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DISCOVERING....

# Devon's Historic Churches



Church of St Mary,  
Kentisbeare

October 2023

## St. Mary's Church, Kentisbeare

The present Church was consecrated in 1259. It consisted of the nave and chancel, north porch, south aisle south west vestry and west tower.



The remarkable 15th Century **tower** is decorated with an unusual chequerboard pattern of white Beer stone alternating with red sandstone. This is the only example of a chequerboard tower in Devon. In the angles of the tower are four figures representing the Beasts of the Apocalypse. According to the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament, he sees the "great sea" stirred up by the "four winds of heaven," and from the waters emerge four beasts, the first a lion with the wings of an eagle, the second a bear, the third a winged leopard with four heads, and the fourth a beast with ten horns, and a further horn appeared which uprooted three of the ten. These are the carvings on the corners of the tower.



Graffiti and carvings are also visible at the base of the tower. Reputedly some graffiti in the form of holes or dots was the result of local and regional practice of folk medicine. In some areas, particularly in France and Spain, it was until recently believed that the stone or plaster of the church, ground to a fine powder and mixed with wine, was an effective cure for many illnesses and diseases

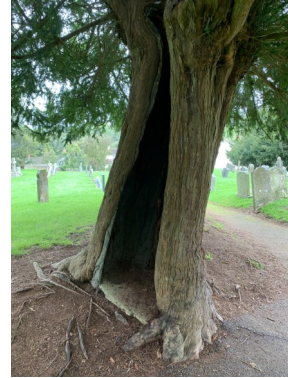


Another unusual feature are the '**Hinkypunk**' **drip-stones** on the north west window dated to c.1400. 'Hinkypunks' were apparently the original inhabitants of Dartmoor, good ones led travellers away from bogs, while the bad ones led them in, while laughing at their victims. They are reputedly also known as will'o'the 'wisps in Devon and Somerset.

There are two other interesting things outside the church. One is the size of the yew tree and the other is the grave of Edmee Elizabeth Monica Dashwood, better



known today as E.M.Delafield, the author. Her best known work is the largely autobiographical '*Diary of a Provincial Lady*', published in 1930. She died in 1943 and is buried under her favourite yew tree in Kentisbeare Churchyard near to her son.



Inside the Church one of the most striking features is the **rood screen** which stretches the full width of the church. It probably dates from the time of Henry VII, being carved by artificers from Tavistock Abbey. The fan vaulting at the top is particularly amazing.



