

OXENHALL CHURCH

The early history of St. Anne's Church, Oxenhall, is scanty. That there was a Church in 1186 is evidenced by records that the advowson then passed to the Knights Hospitallers of Dinmore. Of the earliest building nothing remains. The lead font, of the same mould as five others in Gloucestershire, dates from the end of the 12th century or early part of the 13th. In S. R. Glynne's description of the Church in 1857 he refers to the font being a circular bowl of marble, surrounded by semicircular arches upon an outward swelling stem. Where this font came from, or during what period the lead font was missing, is not known. The west tower, with its octagonal ribbed spire, is early 14th century. By 1397 a Visitation Return reports that "the Chancel is in disrepair in walls and glazing".

In the 16th century several sums of money were left "to the High altar" in the wills of those who had died. In the Churchwardens' Presentment of 1548 all was reported well, but in 1572 the churchyard needed repair and they lacked the Paraphrases of Erasmus. The pulpit, still in the church, has carved oak with the initials WP:W 1632. It may be that these are the initials of William Pippett and William Wetherlock. There is similar carved oak in the Vestry. A Terrier of 1680 records the following items:-

1 Great Bible	1 Register of Parchment
2 Books of Common Prayer	2 other books of accounts
1 chest and 1 coffer	
A bier, a font and a Communion Table	
1 silver Chalice, a pewter flagon and plate for the Communion.	

In 1688 a "Survey of Railes and Walls of the Churchyard" was made. The Church wall was measured with the names of 38 owners of land recorded each being responsible for repairing his portion of the wall.

In a Terrier of 1698 reference is made to the acre of Glebe on which the Vicarage, burnt down in 1664, had stood, and also to "1 dwelling house, garden with small orchard of yearly value 10/-.... which was given long since for the buying of bread and wine at Easter.... which is annually dispensed of to that purpose....". This may refer to the wills of members of the Hill family who died in 1544/45 and who left provision for the High Altar. Further reference is made to this in a Terrier of 1704 - "To the Church 10/- payable to the Churchwardens.... to buy bread and wine for Communion, being the gift of one John Hill long since deceased".

The suggestion has been made that the Church became very dilapidated and was rebuilt in the 17th century. There would not appear to be any conclusive evidence of this, though a major restoration may have taken place. Glynne refers to the south porch as containing "a Norman doorway

with transom and tympanum, very plain", so that whatever rebuilding did take place, the south door was then evidently left untouched.

By 1703 the Churchwardens' presentment found "our Church is in good and decent order and repair". Forty years later a Gallery was erected at the west end on which was painted "Erected in the year 1743, Thomas Pitt Churchwarden and Clerk of this parish 30 years to the date hereof". Subsequently the following words were added: "This Church adorned in the year 1760, James Dowell and Thomas Warr (Churchwardens)". In 1755 at the Archdeacons' Visitation the seats and Communion plate needed repair. The present Church plate dates from the Victorian restoration with the year 1863 engraved, with the possible exception of the flagon.

In a Terrier of 1807 reference is made to a small estate called Haines Oak, of arable and pasture land, with a barn upon it, the purchase being made with £200 of Queen Anne's Bounty. Throughout the 19th century various sums were expended in maintaining the structure of the Church and Churchyard wall. In 1841 the Church House was pulled down and the stone used for making good the wall, and in 1886 Lady Monson's offer to defray the cost of rebuilding the wall was "gratefully accepted". From the accounts of Mr. Spring, builder of Painswick, who was called in to repair the tower during the 1865 rebuilding, we learn something of the cost.

Taking down top of spire	£5.	0.	0.
Preparing sand stone	6.	15.	0.
Stone for top of spire	3.	0.	0.
Rebuilding buttress & quoins	6.	5.	0.
Fixing lead	4.	0.	0.
Working stone	15.	0.	0.

