

Members of Honiton u3a are
DISCOVERING....

Devon's Historic Churches



St James the Great
Talaton

December 2023

St James the Great, Talaton

The present Church dates to the 13th Century and the most striking exterior features are the 15th century **tower** (*below left*) and the **porch**. The church is dedicated to the Santiago pilgrim saint, James, the Greater, an apostle of Jesus. The window shows his emblem of the scallop shell which also appears on the sundial (2012) above the porch door



Stone carvings of both **gargoyles*** and **hunkypunks** can be seen on the different levels of the tower (*right*). The decorative stonework is primarily interpreted as a symbol of rebirth and renewed life. It is found in many cultures and from many ages around the world. The heads first appeared in English churches during the 12C.



Over the **porch** (*below left*) is a statue holding a sundial The sundial (*below centre*) commemorates the lives of Geoffrey and Emmerlinda Skinner and although the time on the sundial varies throughout the year it is designed to record the exact time on 25th July, St James' Day. The centre picture below clearly shows the **gnomen**, the shadow of which gives the time. Under the statue there is a carving of a **Green Man** (*below right*) In April 2023 a **green man's** head was depicted on the invitation for the King's Coronation. It is symbolic of Spring and rebirth to celebrate the new reign.



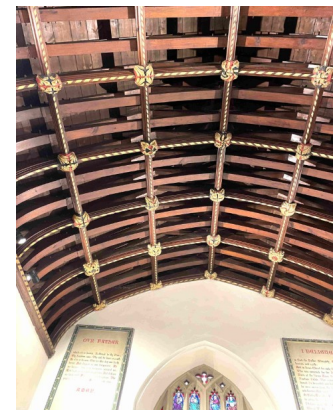
***Note:** More information on terms in bold type can be found in our Glossary booklet



The Norman door to the Church still has a **Sanctuary ring** (right) in place. In 693AD, Ina, the

King of the West Saxons, recognised that if "... anyone accused of a capital offence flies to a Church, his life shall be spared, and he shall make compensation according to justice." An alleged criminal could claim sanctuary for 40 days provided he or she touched the ring on the church door before they were arrested. They would then remain protected in the church for 40 days. Also still on the door is the original lock (*above centre*).

The **wagon roof** of the Chancel and Nave is highly decorated with a **celure** (*below centre*) over the pulpit and rood screen to honour the cross which would have originally stood on top of the rood screen



The Norman **Font** is situated on the south side of the aisle and is believed to date from around 1170. It was present in the original small Norman church and has been used for baptism for over 800 years.



The font is made from a solid block of Purbeck marble which was transported to Talaton on the river Otter, and the sides are decorated with simple arches. The weight is supported by a large central pillar with four slender columns at the corners. The base and wooden font cover are modern. The hinged doors of the top have four sturdy brass rings and



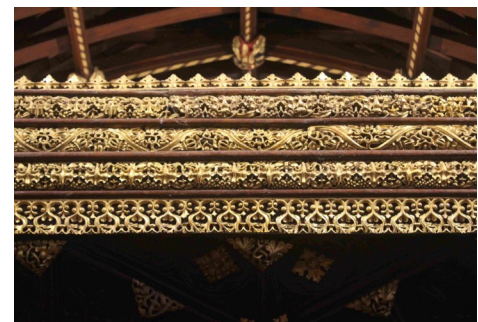
the corners of the cover are carved with the words SAINT JAMES CHU(R)CH TALATON. Unfortunately it includes quite an obvious spelling mistake!



According to James Davidson's church notes written in 1843 there were three **hatchments** on the east wall of the chancel and one on the north wall which bore the same arms as that on a memorial to Charles Harwood, d. 1718. The memorial was moved to the west wall of the south aisle, but the hatchment is no longer there. Only two hatchments survive from the east wall, both of which are now located in the tower. The arms represent Kennaway impaled with the arms of unknown. The arms differ slightly from the description given by Davidson, there was no red hand on a silver shield on the blue fess (*above centre*). Known as the Red Hand of Ulster, it designated a baronet created by James I in 1611 in connection with the colonisation of Ulster.



The 15th century **rood screen** boasts intricate carvings with branches off the central posts holding up the intricate frieze. The bright gilding is a recent renovation



and presents a stunningly attractive finish. The gilding extends to the carved bosses, all being uniquely individual. Interesting to note that this expensive work was undertaken without any financial support from the Diocese. The fine carving of the five rows of the frieze is outstanding.



