



RELIGION AND EDUCATION

AN ABBPAST PUBLICATION



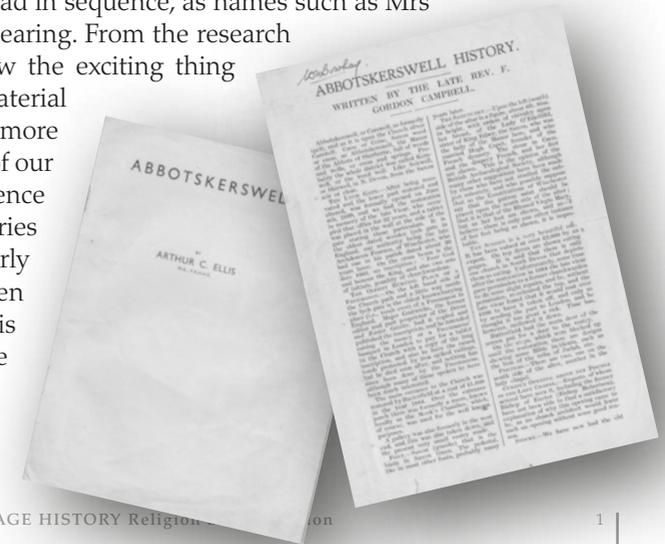


Introduction

The *Abbotskerswell Village History Series*, is now well under way, with this being the third in the series; if you have missed the first two ask in the shop as they should still have copies. We now move on to the story of the hugely significant village institutions of churches, chapels and schools.

The Abbotskerswell of 2016 is a very different place from the nineteenth century village that features in this edition, when the various religious institutions held great importance in most people's lives; the fact that a village of under 500 people had five separate religious groups represented here was remarkable. Of course many people rarely left the village and had simple views on life, they were poorly educated and many would have been illiterate. Our village's story continues with the changes brought about by compulsory education and children no longer leaving school aged ten to go to work.

In writing each booklet we have tried to make each one readable on its own, whilst trying not to end up repeating ourselves. They probably make more sense read in sequence, as names such as Mrs Hare do keep reappearing. From the research team's point of view the exciting thing is the wealth of material that has emerged as more people have learnt of our project. The emergence of village histories going back nearly a century has been fascinating, in this edition we feature two more of them.



Chapter 1

A Religious Heritage

These are two church histories, with our village's vicar Rev. Campbell's dating from the 1920s and Arthur Ellis' being written in the 1930s. Arthur Ellis was a local historian from Torquay who also wrote a history of Cockington Church, we wonder why he wrote one of our Church?

There are the usual thanks to the HLF for the funding, Chris at Central @ Model Stores for stocking the series and Kim at Kingfisher Print. The research team took on a slightly different form this time with Felicity and her young AbbPast members at the School completing the research for the Education chapter and Nick researching The Priory chapter. Once again Trish has had to sort out my English.

We have also added a revised copy of the AbbPast Diamond Jubilee Village Trail, devised in 2012. We hope that after studying the booklets you will wander around the trail with renewed interest.

Peter Wade

www.abbpast.co.uk

Living in the 21st century it is quite difficult for many people to appreciate just how important religion really was in a village community. For 2000 years religious belief dictated most of what people did and when they did it. The Church, whether it was Roman Catholic or Protestant, had views and laws that would have controlled the lives of the people of Abbotskerswell. This was particularly true in our village of Carsuella because it was owned by the Church, having been endowed to the small Dorset Abbey of Horton by Ethelhilda in the late 900s. The vicar would have been one of the few people who could read in the village, so he read the Bible (in Latin!) and described the consequences of not abiding by Church law i.e. going to Hell. This meant working on the church land, giving a tenth (the Tithes) of your crops to the Church and going to church a number of times on Sunday. The arrival of a travelling friar was a welcome event, as they were rather more in touch with the real world than the monks from the Abbey, they also told Bible stories in a way that was rather more entertaining than the sermons the villagers usually heard.

However, by the 14th century things were changing; the Black Death created major labour shortages and gave men more freedom, and the village had been taken over by the Abbey at Sherborne. More dramatic still was the Reformation, when Roman Catholic Christianity was replaced by a Protestant version, with English used instead of Latin. On the one hand it must have meant the parishioners could understand what was being said, but at the same time the stories were full of frightening images of Hell for those who did not conform. In a world where death was common-place and life expectancy low, villagers liked the reassurance of the familiar and found the changes difficult.

One example of this is the story that the statue of St Mary in the Chancel window arch was covered up to avoid its destruction during the Reformation,



Chapter 2

The Abbotskerswell Vicars

and was then forgotten until it re-emerged in the 19th century restoration of the church. An alternative view of the statue is that it represents Lady Ethelhilda who gave the village to the Abbots of Horton, a view supported by Rev. F Gordon Campbell. One consequence of the Reformation, and the later Puritan period following the Civil War, was that the church lost all its elaborate decoration so typical of Roman Catholic buildings; art work on the walls telling the story of Heaven and Hell was whitewashed over, with statues and monuments destroyed. In reality, in a poor village such as Abbotskerswell, the Church would probably have been quite plain anyway. Another change from the 17th century onwards was the rise of nonconformist religions. Born out of the Puritan movement these groups were persecuted at first, but after later toleration of protestant religions they were allowed to worship freely in their own buildings; it ought to be noted that Roman Catholicism was illegal at this time. Chapter 4 describes the arrival of these nonconformist religions in Abbotskerswell.

By the 19th century the power of the Church in legal matters was greatly reduced, the Tithe began to disappear and vicars became more pastoral in their work. Religion also had a major impact on education as well, with most villagers being illiterate until the later part of the 19th century. The Church had a need for educated men to read the Bible to its parishioners, and monasteries were a major centre of learning; it is likely that some Abbotskerswell boys would have gone to the Abbeys of Horton and Sherborne to be educated. However, as industrial change began, it became clear that the country needed a literate work force and it was the Church that began the first village schools. This often led to disputes between the Church of England and the other protestant churches who set up opposing schools in an attempt to encourage participation in their church. This will be explored in Chapter 7 although there is no evidence of disputes, the village was just too small for that.

The 1870 Education Act, despite taking church schools into a state system, still had to accept the power of religion in its statutes; the compulsory



religious assembly in schools today, although often impractical and ignored, is a lasting reminder of this. The village Vicar often visited the local school to provide religious guidance and he was usually a school manager, as shown by Rev. Campbell's signature in the Punishment Book.

The village Vicar or Rector was a hugely important and influential figure in the village for hundreds of years; he was educated when most people could not read or write. He baptised, married and buried the villagers, and explained the complicated theology contained within the Bible, re-telling the stories to guide his flock in their daily lives. His word was totally accepted by rich and poor, especially in a village owned by an Abbey. We know a certain amount about these predominately male incumbents, (until 1994 women could not be ordained as priests in the Church of England.) In the earliest days they were Roman Catholic and later belonged to the Church of England. As Chapters 4 & 5 show there were other religious groups in the village, but they rarely had a religious leader based here.

The Vicars of Abbotskerswell

From the Saxon period until 1320 the Abbots of Horton and Sherborne were described as 'The Rector', although it is likely that they sent those of lower rank to work in the village. The first recorded vicar was Thomas Tankarde; *Table 1* lists the known information on the 44 Incumbents of Abbotskerswell parish. Little is known about many of them, even the spelling of their names is uncertain, although there are some interesting stories along the way.

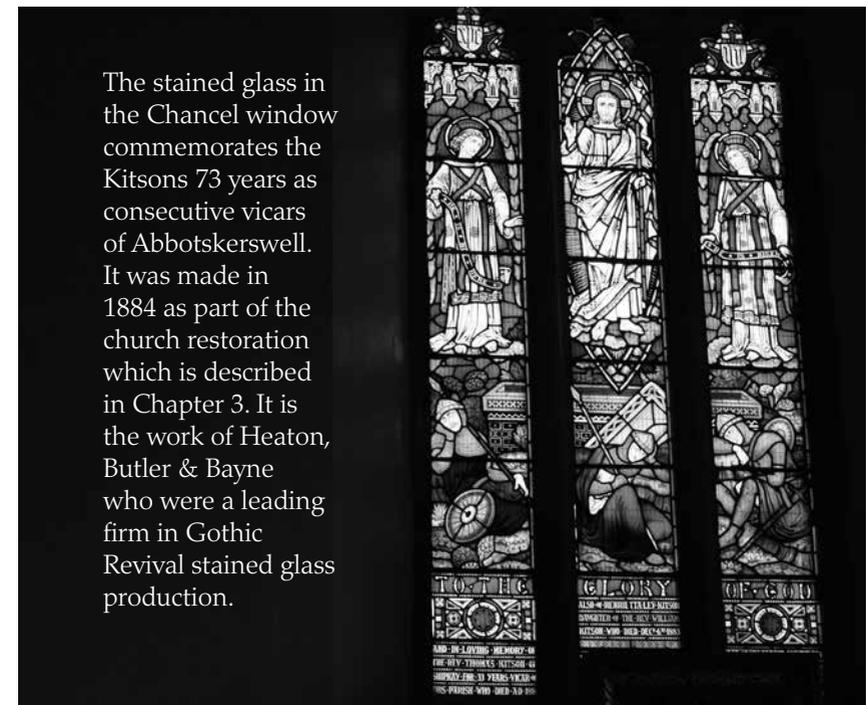
Robert de Fichacre was the first of a number of vicars to complain about the condition of his vicarage, claiming it was in ruins. It seems likely that John Huchon was a victim of the bubonic plague outbreak of 1349, known as the Black Death as he had to visit the houses of the dying to give the Last Rites; it is possible that his successor, William de Bokbourne succumbed to the lesser known outbreak of 1361. The politics of religion would also have had an influence on village life; Henry VIII's declaration of a Protestant Church of England in 1534 may explain the uncertainty in the dates of John Polham and John Potykns, who was the last vicar appointed by the Abbot of Sherborne. The re-introduction of Roman Catholicism by Mary in 1554 may

Dates	Name	Reason for Leaving	Dates	Name	Reason for Leaving
1320-1321	Thomas Tankarde	Died	1658-1691	Lewis Sharpe	Resigned
1321-1347	Robert de Fichacre	Died	1691-1740	John Bartne	Resigned
1347-1349	John Huchon	Died	1740-1773	Francis Milman	Resigned
1349-1361	William de Bokbourne	Died	1774-1807	Thomas Kitson	Resigned
1361-1366	Adam de Cicely	Unknown	1807-1847	William Kitson	Died
1366-1367	Maurice Bergevenny	Unknown	1847-1851	George Cosserat	Resigned
1353 - ?	William Cok	Unknown	1851-1863	George Fisher	Died
? -1374	John Attewill	Resigned	1864-1865	James Cholmeley	Resigned
1374-1380	John Coke	Resigned	1865-1898	Vesey Hine	Died
1380- ?	John Yendebroke	Unknown	1898-1931	F Gordon Campbell	Died
1426	William Blemmynge	Unknown	1931-1933	Charles Faulkner-Chorley	Resigned
1427	John Mayne	Unknown	1933-1944	Gilbert Bassett-Pike	Resigned
? -1487	John Pycote	Died	1944-1949	Arthur Harries	Died
1487-1512	Richard Balcul	Died	1949-1960	Harold Ainscow	Resigned
1512- ?	John Polham	Unknown	1960-1970	Gordon Langford	Resigned
? -1541	John Potykns	Died	1970-1983	Leonard Greensides	Resigned
1541-1544	Richard Lawes	Deprived	1983-1990	Peter Fairbrother	Resigned
1554-1568	Thomas David	Died	1990-1995	David Stanton	Resigned
1568-1591	William Bearde	Died	1995-1999	Jeremy Ive	Resigned
1591-1610	Edward Beidall	Died	1999-2006	Priscilla White	Resigned
1610-1636	John Haycrafte	Died	2006-2015	Gill Still	Resigned
1636-1658	John Bearnas	Died			

Table 1

explain the change in that year, with Richard Lawes described as ‘Deprived of his living’. John Bartne (or was it Brayne) arrived in 1691 and would be the longest serving vicar, staying for 49 years. John Barnes and Lewis Sharpe must have had a difficult period during Cromwell’s Commonwealth, although the geography of Abbotskerswell may have protected them.

The 18th century practice where a person was vicar of more than one parish, the incumbent being known as a ‘pluralist’, seems to be shown in Abbotskerswell with Francis Milman, who was also Rector of Ogwell and Thomas Kitson, also Vicar of Torre. Thomas’ son, William, went one better, as he was Vicar of both Torre and Northlew; he was asked to explain this by the Bishop of Exeter. His explanation was that at Northlew he paid a curate £60 a year to serve the parish, this was accepted as satisfactory. He didn’t live in Abbotskerswell, he lived 4 miles away, but explained that on Sundays there were services with sermons, with Evensong at 3pm and a Sunday School at the village vicarage. It seemed that Communion was only held 4 times a year with around 60 communicants.

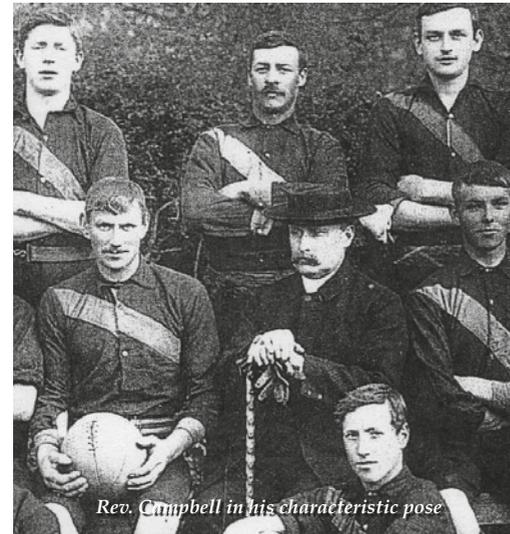


The stained glass in the Chancel window commemorates the Kitsons 73 years as consecutive vicars of Abbotskerswell. It was made in 1884 as part of the church restoration which is described in Chapter 3. It is the work of Heaton, Butler & Bayne who were a leading firm in Gothic Revival stained glass production.

During the 19th century it appears that most of the vicars had a difficult time with the Creeds, who were the leading village family at that time. Curate Lightfoot didn't help matters in 1852, when he refused to hold a baptism other than on a Sunday, and as a consequence the villager concerned went to the new Wesleyan Chapel instead. However, the worst incident involved George Fisher in 1853; he seemed to have fallen out with the villagers, and John and William Creed especially, on a number of issues. These included who should elect churchwardens, the Tithe Map, road and quarrying rights on Glebe land and Sunday School teaching. Matters came to a head in 1853 when on 24 February Rev. Fisher met William Creed in a lane, and after a heated exchange of words attacked him with a walking stick and then his fists; this caused a good deal of blood to be spilt by Mr Creed. William Creed took the matter to the courts and in summing up the judge said he: "... joined in the expression of regret that a clergyman should so far have forgotten his sacred calling"¹, he also noted that no apology had been given. Mr Creed was awarded the large sum of £300 in damages. Accounts of this assault featured in many regional newspapers and as a consequence it was noted in 1854 that: "the Rev. Mr Fisher is taking the Bath waters, and by permission of the Bishop of the diocese, will continue to do so for a couple of years."²

Whether he ever returned is unclear, but his temporary replacement, Rev. Gatty, continued to have problems on similar issues. Interestingly the next vicar, James Cholmeley, only stayed a year, and after only three years Vesey Hine agreed to a year-long exchange with Rev. David Gladstone, from Northamptonshire. When Rev. Gladstone left he was thanked profusely, having brought many villagers back to the church and was presented with a massive silver salver. Things evidently improved as Vesey Hine returned, and stayed for 29 years. On his death in 1898 parishioners, led by Mrs Palk of *Odle Hill House*, raised £16 to renovate the lych-gate in his memory where a plaque commemorates this honour.

Rev. F Gordon Campbell's 32 years in Abbotskerswell saw many events, especially the torrid years of World War 1, when he buried three servicemen and conducted many memorial services for those others who did not return. His relationship with Mrs Hare and then Rev. Dence from *Court Grange* must have been vital for both the church and the village, their generosity is often referred to in our story. The 20th century newspapers have provided a great deal of information on his stewardship of St Mary's, he was very active in many areas of village life. He was President of the Cricket Club, Football Club and Village Club; on the School Board, a Parish Councillor, Trustee of Church House, Chaplain of Sunshine Lodge and many other organisations.