*Top of rood screen*

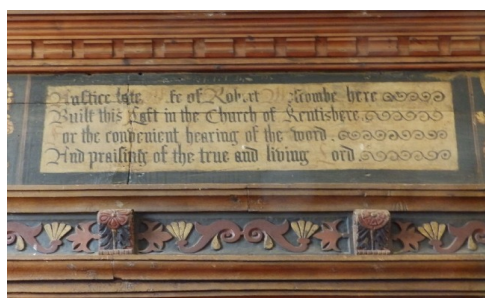


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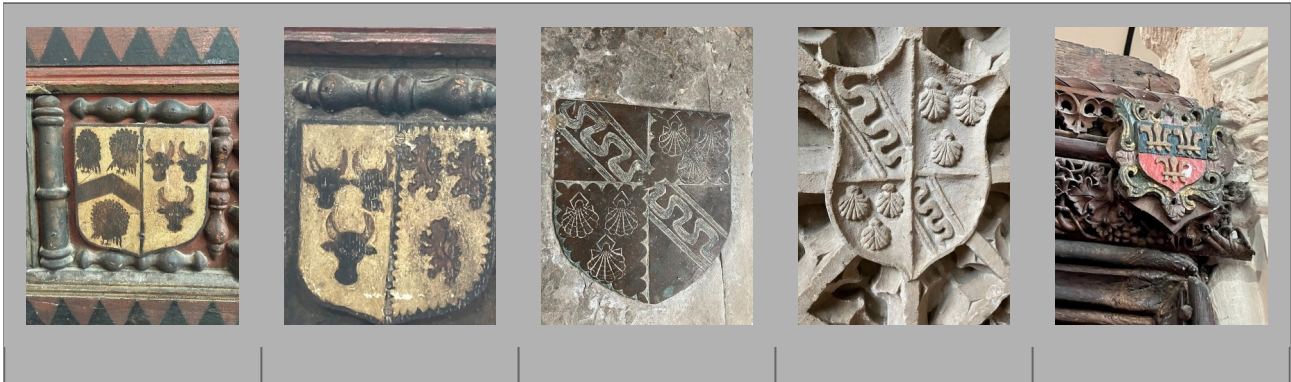
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At the other end of the nave, **Anstice's Gallery** dates from 1632 and is still in use. It was given to the Church by Anstice Wescombe. One of the carvings on the front has recently been identified by a visiting professor as that of a native North American, the oldest representation in a church in Britain. At the back of the gallery is a plaque of who gave what to which charity including fields located nearby which the parish rents out, receiving the income.



Along the front of the gallery is a series of panels carved with a long verse commemorating her gift. The gallery bears arms of the Wyndham and Walrond families, as well as Biblical figures.

The church is especially rich in coats of arms.



This points to the rich landowners who lived in or owned estates in the parish and neighbouring areas who were able to leave money, often thanks to the woollen trade, to refurbish the building and build their memorials and tombs. Apart from the local families there is also a merchant adventurers company shield next to some woolpacks on a capital.

There are coats of arms in stone, wood and metal, some painted, others carved. The arms become ever more complicated as families joined through marriage. The preponderance of the Walrond family is deceptive as although they did marry into the local family most of the shields were transferred from Bradfield House near Uffculme. Some of the more notable heraldic designs include the diagonal wavy band of clouds of the Whytyngs and the scallops of the Clivedons, John Whytyng's maternal ancestors.

During the Middle Ages, canon law required each member of the parish to pay a tax of one-tenth, a tithe, of their income to the church. From this income the rector was required to set aside one-third each year for the relief of the poor. This parochial system was undermined when tithe incomes began to be appropriated for other uses but many residents of Kentisbeare needed this help. There is evidence of this in the record of the number of persons helped in the parish in the period ending Lady Day 1834

10. State in the annexed columns the number of persons relieved in your parish during the year ended Lady Day 1834.

Males above 16	Females above 10	Children under 9	Children under 16 above 9
Able bodied 20	Able bodied 26	Able bodied 95	Able to work 16
Infirm or partially disabled 12	Totally disabled 17	Wholly disabled 16	Unable to work 14
	Infirm, being partially disabled 23		Total 239

Please observe that all the men who were relieved with their families, wives and children are included in this answer.

Some of the most significant local families include those of **John Whytyng (Whiting)** who was born in 1474, during the reign of Edward IV. As the third son he did not expect to inherit the Manor of Woode at Kentisbeare along with the rest of his father's estates but, as his two brothers died when still young men, John became a very wealthy man during his twenties, However he continued to pursue a career in the wool trade for which he had been trained. The family had premises in nearby Cullompton, a kersey-making town, kersey was a twilled woollen cloth for which Devon was famous. Despite the violence of the period, Devon's wool trade was thriving and Tax laws favoured trade and the Whitings prospered.

