

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

There was already a church by the early 12th century, which was named after the Virgin Mary in 1220,³⁰⁸ and dedicated to her Assumption by 1408.³⁰⁹ The church was held as a prebend in the Collegiate Church of Heytesbury, and the living was served by a perpetual curate. The parish came under the jurisdiction of Wylve deanery until 1872, and Heytesbury rural deanery to 1896.³¹⁰ In that year, Hill Deverill was absorbed into the new ecclesiastical parish of Longbridge Deverill with Crockerton and Hill Deverill,³¹¹ and was later part of the parish of the Deverills created in 1972.³¹² The tithing of Baycliffe once supported a chapel with its tithes, although knowledge of the site was lost by 1824, when Baycliffe and Little Horningsham in Maiden Bradley parish formed one tithing.³¹³ Baycliffe became part of Horningsham parish in 1884.³¹⁴

Advowson

The church was presumably founded by the Giffard family, who held the advowson in the time of Bishop Roger (1107–39), when it was given by one Elias Giffard to the church at Heytesbury.³¹⁵ Following the foundation of Heytesbury as a Collegiate Church *c.* 1150–60,³¹⁶ the church at Hill Deverill was granted to one of its four newly-created canons.³¹⁷ These prebendaries were appointed by the Dean of Heytesbury, from 1220 generally the Dean of Salisbury, until prebends were abolished by the Cathedrals Act of 1840.³¹⁸ The right of patronage was then transferred from the dean

³⁰⁸ Hoare, *Mod. Wilts.* Heytesbury, 8.

³⁰⁹ Timmins (ed.), *Chandler's Reg. 1404–17*, p. 293.

³¹⁰ Youngs, *Admin. Units*, I, 536, 819.

³¹¹ WSA, D 1/36/4/9 (23).

³¹² Youngs, *Admin. Units*, I, 536–7.

³¹³ Hoare, *Mod. Wilts.* Heytesbury, 32.

³¹⁴ *VCH Wilts.* IV, 350.

³¹⁵ *Reg. St. Osmund*, I, 349.

³¹⁶ *VCH Wilts.* III, 389–92.

³¹⁷ *Reg. St. Osmund*, I, 337.

³¹⁸ *VCH Wilts.* III, 391.

to the bishop of Salisbury,³¹⁹ who exchanged the advowson of Hill Deverill for that of Imber with the Marques of Bath in 1877.³²⁰

Property

The rectory estate and tithes belonged to the prebend of Hill Deverill, attached to Heytesbury church.³²¹ Although there was once a clergy house in Hill Deverill,³²² it had disappeared by 1649.³²³ During the Interregnum, the annual stipend of the curate was £8 5s.,³²⁴ which had risen to £20 in 1727.³²⁵ Between 1800 and 1820, funds raised locally to increase the stipend were matched by several grants from Queen Anne's Bounty,³²⁶ and the money invested in lands in North and South Barrow (Som.).³²⁷ The Duke of Somerset increased the stipend by a further £10, bringing the annual income to £69.³²⁸ As lessor of the tithes, the Duke had covenanted to pay the stipend of the perpetual curate and to provide him with a house: although he apparently allocated land for a new clergy house, there was no record of it in 1857,³²⁹ and the house was never built.³³⁰ Following his appointment as perpetual curate in 1838, William Barnes asked the Duke several times to increase the stipend further, declaring in 1849 that he 'should greatly prefer relying on their honour and Christian sense of Duty ... than proving by a legal process that due provision was not made for the vicar or incumbent of Hill Deverill'.³³¹ Indeed Barnes paid his own curate £80, and although the trustees of Queen Anne's Bounty were likely to match any grant

³¹⁹ *VCH Wilts. III*, 392.

³²⁰ WSA, D 1/36/4/8(2).

³²¹ Above, Manors: Rectory estate.

³²² Timmins (ed.), *Chandler's Reg. 1404–17*, p. 293.

³²³ WSA, 1332/20; WAM, XLI (1920–22), 21.