Rev. Frank Gordon Campbell 1858-1930. Born in Monmouthshire, educated at Hatfield Hall in Durham, ordained 1888 at Ely. He had previously been a curate in Southsea, Topsham, Ellacombe and Exeter. He was married twice and had 4 children. He was appointed on 9th April 1898, his duties began on 19 June, when he 'Read himself in', and on 26 June he was Inducted into the living by Rural Dean, Rev. W M Birch.

In 1924 the MDA described the village Christmas Day Service being of the "usual bright character", which seemed typical of his services. When he died in 1930, aged 72, it noted:

The inhabitants of Abbotskerswell on Saturday showed in a remarkable way their love and respect for the Rev. F. Gordon Campbell The blinds of the houses were drawn, and practically every adult parishioner was present at the funeral and there were many signs of a sense of real loss.³

At the funeral were 18 clergyman, eight family members and vicarage staff, 166 mourners were listed by name with the comment "and many others". Once again the village's appreciation was shown on his death, with a church memorial, suggested by Mrs Coulson of *The Bungalow*, the plaque just inside the door notes that the stained glass in the chancel's north window was created in his memory.



The inscription on the window reads:
I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD
To the Praise of GOD and in memory
of FRANK GORDON CAMPBELL,
Vicar of this Parish from
A.D. 1898 to 1930.

Next came Gilbert Bassett Pike, pictured with his wife, who set himself the task of restoring the interior of the church, which is described in Chapter 3. He resigned in 1944 to move on to Belstone in West Devon.



He was followed by Arthur Harries, who was the Headmaster of Tadcaster Grammar School and acted as vicar to local churches there as well. He resigned his position at the school to come to Abbotskerswell, but died in 1949, being succeeded by Harold Ainscow.



This timeless scene of the choir outside Church House was featured in *AbbTalk*⁴ and shows Rev. Ainscow, not long after his arrival in the village. He had an interesting background having been an officer in the Lancashire Fusiliers in WW1, when he was wounded three times, and spent over two years as a prisoner of war. He was also a chaplain to the forces in WW2. He was ordained in 1920, and came to Abbotskerswell from Bourton in Berkshire. By the 1950s the days of long incumbency, usually until their death, had come to end, with Rev. Ainscow staying until he retired in 1960, when Gordon Langford replaced him.

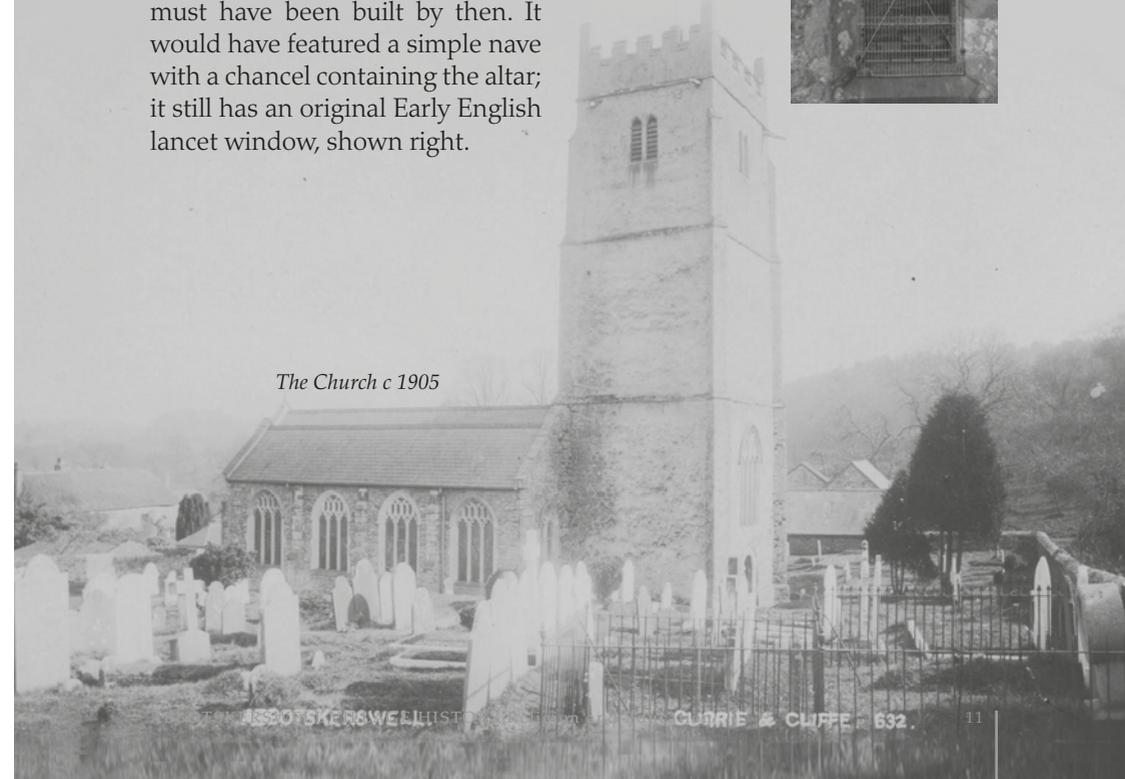


Following the ordination of women priests in 1994, Priscilla White, shown above, became Abbotskerswell's first female Vicar in 1999. She was followed in 2006 by Rev. Gill Still who would be the last Abbotskerswell incumbent. From 2015 Rev. John Leonard is the joint vicar of 'The 3 Wells', Abbotskerswell, Kingskerswell and Coffinswell.

Chapter 3

The Church of St Mary the Virgin

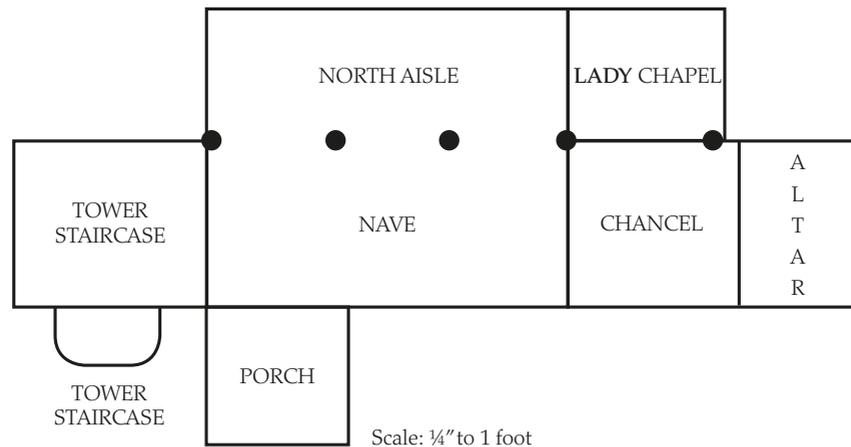
The first church in Abbotskerswell was probably a simple wooden one built by the Abbot of Horton after he was granted the land in the late 10th century. It is likely that it was built on the present site as, it was in the centre of the village, and churches tended to be developed in one place, rather than using a different site for a new building. A simple stone church was built following the takeover by Sherborne Abbey in the 12th century; a visitation in 1342 describes problems with the construction, meaning it must have been built by then. It would have featured a simple nave with a chancel containing the altar; it still has an original Early English lancet window, shown right.



The Church c 1905

In the late 15th and early 16th centuries the church was substantially rebuilt; the chancel was extended and the nave completely re-modelled, a north aisle and a tower were also added. This was the work of Sherborne Abbey, done before its Dissolution in 1539, and is largely in the Perpendicular style of architecture. This style developed as building techniques improved and allowed for thinner columns to hold the roof up, and larger windows with narrower mullions holding the glass in place. The church was renovated in the 19th century, this will be described later.

The Final Church Plan

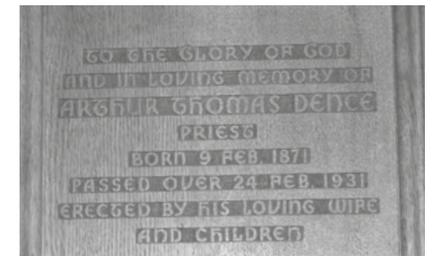


The Chancel

This is part of the original church, although largely restored, and measures 23 x 13.75 (measurements are internal and in feet); the Chancel contains the Sanctuary with its altar. As mentioned earlier, the simple lancet window in the north wall is the only feature of the original church in the Early English style, but containing modern stained glass. The east and the south windows are similar and of a Perpendicular style, with a priest's door in the south wall. Set into the south window is a life sized statue which was uncovered, and sadly damaged during the 1884 restoration. There appear to be two views as to who the statue represents, Ethelhilda or the Virgin Mary. Mary is the most the most likely, especially since the church is dedicated to her, but former vicar Rev. F Gordon Campbell argued for O'Edelhild, an alternative spelling of Ethelhilda, in his village history, basing his ideas on those from the British Archaeological Society:

Lady O'Edelhild, sister of King Edwy, the Saxon. Who was the Lady of the Manor here, and married Hugh Capet, founder of the French dynasty. The stone is Caen, and the drapery French, and her feet are shown Constitutions in Winchester say that ... it is that of the Blessed Virgin Mary but as her feet are shown, and as – I believe – there is only one other instance of her feet being so shown, it is improbable.¹

There is a 15th or 16th century wooden parclose screen (an extension from the rood screen) between the chancel and the Lady Chapel, which has also been a vestry and the priest's robing room. The altar rail was designed by William Butterfield in 1884 and sadly replaced a Jacobean one; the altar is also by Butterfield. The brass lectern on the altar was given by Leslie Johnson of *Court Grange* in 1923 when he left the village. The impressive reredos, the screen behind the altar, and shown below, was donated in 1932 in memory of Rev. Arthur Dence of *Court Grange*. Their stories are told in *2. Houses & Families*.



On the south wall is the memorial to Captain Marcus Hare who died when his ship, *HMS Eurydice*, sank in the Solent. The brass plaque was commissioned by his fellow officers from his time on *HMS Royal Oak*.

In 1919 his daughters gave a flag from *HMS Eurydice* to the church and for many years it hung by the memorial; sadly it seems to have been lost, perhaps because it rotted away. The flag and statue are shown clearly on this postcard c.1930.

The Chancel also contains choir stalls and the organ, which was installed in 1959. The brass chandelier is a memorial to Mrs Olive Fey, the long-time church organist and choir mistress.

The Nave

This is the main body of the church, which measures 30.6 x 15. On the north side are three granite pillars, of the clustered column style, with capitals connected to the arches by a horizontal leaf frieze, they replaced the north wall when the church was extended, each arch has a span of 10 feet. In the south wall are four windows, three in the Perpendicular Gothic arched style and one in the Tudor square style. Above the nave is a wagon, or barrel-roof, which has wooden spines with bosses at the joins, and is plastered between them. Another interesting feature on the south wall is the remains of the staircase to the rood loft, which was blocked off during the restoration. This would have given access to the top of the original rood screen which would have carried the Great Rood, which was a sculpted crucifix.

The rood screen separates the Nave from the Chancel; the word 'rood' is a Saxon one meaning a cross. The Abbotskerswell screen is of 15th century origin, built to a typical Devon design, featuring a moulded frieze showing grape vines running along the cornice on the top, with doves eating the grapes. Unfortunately it was renovated in the late 19th century by a churchwarden who took it upon himself to colour the vines.



This postcard shows the church not long after the restoration featuring the rood screen, the 1884 lectern and metal lamp holders made by village blacksmith Fred Prowse. The lamps were replaced in 1926 by electric lights paid for by J W Palk.



The Font is a plain octagonal granite one and has been described as Saxon, but it is more likely that it was made in the 14th or 15th century with a more modern base. The pulpit was new at the time of the church renovation, with the eagle lectern given by John Westbury Palk of *Odle Hill House* in memory of his mother, Alice, in 1908.



The Nave contains four stone memorials; the village war memorial, an individual WW1 monument to John Hayman, a plaque remembering Rev. F Gordon Campbell and one to the first members of the Creed family who lived in in the village.

The War Memorial was produced by W H Crossman of Newton Abbot in 1920 at a cost of £67 17s 6d and paid for by village collections; it features a sailor from *HMS Devonshire* and a soldier from the Devonshire Regiment. *Abbotskerswell During WW1* tells the full story The one death in World War 2 is recorded on a separate, but similar plaque, below the original.

The North Aisle

This was probably added to the rebuilt church in the early 16th century, and measures 10.5 x 30.6. The aisle was poorly constructed, with little to attach it to the Nave, and much of the work was badly completed. The stone used in the windows had been used before, and one stone contained the arms of Torre Abbey. The aisle has three windows on the north side, all Perpendicular in style but again heavily renovated, and a similar one on the west wall. There are two memorials, another to the Creed family and one to the Henleys of *Mallands House*; there is also a ledger stone (an inscribed stone slab) to a past vicar, John Bearnese, and a board which lists the incumbents

of the parish. The pews on its south side continue into the Nave; they were described as comparatively new in 1830, when the fashion was to dispose of the mediaeval high backed boxed seating with their carved bench ends.

The Lady Chapel

There is a small room, 12 x 10.6, which today is a Lady Chapel, but has probably been a vestry and a priests' robing room in its time. It contains one of the two piscinas in the church; these are shallow basins set in the wall used for washing the communion vessels. (The second piscina is in the Chancel.) It has two windows, one north and one east facing, the same type as those in the north aisle. There are two memorials, another to the Henleys and one to Marcus Hare, marking the renovation of the church in his honour.

The Tower

The tower is nowadays at floor level, in effect an extension of the Nave, as the old west gallery was taken down during the renovation; it measures 13 x 17. The bell ringing chamber, containing a peal of six bells, is accessed via a spiral staircase that is in an external stair-turret, with its entrance inside the tower; it is at the same height as the top of the Nave roof. An inventory in 1553 listed three bells: "iij belles yn ye towre".² Mrs Hare paid for the bells to be rehung in 1906, when the ringing chamber had become unsafe; this created a rumour that the tower could not stand the strain, which was rebuffed by Rev Hine's son, George, in one of his many letters to the press.

There was also a desire for three new bells to be added, but the cost of over £200 was prohibitive at the time. However, in 1925 the ringers' dream became a reality when Mrs Hare's daughter, Hilda, donated three new bells in memory of her mother, also placing a plaque to her memory in the lower part of the tower. The bells were dedicated by the Bishop of Exeter at a special service in February, with Mrs Fey's choir giving an excellent rendition of "I Will Magnify Thee O God".

In 1952 the tower was refurbished, with Hilda once again active, she probably wanted to finish what her mother had started, together with the churchwardens, in the fundraising campaign; this was shortly before Hilda's death. The tower was the only part of the church left unrestored in 1884. There is a small monument at the base of the tower to mark this event.



	Diameter	Weight	Note	Founder	Date cast
Bell No 1	27 inches	4.5 cwt	E	Mears & Stainbank	1924
Bell No 2	30 inches	6 cwt	D	Mears & Stainbank	1924
Bell No 3	31 inches	6.5 cwt	D flat	Mears & Stainbank	1924
Bell No 4	32 inches	7 cwt	C	Mears & Stainbank	1664/1924
Bell No 5	35 inches	8.5 cwt	B	Pennington	1705
Bell No 6	38 inches	10 cwt	A	Pennington	1637

Table 2 The Church Bells

Originally there were three bells: No.4 which was cast by John Pennington of Exeter in 1664; No.5 was by Thomas Pennington III of Exeter in 1705; and No.6 was by Thomas Pennington II in 1637. The 1924 additions were added by Mears & Stainbank of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, London. During the installation No.4, the original treble bell was damaged, and was recast at Whitechapel. The heaviest bells are housed in an oak frame, with the lighter three housed in a cast-iron frame. An unusual feature of the bells is that all six bells swing in the same (north/south) direction.



At the base of the tower are five ledger stones set in the floor, of which two are in memory of the Codner family. The tower also contains a clock with two faces, east and west. The clock mechanism and west face was installed in 1908, when the old clock, that only chimed the hour but had no face, broke down. This created a problem for parishioners knowing the correct time for services on a Sunday; the solution was for the Sexton to get the time from the railway station clock on Saturday, and to ring the church bells at ½ past and ¼ to the hour before the church service. However, a better solution emerged:

Mrs Marcus Hare, of Court Grange, Abbotskerswell, has with her accustomed generosity stepped into the breach and proposes very shortly to place a new clock in the church tower That a 'lady-bountiful willing to defray the entire cost of the clock would step forward was scarcely in our thoughts, but Mrs Marcus Hare's kind action, merely the continuance of a long series, will be much appreciated by the parishioners.³

On 31 December 1908 the new clock was dedicated by Mrs Hare, using silver scissors specially engraved for the occasion, when she cut a ribbon which activated the pendulum. The east face was added as a Millennium commemoration in 2000.