In 1865 Mr. Spring records that "in digging for the buttress of tower came upon the skeleton of a full grown person about 4' below the surface". The pulpit was evidently altered at a cost of £4. 1. 6d. and "a wagon load of old oak from the Church removed". It is believed that surplus stone from the rebuilding was used in repairing the farm wall at Line House Farm.

The Clergy and their Income.

In 1186 John d'Everens gave the patronage and Church to the Knights Hospitallers at Dinmore, Herefordshire, and it was subsequently alienated to various persons. The first reference we have to the clergy at Oxenhall is in 1347 when the Lord of the Manor, Peter de Grandison, founded a Chantry there, endowed with rent and lands, and appointed a Chaplain to "celebrate Divine Service daily for his good estate and on his death for his soul". Fourteen years later it is recorded that Robert, Chaplain at Oxenhall, appeared in Court for assaulting the bailiff of the Prior of Newent and stealing a peacock. Again, three years later, the same Robert appeared for assaulting, beating and wounding one, Richard Coy.

In 1446 a Carmelite Friar of Gloucester, Chaplain at Oxenhall, was accused of adultery. He failed to appear in answer to the charge and was excommunicated. In 1544 and 1545 several members of the Hill family died leaving sums of money for the High Altar and for Masses for their souls after death. William Adys, the Curate witnessed one such Will, and the same William, at a visitation of 1551 was found to be "extraordinarily ignorant for he can answer nothing directly".

From 1577 until the early 17th century there are frequent references to many persons being presented for non-attendance at Church and for being married without banns or licence, which might well be an indication of the beginnings of Puritanism. By the end of the 16th century the parish was unsettled for there was a dispute over the admittance of John Hutchins, but for the next sixty years or thereabouts there are no records of the appointment of Curates.

In 1663 Robert Kerfoot, Vicar, who had been appointed by the Crown, brought a petition to the Court of Chancery, for the establishment of an income for the benefice. The presentation had lapsed, and the tithes, great and small, had been impropriated by the Patrons. A full enquiry was held. Witnesses were heard and though "some of them were very aged" it was established that there had not been a Vicar for at least 60 years. The Bishop of Gloucester to whom the matter was referred, submitted that a dwelling house should be built and 1 acre of Glebe land belonging to the Impropriators allotted to it, to be completed before Easter 1664. The Vicar should receive £13. 6. 8d. yearly together with Church dues for marriages and churchings. The Court accepted and confirmed the Bishop's submission. The Vicarage was apparently built, but later in 1664 disaster overtook it and it was burnt down, the Vicar losing most of his goods together with the Registers. The site of this building was on the west side of Kempley Road, near Hillcroft, and it was subsequently known as Burnt Cinder Field. A new Vicarage was not provided until the restoration of 1865, when one was erected at Three Ashes.

In 1781 Thomas Davies was appointed perpetual Curate to the three Churches of Pauntley, Oxenhall and Upleadon, and in 1795 he was instituted to the Vicarage of Oxenhall. Early in the 19th century a dispute arose between Davies and the parishioners over the Easter offerings. The Chancery Decree of 1663 was referred to, but the parishioners maintained that no stipend had been paid in living memory. The Judge considered that the offerings must "formerly have been of considerable value, the parish being then populous on account of the ironworks". The Vicar was granted "2d. a head over the age of 16, based on right not custom". According to the Judge the incumbency was that of perpetual Curate appointed by the Bishop "the profits of the living being so small as to hold no inducement to anyone to be at the expense of institution".

From 1811 onwards, there being no parsonage, the Curates lived out of the parish, no doubt supplementing their meagre stipend with other work.

One resided in Gloucester, being employed in a School, though he officiated regularly at Oxenhall. Others subsequently lived in Churcham and Newent. In 1839 Thomas M. Sherwood was appointed perpetual Curate, holding Oxenhall in plurality with Pauntley after 1841. The value of Oxenhall was then £53. 5. 8d. with a population of 306 and Pauntley was £67. 17. 8d. with a population of 263. In 1842 Mr. Sherwood appointed a stipendary Curate, William Joy, at a stipend of £80 p.a. and in 1845 Mr. Joy was succeeded by W. Beckingham Ottley. In 1848 the Rev. Thomas Paling Little was appointed perpetual Curate and it was later on, during his incumbency, that the work of rebuilding the Church and building a Vicarage was undertaken.

