

## CHAPTER 7.

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## places of Worship.

*The relations and friends of the*

*Rev. J. P. Bremridge decided to put the money*

*which was originally intended for a stained glass window in the parish Church towards the building of a Church at Hollacombe. Bishop Bickersteth heartily approved of the scheme and, more to the point, gave a donation. Lord Portsmouth gave from his large estates, a quarter of an acre and sufficient wood to support the roof. The Bremridge Family gave a goodly sum on the first subscription and a large amount was collected at various times from a long list of subscribers and the proceeds of entertainments. Through the perseverance of Rev. H. Bremridge the building was quickly freed from debt. The foundation stone was laid by Sir Charles Turner K.C.L.I., son of a former vicar and the site was dedicated by Rev. J. C. Kempe Rector of Merton and Rector of Geter, on September 30<sup>th</sup> 1891. For a number of years the priests of Winklesigh and Ashreigny officiated at alternate Sundays, a Lay Reader taking charge at Mattins and at Thursday services.*

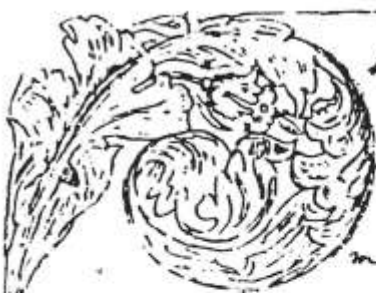
*Two facts connected with this dedication serve to link this modern*

Church to a much earlier foundation. Its patrons were St Michael and All Angels and the procession to the site for the Stone laying started from the Ancient chapel of St Michael at Hollacombe Barton. We may well pause with the antiquaries' sigh of grief, called up when we think of the detail we know of the foundation of this present Church and the shadowy history of the earlier chapel. Distance in time perhaps leads enchantment to imagination.

Here, standing on the north side of the old Barton Courtyard is a building, 34 feet by sixteen feet, still known as "the Chapel". Today among the potatoes stored within the walls, few remains a trace of the position of the altar at the eastern end, the old mortar being visible even now on the stone-work. This is comparable with the lower part of the Chancel walls in the parish church. But as the building fell into disuse and decay the walls were built up with cob and covered with thatch. As a small boy, the writer plainly remembers seeing old bits of wood carving lying about the room. In fancy they became an organ with

"Waves of music from the organ loft  
A prelude that was rich and soft,  
No prelude to a gathering storm  
But heaven's deep silence to perform."

Despite strong imagination and weak verse the Chapel is well authenticated. Michael de Portuo Mortuo was probably at Hollacombe sometime before 1232 for in that year King Henry III at Lambeth, granted



him permission to convey to his brother Wermund as a free gift, the valuable estate of Hollacombe, at that time a sub-manor of Winklergh. We may question if the former was sufficiently endowed with land that the transfer of Hollacombe still left him comfortably provided for or was he destined for a monk's cell? I am inclined to the second view. In 1294 the ancient chapel is mentioned for the first time, but there is no record of its foundation some time in the previous sixty years. <sup>1</sup> We may well ask if Michael de Portus Mortuo was named in honour of the Saint or was the chapel dedicated to his memory, for his piety, and the Saint? At this distance of time and without written record it is unwise to be dogmatic. Yet excavations of this spot might help our enquiries regarding the family and Michael in particular.

Then tradition speaks of a similar chapel at Loosedon Barton. But after the building of the Loosedon aisle in the parish Church, this chapel probably disappeared. The Rev<sup>d</sup> Neobitt used to hold that its existence was recorded at Exeter Cathedral, but the present writer has not been successful in obtaining particulars. So, too, at Southcot <sup>2</sup>. This and an allusion to it in Billong's Directory of Devon (1857) are the only evidence for its existence.

One shadow leads to another. We do not, cannot, know the history of these chapels; they remain romantic mysteries titivating the curiosity of the antiquarian.



ceasing him with fanciful theories. But the historian must turn back to the Church at Hollacombe, substantial before his eyes in the style of the late nineteenth Century, to the rehearsal of well known facts, vouched for by everyone including the village idiot.