³²⁴ WSA, 1332/18, parish survey, c. 1654–9.

³²⁵ WSA, 1332/18, schedule of deeds, 1756.

³²⁶ C. Hodgson, *Queen Anne's Bounty* (1845), 335.

³²⁷ *Glebe Lands Return, 1887*, p. 164.

³²⁸ WSA, 1332/20, letter, 15 Sep., 1857.

³²⁹ WSA, 1332/20, letter, 14 Sep., 1857; *ibid.* undated memorandum, c. 1857.

³³⁰ WSA, D 1/56/7.

³³¹ WSA, 1332/20, letter, 10 Oct., 1849.

from the Duke, he politely refused.³³² The Ecclesiastical Commissioners also rejected a scheme to augment the living, in which the perpetual curate would surrender his lease and would receive in return the outstanding tithes of the parish, worth £52, bringing his total income to £91.³³³ The issue seems to have dropped with the death of Barnes in 1858.

Chapel of the Holy Trinity

In 1318, Robert le Bore granted an estate and the advowson of Holy Trinity chapel at Hill Deverill to the priory of St Radegund, Longleat, to provide four chaplains for his chantry at the chapel.³³⁴ Although Bore planned to transfer the endowment to St John's Hospital in Wilton³³⁵ this apparently did not happen, and in 1404 the advowson was in the hands of his heirs, Alice Westbury and her heirs by her first husband, Robert Balle.³³⁶ In 1408 William Felde was named as the chantry chaplain.³³⁷ There is no further record of the chapel, although it may have been the chapel at Baycliff.³³⁸

Religious Life

The prebend was apparently little more than a sinecure for well-connected absentees, including foreign clergy,³³⁹ who appointed a deputy to serve the living.³⁴⁰ In 1220, the parish was served by a vicar and a chaplain: the church had two altars, the high altar and an altar of St James. Richly decorated with an image of the Virgin, paintings and wall hangings, it was also well provided with liturgical ornaments,

³³² WSA, 1332/20, letters, 14 and 15 Sep., 1857.

³³³ WSA, 1332/20, undated memorandum, c. 1857; letter, 17 Nov., 1857.

³³⁴ *Cal. Pat.* 1317–21, p. 73; 1321–24, p. 361; 1324–27, p. 27; Dugdale, *Mon.* VI(1), p. 583; *VCH Wilts. III*, 302, 365; *WAM*, X (1866–7), 287; *Reg. Martival*, II, 242–45, 440–45; above, manors: Hill Deverill manor.

³³⁵ *WAM*, X (1866–7), 287.

³³⁶ Elrington (ed.), *Feet of Fines 1327–77*, p. 55; Kirby (ed.), *Feet of Fines 1377–1509*, p. 54.

³³⁷ *WAM*, XXVIII (1894–5), 240.

³³⁸ *WAM*, XXVIII (1894–5), 235–52.

³³⁹ *VCH Wilts. III*, 391.

³⁴⁰ *WAM*, XXVIII (1894–5), 241–42, for an incomplete list of curates.

including two processional crosses, a small silver chalice, two portable marble altars, service books and vestments. Although some objects were worn out, the church was acquiring new gifts,³⁴¹ including £2 from Cicely, wife of Geoffrey Hussey in 1267.³⁴² In 1408, the church was dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin and was served by a vicar and a chaplain.³⁴³

Many clergy served other local churches, especially in the Deverills. They included Edmund Ludlow Coker and Benjamin Coker, both of whom became rector of Kingston Deverill; in 1783, Samuel Clarke was also vicar of Chirton and curate of West Knoyle;³⁴⁴ Robert Meek, perpetual curate of Hill Deverill 1837–38, was also rector of Brixton Deverill, and he was succeeded in both posts by William Barnes. Barnes employed Emanuel Strickland as curate and later John Powell, who became the first and last vicar of Hill Deverill upon Barnes' death in 1858.

