

A BRIEF GUIDE TO ST. PETER'S CHURCH BUSHLEY

There has been a place of worship on this site in Bushley for some 800 years, and the present church is the third to have been built at this location. The first was founded in the 12th century by the Lord of the (Bushley) Manor, Simon de Columba, a member of a noble Norman family that arrived with William the Conqueror in 1066. Prior to this date, probably from the 8th century, there was a chapel at Bushley dependent upon the Tewkesbury minster located at the Mythe.

The next church was built in the 14th century by Lord Edward Despencer, a descendant of Hugh le Despencer, Earl of Gloucester, and a favourite of King Edward II. Habington, in the 17th century, recorded that, in the east window were effigies of Lord Edward Despencer (who died in 1375) and his wife, Elizabeth, with the figure of the Virgin Mary in the middle pane, holding the Saviour in her arms. Lord Edward Despencer, with his wife, were one of the principle beneficiaries of Tewkesbury Abbey where they are entombed and there is an effigy of him kneeling before the High Altar.

This church had a nave, chancel and a low tower framed by four large oak baulks erected on stout plinths. The walls were of rubble coated with rough-cast and had good 'decorated' tracery in its windows. Although refurbished early in the 19th century when the nave was partly wainscoted in deal and new oak open seats at the west end were installed, it was demolished in 1842, along with two adjacent cottages. A woodcut engraving of it hangs in the present church. Two original windows were installed into the Moss Green Shrubberies where they still remain.

The present church was built in 1843 by Dr. Edward Christopher Dowdeswell of Pull Court, who considered the previous church inadequate. The architect was Edward Blore who had designed Pull Court, the country home of the Dowdeswells, in 1835. Following the Church Commissioners early C19 conventions Blore's design is in the style of Perpendicular Gothic (third pointed). The consecration of the new church took place on 2nd June 1843 in the presence of the Bishop of Worcester, who was Dr. Dowdeswell's nephew. The total building cost of the church was almost £5,000 and it was further endowed by Dr. Dowdeswell in the sum of £10,000. The churchyard was also walled and levelled at this time.

The church consists of a chancel, shallow north and south transepts, aisleless nave, west tower and spire. It is primarily constructed of blue lias stone, quarried from Sarn Hill in the village, with Postlip stone, from the Cotswolds, being used for the spire and ornamental work. The present chancel replaced the original shallow apse in 1857 and was designed by Sir Gilbert Scott. in the style of C14th middle pointed, (as Scott was not taken with Blore's gothic). Iron screens, chancel floor tiling, timber stalls and pews were all designed by Scott.

There is a chapel on the south side with a small vestry on the north side. The chapel in the south transept, was converted from previous organ chamber, by Anthony Wilson, and was dedicated in 1909.

Inside the church, a number of which were relocated from the previous church, are memorials to the Dowdeswell family who owned the major part of the parish from 1628 to 1932 and several of whom were the local Members of Parliament. The monument to William Dowdeswell, Chancellor of the exchequer 1765-6, who died in 1775 is now in the south transept. Erected in 1777, it was made by John Hickey and bears Burke's long and laudatory inscription.

On the north wall of the nave is a brass to Roberts Freeman, Gent. who died in 1651, with a rhyming inscription and two coats of arms. Also, there is a tablet to General William Dowdeswell, Governor of the Bahamas from 1798 to 1801, who died in 1828.

The font is ancient, dating back to the 12th century and is the only relic of the original church. It consists of a hexagonal shape stone bowl with slightly chamfered corners. In 1842 it was discovered in an adjacent farmyard being used as a water trough. It was removed to the churchyard and placed on a stone plinth said to be one of the original plinths for the timber baulks of the 14th century tower. It was later placed in the present church on a new base, replacing a font of white stone dating from 1843.

