

A visit to St. Mary's Church

The Worthys Local History Group was warmly welcomed to St. Mary's Church by the leader of the ministry team, Revd Paul Bradish. This was followed by an informative talk by Derek Brockway on the architectural changes to the building and the history of worship in Kings Worthy. Derek acknowledged the work of the late David Johnston, whose book *Saints and Pilgrims* chronicles the history of St Mary's Church.

The first church recorded on the site was in 1290. This would have been a shorter version of today's building with a lower tower and no bells. It is likely that the floor would have been of beaten earth and the only furniture would have been benches. The services would have been delivered in Latin which very few of the congregation understood. The font was positioned, as it is now, one step inside the Church.

Moving on to the period 1300-1714 the choir area was enlarged and for some years a rood screen picturing a crucifix and perhaps other figures spanned the chancel. This, however, became the victim of iconoclasts in the fifteenth or sixteenth century. The most significant changes occurred in the nineteenth century beginning in the 1830s with the enhancement of the tower including battlements around its top and the addition of a gallery over the west end of the Church. The pews at this time may have been taller, in the style of those at Avington Church. In 1849 the Church had expanded with the addition of the south aisle. Derek commented that it was the Rector, Revd. Wells', enthusiasm and the wealth of the Churchwardens that would have enabled the enlargement. The congregation would not have been expected to contribute their money or their opinions.



Reverend Bacon's watercolour of the Church and Post Office, 1855

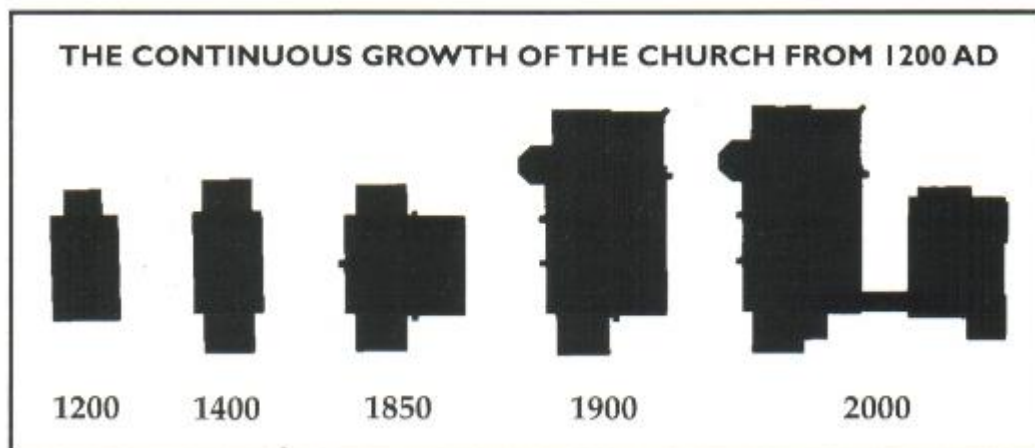
Revd Bacon, a decent water colourist, has helped us identify further changes. His 1855 painting shows a smaller churchyard and the glimpse of a building where the lychgate currently stands. A

painting he produced in the early 1860s shows the newly extended churchyard and lychgate. The lychgate marked the place where coffin carriers rest and meet the Rector before a funeral.