Churchwardens accounts, now lost, indicated that communion was administered four times a year over the century before 1858.³⁴⁵ In January 1857, there was a service every Sunday at Hill Deverill, which increased to two later that year.³⁴⁶ Although it was noted that some parishioners were regular and devout in their attendance at church, it is clear that many were neglecting worship.³⁴⁷ Services at Hill Deverill were accompanied by music, with wind and stringed instruments being replaced by an organ in 1860.³⁴⁸ In 1864, there were services at Hill Deverill twice on Sundays and great feast days, but due to the lack of a clergy house the vicar did not offer prayers on other days. Only about 50, a third of the parish, regularly attended services, and only 10 regularly took Communion.³⁴⁹

³⁴¹ *Reg. St. Osmund*, I, 311–12.

³⁴² *Cat. Ancient Deeds*, III, 438–39, 442.

³⁴³ Hoare, *Mod. Wilts*. Heytesbury, 10; Timmins (ed.), *Chandler's Reg. 1404–17*, p. 293.

³⁴⁴ Ransome (ed.), *Visitation Queries 1783*, p. 134.

³⁴⁵ WAM, XXVIII (1894–5), 242.

³⁴⁶ WSA, 1332/20, letter, 14 Sep., 1857.

³⁴⁷ WSA, 1332/20, accounts for Brixton and Hill Deverill, 3 Jan., 1857.

³⁴⁸ WAM, XXVIII (1894–5), 242.

³⁴⁹ WSA, D 1/56/7.

By the death of Powell in 1895, the average congregation had grown to 70, thanks both to the work of the vicar's son with the young men of the parish, and the attendance of several people from Longbridge Deverill who objected to the ritualism of their own vicar.³⁵⁰ By this time, however, the Marquess of Bath already intended to unite the benefice with that of Longbridge Deverill, of which he was also the patron. The vicar of the newly-united benefice preferred to close Hill Deverill church and invited his new parishioners to attend Longbridge Deverill church, which met with unanimous opposition. Although the Bishop of Salisbury preferred its closure, services were held in Hill Deverill church until 1982.³⁵¹

Church Fabric

The medieval church of the Assumption was a modest building, described as 'mean' by Hoare,³⁵² comprising of a chancel and nave, with a small bellcote at the west end and a porch to the south.³⁵³ In 1841, all but the east wall was pulled down, and a similar but slightly larger church designed by Chapman and Sons was built of dressed limestone,³⁵⁴ at a cost of £436.³⁵⁵ The nave had three chamfered pointed windows on each side; the chancel had two on each side, a pointed window with y-tracery and hoodmoulds at the east end,³⁵⁶ and also a carved stone head built into the east wall.³⁵⁷ The entrance was through a pointed chamfered doorway at the west end, with a lancet window above and a gabled bellcote with a pointed opening.³⁵⁸

Inside, the church was similarly modest, with a simple chamfered pointed chancel arch and plain plastered walls. Its enlargement increased the number of

³⁵⁰ WSA, 2656/1; 1961/62, letter, 21 Nov., 1895.

³⁵¹ WSA, 1961/62.

³⁵² Hoare, *Modern Wilts*. Heytesbury, 11.

³⁵³ J. Buckler, watercolours in WHM Library, vol. III, 6. See also 'The Buckler Collection of Wiltshire Drawings', WAM, XL (1917–19), 168.

³⁵⁴ WSA, D 1/61/117/14; DOE, 'Bldgs. List', Hill Deverill, 122; Pevsner, *Wilts*. (2nd edn), 270.

³⁵⁵ WSA, 1961/43; WAM, XXVIII (1894–5), 242.

³⁵⁶ DOE, 'Bldgs. List', Hill Deverill, 122.

³⁵⁷ WAM, XXVIII (1894–5), 242.