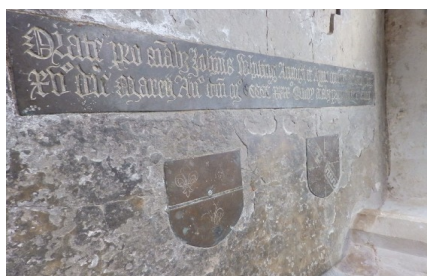


Between 1500 and 1515 the original 13th century church building of St Mary, Kentisbeare underwent quite extensive changes funded by John Whiting who added a south aisle, known as the Whiting aisle. On the outside of one of the north windows, there are two carved heads, one is a bearded man and the other is a woman wearing a headdress. The heads are thought to



represent John and his wife Anne Pouncefoot, a wealthy heiress and the daughter of Sir Walter Pouncefoot, lord of the manor of Compton Pouncefoot in Somerset. The windows of the chapel are in the perpendicular style which developed in the second half of the fourteenth century, and the heads date from the same time as the window. But Devon always seems to be something of an exception, according to Pevsner Perpendicular work in the county is harder to date, but generally it relates to the fifteenth and even sixteenth centuries. So perhaps it is not quite the anomaly it might at first seem.

John Whiting died on 15 March 1529 and was buried in the tomb he had prepared, under the south window of what is known as the Whiting Chapel. The sides of the tomb are of white Beer stone, cut into decorated panels; the top is a slab of black Purbeck marble.



The tomb originally bore brass effigies of both John and his wife Anne until they were stolen in 1857 and apparently taken to America, it is only the shields and the gouged-out shapes of the effigies that remain. (Anne was actually buried where she died, in Compton Pouncefoot, Somerset). The inscription on the tomb translates as: *Pray for the souls of John Whytyng Esquire who died on the 15th day of March in the year of our Lord 1529 and of Anne his wife. May God have mercy on their*

*souls. Amen.* Perhaps when John provided for the prayer life of Kentisbeare church he was ensuring that his requests would be met as it was he who arranged the foundation charter and paid the expenses of the two or three monks who lived in the medieval Priesthall. The church house called "Priesthall" is just outside the north-west corner of the churchyard

In the corner of the same chapel is the tomb chest of Mary (d.1558), daughter of Sir Robert Wotton of Boughton Malherbe, Kent. Mary's first husband was Henry Guildford (d.1532), well connected at court and a friend of Henry VIII. Following his death Mary married Sir Gawain Carew, of Exeter and Devon. Carew rented Wood from Whiting's daughter Agnes.



It was while at Wood that Mary died. She preferred to style herself Lady Guildford, perhaps it was the better title, or at least offered better connections to the Tudor Court. She was the great-aunt of Lady Jane Grey, this was perhaps, a rather tainted connection. Her sister Margaret had married Thomas Grey, 2<sup>nd</sup> marquis Dorset (d.1530), their son Henry married Frances Brandon, the daughter of Henry VIII's sister Mary, thus giving their daughter Jane a claim to the throne. Thomas 1<sup>st</sup> marquis Dorset had married Cecily Bonville, one of their manors being Shute, so there were a number of Devon connections, Thomas was the son of Elizabeth Wydevile by her first marriage to John Grey, thus Henry was also a cousin to the Tudor monarchs.



On the north wall of the chancel is a striking marble monument to a former Kentisbeare rector, Rev. George William Scott, who died in 1830 of scarlet fever, having only been rector in the parish for 2 years. It is worth spending some time looking deeper into the monument rather than just the skill of the sculptor. For example, scarlet fever was common at this time. Between 1820 and 1880 there was a world pandemic and several severe epidemics occurred in Europe. By the late 1830s and 1840s in England and Wales it was a major cause of childhood mortality between the ages of one and five, with some 10,000 deaths per annum,

although it must not be forgotten that adults were also victims of the infection.

Having the role as rector, Rev Scott may have been encountering the infection amongst his parishioners which put him in the high risk adult category which led him to his early death.

Looking at the wording on the memorial there are several stories to tell and worthy of comment.