Reverend Bacon's watercolour of the Church and Lychgate, 1860s

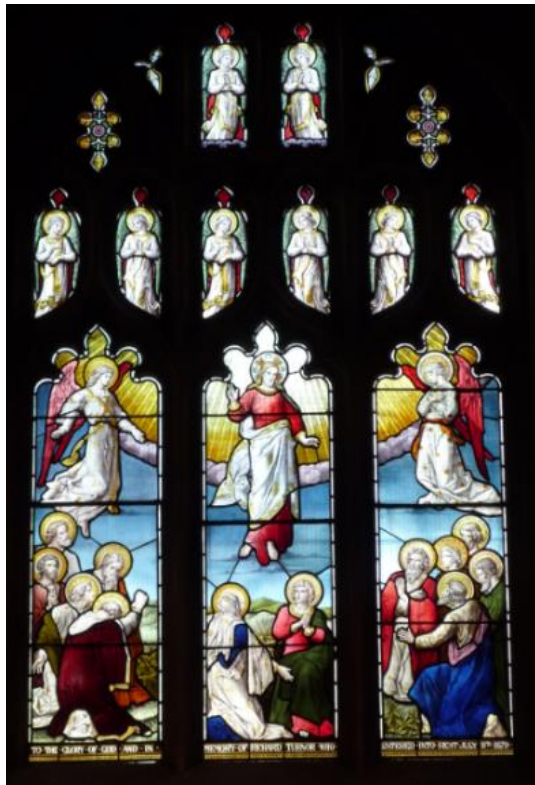
The 1860s also saw the addition of a cosy vestry with a fire place and chimney which was designed by John Colson. And finally, in 1884, the last of the stages of improvement was complete with the addition of a side chapel for the south aisle. Very little changed for over 100 years and then in 2000 the Church Rooms were added to provide offices, function rooms, kitchen and toilet facilities. Derek concluded that despite all the changes to St Mary's Church the basic things like the Christian message have remained the same over the centuries.



The group then split into smaller groups for tours of the windows, churchyard and choir.

The Windows

Eleanor explained that the windows in the Church are nearly all from the nineteenth century. The pictures and associated biblical texts often provide an insight into the characters of those commemorated and reveal rather poignant stories. When examining the windows closely two distinct styles can be detected. Some are more intricate with muted colours; the others are simpler in design but brighter in colour.



The Ascension Window, photo by Jane Rutter

The Ascension Window is situated behind the main altar and was donated by Richard Turnor, a local wealthy benefactor. The Turnor family lived at Kings Worthy House, now a pile of rubble in the land next to the Cart and Horses. Richard was born blind and paralysed and therefore never saw the window which is dedicated to him.

As well as paying for the Ascension Window, Richard also paid for the organ which is still in use today and the Reading Room and Almshouses opposite the Cart and Horses. His initials, RWT, are visible on the exterior of the building.



War Memorials

John Sweeting talked through the variety of war memorials in the Church and Churchyard. To begin with, there is what is known as the Bryce Stewart Memorial. This stands outside the vestry and is where parishioners gather on Remembrance Sunday to hear the list of names of the fallen from the two World Wars. The memorial was paid for by Colonel and Mrs Stewart of Hinton House, whose only child Bryce was killed in the First World War. In addition to Bryce Stewart four others were commemorated but it was known that some names were missing. A few years ago a working party, led by Denis Welstead, organised for the Memorial to be refurbished and the additional names added. At the same time, it became apparent that three names were also missing from the memorial to the fallen from the Second World War. John arranged for them each to be commemorated with a shield and added to the south wall of the Choir. They join the existing shields each displaying the logo of the regiment or service they belonged to and the date of their death. If you take a moment to study these dates you will be able to identify the action in which they served for example the withdrawal to Dunkirk, the sinking of HMS Hood and Operation Chariot.

Additional memorials inside the Church include two commemorating Bryce Stewart. One is a plain wooden plaque dedicated to Bryce by his former Nurse, Selina Hopkins, and the other is a brass plaque placed on the wall above his parents' pew. On the same wall there are memorials to Frank Mullins and four sons of Revd. Baring.

The Churchyard

Jane Wheeler took the group on a tour around the graves giving interesting background information about some of the people buried there. One story of particular interest was that of 18 year old James Stanley Parker, the victim of a brutal murder on the Worthy Road on 8 April 1886. James and his friend Alfred Edward Brown, both sailors, had travelled from Southampton and paused at the Hyde Tavern before resuming their journey towards London. Alfred was charged with murder and executed by hanging at Winchester Prison. The motive for the crime was the wages James had received when they docked at Southampton.

It wasn't just strangers who met unfortunate ends in the Worthys. In 1847, the village post master and shop keeper, Noah Vincent, died of arsenic poisoning aged 34. Noah had apparently left home on Friday to collect bills and having gathered several pounds went to the Spread Eagle in Winchester. Here he co-habited with his paramour, Elizabeth Houghton, and did not return to his wife and five children until Monday. Upon arriving home he took to his bed and died. His gravestone reads "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation".

The evening ended with refreshments in the Church and all the speakers were thanked for delivering interesting and informative talks and tours.