

## St Andrew's history

The most likely route by which Laverstock first heard the Christian gospel is from Britford, where there was an important early church. It served as a 'mother' church for the area, and it may have been one of the clergy from there who came to preach, first perhaps at the lord's hall, then to villagers on the green. We first hear of a church building in Laverstock when, in the 1200s, two bishops of Salisbury appropriated the income of the church to help fund choral music in the cathedral. (In return one of the Vicars Choral was to serve as curate of Laverstock parish.) Given that very few medieval parish churches were founded after 1150 (see Richard Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*), and that there was something of a church building boom, 1075-1125, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a stone church was built in Laverstock about 1100. Much of the building boom was accounted for by the rebuilding of wooden churches in stone. In an earlier building boom, AD 850-1050, local landowners had churches built on their estates, for to have one's own church had by then become something of a status symbol. We do in fact have the name of a man who was granted an estate in 'Winterburnan' by a land charter dated AD 949. The estate boundaries described fit the Laverstock landscape. The man was Ælfsige, and he was the king's gold- and silver-smith. That he built Laverstock's first church is, of course, only conjecture, perhaps plausible, but hardly capable of proof.

A remarkable find from the Anglo-Saxon period came to light in 1780, when a local man found a gold ring in a cart rut. The ring was inscribed with the name of Alfred the Great's father, king Ethelwulf. It is thought that the king had probably handed it to one of his men, as a gift or as a mark of office. The ring is now in the British Museum.

In 1410 fire damaged the church, the priest's house and other nearby houses. An indulgence was proclaimed for those who would help with the cost of rebuilding. (An indulgence, offered time off purgatory, in return for donations.)

In the Civil War period Laverstock showed (and not for the last time!) an inclination to 'do its own thing'. The authorities found that the Rev Francis Bayley was celebrating Prayer Book holy communion, contrary to the orders of the London government. Moreover, people were coming from Salisbury to receive the sacrament! Rev Bayley was duly barred, and replaced.

From a bishop's Visitation Return of 1783 we get a picture of Laverstock church at a very low ebb. The curate, Rev Richard Trickey, acknowledged that Holy Communion was celebrated only at the three great festivals of Easter, Whitsun and Christmas (and the previous Easter there had been only eight communicants). Furthermore, the curate told the bishop that his parishioners did not send their children for catechetical instruction, and there was no school in the parish. When asked about the money given at the offertory, and what was done with it, Rev Trickey answered 'There is none given'.

Seventy years later, when the architect Thomas Henry Wyatt was asked to look into the state of the building, he found that it was 'very damp and ruinous', the walls and roof 'wholly insecure'. The church was also felt to be too small for the needs of the growing population. The medieval church was pulled down in 1857, and the present church built to the designs of Wyatt, in Early Decorated style. The new building was consecrated in 1858. (This church is sited to the east and north of the earlier one.) A 13th century arch giving entry to the south porch of the medieval church was transferred (much restored) to the same place in the present

church. Other features moved to the new church were the late medieval octagonal font bowl, a brass inscription plate of 1530, and five monuments of the 18th century and early 19th century. The longest of these commemorates Peter Bathurst of Clarendon Park. He was an MP and his only reward (according to his widow) was the consciousness of having 'acted as became him'. Inside the church, as well as the Ernley brass there are memorials to Henry Manning (died 1910), medical superintendent at the former Laverstock House Asylum for forty years, and a churchwarden, and Sir James Burrough (died 1837), a connection of the Burrough's Hill family. He was a judge at the Court of Common Pleas. In his handling of cases of crimes against property he gained the name of a 'hanging judge'. He roused the ire of that tireless traveller and radical reformer, William Cobbett, and that is how Laverstock gets a mention in Cobbett's *Rural Rides*.

St Andrew's church has a nave and chancel, with a side aisle to the south of the nave. The original vestry is now the Lady Chapel. A new vestry was added at the west end of the church, in 1906, and extended in 1979. The church (and extension) is brick-built, with flint-stone covering.

Fittings original to the present church include the 1857 stone pulpit, and the stained glass of the east and south chancel windows, the south chapel windows, the clerestory windows, and the south aisle windows. These windows were made from hundreds of fragments of glass, of different patterns and colours. Most of this glass seems to be 19th century, though some may be of earlier date. In the east window of the south chapel there are three roundels of gold and white glass, perhaps 16th century Flemish work, depicting episcopal saints.

The oldest stained glass is 13th century 'grisaille' (greyish) glass removed from Salisbury Cathedral about 1790. The glass was replaced by clear glass in order to make the cathedral lighter, and, despite its historic nature, the medieval glass was thrown away, 'shot into the town ditch.' It was recovered by Canon Stanley Baker, who was a Vicar Choral, a divinity teacher, and curate of Laverstock from 1937-50. After years of dogged searching, trying to find exactly what was meant by 'the town ditch', and where that ditch was, Canon Baker finally discovered considerable quantities of 13th century glass. He carefully leaded up fragments, enough for one aisle window in the cathedral. He then invited the Dean and Chapter to look at the work, with a view to returning it to the cathedral. The offer was turned down, largely because it was thought the glass would darken the cathedral interior. Canon Baker then offered it to Winchester, and they were quick to snap it up. When Canon Baker had pieced more of it together, he gave some to Laverstock, where it was placed in the west window, in 1939. Canon Baker also had the chancel screen fitted, and he included in it some early 16th century carved woodwork, perhaps of Welsh origin, which he had acquired in Shrewsbury. Former students of the Teacher Training College in the Close paid for the installation, as a thank-you for Canon Baker's devoted service as chaplain and teacher of divinity, 1903-1933.

A small amount of the stonework of the medieval St Andrew's church is still to be seen in the south-west area of the churchyard, and the oldest gravestones (of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) are found there. Archaeological work was carried out here in 2007-9, as a result of which it proved possible (in 2010) to mark the lines of the walls of the medieval church with flints. As the archaeologists were tidying up at the end of the project, they happened upon a skeleton, below the level of the medieval church – a brief, tantalising glimpse of Laverstock's earlier history!