have farmed around Newton St Cyres since 1540, making cheese since 1973. Mary Quicke was named by Waitrose as 1 of 10 most influential women in food. She received an MBE in 2005 for her contribution to farming and cheese making. She has been a bell ringer at the church for over 40 years

On the wall of the north aisle there are four **funeral hatchments** to the Quicke family dating between 1729 and 1859. Funeral hatchments are diamond shaped panels showing the family coat of arms usually painted on a wooden board.



Detail from the lower part of the memorial

This memorial to **John Northcote** shows five generations of the family. At the top are his grandfather and father, his two wives are on either side and his son and daughter-in-law are below with their surviving sons and daughters.

The present octagonal marble **Font** was given in memory of Rev, Gould, Vicar 1882-1894. However the base of the original font, dating from the 13th century was found in the graveyard and is now against the north wall as the base for a wooden cross,



The symbol of **three hares** has been found in a large number of places in the Middle East and Far East and the sign seems to crop up along a line - possibly a very early trade route from east to west. The earliest known examples of the motif date back to the 6th century AD and

are on the ceilings of Buddhist cave temples in Dunhuang, China - an important trading post.

In Devon, the motifs are usually found, as here, on roof bosses on church ceilings. Many are medieval and made of wood. The earliest ones are dated at 1450. and in all, there are 29 bosses which have been located in 17 churches. It's believed there would have been many more at one time but these have been lost through the years. A close look shows that the hares share three ears,

Looking round the churchyard we found an unusual plant, an **Ivy Broomrape**, (*Orabranche hederæ*) a parasitic plant which cannot make its own chlorophyll so uses ivy (hence its name) as a host. When fresh the flowers are pinkish and Russian and Northern folklore both describe the plant as highly medicinal. (*Wikipedia*)



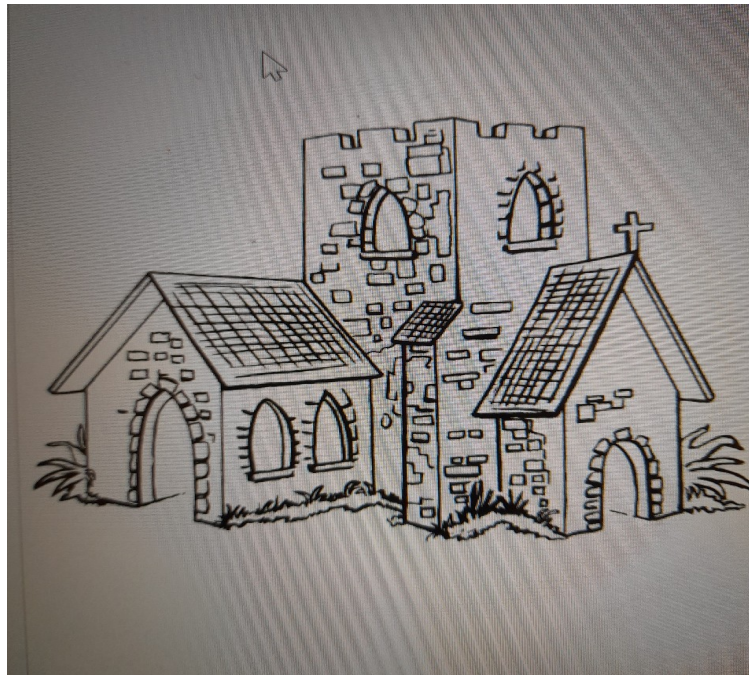
Finally, Newton St Cyres is on the St Boniface Way which runs from Crediton, where he was born in AD 680, to Exeter Cathedral a distance of 12.5 miles. The route is part of Devon Pilgrim, a C of E initiative to encourage more people to discover the spirituality and history of Devon's landscape, churches and holy sites.

Named for Devon's patron saint, the St Boniface Way winds through the countryside visiting a number of important historical and holy sites. Starting in Crediton the trail takes you across the farmlands to Newton St Cyres, Upton Pyne, Brampford Speke, Cowley, and Exeter Cathedral taking in beautiful views and scenic paths as you wind your way along, absorbing the historic atmosphere of this trail.

The first pilgrims set off from the church in Crediton on Saturday 23 October, they paused at Shobrooke's St Swithun's church to plant 300 crocus bulbs and dress a holy well with native plants. The second stop was at St Cyr and St Julietta's Church in Newton St Cyres for the official blessing of the route and a family treasure hunt.

St Boniface was an English Benedictine monk and leading figure in the Anglo-Saxon mission to the Germanic parts of Francia during the eighth century. He was born in Crediton

Photographs were taken by Greg Arnold, Barbara Benfield, Val Frood, Jackie Moran, and Lynda Pidgeon



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