In 1876 the living, held in plurality with Pauntley, was valued at £90 p.a. with the Vicarage and 19 acres of Glebe. By 1931 some of the Glebe land had been sold, but the value of the living had risen to £380 p.a. In 1955 Oxenhall was united with the parish of Kempsey.

Parish Officials and their Records.

The Church Register and records having been burnt in the fire of 1664 the earliest extant Churchwardens' accounts date from 1700. They give some idea of the cost of the maintenance of the Church and show something of the diversity of the Officers' responsibilities.

1700 Steeple climber for pointing tower	£4.	1.	6.
1703 Washing cerplos (surplice)		1.	0.
Mending Church windows		2.	6.
1708 Church work and repairs		7.	7.
Bellrope		2.	11.
1711 Thatching Church House		5.	6.
The Minister & our dinners, drink & horses		4.	7.
1715 Repairing Church		2.	6.
Soldiery, passengers and travelling women		3.	6.
1717 Washing surplice		1.	6.
1727 Mending Church		17.	0.
Paid myself & 2 horses to removing Sarah Cook		4.	6.
Hoops (bullfinches) heads 2/2d., fox heads 2/6d.		4.	8.
1727 Paid for alteration to Prayers		1.	0.
Bread and wine		1.	4.

The Overseers' accounts date from 1783 and are concerned with poor relief and the maintenance of parish roads and bridges. The following are a few extracts:-

Mending Shynnor's boy's shoes			4d.
2 shirts for Shynnor's boy		5.	4.
Breeches & stockings for John Smith		5.	2.
Shynnor's son, 15 weeks		15.	0.
Waist coat for John Smith		4.	6.
To Justice Durbin, Bridge Money and expenses	£2.	7.	6.

5lbs. flax	2.	11d.
Spinning ditto	3.	0.
Dinah Jones for her lame leg	1.	0.
George Williams child for small pox	2.	0.
Paid for Walter Noble's coffin	8.	0.
Paid for 2 shrouds for J. Steward & Ann Noble	14.	0.
Paid William Jones for curing Mary Collier's leg	7.	0.
Loaf of bread for Thomas Turner's burial	1.	0.
Coffin & shroud for Thomas Turner	11.	6.

In the year 1783 the monthly disbursements varied between £7. 16. 4d. and £13. 9. 10d. and the total for the year amounted to £137. 11s.

From the Vestry Books dating from 1840 to 1912 we have a record of some of the Churchwardens, the Overseers of the Poor and the Surveyor of the Highways (becoming the Waywarden in 1863). There is a reference in 1841 to an iron chest in the Church for the safe deposit of documents, and frequent references to the repair of the Church itself. The Church Rate was fixed at the Annual Vestry meeting, varying from 1d. to 7d. a year, and in 1869 it could be recorded that there was "sufficient surplus of Church Rate from last year that no further Church rate be necessary".

In 1847 the salary of the Parish Clerk was raised from 30/- to £3 p.a. with 5/- extra for Lent Services. In 1851 Mr. William Loveridge celebrated 42 years continuous service as Churchwarden, Overseer and Surveyor at various times. The Choir is mentioned for the first time in the same year, when it was agreed that "£4 be allowed out of Church rates for benefit of the Choir, to be divided among them at the discretion of the Incumbent, on the understanding that he add £1 himself". In 1858 a Collector of the Poor Rate was appointed at a salary of £5 p.a. Two years later it was agreed to sell the 'cello belonging to the Parish, the proceeds to be handed to the Incumbent towards the cost of a Harmonium. In 1865 the decision was taken "that the Tower and Spire of the Church be at once repaired and a rate of 9d. be granted for the purpose". And at the same meeting the Vestry "agreed their consent to the rebuilding of the Nave and Chancel of the Church according to the plan furnished by Mr. Middleton (of Cheltenham) as soon as sufficient funds from any private source be obtained". The next year the plans submitted for the rebuilding were approved and the Churchwardens were authorised to apply for a Faculty for demolition and rebuilding.