The Porch

This is on the south side of the nave and was re-constructed in the 19th century. During the 1884 renovation a room, called the Monk's Chamber, was removed from above the porch; its access was via a doorway and staircase beside the inside door, which can still be seen. Above the outside door are four features; two rose bosses, a quatrefoil (a decorative carving made up of four overlapping circles, or 'four leaves' in Latin) and a shield of the Courtenay family. Carved into the left side of the doorway is the intriguing inscription "The stone that the builders refused is become the headstone".

The Restoration of St Mary's in 1884

The restoration of the church has been referred to several times and its story needs to be told. In *2.Houses & Families* there is an account of the tragic death of Captain Marcus Hare in 1878 when his ship, *HMS Eurydice*, sank with huge loss of life. His wife Matilda had two young daughters and finding the right kind of memorial to him was obviously important to her; in 1881 she had chosen:

It is proposed to restore the Parish Church at Abbotskerswell, where, at Court Grange, the deceased officer resided for some time, and where his widow and orphan children live. The cost of the restoration is estimated at between £1,500 and £2,000.⁴

A committee to organise the restoration was formed, with Rev. Vesey Hine as Chairman, joined by churchwardens T Maddicott and W Vening, together with John Phillips from Aller, and R Hole. It was noted that Marcus Hare "took deep interest in this church, and if he had been spared it was his avowed intention to restore it".⁵ Although Mrs Hare was donating much of

the money for the restoration there was still a need for fundraising to fulfil the work. She led a committee of ladies who ran a bazaar in Newton Abbot to raise funds.

The architect chosen to oversee the work probably tells us something of Mrs Hare's position in society; this was William Butterfield of Adam Street, Strand, London. He designed a great many buildings, including nearly 100 churches; Keble College, Rugby School, All Saints Church at Babbacombe and Melbourne Cathedral are examples of his work. He was "one of the most influential exponents of the Victorian Gothic phase of British Architecture"⁶ and was awarded the Royal Gold Medal by the Royal Institute of Architects for his work in the revival of Gothic architecture.

Messers Luscombe and Son of Exeter won the £1400 contract for the restoration work in the Perpendicular Gothic style, which was intended to blend in with the existing building. Externally all the rough render was removed and the stonework repointed, with the builders making good the poor workmanship in the original building of the aisle. Most of the windows were heavily renovated, given new mullions and re-carved tracery; if you look at them you can see how most have sharp, well cut edges made by modern tools but there is one exception, which is on the south side next to the rood loft staircase. The small early English window in the chancel was revealed and opened up once again. As described earlier, the porch was considerably altered as well.

Inside the church there was much change, with all the whitewash removed to expose the stone pillars, the screens refurbished and new pews installed, with the floor beneath them wood boarded. Underneath the tower, the rather unsightly western gallery was removed to create more seating space. Many new fittings were added; Butterfield designed a new altar and railings made of Canadian walnut and oak, as were the new pulpit and choir stalls,



The monument to Captain Hare



The bookplate in the Hare Bible

and the Chancel was laid with Minton tiles. The windows had stained glass put in them, all designed by Butterfield. The new east window had glass designed in memory of the two Rev. Kitsons, former Abbotskerswell vicars; the other windows had cathedral glass in different tints made by F Drake of Exeter. The famous architectural writer Nikolaus Pevsner described Butterfield's work as "restored uneventfully".⁷

As shown on page 19, the church contains a number of memorials to the restoration, the main one being the marble plaque in the Lady Chapel remembering Captain Hare. Mrs Hare also presented a new Bible, which would have been for the new lectern, which was in turn replaced by the later Palk version.

From April 1884 church services had been held in the School Room, which had been licenced for the time of the work, but at last on 16 October 1884 the church was reopened with special, and harvest thanksgiving services. It was a major day in the village, with the services being led by Rev. Hine; there were readings from two other vicars and a sermon given by Bishop Earle. The morning service was followed by a walk in the grounds of Court Grange, it was a great opportunity for villagers to see what was quite a new house then. This was followed by a luncheon, provided by the parishioners in the barns of Abbotsford, with 150 villagers served by the wives and daughters of important villagers. The description of the event is quite splendid:

Not only were the arrangements most complete, but the vivands were truly of a *recherché* description, thus showing in seconding the noble efforts of Mrs Marcus Hare, a lady most highly esteemed, the parishioners, who had so kindly assisted in other respects in the day's interesting proceedings, had neither spared time nor expense in order to ensure visitors generally a truly hearty welcome.⁸

After lunch there were loyal toasts and responses; Rev. Way, on behalf of Mrs Hare, believed she had been:

Actuated with a desire to promote the moral and spiritual welfare of the parishioners and if her generous gifts and her labours, which had been to her a work of love, achieved the object she sought, it would be a source to her of the greatest gratification.⁹

This brought great applause. In the afternoon there was a tea which 400 villagers attended, with church services held in the evening with crowded congregations. The collections at these services, together with donations, raised £18, which nearly paid off the last of the £1400 costs of the renovation.

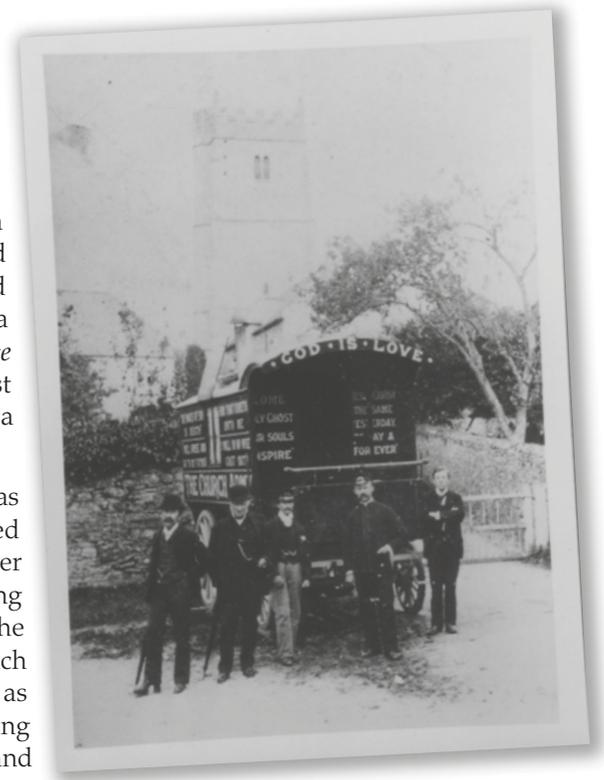
Life at St Mary's Church

Events in the village were regularly reported in the local papers, and a number of them have been described in other places, but some interesting events did happen to enliven a quiet village. One was the arrival of the Church Army and their travelling 'soldiers'; they were formed in 1882 by the Church of England, based on the Salvation Army, to be evangelical workers against poverty. In October 1898 a Church Army caravan, shown in the picture in front of the church, arrived for a fortnight's stay. They held various meetings, often in the Coffee House in Church House, giving talks on their work, a magic lantern show called "The Torn Bible", addressing the Sunday School teachers and the children in the Board School.

Mrs Hare was a supporter of the Church Army's work and raised funds for them; she held a garden party with the Honorary Evangelistic Secretary present before the visit. There was drama when they left, as the caravan had become stuck in mud and in trying to lever it out, a gardener from *Court Grange* was hit in the head, and lost a great deal of blood before a doctor arrived.

The Sunday School was enthusiastically supported by the Hares, with mother and daughters all being teachers at various times. The beginning of January each year was an exciting time, as it was the annual prize-giving and Mrs Hare put on a tea and gave prizes:

About 150 sat down to a tea of currant, seed, and cocoa-nut cake, jam and buttered cake, and bread and butter, the whole of which the children did good justice to.¹⁰



Prizes were given to 16 children who had full attendance all year, as well as class prizes of prayer books, and Bibles, with dolls and toys for the younger children. Rev. F Gordon Campbell described a session at Sunday School as a Collect, or a verse or two of a hymn, or a short Bible lesson. Parents were encouraged as well, with Mrs Hare's mother's meeting, her married women's class and Miss Hare's Bible class being invited to tea and entertainment which was a display of living pictures. They were encouraged to help "by training their children to be reverent and attentive to their teachers".¹¹

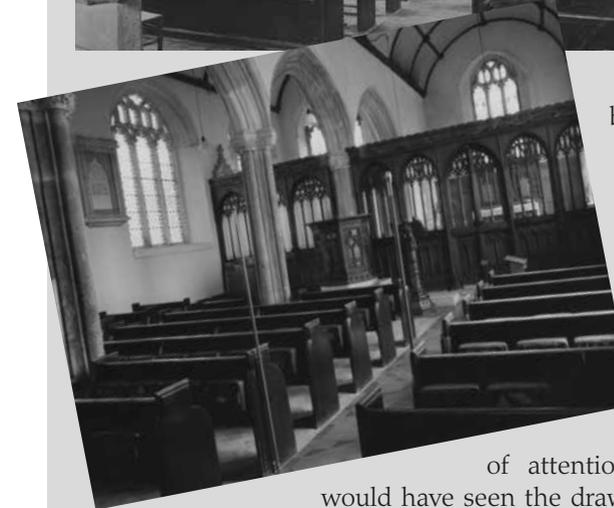
This annual event was a great occasion throughout Mrs Hare's life and was enthusiastically reported every year with descriptions such as Miss Ethel and Miss Hilda' classes being 'trained to perfection' in action songs and recitations, dialogues, song and fan drills. After 1918 Guy Henley and his wife kept up the tradition for many years.



A Church Magazine from 1923

The WW1 years were traumatic for the village, with the church constantly being in use for the usual weddings and christenings, but also for the burials and the memorial services for the 18 men who died. They must have felt closer to the war when, in November 1917, blinds had to be fitted in the church to allow them to have evening services; this was because of the threat of Zeppelin air raids. For many years after the war, on 22 October, women decorated the war memorial with white chrysanthemums for the anniversary of the death of Alfred Rowe who had died aged 18.

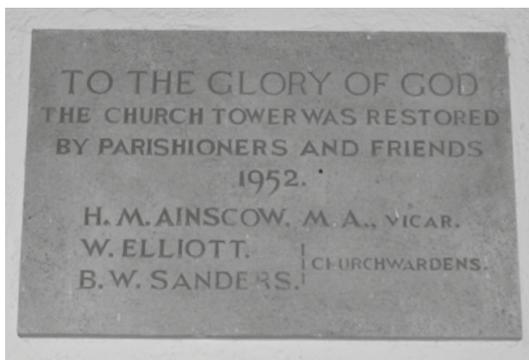
The 1938 Annual Church Fete at The Vicarage, in aid of the Church Restoration Fund, was a splendid affair. There were teas, flower and plant sales, beans in a bottle, name the doll, needlework stalls and many more. The competitions for darts, skee ball, hoopla, bowling for a pig, and table skittles were popular. The blind children from Court Grange, who sang a great many songs, and the children's fancy dress were a great success, with Tony Bowhay winning the infant boys' section as a balloon boy. The 1952 Fete finished the fund raising for the tower restoration, which was completed at the cost of £590. In 1953 the Bishop of Plymouth dedicated the tablet, shown on page 24, to commemorate the work, commenting: "You are to be congratulated and on behalf of the whole diocese I wish to thank you."¹⁴



At the Church Fete in 1935 Rev. Bassett Pike made this impassioned plea to: "restore some of the beauties of the Church which had been lost during the passing of the centuries ... During recent years there had been a real desire to restore the beauty that had been lost."¹²

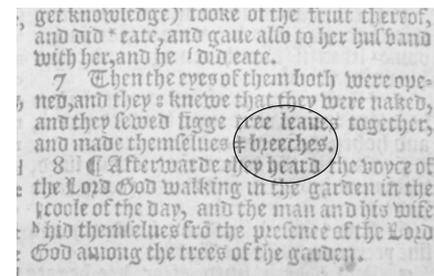
It is not clear whether this was a criticism of the Hare restoration but he did name the rood screen as being in need of attention: "The parishioners would have seen the drawings of the screen as it was once, and they were hoping to be able to restore it to its original condition."¹³

By 1936 £84 had been spent on internal improvements but it was the screen, described as 'mutilated 400 years ago' that was the main focus. A garden sale at the Vicarage was opened by Dame Violet Wills from the wealthy Bristol tobacco family (and sister of Ella Rowcroft who gave the house that became the hospice), who donated £100. The restoration eventually happened in 1951 when Miss Pidwell and the Guild of Craftsmen from Plymouth completed the work. The work involved replacing some rotten wood and re-fixing the doors, which as the top picture shows were not in place, having been removed by Butterfield in 1884.



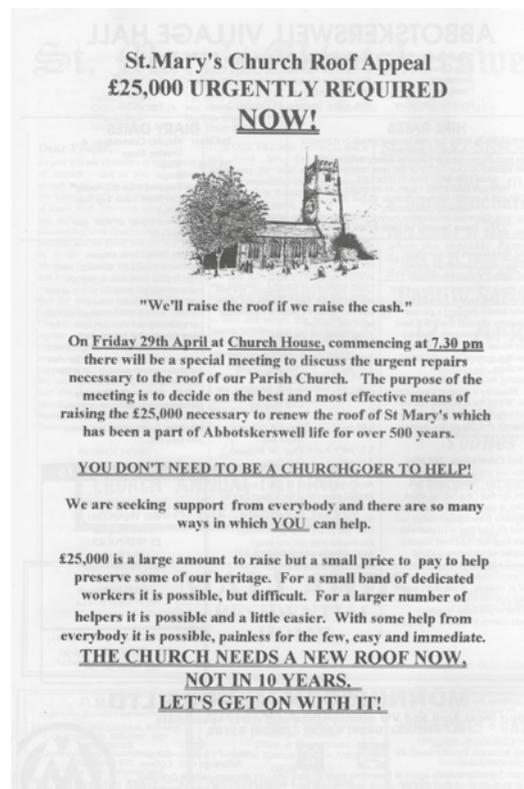
Over the years the church has witnessed many events and always popular are the Flower Festivals, as the 1950s and 1989 photographs show. The 2006 Festival was particularly impressive with 26 individual displays.

In 1971 the church received a number of bequests in the Will of Elspeth Carr of Kingsbridge; she was one of the last direct descendants of the Creed family. Her mother, Susan, was sister to William and John Creed who had lived at The Manor House and Whiddon House in the late 19th century. Susan lived at Twerton, married to the wealthy Thomas Carr; they had four children, none of whom married, and Elspeth was the last. In her Will she remembered her ancestors by leaving their home church the family Breeches Bible, which had been in the family since at least 1640 and her prayer book. She also left £10 for a case to be made to hold the Bible, this is just inside the door but now contains Mrs Hare's Bible as the Breeches Bible is in Newton Abbot Museum. The museum also keeps the valuable church silver, a Communion chalice from 1692, a three piece communion set dated at 1768, a tazza bowl from 1768, and the 1767 lava bowl.



The Breeches Bible is so called because of the use of the word 'breeches' in Genesis Chap 3 v7, shown above. The later King James Bible replaced breeches with the word apron.

There were also financial bequests to the church, with one for churchyard maintenance, in the hope of ensuring that the Creed burial enclosure was maintained.



In April 1994 a major fundraising campaign was launched to repair the church roof, featuring this message. Many village groups helped in the cause. John Somers Cocks wrote two booklets to help raise money for the appeal, his history of the village in 1995 and his Church description of 1989. By December the funds had been raised.

St Mary's Church is now the sole active survivor of the village's religious heritage and continues to play an important part in village life. However, dwindling congregations and high costs to maintain an old building present ongoing problems.

Chapter 4

Nonconformism in Abbotskerswell

After the Reformation and the break with the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England became the 'established' church; however there were many people who felt it had not gone far enough in its doctrines and practices, and they formed groups who did not 'conform' to the new Church, hence they were called 'Nonconformists'. They were usually Puritan groups who wanted a plainer and more devout church. As a consequence these groups suffered persecution that could involve prison, fines and confiscation of land. King James II's Toleration Act in 1689 allowed nonconformists to come out of hiding and worship freely. There would be many different groups to emerge in the next century, and at least three of these have had a presence in Abbotskerswell.