Near the font are the brass figures of Thomas Payne and his wife, Ursula, previously in the centre of the chancel of the old church. The inscription and the figures of seven sons and four daughters, together with coat of arms have been lost. Thomas, a wool-stapler and retainer of the Earl of Warwick, was the builder of Paynes Place, where Queen Margaret of Anjou sought refuge after the defeat at the Battle of Tewkesbury. He died in 1500 and was buried in the churchyard, having obtained in 1477 for the people of the village the right of sepulture in their own churchyard. Previously corpses had been taken to Tewkesbury Abbey for burial, a hazardous operation in times of flood.

The organ, a fine example by an unknown maker, was moved from the south transept to a purpose built gallery at the west end of the nave in 1909. It was rebuilt in 1902-1905 by Nicholsons of Worcester and again in 2000 by Trevor Tipple of Worcester.

The Reredos, which has painted scenes by George Ostrehan, was erected in 1902 by the Rev. E. R. Dowdeswell in memory of Mrs. A. L. Dowdeswell. The organ gallery, iron screen to the chapel, pews and fabric of the church were made, to the architect's designs, and installed by workmen from the Dowdeswell estate workshops. The timber used came from the estate.

In the tower there is a ring of six bells, the treble cast in 1889 by Mears and Stainbank, and the remaining bells by Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester in 1710. Also in the tower is a 'turret' clock made by Benjamin Lewis Vulliamy (1780-1854), a noted clockmaker who held appointment of clockmaker to Kings George IV, William IV and Queen Victoria. The clock was made in 1843 and is numbered 1585 and is a rare and fine working example of its type.

One treasure of the church is a copy of Erasmus' Paraphrases of the Gospels, dated 1557 and purchased by the parishioners in 1590. During the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553) it was customary for every church to possess one of these books, as well as the bible. On the accession of Queen Mary, when the country reverted to Roman Catholicism the majority of these books were destroyed, those that remained became rare. The Bushley 'Paraphrases' is currently held in the Worcestershire County Archive.

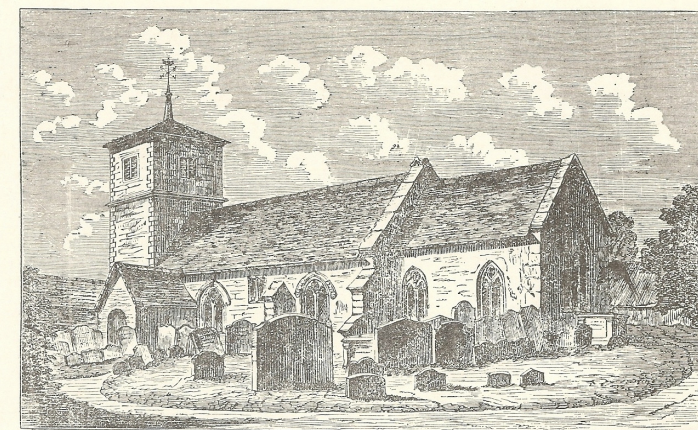
The parish registers date from 1538 and are remarkable in that the entries for the first 36 years are on the original paper as well as on the parchment that all registers had to be copied onto from 1597 onwards. Few parishes have their original paper registers. The registers, prior to 1812, contain all entries from 1538 to 1695, baptisms and burials from 1696 to 1812, and marriages from 1696 to 1812.

Adjacent to the Church, the vicarage (a private residence since 1976) was only adapted for clerical use in 1850, as until that time the parish priest did not reside in the village. Previously it was 'Church Farm' with farm buildings and farmyards surrounding three sides of the church. The medieval farmhouse was substantially rebuilt and is a good example of Victorian Jacobethan domestic architecture. It was converted by John Armitage, (who had been Blore's assistant at Pull Court) and the architect of the Old School House (also adjacent to the church) and Sarn Hill Grange at Bushley Green.

References.

The Buildings of England, Worcestershire by Alan Brooks and Nikolaus Pevsner.
The Victoria County History, Worcestershire.

Nigel Nicoll/06/201



BUSHLEY OLD CHURCH.

