

A Brief History of Walford Church

The church has a long history of ministering to a small village community. Before Norman times the mud and wattle building was dedicated to St Leonard , a Saxon saint, but the name was changed at the restoration of the building in 1887 to its present dedication.

In about 1100 the centre part of the nave was built, which makes it one of the earliest churches in the county of Herefordshire . The de Walford Family held the Knight' fee of Walford, and the north aisle formed their private chapel, later becoming the Kyrle Chapel. During Cromwell's time, Lieutenant- Colonel Kyrle occupied Walford Court , wavering between one side and the other during the fighting. Over the chancel arch hangs his helmet, which is possibly a funeral helm because of its small size and thin metal.

Growth of the Building

The first structure of the church was a simple rectangular building consisting of the present nave. The entrance was by the south door without a porch, from where a path led across the churchyard and the stream from the village. Just inside the old porch there is a stoup for holy water, and the original altar probably stood about where the lectern is now. Up above, the corbels of east and south walls can be seen jutting from the present walls.

From about 1230 – 1240 the North aisle was added, together with the arcades of four pillars and arches. Soon afterwards the aisle was continued from the North Chapel behind and including the present organ chamber. This was originally built by the de Walford family as a private or Chantry Chapel. It was finally handed over to the church in 1887. All this work belongs to the Early English period of architecture, including the chancel. Note that the point of the east window is not in line with the top of the arch and that the chancel is not in line with the nave. Arches and windows are pointed (whereas Norman style is semicircular) and the walls are about three feet thick, with splay each side of the windows. Note the different “stiff leaf” decoration on the capitals of the pillars.

Next to be added were the North porch, standing at an odd angle to the main body of the church, and Tower, which stood alone and at first was topped by a spire. It appears even today that the tower is leaning slightly to the east, but it was in a thunderstorm in February 1813 that the spire was struck and fell. One commentator said that the church looks “curiously naked” without its spire, but opinions differ about that. When the spire fell, the bells came down too, some being broken and the others finding their way to Ruardean Church which, with Hope Mansel, at one time came under the single care of the Vicar of Walford. The present bells are only two and are inscribed "John Rudhall fecit 1824": the larger tenor bell weighs about half a ton and measures over three feet in diameter.

By 1430 the church was in a sadly dilapidated condition and general repairs were undertaken; the east wall of the chancel was completely rebuilt. A passage was also added connecting the tower to the main building through the north chapel. That concluded the work of the building as it now stands except for the extensive restoration of 1887 when the gallery, added in 1754 at the west end of the nave, was removed and the walls stripped of the remains of coloured plaster. In 1954 the church was completely re-roofed.

Internal Points to Note

Opposite the main door is the font, eight sided with a Tudor rose decoration. It was made in the 15th century and is a good example of that period. Standing at the back of the church and looking to the east end, note the offset chancel and arches. The chancel arch is relatively low, making it difficult for sound to carry from the choir to the nave. At one time there was a big rood-screen right across this arch with room for people to cross, and bearing the large rood or crucifix. All such emblems were of course removed at the Reformation and in Cromwell's time much damage was done to many churches. Remains of the rood loft can be seen in the small of access above the pulpit, the entrance is behind the pillar next to the organ.

On either side of the arch are two hatchments with the arms of the Clarks of Hill Court; this family was descended from the Kyrles, but died out early in the nineteenth century in the male line. Hill Court and Walford Court then passed by inheritance to Kingsmill Evans and then to Kingsmill Manley Power whose father was one of Wellington's generals and afterwards Governor of Malta. The church possesses his Corunna Medal.

Monuments

In the chancel there is a tablet with a Latin inscription dedicated in 1681 to former vicar, William Adams, who during the changeable times of the civil war (and unlike the vicar of Bray) continued to use the Book of Common Prayer. A translation of the last part of the inscription reads "He was a strenuous assertor of the Liturgy of England during the horrid storms of civil war, when enemies were insulting the Church of England, as also an assiduous minister of the parish of Bicknor".

There is also a flat stone to Mr Richard Greenway, MA vicar of Walford for 63 years 9 months 9 days! He died on May 9, 1745 aged 88.

Another notable vicar of Walford was the antiquary Thomas Dudle Fosbrooke, author of an Encyclopedia of Antiquities, History of the County of Gloucester and a book on the River Wye. His memorial tablet is also in the chancel; he held the livings of Walford, Ruardean and Hope Mansel from 1800 to 1842. The Sunday round of services in these three scattered churches must have taxed his energies, riding around with his cassock and canonicals. Fosbrooke was a friend of Dr Jenner, the discoverer of vaccination, and preached the sermon in Gloucester Cathedral at the unveiling of the statue of Jenner.

Another interesting stone within the sanctuary marks the grave of an old Cavalier, Thomas Yeme, who died on January 30, 1667, the day on which Charles I was beheaded. The inscription here reads "*Meo rege resurgam*" (I shall arise with my King).

Richard Bond of Cowberry, Walford, is also buried here. He is the grandfather, through his daughter, of Colonel aged 51 years Hanger Lord Coleraine, equerry to George IV when he was Prince of Wales, Coleraine Farm still forms party of the Cobrey estate, now owned by the Chinn Family whose work and benefactions are commemorated on the wall of the vestry. Here too, under a flat Stone, rests after his "storms and onslaughts and outfalls", the bones of the "stony-hearted rebel", with the following inscription, "Here lieth, in hope of a blessed resurrection, the body of Robert Kyrle esquire of this manor, who was buried Oct 2, 1669 aged 51 years".

He was the son of John Kyrle, the well known benefactor, the Man of Ross.

Like many parishes along the river Wye, Walford has many records of people having drowned in that notorious river. There is a simple monument in the chancel to one Eusebius Beeston, drowned in the Wye in 1815, at the age of 26.

Kentish Bache is another notable vicar who suffered not only ill health but many years of misunderstanding about the payment of a curate for the daughter church of St John's on Howle Hill, a chapel of ease erected at the expense of Miss Beatrice Phillips who lived in Bishopswood. She contributed largely to the restoration of Walford Church in 1886 and also gave the organ.

The only stained glass in the church is in the West Window commemorating two sons of the Butt family of Holcombe House, Bulls Hill. The glass is modern.

Outside

The church is built of local sandstone, rubble and ashlar (squared stone) which has weathered well. There is a mason's mark of unknown origin in the south wall just east of the porch. It resembles one of the signs of the Zodiac.

The lychgate was restored and rebuilt at a cost of £70 in 1900: as the inscription shows, this was done in the memory of the vicar who was responsible for the major restoration of the church in 1887. Sadly at the time of the reopening service, the Rev George Kewley was gravely ill at home; he died only a week later.

The road of remembrance with its lime trees planted in 1923, commemorates those who fell in the first World War. In previous times there used to be a whipping post nearby but it must have been about 1830 when the last man suffered this punishment. The churchyard was also extended in 1923. After the second World War the entrance gates and posts were added to the avenue as a memorial to those who died.

The strange looking pointed stone in the ground outside the porch is an old parish boundary marker.

There are two old vicarages in the village, one near the school and the other now called Hunsdon House. The present Vicarage was built in 1968.