There are some unusual windows in the Church. One in particular shows two angels, with brilliant blue wings which contrast with the muted colours of the figures and landscape, flanking Christ in his glory blessing the world. Around Christ flutter 6 **butterflies**. The window was made in the studio of Achibald Keightley Nicholson (d 1937), an ecclesiastical stained glass maker whose work is to be found in 700 churches and cathedrals including Sir Edward Elgar's memorial window in Worcester Cathedral. In some cultures, butterflies symbolise re-

birth and the resurrection of Christ. The butterfly is also a symbol of being transgender, because of the transformation from caterpillar to winged adult. In Devon, it is reputed that people once hurried to kill the first butterfly of the year, to avoid a year of bad luck.



Talaton's first **clock** was made by Francis Pile of Honiton and was installed in 1752 at a cost of twelve pound. The clock rang the church bells for the quarters and for the hours – there was no dial.

In 1925 the clock became redundant and was replaced by a clock recovered from Haldon House.

The old clock was not maintained in any way and was left to deteriorate. The timber frame collapsed, the wrought iron work of the frame and the working parts were left to rust and the whole assembly was left to gather dust (remains of pigeons' eggs were found nesting in the bottom!)

In October 2019 the clock was examined with a view to restoration . Work started in January 2021 to remove the clock completely and it was sent away for soda blast cleaning. In August of that same year the clock was ready for reassembly to determine the work needed to get it running again. However, it was evident that many of the working parts had suffered heavy wear and abuse during its working life of 173 years and many had to be replaced before complete reassembly could be completed.

The clock you see today is essentially as it was in 1752.

The restoration was funded by Michael Morobito as a memorial to his grandparents Olive and John Trump, both of whom are buried in the churchyard.



One of the other features of the Church is the large amount of **foliate decoration** in the stone carving, woodwork and window designs. Even many of the kneelers have leaves and plants on them.



The floral theme extends to the elaborate carvings on the ends of some of the pews..



Finally we found some unusual gravestones commemorating the servants of the household.

Aaron Webb was the coachman to Sir John Kennaway while Susan Webb (who was baptised as Susanna on 25 December 1805 in Kingscote). was his wife but was buried with another servant, Caroline Gullwell.

Aaron's grave bears the inscription *"A native of Kingscote, Gloucestershire and for twelve years coachman to the family of John Kennaway*



and for twelve years coachman to the family of John Kennaway Bart. He was a dutiful son, a faithful and skilful servant and an obliging and ready friend. He was thrown from his saddle by a colt which he was riding on the lawn at Escot and falling against the oak tree he was killed on the spot. June 12th 1848 in the (36th?) year of his age. Therefore be ye also ready for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh. Matthew 24 v44. His master and fellow servants



out of respect and affection to his memory have created this stone"

A very elaborate memorial for a servant, but that of his wife is even more detailed: *"Sacred to the memory of Susan Webb, wife of Aaron Webb and of Caroline Gullwell, both natives of Gloucestershire and sometime servants in the family of Sir John Kennaway Bart of Escot in this Parish. Brought up in the same school they were strikingly alike in disposition and natural character, cheerful, amiable and obliging when at last convinced of sin the sense of its guilt deeply oppressed them but faith triumphing over fear they embraced the saviour and found peace in believing. Both in early life became the prey of lingering consumption and testifying to the grace of Him who washed them white in his blood they departed in hope and side by side they sleep in Jesus. Susan Webb died April 1838 aged 32. Caroline Gullwell died August 1838 aged 24. Also of John and Thomas, both sons of Aaron and Susan Webb who died in infancy 1838"*

Note: Further investigation in FreeBMD shows a birth record for both boys in the September quarter of 1837 so they would appear to have been twins. There is also a death record for John in the same quarter, while the death of Thomas is recorded in the March quarter of 1838.

The Kennaway family



The Kennaway family originated in Fife, Scotland. In 1713 the young William I Kennaway moved from Scotland to Exeter to continue his trade as a sergemaker and clothier. His son William II Kennaway joined the business which between the years 1750 and 1790 expanded into a major force in the Devonshire woollen trade, which however soon thereafter collapsed due to the Napoleonic Wars. William III Kennaway (grandson of William I) started anew in the wine trade, whilst his brothers sought their fortunes in the East Indies: John Kennaway, later the 1st Baronet and Richard Kennaway (later of Fort House, Sidmouth built in 1805, now called "Kennaway House") who also acquired a fortune working for the Board of Trade in Bengal.

The seat of the Kennaway Baronets since 1794 has been Escot House The Kennaway family motto is *Ascendam* ("I will rise").

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