



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

LONDON

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ST NICHOLAS'
CHURCH

BERWICK BASSETT
WILTSHIRE





THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST NICHOLAS' CHURCH
BERWICK BASSETT, WILTSHIRE

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 325 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH until 30 September 2002. We will be moving to new offices in the autumn of 2002, so please look out for announcements in our churches or visit our website www.visitchurches.org.uk for details of our new address.

We hope that you will enjoy your visit and be encouraged to see our other churches. Some are in towns; some in remote country districts. Some are easy and others hard to find but all are worth the effort.

Nearby are the Trust churches of:

ALTON PRIORS, ALL SAINTS
5 miles NW of Pewsey off A345

EVERLEIGH, ST PETER
6 miles SE of Upavon on A342

DRAYCOT CERNE, ST JAMES
ST MARY
5 miles N of Chippenham off B4069

ST NICHOLAS' CHURCH

BERWICK BASSETT, WILTSHIRE

by NEIL SKELTON

INTRODUCTION

The hamlet of Berwick Bassett is on the Ridgeway three miles (4.8km) north of Avebury, and sheltered by Hackpen Hill. It is an ancient settlement and there is a record that Alan Bassett held the manor in 1211 (Berwick meaning an outlying grange or farm). He or his successors may have built the first church. The old manor house, just to the south of the church, is a picturesque building dating from the 15th century. Its original doorway is now at Vasterne Manor, Wootton Bassett. The new manor house, a short distance to the south-east, dates from the later-17th century.

THE CHURCH

The church consists of a nave, chancel and south tower, which also serves as a porch. The chancel was rebuilt in brick during the 18th century reusing older windows. High up in the east wall is a small quatrefoil window. The nave and tower walls are of sarsen stone which has a very rough finish and is difficult to work. This stone (also known as 'grey wethers' from its similarity to grazing sheep when viewed at a distance) is scattered over the expansive prehistoric plain of Wiltshire and it is to this that the great stone circle at Avebury owes its existence. Local limestone has been used for the quoins, copings, string-courses and window masonry.

Until 1857 there was a timber belfry on a stone base but this did not survive the restoration by Thomas H Wyatt when much of the mediaeval nave was rebuilt. The weathercock, blown down in the severe storm of 1990, shows evidence of having been used for 'target practice' in days gone by.

On the south side of the nave is a mass-dial, used in the mediaeval period to ensure that the bell was rung at the correct time to mark the canonical hours. A smaller mass dial is visible on the east jamb of the south doorway. The north doorway appears to have been blocked sometime after the Victorian restoration. Whilst it is barely visible from the inside, the 19th-century door remains in place on the outside.



St Nicholas from the south by John Buckle

(W.A.N.H.S.)

INTERIOR

The Early English font pre-dates the foundation of the present church which suggests an earlier building on the same site. The south doorway is mediaeval, although the door itself is Victorian. The chancel screen is 15th century with one-light divisions and exquisitely carved tracery, top rail and cornice. In the chancel floor is a brass demi-figure of a priest. The inscription translates: 'Here lyeth William Bayly, thus it pleases the Lord. He bequeathed to the Church one hundred shillings always to remain. He died the 5th before the ides (13th) of November, A.D. 1427'. The brass was returned to its former position after removal to Avebury in 1970. The chancel floor tiles are by Minton. Only two of the Victorian pews remain; the rest were brought here during the 1970s from the redundant Christ Church, Meadow Lane in Leeds, Yorkshire. The altar, pulpit and reading desk date from the Victorian restoration. The roundel of the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) in the east window is the sole survivor of the Victorian stained glass in the church.

On the north wall is a stone tablet recording the bequest of Henry Webb who died in 1776. He left a sum of money to provide the salary for a teacher to instruct the children of the poor and indigent of the parish. Just inside the door is a ledger commemorating Frances, wife of Thomas Cripps, who 'departed this life in prayer upon her knees'. In the nave and the north-east part of the churchyard are memorials to 18th- and 19th-century members of the Nalder family, lords of Berwick manor.

BELLS

There are three bells:

- 1 Robert Cor of Aldbourne. 1694.
2. John Wallis of Salisbury. 1605.
3. William and Richard Purdue of Bristol. 1663.

The bells are now no longer safe to ring full-circle but can be chimed for the occasional services held here.

COMMUNION PLATE

Belonging to the church but in safekeeping elsewhere is a communion cup and cover. The cup is inscribed: 'Purchased by the joint subscription of S. Adams, Curate: Hen Webb, Thos Biggs Churchwardens: Eliz Seymour, Widow, and given to the parish of Berwick Bassett 4th June, 1775'.

REDUNDANCY

With only a few inhabitants to maintain the church, regular services ceased in 1970. It was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust in 1973 and has since undergone extensive repair. Initial repairs were carried out under the supervision of Kenneth Wiltshire of the Sarum Partnership, Salisbury.

*Front cover: St Nicholas' from the south (TO COME).
Back cover: Nave looking east (NEIL SKELTON).*

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