The Quakers

On Wilton Way is a rather unusual relic of the village's religious past, a walled Quaker burial ground, thankfully recently renovated by the Parish Council. The Quakers were the first example of a nonconformist religious group in Abbotskerswell and the cemetery is still owned by the Tuckett family who were Abbotskerswell Quakers in the 18th century.



The Quakers, more correctly known as the Religious Society of Friends, were formed by George Fox around 1650. History has it that they became known as Quakers because he told a magistrate trying to prosecute him to 'tremble at the word of the Lord'; at the

time the name 'Quaker' was a way of ridiculing Fox but it became widely accepted. They met in members' houses, and in Abbotskerswell this was at *Court Farm* which was owned by the Tuckett family. We are fortunate that a family descendant, Hubert Fox, described their lives in an early *AbbTalk*. In 1678 Elias Tuckett of Christow who was 81 years old, blind and almost deaf, was committed to the sheriff's ward at Exeter, and was held as a prisoner for 10 weeks on the orders of John Davis, a Justice of the Peace and Impropiator for Tithes. Elias died in Christow, but his son James moved to Abbotskerswell, living at the 'manor'; which we know as *Court Farm*.

Following the Toleration Act, Quakers were allowed to worship behind locked doors, but they had to pay tithes to the Church of England, risking imprisonment if they refused; James was imprisoned for this reason in 1732. James modernised the *Court Farm* and the porch carries his plaque over the doorway stating "THIS HOUSE WAS REBUILT BY JAMES TUCKETT THE ELDER ANNO DOMI 1721". Legend has it that any Quaker can visit the house, and if requested, must be given a bed for the night in the room above the porch; this maybe rather a tricky as it is now a kitchen! Around this time the Tucketts established the Quakers' burial ground and James and his son Elias are probably buried there, with other Quaker members from the families of Collings, Prince and Hancock. Mary Tuckett, Elias' wife was the last of the family to be buried there on 26th April 1771, as her son, James, left the village to live in Looe.

The Baptist Chapel

In 1609 John Smyth created the earliest church labelled 'Baptist' in Amsterdam, having fled there to avoid persecution. His interpretation of the New Testament was that baptism should only be for believing adults, he rejected the Catholic doctrine of baptism of infants and the idea they would go to hell if not baptised. In those days children were baptised immediately after birth, as many died soon afterwards. It was in 1612 that Smyth's friend Thomas Helwys established the Baptist congregation in England, with 'baptism by immersion' as a key doctrine.



In 1821 Rev. William Kitson noted that in Abbotskerswell “there are no Papists [Roman Catholics] but Methodists of every denomination”¹; in fact it appeared that two houses were licensed for nonconformist services. Although it is not known which these houses were, in 1838 a Baptist Chapel was created in what today is *Court Cottage*, shown on page 27.

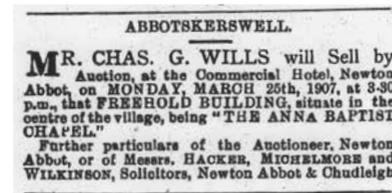


The house was given by Mr Richard W Ford in 1838, and is shown on the 1839 Tithe Map, which refers to number 276 as the Baptist Congregation Chapel, owned by the Baptist Trustees. It seems likely that Richard was the father of George Ford who was the large landowning farmer at Abbotsford in 1839. The chapel was variously described: in 1850 as “a cottage [which] has been converted into a Baptist Chapel”² and as “a small structure, erected upwards of 25 years, by subscription, the site given by Mr Richard Ford, and will seat about 80 persons.”³ The chapel had a 15 foot frontage and measured 26’ 6” x 13’ 8” by 16’ high with a staircase to the gallery. There was a chimney on the west wall and it had pews and railings in the gallery. The gallery

was obviously decorated with biblical writings as some still remain and were revealed by the present owners; as shown on the left. Villager Mrs E Low also told the story that when the Chapel was being altered in the 1930s its ‘Ten Commandments’ tablets were taken to a Chapel in Torquay but there does not seem to be any record of this, or that the tablets still exist.

There are very few references to the chapel, but it was noted in 1894 that services would be held at 3pm in the winter months and that the special subject for 23 December service would be “The Birth of Jesus”, using hymns from the “revivalist” American Moody and Sankey’s Hymn Book, with songs such as “Washed in the blood of the Lamb”. Their use of the harmonium was very popular with congregations at this time. It was also noted in the 1902 Kelly Directory that “Here are Baptist and Wesleyan Chapels”; whereas there are detailed descriptions of events in the Wesleyan Chapel in the East South Devon Advertiser’s ‘Abbotskerswell’ section, there are few references to Baptist events. This makes it hard to know how popular the Chapel was and exactly when it closed down. When the chapel was sold it was listed

as “...known as the ‘Anna Baptist Chapel’”.⁴ This was a miss spelling of *Anabaptist*, who were a group within the Baptist community who demanded that a child who had been baptised had to be re-baptised when an adult, this was to make them responsible for their own faith. However, it was also used unwittingly by those who were not aware of Baptist doctrines, so it could be a naïve use of the term by the auctioneers.



On 25 March 1907 the freehold site was offered for sale by auctioneers Charles G Wills, at the Commercial Hotel in Newton Abbot; they noted that it was “...eminently adapted for reconversion into a cottage”.⁵ The ESDN described the sale of the Chapel,

noting that it was complete with pews and railings, so it seems likely that it had closed not long before.

The bidding began with village baker Tom Cann offering £10; it continued up to £40, when he dropped out, and solicitor Harold Michelmores purchased the Chapel for £41 for his client Mr Francis Garland. Francis Garland was a retired coach painter from Newton Abbot; however he had married an Abbotskerswell girl, Mary Pack, and they had lived in *Town Cottages* prior to moving into Newton Abbot.

The chapel was converted into a four roomed dwelling and named *Venton*; in AbbTalk No72 John Somers Cocks reports that a Mr Palmer, a retired farmer from Dunstone near Widecombe-in-the-Moor, purchased the Chapel and named it *Venton* after his old farm. His source was Mrs Low but it should be noted that no evidence has been found to support this. By 1911 John and Blanche Lee from Ipplepen were living there. *Venton* was renamed as *Court Cottage* when it was owned by Mr James Norris in the 1950s; his wife, Amy, was a sister of Melva Purkis who owned *Court Farm* which seems to have influenced the choice of name. The house has since been extended but is still an attractive stone built cottage.

The Wesleyan Chapel

In the early 18th century John Wesley, his brother Charles and George Winfield led a revival in the Church of England. They dedicated themselves to a life of study, prayer and charitable deeds, rather than the pleasure-seeking of so many clergymen of the time. They set a methodical routine to live by that gave their doctrines the nickname of ‘Methodism’. They tried to work within

the Church of England to create change; John was a brilliant preacher capable of reducing his audience to tears and trembling, which was rather a contrast to the usual easy-going clergymen. As a consequence he was not allowed to preach in C of E churches and therefore took to preaching outdoors, with the aim of spreading scriptural holiness throughout the country.

He had not wanted to form his own church, but found it was the only way to try to reach the new industrial workers in the towns, who were impressed with his promise of salvation and the mass singing of Charles' hymns, such as 'Hark, the Herald Angels Sing!'. The Methodist name was revived and by 1784 they had 356 chapels and were very prominent in Devon.

In Abbotskerswell a number of the important families were 'dissenters' in the early years of the 19th century; prominent amongst them were the Henleys and the Creeds. By 1850 the Creeds had established themselves as the leading village family, a story told in *2. Houses & Families*. The first William Creed in the village had all eight of his children baptised at the Salem Chapel, which originally stood at No 51 Wolborough Street in Newton Abbot; the site is now a pawnbrokers. This was described as having been founded in 1730 and "formerly said to be Presbyterian now Independent".⁶ However, by the 1840s they had become members of the village church, and acted as churchwardens, but it seems their dissenting ancestry was not lost as in 1850 William's son gave the land for a new Wesleyan chapel in Abbotskerswell.



The Chapel c.1930; note the advert on Fey & Elliott's shop below it.

The plot on Vicarage Road, part of the orchard next to 'Heathcot', was on the roadside and the small Chapel was built in 1852 in a typical plain Wesleyan style. It was 23 feet wide by 33.5 feet long, with a porch at the front.

Sadly nothing is left inside to show what it was like, although this brief description written in 1870 gives

an impression: "the interior is fitted with pews and open seats, and will accommodate about 100 persons."⁷ Perhaps the Chapel at Poundsgate, whose building is virtually the same, gives a real impression as its interior is original. Interestingly Poundsgate Chapel was built in 1833 on land given by Susan Arnell from Widcombe-in-the-Moor, who would become the second William Creed's wife.



The pews were usually set out in this style, with two aisles at the side; the one on the right was called the 'single aisle' and on the left the 'married aisle' because of the order a bride entered and exited the chapel. The high board at the back was to protect worshippers from draughts.



At the front was the pulpit, which was always in the centre as it represented the 'Centrality of God's Word'; it could hold three people as its main function was preaching. The wainscoting (wall boarding) to its left would have extended all the way round the chapel. A harmonium can be seen on the right.

Unlike the Baptist Chapel a great deal is known about the activity of the Wesleyans in the village, as it was regularly reported in the local press. By October 1852 their impact was being felt when a villager could not have his child baptised when he wanted in St Mary's Church because of the views of the Vicar and Curate, consequently:

... the Wesleyan Chapel was opened and the neophyte was baptized by the Wesleyan minister. So fast a friend is Curate Lightfoot to the Church, that he prefers driving his parishioners to the Wesleyan Chapel rather than abate one atom of his priestly assumption.⁸

This is an interesting piece because it both confirms when the Chapel was opened, and gives a good idea of some of the problems with the C of E at that time; notably that dogma seemed more important than the parishioners. What is clear is that the Wesleyan Chapel was soon a busy and popular place of worship as by 1897 we learn that "attendance was fair"⁹ and that at the Harvest Festival Service the "Rev. A Hoad of Moreton preached to a large congregation"¹⁰ which was followed by tea at *Court Farm* provided by

Mr & Mrs Widdecombe with over 50 people present. The Evening Meeting was also crowded, with Mrs Widdecombe playing the harmonium and the choir singing. There was no village minister for the Wesleyans, as they used a circuit system with a minister visiting to perform the services. In 1901 there was a Sunday School trip to Pitt House in Chudleigh, the home of the local MP, the Rt. Hon C Seale Hayne. In 1902 the Rev J Wakely, the Superintendent of the Circuit, presided at the Chapel's Anniversary of the Sunday School, followed by a public meeting which reported on an excellent year's work with good congregations.

The chapel was used for a wide range of activities, with visiting Wesleyan Choirs, Young Wesleyans missionary work, fund-raising and concerts. In 1906 the Salvation Army 'Self Denial Movement' members came and services were held around the village and the selections by their band were highly appreciated. The educational aspect was shown in an article in 1907 describing the work of the Chapel Sunday School, which had over 20 children attending each week. John Tretheway, whose father was a village coal dealer, and ran a shop at Prospect Place, was an active member, being a teacher and secretary. The Superintendent, Gerald Perry, was particularly keen to establish a library as the "winter evenings of the children would be brightened considerably by the reading of good books, and would improve the tone of the children generally"¹¹. He rather ominously added later "our hold on the children will be the more easily retained if we are in a position to place before them books which will back up the teaching they are receiving in the school"¹². The villagers responded positively and by November 1907 a library was opened with 150 volumes available.



Map 1

Each year there was a report of The Anniversary of the Chapel service. In 1921 70 people had tea in the grounds of the Chapel, circled in Map 1, provided by Mrs Hole who was the Steward.

Throughout the 1910s & 20s the MDA carried regular descriptions of services of song such as "For the Master's Sake" in 1913 and also concerts; in 1919 Edie (later Mrs Low) & May Coombe sang a duet at a concert, with Edie singing another duet and a solo at the 1925 Harvest Festival.

In 1925 the Sunday School outing was to Goodrington Sands, and in October there was a social occasion in aid of the Sunday School and Christmas tree fund. However, the last report in the MDA was featured in 1930 and it appears that the enthusiasm for Wesleyan worship was declining. In 1932 the Wesleyan Church joined the Methodist groups in the Methodist Union to form the current Methodist Church of Great Britain, but its days in Abbotskerswell were numbered. On 5 June 1937 the MDA's District News for the village reported:

CHURCH CLOSED. – Abbotskerswell Methodist Church, after half a century's existence, has been closed down owing to a very meagre Church membership and also to the fact that the building is badly in need of repair.

The Circuit Superintendent commented on the poor state of the roof, and that there was practically no congregation to take an interest in the chapel's welfare. The Home Missions Trustees were given permission to dispose of the building, and so after 85 years the Chapel ceased to function.



However, the building was not lost, as local builder Mark Rowe of *Hillborough*, on Nunnery Lane acquired it as his builder's yard, using it together with Chudleigh's Orchard behind the Co-op. He used it until the late 1970s, but after his death his son Jack let it to Michael Norrish, who later acquired it. In 1981 Michael set up a motor body repair shop, his 1985 AbbPast advert shown left, shows his services, which continue in 2016.

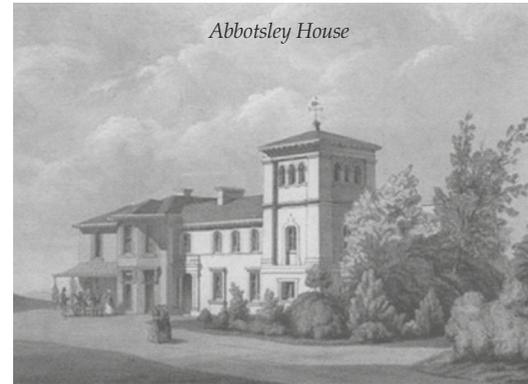


The old Chapel is now in a rather sad state, with its original porch demolished, a larger door and a window added. It is still used as a garage by Michael, although not very often; it is to be hoped that it is not lost to the village and its history, and that one day it can be returned to its original state.

Chapter 5

The Priory of St Augustine

The research for this chapter was completed by Nick Nicholson.



The fifth denomination to be represented in Abbotskerswell was Roman Catholicism, when the Priory was built in the late 19th century. The 'Nunnery', as it became known locally, was intended to house 50 nuns with their chaplains, and continued its existence until the last three nuns left in 1983. The nuns were from the Order of the Canonesses Regular of St Augustine of the Congregation of St John Lateran, which dates from the 12th century.

When the site was purchased in 1860 it contained a "very elegant Mansion of the Italian style of architecture"¹ complete with four ground floor rooms and a verandah, seven bedrooms, dressing and bathrooms, and servants' quarters; there were also barns, gardens and 36 acres of land. *Abbotsley House* (although usually spelt *Abbotsleigh*), had been built in the 1840s and was owned by Charles Braine who had worked in the Far East.

The Augustinian nuns had moved around Europe for 400 years, from England to Belgium during the Reformation, back to England during the Napoleonic Wars, before finally settling in Dorset. However, it was their desire for seclusion and to be a closed order that meant they bought *Abbotsleigh*, with the plan to build a Priory. Joseph Hansom, of Hansom Cab fame, was the architect, and drew up the plans for the Priory, which incorporated *Abbotsleigh*. In 1861 the Convent Wing, containing kitchens and accommodation, was completed and was blessed by Bishop Vaughan. The existing farm buildings were enhanced for the gardener, Thomas Flip, and his family.

The important Church was built in 1863, with the interior in an elaborate gothic style, including the fine altar, designed by Benjamin Buckland. The rest of the Priory was added in the following years, with the West Wing, Presbytery and Guest

House by 1876, and lastly the Chapter House and North Wing. One of the unusual features was the two tunnels that appear to have been built for a hasty escape, presumably built because of the Order's persecuted past. One ended near the main entrance and the other near the farmhouse. Farm workers' and gardeners' cottages were also built by the roadside.



One important feature was the burial ground, needed as they were Roman Catholics; there are 129 recorded burials of nuns, priests, and bishops, as well as secular families such as the Flips. The first burial was in 1862 and the last in 1982 with most marked with an iron cross and a few with a stone monument, such as the one on which is written "On your charity pray for the soul of the very reverend Seth Canon Agar who died August 23rd 1872".

Life in the Priory

Records suggest that there were usually around 40 nuns, with a Mother Superior, and several chaplains at the Priory for much of its lifetime. After WW2 the numbers began to fall and by 1972 there were only 12 and when the numbers dropped to four in 1983 it was decided to close the Priory.

For most of the time the Priory was a closed order, with the nuns having no access to the outside world or local people; however, on Sundays local Catholics could attend services in the church, but had to use a separate side door to a chapel off the altar. Their purpose was for the "Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament"², which meant seclusion.