The fabric is of local stone, with special colour stones from Denham quarry, Ashridge and Bath stone dressings.

The masonry is good, surprisingly so when we consider the low cost of the building. The simple, fairly English style of the little Church is appropriate and fits well into the hanging branches of chestnut and oak. The building is 51 feet long by 20 feet 9 inches wide and includes tower, porch, vestibule, vestry, Choir and Chancel.



The tower is probably the most attractive sight from the exterior. It is not very tall, and the spire and cock weather vane are not particularly remarkable. The two lower windows add nothing. But the spire is covered with oak shingles which match the texture of the surrounding scenery.

Passing inside the nave appears rudely simple. The three small double lancet windows on the north are paired with 3 on the South wall. The west window is much larger and over the two lancets is a circular light. All are splayed within and without the building. The six corbels are plain. The chancel is raised from the choir and the floor has dismal coloured tiles. Two freestone corbels

decorated with grape and passion flower, mark the division. The Roof is a continuation of the nave but with smaller compartments in the panelling. There are two single lancets and one large circular window on the eastern wall and a small double lancet on the North. The Chancel is separated from the nave by two steps and here again two corbels on the North and South sides indicate the division. These are carved mechanically to represent angels with the word and below are sgraffito designs of sacred emblems, with a straight band and leaf ornamentation. This is the only colouring on the otherwise plain plaster walls. The roof is of the arched braced type with panelled ceilings, not unlike the wagon roofs. The woodwork is of pine and deal, with oak supports.



The cornices have ornamental piercings and the whole is covered with excellent slate

A wide and low segmental arch opens out from the south of the chancel to the small but convenient vestry, in which there is a circular light south window. The porch has a pointed arch with rather deep mouldings. The hood mould terminals have carved freestone heads, representing our Saviour and the Virgin. The ceiling is of varnished deal and the floor has coloured tiles. A doorway to the west leads into the vestibule where the bell is tolled and on the north a door opens into the Nave.

The Font is of Beer Stone, octagonal pattern and in keeping with the general design. It was given by Mrs John Dunning.



The pulpit, approached by two steps at the north west side of the Choir, is made of pine, and the plan is Gothic in character, having foliated openings. Originally intended as a temporary fitting, when funds were low, it has not been replaced by a more expensive work. In spite of the low cost, Mr Bushell and son did not allow it to suffer in architectural beauty. The Lectern is of oak, with slight wrought ironwork of iron, and the latter is coloured and gilded.

The Communion table is of solid oak with a carved representation of the Agnus Dei on the front central post. There are beautiful frontals worked by the ladies of the parish.

The embossed Gothic Reredos

is of granite with slight line colouring and gilding, and the two openings formed by the tracery on either side of the Cross contain illuminated archangels on metal. The colouring and gilding was renewed by Mr Bushell and son of Down St Mary.

The Chancel Rails are of oak, ornamented with foliage design in coloured ironwork. These were adapted to their present position from Wootton Bassett Parish Church. The Choir stalls are of plain pine and now are not used. In the early years of the church there were about twelve boys and four men in the choir. Mr R Molland used to play the fiddle until he became too old for the labour of love in 1933. He must have been one of the last of the old church musicians. The American

organ is now left to provide its uncharitable music for the infrequent services. The seats are of pine too, and it remains a matter for deep regret that the roofs and <sup>the</sup> seats were not made of local material instead of cheap looking varnished matchwood. Sufficient oak was at hand and the extra cost would have been little loss.

besides the gain in character, the plate consists of chalice and altar and are of modern workmanship.

The memorials are few in number and all relatively recent. A brass tablet, mounted in local oak, marks the death during the last moments of the 1914-18 war of one of Hollacombe's best loved sons.

all the chancel windows are of stained glass, each alike - uniform mediocrity,

presenting no contrasts, and serving only to darken the interior. The large central light over the altar was the parish-

