

Early history

Early records suggest that warriors killed in a local battle at Musbury Fort were buried in Kilmington Churchyard in 937AD thereby indicating the presence of a place of worship on the site. A yew tree was planted at that time on the south east side of the present church at the location of the burials now recognised by a flat stone plaque. We are certain that in 1266 the then Lord of the Manor, Robert Weston, gave an acre of land to the parish of Kilmington to sell ale towards the maintenance of the chapel. Later, at about the end of the 15th century, a stone church was built together with the existing tower and stood until the mid 19th century. For over 100 years the church required extensive repairs and it was decided that it should be demolished, with the exception of the tower, and a new church built.

The church patron St Giles is also the patron saint of woodlands, lepers, cripples and those struck by some sudden misery. It is not known precisely when St Giles was adopted patron saint, but the literature suggests before 1548, possibly much earlier as it was popular to choose patrons of parish churches and chapels during the 12th century.

The present church

The new and now existing church was built in 1862 at a cost of £1330 and is a typical Victorian church design. The main structure is built of course stone with freestone dressings and slate and tiled roof. Internally the design provides an open plan, with a “wagon” style

roof to the nave, chancel and four centred roofs combining with a bright decor. The chancel is slightly elevated from the nave without a screen or rood. The Tower contains a fine ring of six bells installed at various times between 1672 and 1895. It was about 1895 when the bell chamber was added and a glass panel installed. In the bell chamber are a fine set of hand bells and a rare item known as the "Ellacombe apparatus" which is still in working order. The apparatus, now rarely found in churches, enabled one person to perform the change ringing of church bells. The tower also houses a clock mechanism which was installed in 1909 and has been wound weekly by three generations of the same family. The clock face on the roadside of the tower has the inscription "My times are in thy hand" from Psalm 31v15. A north porch was built for the north door to include toilet facilities in 2006/07, together with a small kitchen at the back of the church at a total cost of over £90,000.

Until 1912 St Giles was responsible to St Mary's Church, Axminster, its mother church, and was served by a curate. Prior to 1678 the Axminster churchyard was used to bury the dead of Kilmington.

Internal journey

Commencing left from the new north porch along the north aisle the two prominent Kilmington families are depicted in very elaborate stone and marble plaques. The first is of the Tucker family who resided at Coryton Park listing the family from 1691-1841 and a little further on, listed in Latin on a Corinthian pilaster, are

details of the Southcott family. Under the stone floor slabs in this aisle are contained the remains of these and other families, the oldest dated 1671.

The church contains nine stained glass windows which are prominent to the eye as one walks around the church. The first you will come across is at the end of the north aisle depicting the virgin and child dated 1926. As you move from the north aisle and pass the former vestry you will see on your right an old wooden church chest used for the storage of vestments etc. Opposite is the oak pulpit installed in 1899 after 30 years of discussions! The top contains a popular intricate decorative 14th century style of curvilinear tracery. By the pulpit one will notice a brass plaque one of many to be found in the church.

Ascending the steps up into the chancel the choir stalls with their attractive end carvings can be found on either side. These stalls were provided by a generous donation of £200 from a Major Percy Gardiner in memory of his aunt Miss Frances Ann Anning in June 1928. The organ which can be seen on the left was acquired by public subscriptions and installed at a cost of £200 in about 1895. Nearby is a wooden plaque made from the former yew tree referred to earlier. Close by is the stained glass north lancet window depicting St Giles and the hind. Interestingly, below this window is a small brass door embossed with the initials IHS an abbreviation in Latin meaning *Jesus Hominus Salvator* engraved thereon and translated as "Jesus the Saviour of the World". This recessed cabinet, known as an ambry, was installed when the church was built. Close by is a large comfortable chair used by visiting

bishops. The altar can be found in its appropriate position at the east end of the chancel with a curtain reredos and a fine stained glass window showing the Crucifixion dating back to when the church was built. Immediately to your right is the stained glass south lancet window.

Returning past the choir stalls and down the steps there will be found the vicar's wooden engraved reading desk. Behind the desk is a replica of the famous "Glastonbury Chair" suitably engraved with words in Latin. Making one's way left is the Lady Chapel, formerly the private chapel of the Tucker family. In 1951 Mrs Marwood Tucker wished for the pew in the chapel to be used by the ladies in the choir. Whilst in the Lady Chapel it is worth studying the stained glass windows. The window behind the altar depicting "Suffer little Children" was dedicated in 1959 and on the south side the magnificent stained glass window containing the various family coats of arms of the Tucker family.

Stepping down from the Lady Chapel one will see further stone floor slabs where past parishioners have been buried. It is interesting to note that there is a gap where three graves could have been without any memorial stones. At a similar position on the external wall of that part of the church are three memorial stones. It is likely these were removed when the new church was built and extended over the graves.

Along the south aisle there are two stained glass windows, the first showing another version of the Crucifixion and the second the Resurrection. Both of these windows were presented in memory of one of the Anning family. Further along is a stone plaque referring

to Frances Anning who in her last moments “desired her bones might not be removed from here”. It will be seen that along this aisle there are several brass plaques in memory of military personnel.

In 1995 authority was given to screening of the west end of the south aisle to form the new vestry. If the vestry is open one can view the stained glass window depicting the glory of God and also an interesting marble plaque built into the wall.

Coming now to the end of your journey through the church it would be amiss not to take a look at the octagonal perpendicular font, with its characteristic ornaments of quatrefoil panels and cusped niches being a good example of 15th century workmanship. The wooden cover is a recent replacement. As you pass the kitchen area look up and you will see a royal coat of arms dating back to Charles II.

The churchyard and Millennium Memorial Garden

Reference has already been made to the use of the churchyard which is contained in two sections. The oldest graves are located around the church with an extension at the rear of the Millennium Memorial Garden. There are about 700 graves in the old section, some containing more than one person. There is a chest tomb of the Tucker family on the south side of the churchyard. This churchyard contains the remains of three clergy that officiated at St Giles’ Church. The first two were curates, but the third was the Reverend Edward Keightly Botwood the first vicar of Kilmington who died in 1916. His memorial and grave is located at

the entrance to the churchyard at the car park end and is one of two designated Commonwealth War Graves.

Between the old and extended churchyard is the Millennium Memorial Garden completed and consecrated by the Lord Bishop of Exeter in 2000 and financed as a joint project between the Kilmington Parish Council and the Kilmington Parochial Church Council.

Church activities

St Giles' Church has active worshippers and followers, with a choir, handicrafts group, bell ringers, study groups and coffee shop and many events are arranged, including flower festivals and fund raising activities.

A comprehensive hardback book about its history over a millennium, illustrated in colour, is on display at the back of the Church. Copies can be obtained from the Rev. Simon Holloway (01297 35433) or the church historian Michael Tyler (01297 34958).

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