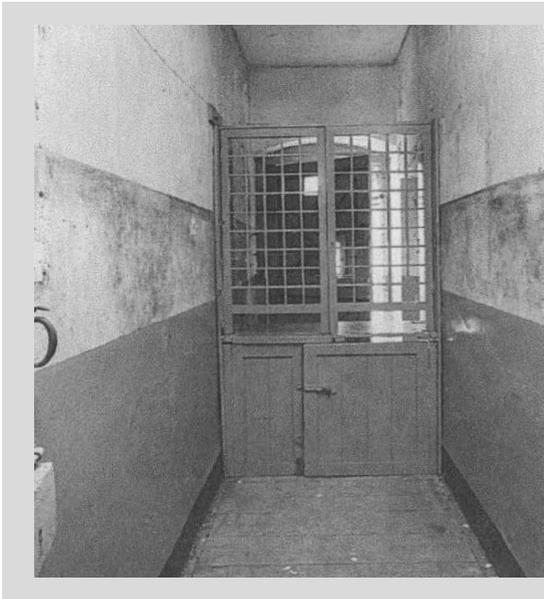


"These ladies, highly educated and refined, lead a most austere life. They assemble in the Church at midnight to recite the office of Matins and Lauds. They meet again at 6am for the Prime and Meditation; they assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and frequently do they receive the Holy Communion. Again they meet at 9am for the office of Tierce, and to assist at the second Mass; Sext and None follow. At 3 30pm they meet again for public prayers and Vespers. At 7 15pm they recite Compline, and assist at the service of Benediction."³

The local papers occasionally carried stories about the nuns, as in 1894, when they celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Order's return to England. The Rev. Father Gilbert Higgins of Newton Abbot was the Master of Ceremonies, with the Bishop of Plymouth at the throne for a service that included a sung Pontifical High Mass; over a dozen clergymen also attended a number of services during the day. In 1902 Sister Lucy, Martha Clarke, celebrated her jubilee of 50 years as a nun, and in a special service by the Chaplain Father Higgins, she received a crown of flowers and a staff trimmed with flowers. Also in 1902 was the solemn burial service of John Flip, the infant son of the Priory's gardener. In 1909 it was the 300th anniversary of the foundation of the English nuns; "The beautiful Church of the Holy Ghost was even more beautiful with lovely flowers and candles".⁴

At the 1930 Abbotskerswell Cottage Garden Show the Priory, presumably via their gardener, won numerous prizes: five 1st places for dessert apples, plums, runner beans, onions and marrows as well as three 2nd places and two 3rd places.

In the early 1950s Mr Willoughby was the gardener, and his daughter, Theresa, remembers fondly the gardens, orchard and farm. Her father grew the vegetables and flowers for the nuns, and kept two pigs and chickens; on the farm were a few cattle for milk. Although there was little contact with the nuns she does recall seeing them in the village in the 1970s in their full habits and going to services both in the side chapel and the main church.



This was the only entrance into the Priory for outsiders, a specific nun, called the portress, answered the bell or received goods through the doors under the grill. One villager who went to the Priory selling Poppies described the process of passing through the portal and entering a small room without actually seeing anybody, it was scary to a 10 year old.

needed a quiet period. The nuns were sometimes seen in the village, and The Reverend Mother even visited the W.I. with two nuns and gave a talk about the Priory's history; "we never called it the 'the Priory' – us always said 'up the Nunnry'!"⁹

There are also stories of ghosts at the Priory, with sightings of nuns and monks: "a ghostly nun appeared during Mass in the chapel of the Priory and was witnessed by all the worshippers present."¹⁰

The New Priory

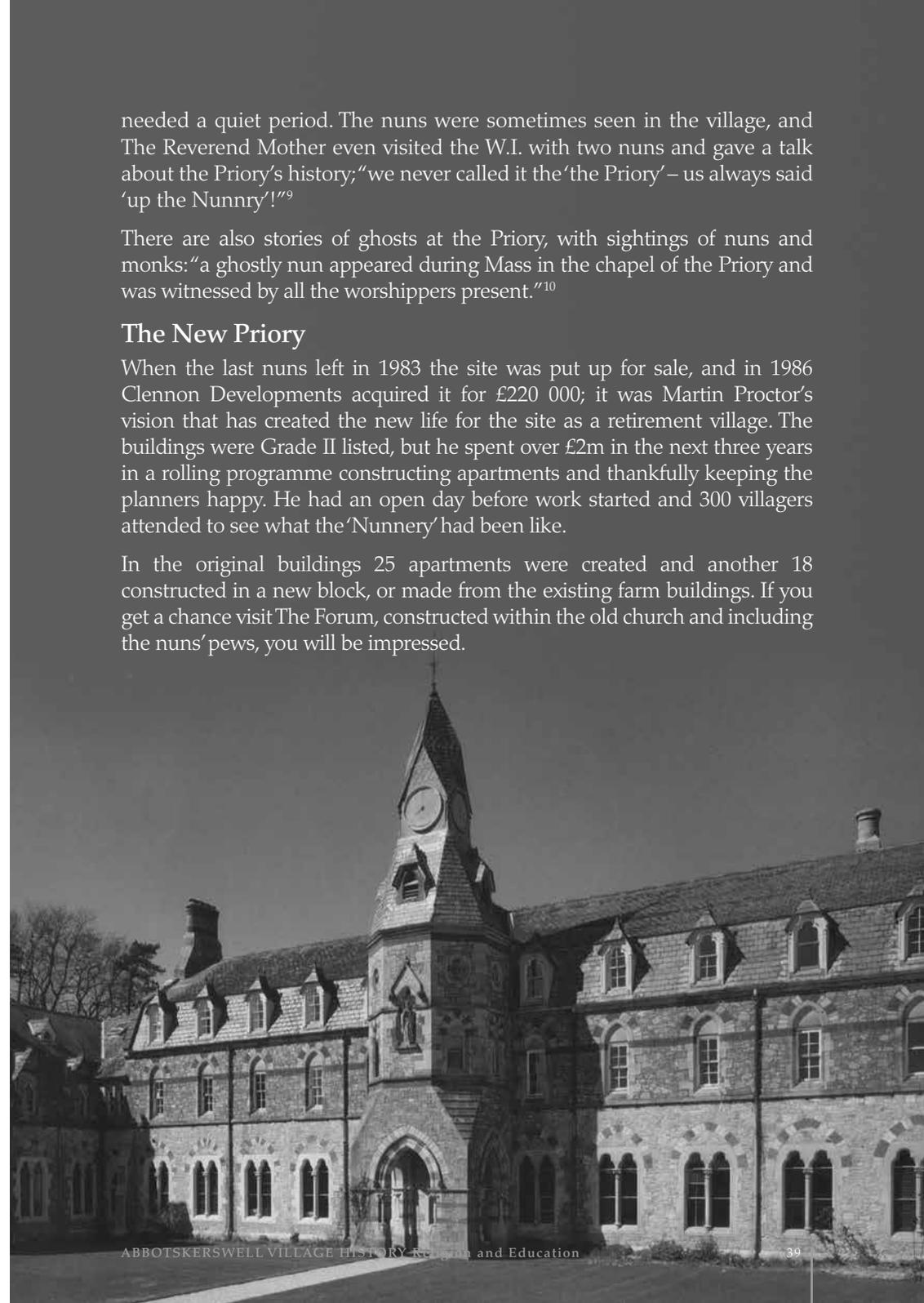
When the last nuns left in 1983 the site was put up for sale, and in 1986 Clennon Developments acquired it for £220 000; it was Martin Proctor's vision that has created the new life for the site as a retirement village. The buildings were Grade II listed, but he spent over £2m in the next three years in a rolling programme constructing apartments and thankfully keeping the planners happy. He had an open day before work started and 300 villagers attended to see what the 'Nunnery' had been like.

In the original buildings 25 apartments were created and another 18 constructed in a new block, or made from the existing farm buildings. If you get a chance visit The Forum, constructed within the old church and including the nuns' pews, you will be impressed.

In 1985 Mrs Low described the work of the nuns in *AbbTalk*: "we rang a bell and the nuns would pull back a bolt and open the door. The nuns would stand behind an iron grating and speak to you"⁵

The nuns' main work was to pray for the forgiveness of sinners, but "they are known far and wide for their kindness and charity to the poor. No applicant is refused."⁶ At 1pm each day a bell was rung and soup and bread provided for the needy, such as pensioners and tramps. Mrs Low remembered tramps such as Brixham Jack, Creacy (Greasy) and Jethro who came for their lunch: "Outside the door were two iron chairs, and on these chairs would be a basin of soup and a piece of home-made bread. This was put out every day, but anyone could have soup to take away."⁷ Laurie Saurin told a similar story: "Jimmy Prowse was a village character ... with his bowler, stick and curious walk. He went out daily with a wicker basket from his home by the Tradesman's Arms to get his soup at the Priory."⁸

In the 1950s the nuns were given more freedom and began selling honey and eggs from their farm. By the 1960s it had ceased to be a closed order and reciprocal visits between the Priory and St Mary's Church took place; after the services the congregation was allowed to have tea with the nuns in their frugal rooms. Part of the buildings was also used as a retreat for outsiders who

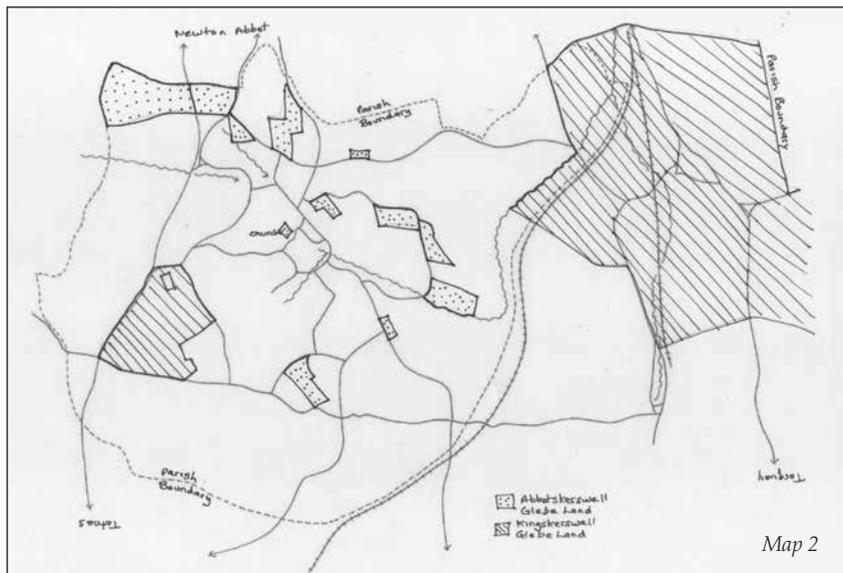


Chapter 6

Church Properties in Abbotskerswell

The Church had always been a large land owner in Abbotskerswell, but it also owned a number of important facilities too. These have played an important role in village life for hundreds of years therefore they are worth study in our village story.

For centuries the vicar not only had his church and vicarage to look after, but also the glebe land; this was land owned by the church that brought the vicar valuable revenue to use. In 1613 a survey of glebe land in Abbotskerswell recorded a hall-house with a barn, a pound house (for making cider), a garden and 50 acres of land. The land was rented out to local farmers who paid the church both rent and a tithe for its upkeep. The tithe was paid in crops rather than money, a commodity rarely used then by ordinary people.



The 1613 survey lists 29 tithe payers with the amount paid in bushels, which was a measure of volume measuring 8 gallons, this was about 64 pounds of wheat. In addition most married men had to pay 4d a year and unmarried men over 2½d to the church. In 1836 the Commutation of Tithes Act replaced payment in kind with a monetary value; the 1839 village tithe map showed glebe land amounted to 63 acres, with another almost 300 acres being Kingskerswell glebe land, as shown on *Map 2*. As this was a source of income for the vicar, they were keen to maintain their rights over glebe land and this often caused problems as Rev. Fisher found out in the 1850s, as shown on page 29 in *2. Houses & Families*. A farming clergyman had become an obsolete occupation by the 20th century, consequently the glebe land was sold off by 1906, leaving just 1.5 acres of grounds at the Vicarage.

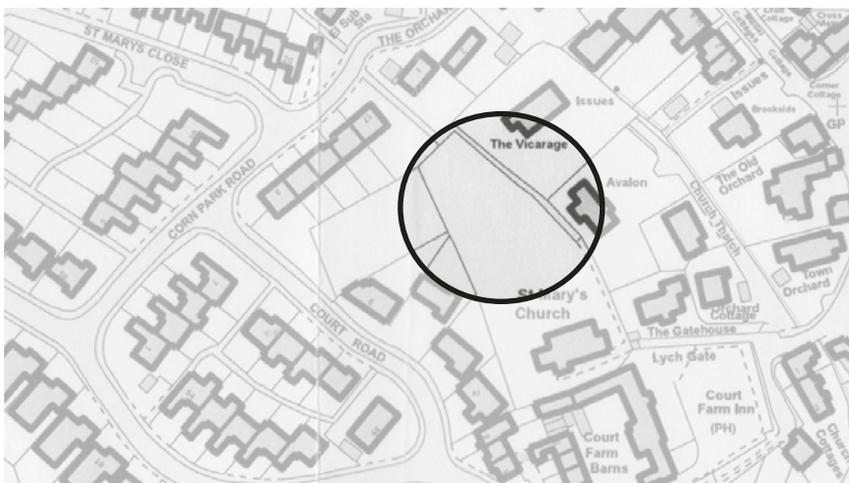


The Churchyard

St Mary's Church has almost certainly stood on the same site for over 1000 years, and its churchyard has been used for burials for all of that time. There are three parts to the churchyard: the original area around the church contains a number of interesting graves, two of which are shown in the photograph. The railed enclosure is for the Hare family, whilst the chest tomb with a tombstone is dated 1639. Below the south wall of the church is the grave of John Phillips, of the Aller Pottery, which was renovated in 1997, with a memorial service being held at that time.

As you walk up the path to the church you pass underneath the lych-gate, this is reputed to be the oldest dated wooden one in England. On a roof timber is carved "FEARE.GOD. T.R.1603. S.R.HONOR.YE.KNG.S.Y." There are memorial plaques to remember the two renovations of the lych-gate, these are to 'Rev^d. V C Hine' in 1899 and 'A.K. (Peter) Judd' in 1989.





Map 3

In the early years of the 20th century the need to extend the churchyard was apparent, and in February 1903 fund raising for the churchyard fund began with a concert in the schoolroom, organised by Mrs Henley. Once again it was Mrs Hare who solved the problem by donating the land for an extension, as shown by the marked area on *map 3*, and paying for the new walling.

In October 1905 the new churchyard extension was consecrated by the Bishop of Crediton with just £5 still to be raised for the £100 project; a jumble sale and entertainment evening solved the problem. However, by 1956 this extension was full and more land was needed; this time it was Melva Purkis, the new landowner of the Court Farm estate, who donated the land to the left of the marked area on *map 3*.



Melva, in the jacket, pictured with the Cricket Club in 1950.

There are two plaques on the walls by the entrance into the 'new' churchyard that commemorate Melva and Elsie's generosity and the donation of the gates by the Dence family, which were designed by Rev Dence's grandson Timothy. These gates were provided as a memorial when Mrs Dence died in 1956. The plaques' details are shown on page 43.

TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN LOVING MEMORY OF ARTHUR THOMAS DENCE, PRIEST. BORN 1874 DIED FEB. 24TH 1931
 AND OF HIS WIFE ETHEL MARY BORN 1876 DIED FEB. 16TH 1956
 AND OF THEIR FAITHFUL FRIEND AND COMPANION MARY CATHERINE ANNE STEVENSON BORN 1871. DIED FEB. 22ND 1956
 THESE GATES WERE DEDICATED BY THE LORD BISHOP OF SHERBORNE
 PALM SUNDAY 1957

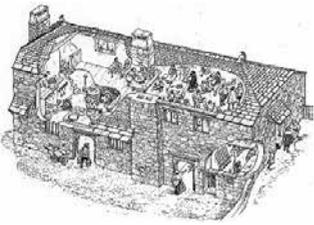


Church House

In 1524 The Abbot of Sherborne gave a plot of land to the parish of Abbotskerswell measuring 100 feet by 60 feet on which the feofees, or trustees, were to build a house. This was to be a 'Church House' which was the mediaeval equivalent of the church hall and

Devon saw a good number of them built during the early 16th century; there are good examples at South Tawton and Widecombe-in-the-Moor.

