

Church Stories

St. Laurence, Upwey



The story of this church has been taken from a number of sources and is, by collective assumption, reasonably accurate.

The story is not definitive however and is always open to critique, correction and addition. All contributions welcome.

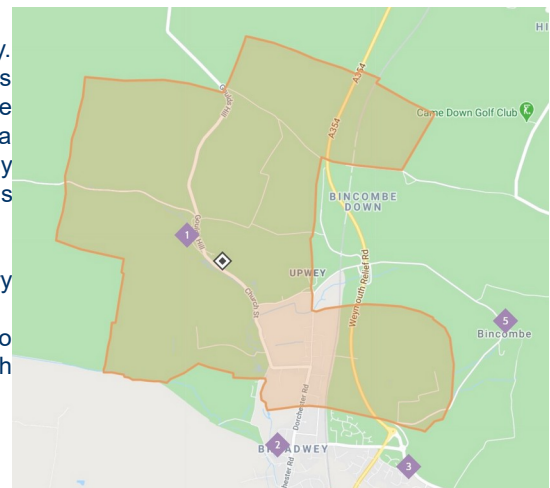
The account below includes extracts from Wikipedia, the guide written by Edmund Scott in 1994 as well as documents provided by Chris Carter. Photography is generally by Adrian Wood. Other specific references are not provided at this time. Further research for those wishing to explore the history of Upwey is readily available online. A good place to begin would be www.upweybroadweyhistory.co.uk

The Parish of Upwey

Upwey is four miles north of Weymouth at the foot of the Ridgeway, part of the Dorset Downs. The river Wey emerges from the springs along the chalk base. Streams feed into the bigger river fed by the Wey spring in the gardens of the Upwey Wishing Well. The well has a significant history more recently as a visitor attraction enjoyed by visitors up from Weymouth. The whole river to the mouth in the town is only approximately four miles long.

There is reference to Upwey from Thomas Hardy, notably in his story Trumpet Major and a poem he wrote about Upwey Station.

There is also a recorded connection with an American family who claim ties back to the original crossings to the 'New World' in the 17th Century.





Upwey Looking along the Ridgeway and church area among the trees



Upwey Elwell Street

The Church

It is thought that the well was a place of worship long before a Christian site was developed. The earliest reference found so far is 1201 when the building was probably no more than a thatched chapel. Recorded mention is made of an Alan de Bayeaux coming to St Laurence on the Wey in 1243 where a small chantry was made by his son John Bayous.

The current building is a mixture of styles and ages with going back to 13th and 14th centuries. The church is often referred to as 12th century but there is little evidence for that assumption. Parts of the nave, north aisle, west tower and north porch date from the 1400s. A west Gallery was added in 1685. North and south galleries were added in 1834. The south aisle and arcade were added in 1838 and the clerestory in 1841.

In 1891, general repairs: new flooring and removal of the galleries and the installation of new pews were carried out at a

cost of £890 with further work in 1906 to build a new chancel, vestry and organ chamber and a new organ replacing the previous organ of 1685 and recasted bells installed. The work, which also saw the moving of the 14th century chancel arch to the east end of the south aisle cost over £1000 and church dedicated by the Bishop of Salisbury in 1907.

The St. Laurence Story

What follows is a combination of notes and relevant photographs. The guide was written to be used as reference on a physical tour of the church. This is available as described although there may be some copies available for sale in the church.

We have used the general structure of the guide here:

Entering the church

The Porch (Poor Church) was used for the first part of marriage and baptism services; hence the benches along the sides.

The porch roof is rough stone slabs.

The studded door is thought to be over 500 years old, made oak and elm with iron strap hinges.

An oak inner door has been added to help keep the church warmer during services.



The Pulpit

The pulpit was made and installed in the 1600s: date unknown. It was originally across the other side of the chancel. It is Jacobean and once stood on a panelled base with carvings that are now on the walls; one of St Philip above the lectern and two either side of the bell ringing room at the base of the tower.



The Chancel



The current chancel was built in 1906 as an enlargement project funded by the rector Gildea who also carved the ends of the choir stalls. The Squint was added to allow a view of the altar from the north aisle



The East Window

The panels were donated by the Reverend George Gould of Fleet in 1840. Around the edges are fragments of glass smashed during the Civil War.



The central panel is a copy of a Dürer drawing. All the windows in the church were restored and repaired between 2008 and 2011. Read more in the guide.

The Organ

The original organ was installed in 1685 in the gallery and moved to the south aisle in 1891. Having served the church for 206 years, the organ was replaced with the present organ and moved to its location in the organ chamber in the chancel.



The Nave

The main part of the church where the congregation sit has seen many changes.

Before 1841, there were galleries for musicians against the wall at the west end and also the wall to the north before the north aisle was built later. The roof was lower and the floor was not tiled. Work was carried out to raise the roof and add the clerestory windows, to remove the galleries and replace the floor. Also, the high pews were removed. There were spaces under the floor; the vaults. These were filled in. There was a serious flood in 1955 in which a local lad was unfortunately drowned. The church was flooded to the mark on the end of all the pews.



The Nave from the pulpit



The Aisles

These are the two areas along the side of the nave through the arches - the colonnades

The North Aisle The Roses and Texts

Added to church some time between 1480 and 1520. Still on the nave side of the arches are two Tudor Roses that were probably part of more general illustrations and decorations that were painted on the church walls as messages and prayers although mostly, these were covered up as people were able to read scriptures or at least have more easy access to the written word. The Tudor Roses were known to be there from the records and were revealed by conservators in 1988 having been painted some time around 1486 as a part of the original decoration.

On the north wall, either side of the doorway are two layers of bible texts or the remains thereof. Deepest into the wall at bottom right is almost illegible text dating to the original construction. On top of that is text from the Authorised Bible of 1611: three verses from the Book of Proverbs.

In the middle is text from the time of the Civil War in favour of King Charles 1st. In view of the prevailing political situation and the diametrically opposed ideologies between the local Parliamentarians and Royalists, the texts were quickly covered over once the Royalists were beaten and the King was condemned to execution.