The Vestry were concerned with the Parish valuation List and in 1882 agreed that the rateable value of property in the parish should be reduced by 15%. In 1885 the Churchwardens' accounts showed a deficiency of £3. 10. 9½d.

The Jubilee did not pass unnoticed for in 1887 new bell ropes were ordered and the celebration of the Queen's Jubilee was to be "Noticed" - this to consist of a Service of Thanksgiving, a dinner for the men and tea for the women and children.

In 1893 we learn from the Parochial Register that £26 was spent on Suspended Lamps, Altar candlesticks, coconut matting and carpeting, and £11. 4s. on cassocks, surplices and hymn books. In 1894 the Vestry recorded their opposition to the Waterworks scheme and in the last year of the 19th century the cost of heating and cleaning is of interest:- oil for lighting 7/-; wood for firing 2/9d.; coke for firing 12/-; washing surplices 7/6d.; Verger's salary £1. 10.; cleaning £1. 10.; while the Church Offertories amounted to £3. 15. 4d. The same year the first reference to a Bellringer appears. In 1905 the organist, mentioned for the first time, asked for a "rise", but the Vestry reaction was short and to the point; "refused, not enough money". In 1909 the Church insurance was increased to £2,000 and insurance cover taken out for paid Church officials. Two years later the Tower needed further repair and the Vestry had £15 in the Savings Bank available to defray the cost. In 1912 they recorded their protest against the Welsh Disestablishment Bill.

The Restored Church of 1867.

Of the old Nave and Chancel nothing now appears to remain. The Victorian Gothic restoration, in red and light sandstone, was total. The tower, with stair in the S.E. corner was left untouched, apart from a door being put on the south side, where, according to S. R. Glynne's account there had been an ogee-shaped recess. A window was put at ground level at the west end, the buttresses were renewed and other repairs undertaken which were referred to in the accounts of Mr. Spring, builder.

In the Chancel and Nave floors are flat tomb stones dated 1685 and 1681. There is a large memorial of an unusual kind to an infant, Charles F. Ashworth of Bolton, Lancs. A female figure is carved in alabaster, standing on a jutting rock. The head is surrounded by angel heads, and beneath the rock is a wheel bell.

In 1898 there were "extensive repairs to the Chancel" amounting to £9. 18. 6d., the cost of which was borne by the Impropiator. The following year the burial ground wall was again repaired at a cost of £6. 15. 2d. In 1912 the Spire received further restoration and the bells were renovated. At the same time a Faculty was sought to place in the Church Priest and Choir Stalls, an organ (instead of a harmonium), new heating apparatus and a fourth bell. Of these the organ and the bell are still awaited. In 1914 the Rural Dean reported that the Church was kept locked "on account of suffragettes" - rather a far cry from the railings of Whitehall. By the next Visitation in 1917 two standard candlesticks had been presented by the Duke of Newcastle, and the War Calvary in the Churchyard was dedicated. At the same time the Rural Dean referred to the window in the coal hole under the Vestry as "the only part of the former Church now left". It is possible that this is an old window, thrown out at the rebuilding and subsequently used to illuminate the cellar and form a chute for the coke.

Of the Church bells not much is known. In 1719 a fourth bell was nearly added. The Chapel at Kilcot being ruinous and unused one of the Oxenhall Churchwardens took steps to buy the bell which was in good condition. He was accompanied by a bellfounder to assess the value. The latter, seeing that the metal alone was worth more than the price asked, and pretending to sound the bell, took a hammer and smashed it, and kept the metal for himself. Of the three bells, only two are inscribed. The first is "In Honore Sancti Nicholai" the second is blank, and the third has the letters MDCV RI RHVG RI.

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