Until church houses were built, the church nave was often used as a secular meeting place for parishioners, but with the advent of pews there was no longer space. With the land provided, the Abbotskerswell feofees built a house whose rents and profits were to go "towards the maintenance and sustentation of the aforesaid church and of the minister yearly serving God".¹ It was able to succeed in this task because its chief purpose was to house the festivals and 'church ales'. Church ales were village functions which could include sports, plays and Morris dancing, encouraged by a brew of strong ale, made on the premises; brewing and baking were some of its main uses. The feofees also had to pay the Abbot 12d a year in rent.



This illustration of Week Church House at work by Norman Young shows its varied uses.²

Church House is an impressive, solidly built building, made of limestone rubble walls, with three chimney stacks, that suggest it was originally two rooms downstairs and one

upstairs. There are two stone staircases, one outside and the now hidden stone newel stairs inside. Although the windows are from the 20th century renovation it still features an original heavy round-headed wooden door-frame.



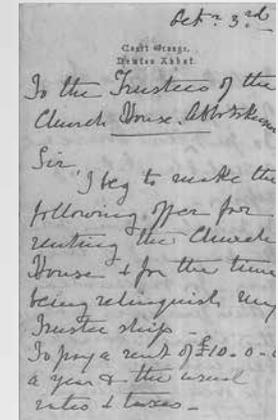
This is the earliest known picture of Church House, dated 1910 showing the pre-restoration building. The roof appears to have been tarred and windows are different from the modern picture shown on page 45.

It was useful as a waiting room between church services: "At Abbotskerswell the men sat in the lower, the women in the upper room. Each was furnished with an enormous fire in winter, and here the congregation took their dinner before attending Vespers."³ However during the 17th century Puritan period under Oliver Cromwell such merry-making was frowned upon, and ale brewing was banned. Redundant church houses were then converted to other uses to benefit the parish, for example a school or an almshouse. Sometimes they were

rented to a former housekeeper, who continued to brew and sell ale, turning the building into an ordinary alehouse.

In 1804 a new Deed was drawn up which created trustees who were appointed. During the 19th century Church House was used as a Parish Poor House and a schoolroom and, as described in *1. Industry & Commerce*, as a bake-house until the 1890s. At this time Mrs Hare, from *Court Grange*, began to take an interest in Church House which would be hugely significant in its history. In October 1895 she leased Church House for £10 per year and by November 1895 it was reported that she had opened a coffee house in the building; meetings at Church House often minuted thanks to Mrs Hare for its use. A clause in the lease allowed for one room to be used "for the purpose of paying the poor"⁴, when the 'relieving officer' from the Poor Law paid 5 shillings to use the room to give out relief money.

In 1903 a new scheme appointed the following Trustees: Mrs Hare, Edward Palk, Edward Coe, John Mortimore, George Hind and William Henley. In addition the Vicar and Churchwardens were ex officio trustees. What was clear was that the building was in a poor state of repair. Architect F W Locke described it in 1913: "poor timbers and slating, dilapidated windows, decayed floors, defective plastering on walls & ceilings"⁵ Mrs Hare suggested she bought Church House, and in October 1913 she paid £150; the Trustees felt that although they lost £10 pa, in rent there were no costs to be met. Mrs Hare then sympathetically renovated the building at her own cost, with new windows, roof, door frames and floors:



Mrs Hare's request to lease Church House

Despite the C20th restoration, this church house remains virtually unaltered in form, preserving some good quality internal features, with more possibly concealed, and is a good example of its kind occupying a very prominent position in the village.⁶

On 9 November 1914 it was rededicated by the Bishop of Exeter and has been used extensively by the village ever since. Following the death of Mrs Hare in 1918 her daughters, Hilda and Ethel, gave Church House to the Exeter Diocesan Trust for the village's use. It was to be run by trustees, who were the Vicar and Churchwardens and they still run it to this day. The generosity of the Hare family is commemorated in Church House by the pictures of Mrs Hare, and her daughters, first hung in July 1920.





The plaque on Mrs Hare's picture

As part of the renovation, the former bakery was turned into living space for a caretaker. What is now the kitchen was the sitting room, with a kitchen at the back, and bedrooms upstairs, where The House Vet is today.

The first caretakers were Albert and Annie Howard whose son Claude was responsible for a number of the war Rolls of Honour now in the Parish Rooms. When Albert died in 1936 Annie continued to live at Church House; she lived there rent free whilst acting as caretaker. Annie left during WW2 and was replaced by Mr & Mrs Henry Davis until the 1970s, Henry was also the church verger. Mr Davis was badly wounded in WW1 and was hampered by his injury; he was known locally as 'Joe' because he spent hours practicing on the snooker table in the Village Club. The Club's story, which was held in Church House, will be told in *4. Pubs, Clubs & Governance*.

It needs to be understood that Church House is owned by a Church Trust that insists on certain ways of behaving. In 1925 it seemed that Rev. Dence had brought some workers to his estate who were of a Wesleyan sect, but did not want to worship in the village chapel. They applied to the Trustees to rent Church House one day a month to hold their Meeting, however, the rules stated:

Provided always that the Trust premises shall not, nor shall any part thereof, be used for the holding of political meetings, lectures, or speeches advocating doctrines inconsistent with the doctrines of the Church of England.⁷

Similarly the rather dramatic closing of the Village Club in 1937 over betting on a snooker match was because of the Church rules.

Using Church House after the Restoration

From the time Mrs Hare took a lease, and then bought Church House, it became a centre for village activity; her introduction of a Coffee House in 1895 and a Village Club distinguished it from the Board School, which had often been used for social events. Following the restoration, Church House was used extensively as a 'village hall' and the local press often reported its events, including the Village Club, of which Mrs Hare was its first President.

One of the first events reported was a most successful 'smoking concert' held in 1897; Frederick Paddon, who worked at the Priory, was in the chair and an enthusiastic audience enjoyed the many songs. The concert featured the village hand-bells, which had been bought in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. They were owned by a village trust and were rung at village events; at the concert the ringers played 'Peal with Changes'. Songs such as 'That Was Enough for Me', 'Hearts of Oak' and 'Tommy Atkins' were performed by villagers.

During the 1920s Church House was the social centre of the village with concerts and whist drives every month; on 7 July 1923 a Big Concert was held for the annual children's outing fund which raised £2 13s. 3d. There were others in aid of Newton Abbot Hospital, cancer research and the Piano Fund, which was organised by Ruth Dence and at which the "Misses Dence brought the house down with their sketch 'Between the soup and the savoury' which was very amusing".⁸ The children's concert for under 14s in aid of the outing fund, organised by Mrs Fey, was described by J W Palk as "one of the best concerts he had ever seen at the Church House".⁹ Whist drives were hugely popular, and always reported in the MDA with the winners named, by 1931 they were a fortnightly event. In 1946 a whist drive was held to raise funds to finally pay off the debts for the bus shelter built in 1935!

In 1926 Church House had electricity installed in its clubroom, which was largely paid for by Rev. Dence, providing light for the new snooker table, which he had bought. In those days the dances were held upstairs (in what is now the model railway room,) whilst the downstairs was divided into two, with a snooker room next to the caretakers' rooms and a games and reading room next to the outside door. During the 1930s dances became popular at Church House, an early one being the New Years' Eve Dance in aid of the Cottage Garden Society in 1935. These dances, known as six-penny hops, became very popular, Phyllis Ford recalled them in *AbbTalk*:

Church House was our community centre. Dances were held there, sometimes in fancy dress, to live music in the top room. Sunday school parties and Choir Suppers were all in Church House. We even had social evenings there when the local talent would do a turn. Church House was also used for lessons when the influx of evacuees proved too much for the village school.¹⁰

Tony Bowhay also remembers one of the fancy dress dances in 1939, when he won a prize dressed as an Australian. He also recalls being taught in

the upper room during WW2 when the number of evacuee children in the village meant that this was necessary. The 1948 New Year's Eve dance was called the 'Long Night Dance' which raised £16 in aid of the Children's Outing Fund and a 1949 Cricket Club dance featured music by the Regal Dance Band. The RAOB Outing photograph below shows what the dance room was like in the 1950s, with the Hare's photographs and WW1 Roll of Duty manuscript on show.



Not long after this photograph was taken, the downstairs dividing wall was taken out to create a bigger space for the dances, with the snooker table moving upstairs. However, by the 1960s times were changing, with better wages, cars and television changing leisure habits. In 1962 the village 'Library' was moved to Church House from the school, it was noted that there was no chance of a mobile library coming to the village for several years. However in May 1963 there was the serious danger of Church House closing; Rev Langford commented: "We've now reached the point where we can't keep open unless something is done".¹¹ One issue appeared to be the reluctance of the Trustees to allow a wider usage of the building, they refused to allow a playschool or a youth club there, for fear of damage to the floor. Villagers seemed to feel that it was only for 'Church' events, and soon there was great support for a new, purpose built Village Hall for Abbotskerswell. However, despite this happening in 1976, Church House has survived by renting out the upper floors, the 3rd Age Project, South Devon Model Railway Club and the House Vet have all been there, and it provides a smaller venue than the Village Hall for functions such as AbbPast, Coffee Mornings and Keep Fit sessions. It has been modernised with a new kitchen, and is once again a centre of village life.

The Abbotskerswell Vicarage

The village is rather unusual because we now have three houses that have been vicarages, and of course we no longer have a vicar living in the parish, not for the first time, however. The earliest reference to a vicarage is in an Archdeacon's Visitation in 1342. When Robert de Fissacre became vicar in 1321 he found his house was very small and in ruins. Over the next twenty years he steadily rebuilt it, apart from the hall and one other room as that could not be done for less than a hundred shillings (£5), a considerable sum in those days.

The story of a modern vicarage begins in 1807 when Rev. William Kitson became the new vicar of Abbotskerswell. Rev. Kitson was also Vicar of Torre and he seems to have lived there; because the vicarage was too small for his family he had a licence of non-residence. He did have a housekeeper in Abbotskerswell and the vicarage was used for Sunday Schools and Prayer Days, although he wrote in 1821 "the house of residence is not in good repair but I have lately laid out a large sum on the premises which I intend to soon complete".¹² However, in 1837 a new vicarage was built with money borrowed from Queen Anne's Bounty, which was the forerunner of the Church Commissioners, and this one was most certainly big enough for his family.

This *Vicarage*, on Vicarage Road, is a magnificent stone built structure standing on a slightly raised platform and facing south. An entrance porch led to a hall, off which were a drawing room, dining room and study.



The kitchen had a scullery, larder and two store rooms; outside were gardener's and fuel stores. On two more floors were five bedrooms, a dressing room and bathroom. The stable block contained the original cider pound and barn.

This fine house replaced what was probably a cob and thatch building, possibly sited slightly below it, where *Stawne* now stands; the 1809 OS map certainly shows buildings in this area. The Census returns rather strangely show no Vicar living there until 1871, when Rev. Vesey Hine, his wife, two children and the parlour maid and cook were in residence; this was probably because of the trials and tribulations of Rev. Fisher who may not have been living in the village. By 1901 Rev. F Gordon Campbell was the incumbent, with his wife Clarice, their three children and two servants; vicars still lived quite well then. Clarice died in 1910 and in 1914 Rev. Campbell married Maud Britton, with whom he had a daughter named Eileen. During WW1 Keith Campbell was a conscientious objector, although he did serve in the Non-Combatant Corps.



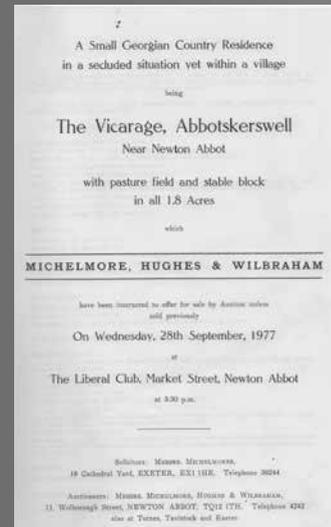
Rev. Campbell and Maud being led by Jack Warren in 1916 at *The Vicarage*.

In 1913 the stable block was seriously damaged in a fire, despite the best efforts of the Newton Abbot Fire Brigade, with a full complement of men and an engine drawn by 4 horses. The barns were rebuilt as a coachman's house and stabling, with a hayloft above.

When Rev. Harries came to the village in 1944, he and

his wife started a Tennis Club, using the tennis court at *The Vicarage*, which was situated in the grounds behind *Stawne*. The members cut and rolled the court, and the Harries' taught people how to play; there were soon 40 members. It was open each evening and Tony Bowhay and Ann Wild both remember playing there. A club competition was held on 1 May 1944 which saw Mrs Birley beat Mrs Huggett in the Ladies' Final and T Bearne beat C Lake in the Men's Final.

However, times were changing and huge old vicarages had become a thing of the past; consequently in September 1977 *The Vicarage* was put up for sale by auction. It was sold to Mr & Mrs David Wheelaker from Torquay who paid £34 000 for it.



Their first task was to find a new name for the house. They were not allowed to use 'Old Vicarage' so looked at the names of former vicars for inspiration, nothing struck them so they opted for the very suitable *Glebe House*. The modern photograph makes an interesting comparison with the 1905 view shown earlier.

The 19th century vicarage was replaced with a smaller modern house, built a few years earlier by Keith Pilchard; *Town Orchard*, a chalet bungalow next to Church House became *The Vicarage*, with Rev Greensides being the first occupier. This in turn was replaced in 1990 by another Keith Pilchard built house, *Beechbrook*, a split level bungalow at the end of Church

Path owned by Mr & Mrs Mallinson; the reason for the change was that the Diocese thought the 'new' vicarage with its large garden would be more likely to attract a vicar with a family, ironically the first incumbent was a bachelor and the following vicars have all complained about the over large garden! When Rev. Still left in 2015 *The Vicarage* became obsolete, and it is to be let for the time being.

After renovating Glebe House the Wheelakers turned their attention to the old stable block and created a modern conversion called *The Barn*.

As is often the way with old railway stations and vicarages the historical clues to their whereabouts are often all that is left in the road names; in Abbotskerswell's case we have a Vicarage Road.



Chapter 7

Education

The research for this chapter has been completed by Felicity House and Junior AbbPast at Abbotskerswell School, they are pictured from L to R: William Brownlee, Ewan Donald, Daisy King, Phoebe Efstathiadi, Todd Denning, Owen Whitefoot and Harry Brewer.



In 1821 Rev. William Kitson wrote to Bishop Carey to answer his questions in preparation for a visit, in these answers he wrote: "I have a Sunday School at my Vicarage House ... there are also two other schools, in one is taught writing and reading – in the other reading and work of various kinds".¹ In this one statement we learn of the three kinds of schooling available to working class Abbotskerswell children for much of the 19th century; no state system of education existed until the mid-1870s.

Sunday Schools

The first Sunday School was founded by Robert Raikes in Gloucester in 1783; these schools were intended to keep the children off the streets on a Sunday, to give a basic education in reading and writing through the use of the Bible, and to teach a sense of subordination and respect for their superiors. The Sunday School was seen as important in the village, and significant villagers became teachers, which was not without its problems. In 1853 the teaching by the Creed Family, the village's most important family, was questioned by the new Vicar, Rev. George Fisher, who was considered as being high church. Later Mrs Hare and her daughters taught and gave the annual prizes, and following them it was the Henleys. It is also likely that the village Baptist Chapel had its own Sunday School, and, as shown in Chapter 4, the Wesleyan Chapel mostly certainly did.

National Schools

Rev. Kitson's second reference is likely to be to a school run by the *National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor*, a Church of England organisation which, after 1811, organised schools to compete with the new Methodist Church's schools. The comment that they taught writing and reading was correct, but that was about all, with the quality of teaching often poor through the lack of educated teachers. In 1850 White's Directory stated there was indeed a National School in the village and by 1857 we learn that: "A SCHOOL for the education of the children of the parish, is held in a room in the church-house. Mr W. Vening, Master. No of children, 42."² The master seems to be William Vening (1786-1870) who was an Abbotskerswell farmer living at 2 Town Cottage; in his later years he acted as a parish clerk as well as being the teacher.