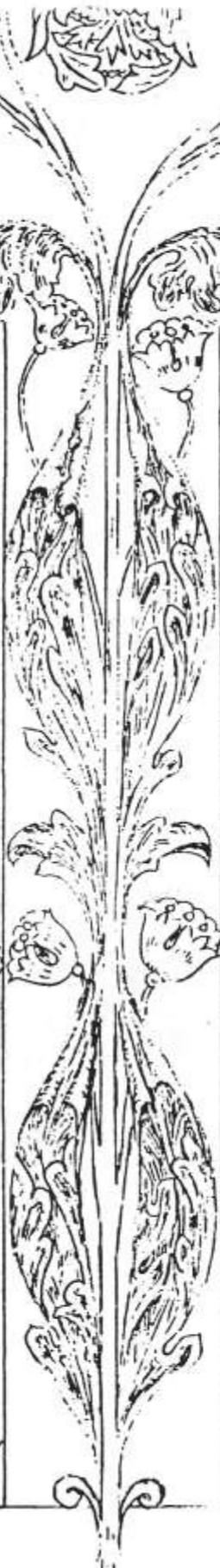
ioners reminder of Isaac Goston, fifth Earl of Portsmouth.<sup>4</sup> The two stained lancets on either side of the altar are memorials to the Rev J P Bremridge and Mary, his widow. The North window

represents the Lord blessing the little children and was erected to preserve the name of Henry Bremridge's wife and child.

The Nonconformist chapels of the parish are equally dull.

The Methodist Chapel was formerly Bible Christian. A small chapel built of stone with rough cast was erected in Red Lane or Barnstaple Street, Winkleigh, opposite the vicarage some years ago.

According to tradition the squire built it purposely to

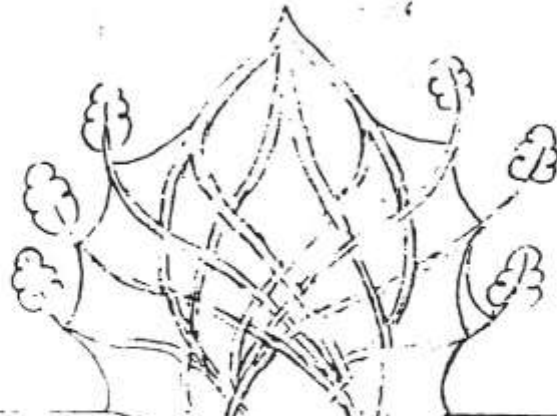


survive the vicar, with whom he was at loggerheads. This building was too small for the congregations lost by the parish church and in 1882 a new Chapel of stone and brick was erected near the Council School. The rostrum and the seats are of pine and there is a gallery. It is served by the Hatherleigh Circuit, there being no resident minister. Staple Green (Daniel Chapel) of the United Methodist Church was "Bible Christian" before the amalgamation. It is a stone building with rough cast of the familiar Devonshire type of the period (1840). The rostrum and seats are of pine, and there is a gallery. It was closed for a number of years, and during the First Great War. There is no resident minister, being served by the Ashreigney circuit.

There is a Sunday School attached, and structural alterations were made in 1936 to provide modern offices, in connection with social gatherings.

The Wesleyan Chapel, a well built building of stone and brick, was erected in 1864 at a cost of £400 raised by subscription. The rostrum and seats are of pine. There is also a gallery. The Church possesses good oak furniture, (table and chairs). There is no residential minister, being served by the Okehampton Circuit. The Chapel is licensed for marriages. Hollacombe Congregational Chapel, built with local stone, by Simon Brook, master mason, was opened for public worship by the religious body known as Independents, in 1836, and for a hundred





years has contributed in no small measure to the spiritual life of the district. For a considerable time this Chapel with that of Wembworthy was under the Ministerial Charge of Chalmers, but in later years the two were amalgamated. The Centenary Festival was observed at Wembworthy in 1936. There was a re-union of old members of the district, and a memorable day was spent. It was enlarged in 1869. There is a manse attached, but many ministers prefer to live at Wembworthy where responsible for the services on alternate Sundays. Hollacombe Chapel has the usual pine rostrum and the standardised gateway, fit for a mass production age.

a well built building

at the North East end is used as a Sunday School and for social gatherings. The whole is built in the North Devon style of Nonconformist buildings.

This schoolroom was used as a Day School for Evacuee children during the 1939-45 War. Secularisation is evident as in so much else of Village Sacred life.