³⁵⁸ DOE, 'Bldgs. List', Hill Deverill, 122.

seats from 85, of which only 22 were free to the poor, to 148 free seats.³⁵⁹ There was a gallery in the west end, in which an organ was erected in 1860.³⁶⁰ The two principal monuments commemorated the Ludlow and Coker families of Hill Deverill manor. The Ludlow tomb, a large altar tomb erected by William Ludlow (d. 1533), for his father John Ludlow (d. 1519), is elaborately carved with angels supporting shields displaying the arms of William Ludlow (d. 1478), and his descendents, although the brass inscription was removed.³⁶¹ Sir Henry Coker (d. 1692), was commemorated by a portrait painted by William Faithorne, and he and his family by two inscribed wooden tablets in a recessed pointed arch on the north wall of the chancel, painted to look like stone.³⁶² The wooden communion rails date from the same period and may have been part of the same decorative scheme: they were transferred to the new church.³⁶³ Although the building was in good repair in 1895, the fittings were in a state of general decay, and repairs were necessary in 1896.³⁶⁴ By 1957, the church was deteriorating due to lack of use, and it was still lit by candles in 1977.³⁶⁵ The church plate consisted of a paten and flagon dating from 1700 and a cup of 1771.³⁶⁶ There was one bell,³⁶⁷ which was removed by the diocesan authorities when the church was closed.³⁶⁸ The parish registers date from 1648.³⁶⁹

The church was closed in 1982,³⁷⁰ and sold for conversion to a private dwelling in 1985.³⁷¹ The nave was divided into three reception rooms, and a second

³⁵⁹ WSA, 1180/59.

³⁶⁰ WSA, 1180/57.

³⁶¹ WSA, 1961/45; Hoare, *Mod. Wilts.* Heytesbury, 10 and plate opp.; WAM, XXVII (1893–4), 270–1 and plate opp. p. 271; WAM, XXVIII (1894–5), 240; Pevsner, *Wilts.* (2nd edn), 270; DOE, ‘Bldgs. List’, 122.

³⁶² WSA, 1961/45; WAM, XXXIII (1893–4), 124.

³⁶³ WAM, XXXV (1907–8), 502, corrects WAM, XXVIII (1894–5), 242, which dates the rails to the 18th century.

³⁶⁴ WSA, D 1/61/37/12.

³⁶⁵ WSA, D 320/1/92.

³⁶⁶ WAM, XXVI (1892), 334.

³⁶⁷ WAM, II, (1855), 335.

³⁶⁸ WSA/1180/58, extract from Deverills Parish Newsletter, Nov. 1983, p. 3.

³⁶⁹ WSA, 1180/19–24; 1961/6–8.

³⁷⁰ WSA, 1961/29.

³⁷¹ DOE, ‘Bldgs. List’, Hill Deverill, 122.

level containing bedrooms was added, whilst the gallery was repositioned in the chancel, to which the remaining monuments were moved,³⁷² after the Ludlow monument was transferred to the church of Sts Peter and Paul, Longbridge Deverill.³⁷³ The churchyard contains two chest tombs: one, of the early 18th century, belonging to Elizabeth Townsend, the other unidentified and dating from a century later.³⁷⁴

Nonconformity

Neither Catholics nor dissenters were recorded in Hill Deverill in 1603,³⁷⁵ although the churchwardens presented an ‘obstinant recusant’ in 1625.³⁷⁶ In 1864, the vicar recorded 14 dissenters, whom he described as ‘ranters’ although they did ‘not exhibit a very hostile spirit’. There was never a meeting house within the parish.³⁷⁷

³⁷² WSA, 1180/58, extract from *Weekend Telegraph*, 14 Nov., 1992.

³⁷³ WSA, 1180/58, extract from Deverills Parish Newsletter, Nov. 1983, p. 3; DOE, ‘Bldgs. List’, Hill Deverill, 122.

³⁷⁴ DOE, ‘Bldgs. List’, Hill Deverill, 123.

³⁷⁵ Dyer and Palliser (eds.), *Diocesan Pop. Returns 1563 and 1603*, p. 479; WSA, D 5/28/3.

³⁷⁶ WSA, D 5/28/25.

³⁷⁷ WSA, D 1/56/7.