In 1833 new legislation was passed that restricted the employment of children, and in the same year Parliament approved a grant of £20,000 to the two voluntary church bodies that ran schools. Consequently by 1867 Abbotskerswell's National School was under Diocesan care, with government inspection because it received grant funding; there was an average of 45 pupils, both girls and boys. There was also a new mistress as the teacher, Miss Emma Cornish, with the school still being in Church House:

We afterwards visited the Abbotskerswell School, where there were present 23 boys and 30 girls. This appears to be the most promising school of the group. The children are brighter and more alive than in the other schools, and the mistress has much natural aptitude for teaching.³

Dame Schools

The last type of school Rev. Kitson appears to refer to was known as a 'Dame school'. They were often run by former soldiers, or old ladies who, for a small fee, taught the basic 'three Rs' of reading, writing and 'rithmetic; hence his comment about 'reading and work of various kinds'. They were normally held in their homes, and they were little more than child minding for working women, a famous quotation described their work: "If I can keep them quiet it's as much as I can do and all I'm paid for".⁴

The Board School

All of the schools described so far were voluntary, and the farming year took a toll on the attendance of the children, however, there was growing pressure for the state to provide schools. In 1869 the recently formed National Education League began its campaign for free, compulsory education for all children, as

it was felt that mass education was vital to the nation maintaining its world lead in manufacturing. Consequently in 1870 W E Forster, MP for Bradford, introduced The Elementary Education Act (always known as Forster's Act). This Act allowed voluntary schools to carry on unchanged, but established a system of School Boards to build and manage schools in areas where there were none. The Boards were locally elected bodies which drew their funding from the local rates, and unlike the voluntary schools, religious teaching in the Board Schools was to be non-denominational.

This occurred in Abbotskerswell, where a School Board was created in August 1874, and by April 1875 an election had been held; this produced a Board of five members, who were all prominent village men.

- William Creed, a landowner from *The Manor House*
- John Creed, a landowner from *Whiddon House*
- Thomas Maddicott, a farmer at *Town Farm*
- Richard Ford, a farmer at *Abbotsford Farm*
- Marcus Hare, an officer in the Royal Navy from *Court Grange*

As is often the case, village politics quickly emerged, as Marcus Hare immediately resigned because he only came fifth in the voting and he took this as a vote of no confidence; he was replaced by William Vening (not the former master), another local farmer from *Prospect Cottages* and later of *2 Elm Cottage*. However, this did cause quite a fuss in the village as Capt. Hare nominated a tenant of his, Mr May, who lost the election by three votes. There were claims that Mr May used every possible means to win the election, and then blamed his defeat on the drunkenness of the voters. The first meeting of the Abbotskerswell School Board was on 15 April 1875 and they quickly set about the task of building the village school, appointing J W Rowell of Newton Abbot as the architect. Four possible sites were chosen and discussions began with the owners of the land.

- Mr Crew's orchard, belonging to Mrs Wills (Today's School site)
- John Skinner's barns and orchard, belonging to Capt. Hare (*Croft Cottage* site)
- Mr Clerkenwell's land behind Vulcan Place (*The Old Post Office*)
- Behind the Old Poor House, belonging to Capt. Hare (*Laburnum Court* site)

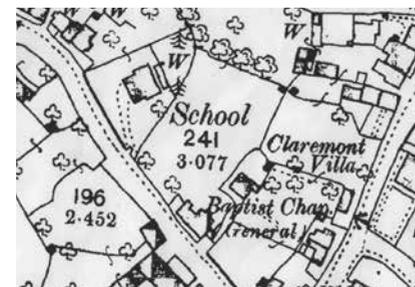
In June it was agreed to pay £100 for Mrs Wills' site, and with J W Rowell's plans agreed, the tendering process soon began. The Board applied to the Public Loans Commissioners for a loan of £600 to pay for the cost of the site

and building the new school. By July Messrs John Stevens & Son's tender of £490.13.0d had been accepted, and on 5 August the foundation stone of the new school was laid by John Creed. The children were given a half day holiday, but were assembled at 3.30pm and walked to the grounds, where they sang at the ceremony and then William Creed provided a tea for them at *The Manor House*, where they had games and played until 8 o'clock. The pace that the School Board set for the building of the school was indeed impressive, as it was completed in just over ten months from the first School Board meeting.

Abbotskerswell Board School

In readiness for the opening the School Board gave careful consideration to the thorny issue of religious instruction; at that time the village had two chapels as well as the church. They agreed on half an hour at the commencement of the morning school and half an hour at the end of the afternoon school; importantly they decided that religious education was to be taught by the teacher and not by the vicar. The Chairman had agreed the timetable for the school with the mistress and made it clear that there must be no deviation from the rules and times.

On 24 February 1876 the school opened with great fanfare, with speeches by John and William Creed and Capt. Hare, there were songs by the children and a tea provided by John Creed; there was another half day holiday for the children. Schooling was not compulsory at this stage and children left at about 10 years of age.

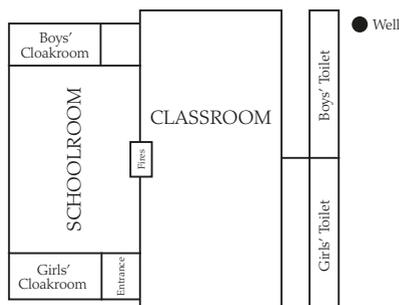


Map 4

Map 4 shows the school was sited in a small plot with no playing field, at that time, this was the garden of *Well Cottages* (where 'School' is written). There was a well (W) which provided water. The school entrance was via the gate and steps at the *Sunny-bank* end of the site.

The school was a typical village Board School, with two main rooms, one each for the infants and the older children, and a toilet block, with seats over an open gutter with water running underneath which flowed into the village stream! To either side were cloakrooms and entrances, separate ones for boys and girls. The two rooms had open fires.

“A new and very picturesque school has been built here since last year, comprising a light and cheerful school-room and classroom.”⁶ Two views are shown here.



The Teachers

The first schoolmistress was Miss Cornish, who had been retained from the existing National School. Her salary was fifty pounds a year, with her lodgings also paid for. Emma Cornish (1843-1899) was born in Torquay, and took over at the village National School in the 1860s and impressed the new School Board enough for her to be appointed as the new Schoolmistress: “Miss Cornish who has now passed her examination, has good order and is teaching reading and writing well.”⁷ In 1871 she was lodging at 1 Prospect Place and remained at the school until 1881.

One of the problems for the new state schools was a lack of qualified teachers, therefore Miss Cornish was assisted by monitors and pupil teachers. Monitors were the oldest children, who were taught a lesson by the teacher and then led groups of children repeating that lesson; they sometimes stayed on at school after the normal leaving age, received extra tuition and a little pay. At Abbotskerswell the first monitor was 13 year old Charlotte Blackler from *Burridge Place (South View)* who was paid one shilling a week, which would have helped her widowed mother look after her four children. She left in 1877 to become a housemaid to a doctor in Bovey Tracey and was followed by ex-pupils Susan Wotton, Ellen Darke and Bessie Partridge; over the years there were 15 different monitors, of whom three became pupil teachers.

Not surprisingly the quality of the ‘teaching’ by monitors was not very high, therefore in an attempt to improve standards pupil teachers had been created; these were usually monitors who at the age of 13 became pupil teachers, if they fulfilled certain scholastic, moral and physical conditions. They were paid and acted as teachers during the school day but also received two hours

schooling from the teacher after school finished; they were apprenticed to the school for five years. They had examinations each year, and if successful at the age of 18 they could obtain a ‘Queens’s Scholarship’ to go to a teacher training college to become a qualified teacher.

In July 1878 the School Board agreed to Amy Partridge becoming a pupil teacher at the school, paying her four pounds a year before she passed her first examination and then increasing the salary by four pounds a year for every successful year afterwards; she was to be bound (apprenticed) to the School Board for four years after she had passed her first examination. Amy Partridge lived at what is now *Bow Cottage*, her father being a wheelwright; she was born in 1863 and had progressed through the school from a pupil to a qualified teacher by 1882. In 1901 she was the Headteacher at Alvington St Andrews in North Devon, proving the system did work and showing that a working class girl could continue her education and become a teacher. In the first 25 years of the school there were five pupil teachers and, as *table 3* shows, the other four also became teachers.

	Birth	Father's Occupation	Monitor Age	Pupil Teacher Age	Teacher Career Age	
Edith Chard	1870 in Abbotskerswell	Baker	12	14	21	1891 Board School teacher
Annie Blackler	1874 in Abbotskerswell	Labourer	13	17	22	1891-96 teacher at Abbotskerswell School, by 1901 in Newton Abbot
Annie Lee	1878 in Ipplepen	Agric. labourer		17	22	1902 became Mrs Howard; illness cover at Abbotskerswell School – eg 1904 for Mrs Hennion, 1910s for Mrs Keites
Eva Court	1886 in Abbotskerswell	Coachman at Court Grange	12	17	21	Became a teacher at Abbotskerswell School until 1913

Table 3

A Village School

Very soon the school was part of village life, with important villagers keen to be involved in school activities. In January 1877 Captain and Mrs Hare gave the children presents and a tea, in August it was William Creed who provided a treat with a half day holiday; there was a visit from Mrs Wills and Mrs Carr (both nee Creed) and Rev. Hine gave two prizes to the school, for which he would be the judge although the response to his gift showed how religious teaching was still an issue:

The Board have no objection to the prizes mentioned being given by Mr & Mrs Hine, but they object to the same being made an excuse for interfering with the school or the school mistress and therefore any examination for such prizes must be limited to one occasion previously agreed on.⁸



The classroom was largely unchanged in the 1990s



This must be the oldest photograph of village children, it is in The Square c.1900 because the old elm tree is still standing; it was replaced in 1902.

It is unlikely to be a school picture as there are no female teachers in the picture, but it gives a real feel for the time.

The classrooms were slowly becoming places of learning, with a world map purchased, as well as practical improvements such as fire surrounds and shoe scrapers for the doorways. The school could accommodate 75 children but an average of 63 had only been achieved by 1889.

In 1878 the five members of the School Board were re-elected but in 1879 John Creed died, being replaced by Job Pickard from *Whiddon Farm*. Others changes were also imminent as the Education Act of 1880 finally made school attendance compulsory between the ages of five and ten years, rising to eleven in 1893. As a consequence it was necessary to appoint a paid clerk and attendance officer, with John Harris Browse of *4 Town Cottages* being elected; soon parents were being warned of possible fines if children did not improve their attendance. In 1886 it was reported that Mr Browse had brought prosecutions against three parents who were fined 2/6d each. In 1899 the leaving age was raised again to 12 years of age.

Weeks, who had turned the post down in 1881; she stayed at the school until 1893 and when she left the School Board noted it: "regrets the loss of Miss Weeks, Schoolmistress for this Parish, she having discharged her duties most satisfactorily during the whole time she held this office."⁹ She was replaced by Miss Amelia Taylor, who was paid £60 per year, and suffered the trials of a village teacher with H Hellier late four times and Mrs Perkins annoying her.

In March 1896 Mrs Hare became 'Chairman' of the School Board and would be a passionate supporter of the villager's education for the next 20 years. By this time the numbers in the school had risen to 90, ranging from three to twelve. The existing buildings could no longer cope, and there were problems with the sanitation. As the picture below shows the toilets were joined to the school, with the well needing to be sunk 10 feet deeper. The increased numbers were also creating the need for a second teacher as a pupil teacher was still teaching the infants.

In 1897 Miss Taylor left, being replaced by Miss Knight who had been teaching at Cadeleigh Board School near Tiverton; she was keen to teach geography, even if grammar was removed from the timetable. Mrs Hare provided a world map and map of England, she had already agreed to provide medals and prizes for attendance.



Miss Knight left in 1900, even though offered a pay rise, and the School Board this time advertised for a certificated master and mistress at a joint salary of £100. Peter Leather and his wife Elizabeth from Hennock took up the post, and the use of *2 Grange View* was also arranged for them; Peter was the first man to teach at the school. Their appointment saw the last pupil teacher, Annie Lee, leave her post.



School House

With a married couple being appointed, the Board began to consider the need for a house to be provided by the school for the Headteacher, and a site near the school was suggested to the Board of Education. In August 1901 Mrs Hare agreed to sell a site next to *Well Cottages* for £30 for the erection of a house, and Mr Samuel Segar, an architect from Newton Abbot, produced plans for the house which he estimated would cost £375 to build. In October the plan and a loan were agreed



School House was quite new when this photograph was taken in 1910. Notice Well Cottages to its left and the washing where play areas are today.

by the Board of Education. The urgency of the issue was shown when Mr & Mrs Leather had to move to Newton Abbot when their tenancy at Grange View was ended. A tender was agreed with Messrs Yeoman Brothers of Kingsteignton for the sum of £358, although a well had to be added in addition to this. The house was completed during late 1902 and is a fine looking stone and render built structure sitting above the road. The house had a kitchen, three reception rooms featuring large bay windows, four bedrooms and a bathroom.

In January 1902 the Leathers left and were replaced by Mr Thomas Bonner Chambers and his wife Elizabeth, who were moving from Aberhosan in North Wales. The school still seemed to run on a very local basis, with a day's holiday granted in honour of Mrs Hare's daughter's wedding, and a half day closure to see King Edward VII's train pass by at Aller Junction. However, Mr Bonner Chambers found getting on with the villagers difficult, and was gone by the end of the year.

The arrival of Mr & Mrs Hennion coincided with the completion of the *School House* and they were to be its first occupants in January 1903. Once again Frederick and Sarah were to be the teachers, they were both 31 year old Londoners. They already had two children, a working mother teacher was unusual in those days; in their three and a half years in Abbotskerswell Sarah had two more children, before they moved back to London. During his headship Mrs Hare gave the school a rather unusual gift, 24 disused rifles for teaching military drill and physical exercises, a dozen forage caps and belts for the boys when drilling; apparently the boys took a keen interest in the drill (*Abbotskerswell During WW1* P20-1 tells the full story). An inspection report in 1904 made poor reading, noting that the stock of materials had been used up and that the School was without the means of carrying on instruction properly. There was no chalk and the supply of ink, pencils, paper & books had come to an end. The desks were obsolete and unsatisfactory. However, it was reported that:

Fair progress has been made up to a certain point, but the work is now at a standstill owing to the lack of proper materials. The Teacher is carrying on the work as best he can under the circumstances. The drawing is very seriously affected by the want of materials.¹⁰

Thankfully new materials arrived quickly but there were obviously problems at the school. The building was not properly cleaned, floors and windows were very dirty, a new blackboard was needed, a fireplace was in need of repair, the infant classroom had bare walls and there was overcrowding with 54 children in the classroom but desks for only 48. Despite this: "the order is good and the teaching is in all respects creditably efficient."¹¹ Perhaps these issues helped persuade the Hennions to move on in 1906?

Teachers 1906 – 1949

The next incumbents were Henry and Amy Keites who would become valued members of Abbotskerswell for 16 years, with Henry creating a new trend of long headships. Henry was 48 when he was appointed to his first Headteacher's post after teaching for 25 years in the Midlands. Amy was 14 years younger than him but had taught for 15 years herself; they had no children and Amy's health did not seem to be good for a great deal of the time. They seemed to make their mark straight away, as in a Religious Inspection it was noted that the School was rated overall as 'Good' and that: "The work of the Senior School is somewhat scanty and uneven, but under the new Master and Mistress who have but recently been appointed, there seems to be every likelihood of good progress."¹² Mr Keites is remembered for always wearing a white boater with a black band around it and for being a strict disciplinarian; he kept his cane beside him on the table and as the section on punishments will confirm, he used it too.

Henry soon became involved in village life, being Secretary of the Village Club for 15 years, he was Secretary of the War Memorial Committee and in 1920 it was his idea for the school to have its own Roll of Honour board, produced by old boy Claude Howard. His wife's failing health meant he resigned as Headteacher in 1922 and they moved to Norfolk. At a leaving presentation at the school, where he was given a case of pipes and a scroll by Claude, he asked the pupils "to do their utmost as far they were concerned to make the work of his successor as pleasant and happy as they had done in his case."¹³ The Cricket Club and Village Club also made him a presentation of a suitcase.



Back Row: Peggy Flip, Betty Kite, Florrie Cudmore, Queenie Huggett, Kitty Flip, Nellie Turner, Ada Abraham, May Chudleigh.

Middle Row: Annie Turner, Gladys Lee, Yvonne Mudge, Hilda Truscott, Winnie Flipp, Edna Rowe, Ena Coombe, Ethel Stoneman, Emma Abraham, Ivy Lidstone.