The text on the memorial relates his family feelings about their young family member written in the sentimental style typical of its time, it reads: -

*"To the memory of the Revd. George William Scott, Rector of Kentisbeare, third son of Hugh Scott, Esquire, of Harden. This stone is erected by desire of his afflicted parents and brothers and sisters, to whom he was the best of sons, and the best of brothers. To the purest piety he united a quick and steady judgment, with the most benign benevolence, and the strictest integrity, and was exemplary in the performance of his religious and moral duties. He bore the sufferings of illness with the resignation of a devout Christian, and died at Kentisbeare on the 9th June 1830, in the twenty-sixth year of his age. Beloved and regretted by all who knew him."*

A striking feature is a scroll being revealed by a naked boy of about 5 years of age pulling aside a pall, the meaning of which comes from the word "pallium" now shorted to "pall" referring to a heavy cloth, rather than a cloak. In some religions palls are pure white, to symbolise the white clothes worn during baptism and the joyful triumph over death brought about by the Resurrection.

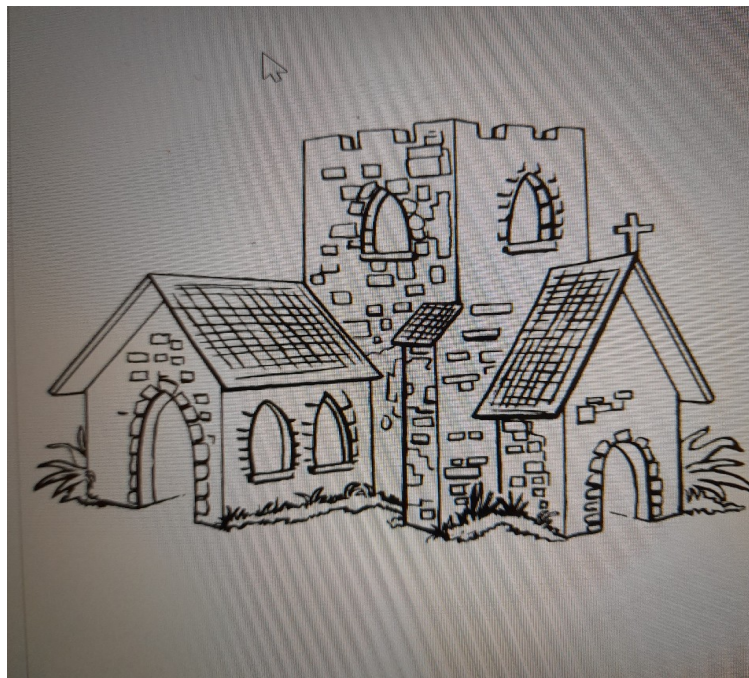
With the pall partially removed there is a stone sarcophagus, and a poem inscribed on the scroll. On the scroll is a butterfly. Butterflies are a common symbol of death amongst many cultures and religions. It is believed that this symbolism started back in Ancient Greece, where a butterfly sighting after the passing of a loved one was seen to represent the soul of the deceased. This symbolism is still widely respected today, providing comfort to the bereaved. In the Christian faith, the butterfly symbolizes the earthly life you leave behind and the new, spiritual life you begin. The butterfly gives hope. At the foot of the sarcophagus is a Bible and a Chalice representing his career as a priest.

On the scroll is a sentimental verse by Sir Walter Scott, the Scottish historical novelist, playwright, and poet, widely known for his popular novel "Ivanhoe" published in 1820 and set in 12th-century England. This poem specifically written in memory of his cousin. Though the verse is a perfect example of early Victorian sentimentality, it is hard not to feel a lump in your throat at some of Scott's verse.

*To youth, to age alike, this tablet pale,  
Tells the brief moral of its tragic tale,  
Art thou a parent? Reverence this bier,  
The parents fondest hopes lie buried here.*

*Art thou a youth prepared on life to start,  
With opening talents and a generous heart,  
Fair hopes and flattering prospects all thine own?  
Lo! here their end, a monumental stone.  
But let submission check repining thought,  
Heaven crowned its champion ere the fight was fought."*

Contributions included from Greg Arnold, Pat Arnold, Val Frood, Stuart Jones, David Lanning, Jackie Moran, Peter Moran, Ann Payne, Lynda Pidgeon, and Wendy Randle



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