Sitting: Edie Coombe, Gertie Symons, Marie Brooks, Alice Brimcombe, Audrey Taylor, Louie Truscott, Edie Sandford, Gladys Sandford, Edna Cornish



In 1923 the new Headteacher was Miss Gwendoline Hull, the 33 year old daughter of the Headteacher at South Brent School, who is remembered for having two terriers called Fife and Buzzy Banjo; “... known to us as ‘Gwenney’ when out of earshot”.¹⁴ She also kept a pot of vegetable soup in *School House* to warm the children who had to walk to school from Stoneyhill. She had previously taught at Yealmpton and would be at Abbotskerswell for the rest of her career, retiring in 1949. With Mrs Keites having also left, a new infant class teacher was needed, and until 1935 this was Miss Stella Easterbrook, pictured marrying villager Ronald Elliott. She was followed by Miss Muriel Willett until 1943 and then Miss Annie Menhennett, who left in 1953.

In the 1930s the classroom was set out with long wooden desks with holes in them for china inkwells and a shelf below for books, and attached to benches. Every Friday the inkwells were collected in a special tray and washed ready for Monday when they were filled with fresh ink made from powder and water. Children were all taught to write with wooden pens with a metal quill on the bottom that had to be regularly dipped into the ink.



One of the popular activities in the school year was ‘Empire Day’ when the children dressed up to represent people from around the British Empire. The first picture from 1935 features Laurie Saurin on the far left and the second is 1940 and features Tony Bowhay, second left, as a cowboy.



House events have been important in school life and since 1952 the houses, which then were Saints Andrew, David & Patrick, have competed for the Leslie Billett Cup (He was Secretary of the Cricket Club) and from 1973 the PTA Sports Shield. In 2014 new houses were introduced: St Marys, Henleys, Carswell & Priory.

Punishments

The use of corporal punishment, (smacking or caning,) in English schools was common-place until the 1970s when STOPP, The Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment, began a campaign to abolish its use. In 1986 they were successful when Parliament abolished corporal punishment in state schools. Schools have always been required to maintain a ‘Punishment Book’ and the Abbotskerswell School one gives us an insight into life in the school. The surviving book covers 1911 until 1950, under the headships of Henry Keites and Gwendoline Hull; they were both enthusiastic administrators of the cane, Mr Keites used the cane 48 times in the 1911/12 school year. The first record tells us that Mr Keites gave “1 cut on the hand” to Charles Abraham for talking, girls were also caned with Lily Cowell being caned for misbehaviour, idleness and also inattention and talking; however, she received “2 cuts across back” for being impudent to the master. Ada Lee’s reason for punishment was untruthfulness.

Any debate regarding corporal punishment has always been about whether it really worked, and what the book shows is that often it was the same children who were caned, so for them it did not work. Emmanuel Taylor was caned five times in a school year with the most severe being the “3 or 4 cuts across back parts” administered by Mr Keites for his idleness and impudence. Leslie Bovey was caned on 21 occasions during his time at the school, once being “several smart strokes. Hind quarters” suggesting Mr Keites was getting annoyed with him! Harry Symons gathered 17 offences, his most dramatic being “opening and taking master’s cane out of his desk during playtime”. However, the fairness of caning must be questioned when it was noted that the three Knapman boys were caned 28 times in four years, mainly for lateness and truancy: was that not the parents fault?

When Miss Hull became Headteacher in 1923 she kept exact records of all corporal punishments delivered, whether caning or smacking. Her reasons included Joseph Coombe’s “vulgarity – using dictionary improperly” which earned him “3 or 4 raps on the hand” and Edna Cornish was slapped on the shoulder for “giggling at her own mistakes in a Scripture lesson”. However, George Tapper was evidently a naughty boy, being caned for a variety of reasons, beginning with pronouncing words wrongly in singing, to try to and cause amusement, to be followed by idling and playing, getting into Mrs Lee’s garden, foolish behaviour, grinning when reprimanded and disorderly behaviour. Similarly Donald Uren earned Miss Hull’s wrath on 21 occasions, and her detailed descriptions are interesting: “again disorderly, destroying food and breaking wall plaster while at play” followed by “throwing muddy apple

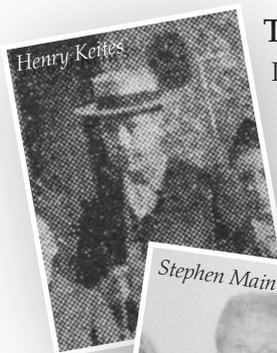
cores on newly painted lobby walls". There are a few well-known local figures in the book, Tony Bowhay received two strokes on the hand for disorder, from the WW2 evacuee's teacher, Mr Elliott; Fred Brimecombe featured a number of times and the last entry is Robin Pugh's one stroke for disorder on 1 April 1949.

Teachers 1949 -2016

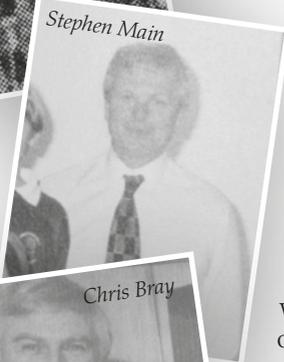
Interestingly the next Headteacher, Miss Blackmore, appears not to have been a caner as there are four "Nil" listings by the School Managers, who had to sign the book regularly. Miss Nancy Blackmore arrived in 1949, and is remembered as being talk and elegant, would remain at the school until retiring in 1960; she was replaced by John Humphrey Quicke who stayed until 1977. His successor was Peter Dart who moved on to a bigger school in 1982, being followed by Chris Bray in 1983 who oversaw the rebuilding of the school before retiring in 1997. Stephen Main was in charge next, until 1999 when Viv Clare arrived at the village school. She retired in 2013 and was succeeded by Tim Hughes who has seen the school develop in the eyes of OFSTED in his time.

As the village grew so did the school, with more classes and teachers, with the popular Miss Menhennett being followed by the long serving Mrs Heywood (1953-1970). The new 'temporary' classrooms saw the arrival of Mrs Hawkins (1973-1981), Miss Tilney (1972-1985), Mrs Dot Greenwood, Mr Welch (1976-1987). A Deputy Headteacher was created in 1975 with Miss Coles (1978-1984) in the role, leading to her appointment to a headship.

In 2016 there are 3 classes and 6 full and part time teachers, with 93 children. The classes have had various names, in the 1990s they were Class 1 Apple, Class 2 Silver Birch, Class 3 Chestnut, Class 4 Hazel, whereas today they are Robin, Swift, Puffin and Kingfisher.



Henry Kettes



Stephen Main



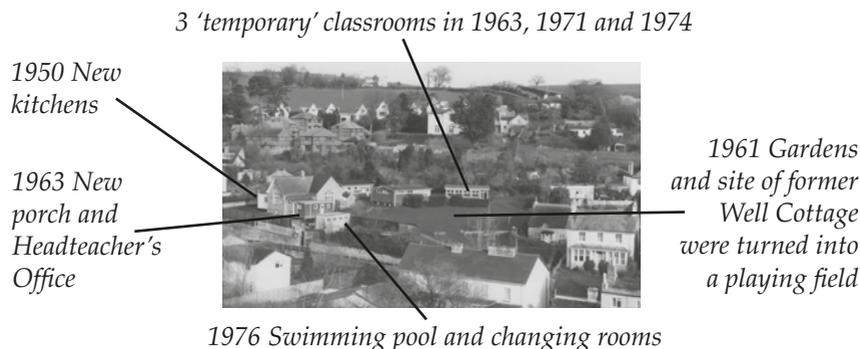
Chris Bray



Viv Clare

Developing the School

Over the years the original buildings were amended to cater for differing educational standards and more children. The picture below shows some of the post WW2 changes.



The provision of school meals appears to have begun during WW2 when they were served in Church House, but it was in 1950 that a kitchen was added to the school on the site of the boys' cloakroom. The first cook was Mrs Johnson, being followed by Miss Dicker and Miss Northover until 1965.

The swimming pool was built by the parents and was opened in June 1976 by Rev. Greensides and would be enjoyed by the village children until the school finally had to give it up in 2009. One ex-pupil commented: "We went at every available opportunity. I have swum in the rain there lots of times, it was freezing! It was so shallow you'd invariably kick the floor when swimming."

During the 1970s there were vague plans to build a new school behind Town Farm or on Manor Road, but finances were never available for such a grand plan, so the need for more room was solved by the 'temporary' classrooms; these are still there of course. However, after many years of agitation, the village school did finally receive a major rebuild in 1995, with the construction of a classroom, resource area, new hall, new toilets, entrance, administration area and Headteacher's office; it was opened by Cllr K Turner on 20 November. The rebuild was paid for with a capital building grant, but also from the school budget and the sale of *School House*. After Miss Blackmore retired *School House* had not been used as a teacher's house, but had been rented out. In 1976 the school had once again taken possession of it and used it as ancillary accommodation for reading groups, music practice, medical inspections and a library. However, it was finally sold in 1995 to Martin Nolan.



Chapter 8

The Abbotskerswell Diamond Jubilee Village Trail

In 2012 AbbPast celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II with an exhibition, and the creation of a Village Trail. This is a good opportunity to reprint the Trail, with a few slight improvements since our knowledge of our village's history is a little better now. A more detailed version appears on our website at www.abbpast.co.uk.

The fertile valley in which Abbotskerswell is sited has been used as a settlement since the Bronze Age, when the trees were cleared and agriculture began. The Saxons continued the village's growth when Carsewell, meaning where water cress is grown, was divided in two; shared between the King and the Abbot of Horton (explaining the 'Abbots' in the mediieval name).



The Square c.1910



The 'new' extended school

In 2005 further improvements were made with a new library, kitchens and servery added to create a really modern school; however, if you look closely, particularly on the gable ends, you can still see many of the original parts of the Board School.

Ex-Pupils Remember

The research work of the pupils has produced some interesting reminiscences:

- We used to have milk delivered in small glass bottles to the top of the steps by the main gate and had to collect it, bring it into the classroom and defrost it on top of the oil heater.
- My best memory is when Mrs Rowe, Hilary Duncan's grandma, brought toffee apples to sell for blind people.
- Maypole dancing was compulsory for all of a certain age, boys as well! Practice was during school hours along with "folk or country dancing" practised at the village hall.
- Miss Tilney taught Alison the recorder as a five year old and she got on so quickly that we had to buy the next book most weeks; oddly Miss Tilney kept apologising that she was getting on so well!
- I remember the swimming pool being really cold because it was outside. We had a tray of special water by the ladder that we had to step into before we could get into the pool. We got changed in the changing rooms, they were cold and often had spiders in
- I remember Mr Bray always wore a brown suit with sandals and socks. A lot of children used to laugh a lot about this.
- I was in the netball team when we won the Police Small Schools tournament, we'd only just learned to play proper 7 a side and it was the first time we'd played a competitive match. We were extremely pleased with ourselves!
- Assemblies were kind of fun. We used to sing songs like "You will go out with joy" and we had to clap our hands.
- Mrs Greenwood was funny, she would stomp her feet when someone did something naughty and say "I'm having a paddy." Because it was in the hut the floor would shake! Playing on the indoor apparatus was the best thing ever!

Rosemary Owen



Bethan Shore



Sports Day 1982

William I's Domesday Book of 1086 noted that 'Carsuella' had 200 acres of farmland, needing 6 ox-teams and had a population of 100, including 10 tenant villeins. In c.1300 a village of 250 people with many farms and a stone church had developed. By c.1600 many of today's thatched cottages had been built, the orchards planted, and farming was thriving; in 1839 there were 10 farms in the village. In Abbotskerswell you will find all that is best in the typical Devon village.

As you walk around Abbotskerswell you will be part of a 3,000 year old story of human habitation and development, beginning with the valley that provides everything early settlers needed: water, wood, shelter and farming land. The buildings **highlighted** reflect some 600 years of that story and are many and varied.

KEY

- Ladywell
- Barnfield houses
- The Village Hall
- Town Farm and cottages
- Church House
- The Parish Rooms
- The Church
- Court Farm Inn
- 1960s development
- Court Grange
- The Quaker Burial Ground
- Carse Mill
- Odle Hill House
- Mallands and Henley's Cyder
- Prospect Cottage
- Monks Thatch
- Yeoman's Cottage
- Abbotsford
- The Village School
- The House Cottages
- The Grange Farm
- The Spire
- Whittowes Chapel

The starting point of the Trail, at the Park, leads to the **Ladywell (1)** which is considered to be a sacred spring. This is probably because its existence gave rise to the village's site; historically it has also been thought to have healing properties for eye infections. Walking back past **Barnfield Terrace (2)** shows how the modern village has evolved, these were its first Council Houses, built in 1928. Another modern feature of the village is **The Village Hall (3)** built in 1973 mainly with volunteer labour, it replaced the 16th century version. As you walk towards the centre of the village its real character begins to unfold and this is reflected with c.1600 thatched houses. **Town Farm and Town Cottages (4)** were originally open hearth houses, made from cob (a mixture of mud, clay and straw) on a limestone base with a thatched roof.

Opposite Town Farm is **Church House (5)** which was built in 1524 on land given by the Abbot of Sherborne. It served as the village hall and bakery for over four centuries. Behind Church House stand **The Parish Rooms (6)**, which were rebuilt in 1980 from the parish baths provided by Rev. Arthur Dence of Court Grange. Clearly visible now is the imposing **Church of St Mary (7)**, built on a Saxon site it was rebuilt in stone in c.13th, reconstructed with a nave, a chancel with a tower and aisle added in c.15th; totally renovated by William Butterfield in 1884 in memory of Capt. Marcus Hare. The impressive village War Memorial is inside the church. As in many Devon villages the Church Farm was close to the church and in 1839 was the largest of the 10 farms in the village. Today it is **The Court Farm Inn (8)** created in 1973 after it ceased to be a farm. Much of its farmland went to provide sites for the extensive modern houses that have been built on this side of the village. The interesting architect Mervyn Seal designed **houses (9)** built in 1968 on lower Wilton Way providing an alternative approach to village vernacular architecture.

A short, but steep, footpath takes you to an important house in the history of Abbotskerswell, **Court Grange (10)**. Built in 1865 by Mrs Marcus Hare, whose family was to play an important role for 60 years as village patrons and benefactors. It was given to the National Institute for the Blind in 1928 for a blind babies' home and eventually became a school for the deaf in 1963. This closed in 1999 and today it is housing.

Returning to Wilton Way you will find the interesting **Society of Friends burial ground (11)** which was used by the local Quakers from the 18th century. A walk through the 1960s and 70s houses takes you onto Odle Hill, past Rock Cottage, built in Tudor times and onto **Carse Mill (12)** which probably was never a mill! Turning up the hill you will pass a number of fine buildings constructed for the wealthy of Abbotskerswell in 19th century: **Odle Hill House (13)** and Westbury were owned by the Palk family who were local farmers and butchers. Further up the hill you will find a large imposing house, **Mallands (14)** which was built by another important family, the Henleys. They developed a 'cyder works' which by 1884 was employing 20 men; the vets are in the original cider making building dating from 1791. The remains of the works are to be seen behind the house, now an industrial estate, developed when Whiteways left in 1965.

Returning down the hill you will pass an area that is steeped in the past. **Prospect Cottage (15)** is the only remaining thatched cottage from a group of c.17th workers cottages in this area of the village. Of the same

era is **Monks Thatch (16)**, which was formerly a large farm, it is splendid example of the 'Devon Longhouse' the home of a yeoman farmer. On the right is **Yeoman's Cottage (17)** once a pair of c.17th worker's cottages and on the left stands the impressive **Abbotsford (18)** built in c.1600 as a farmhouse and given a Georgian facade in c.18th.

The **Village School (19)** stands high above the road in the centre of the village; it is a good example of an 1870s 'Board School'. Further down the road you will come to a group of houses called '**The Model Cottages' (20)**. Nos 1 and 2 are splendid examples of c.19th century 'model', or good example houses, built by an enlightened landlord to improve living conditions for workers. In the centre of Abbotskerswell is **The Square (21)**, here the coronations of Edward VII and George V were both commemorated by the planting of trees in the middle of the road. Sadly the last one, a pink hawthorn, was demolished by a lorry in 1952 and now it is just a roundabout! There were once 3 shops here. Heading up Buckpitt's Hill you pass the Old Post Office before turning into Vicarage Road to find the now redundant **Wesleyan Chapel (22)** used between 1851 and 1937, and the end of our Abbotskerswell Trail.



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Chapter 2

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- ² *The Western Times* 8.04.1854
- ³ *Mid Devon Advertiser* 22.11.1930
- ⁴ *AbbTalk* No 21

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- ¹ *Abbotskerswell History*
Rev. F Gordon Campbell
- ² *St Mary the Virgin ABBOTSKERSWELL*
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- ³ *East & South Devon Advertiser*
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