

Digging into the past

Holy Trinity's one thousand years of history

EXPLORE YOUR HERITAGE

Despite the title, my talk on this subject on 10th July actually went back 1,100 years, to when the site of Holy Trinity was an open hillside. This was before the High Street was laid out as the main street of a planned town sometime in the mid-900s. The town was divided up into plots for families and it seems likely that Holy Trinity occupied one of these plots, with the church, the churchyard and the rectory with its own plot of land. The main plot went further back than it does now, because Sydenham Road was narrower. The cottages along the east side of the churchyard (where the Trinity Centre is) were probably built on the edge of the churchyard, starting perhaps in the sixteenth century. Numbers 6 to 11 were built after 1852 when that piece of land was sold. The houses nearer to the High Street had been sold by the parish to raise money for rebuilding the church, in 1755.

There are a couple of confusing references to a large ditch in this area, but this remains a puzzle at present.

The rectory was what is now 13 and 14, Trinity churchyard, and the Royal Oak. It is thought to have been built around 1500, but I hope that tree-ring dating carried out this month should give us a precise date.

In front of the church from 1579 until 1758 was a rye market house, which contained schoolrooms for charity children from 1712. It spoiled the view of the new church and was demolished. A small new one further east was demolished in 1813. These, and other events, explain the dates and initials in the railings along the High Street.

The west steps were probably built in 1840, when the churchyard was enclosed with the present wall and railings. When the ramp was built in 2010 graves were found (not surprisingly) but also some interesting finds from the late 17th century up to about 1800. Some of these could have been lost or broken by workmen, as there was building work from at least the 1690s until the church was opened in 1763, but some are surprising, such as a teacup and a chocolate cup. Builders did not drink tea in the 1700s, they had beer!



Mary Alexander

The North Steps of Holy Trinity Church

EXPLORE YOUR HERITAGE

The north steps were part of the design of the new church, built after the collapse of the medieval church in 1740. The new church was finished about 1754 but it took another nine years until it was ready for worship. The north steps may not have been built until the early 1760s. They were the only steps at this point. The medieval church had steps up to its north door, which was further west – just like St. Mary's and most other medieval churches. This is interesting, and raises questions about the ground level because all the other High Street properties are at street level. Presumably the churchyard had risen because of centuries of burials, but the church was also at a higher level.

The new church was in the Palladian style which had to be symmetrical, so the new north door was in the centre and needed new steps. These were built in Portland stone, in an elegant D-shape. From 1579 there had been a Rye Market house in front of the church, stretching from the old steps to the east end. It was demolished when the new church was built and a smaller market house was built further east. In 1712, during earlier improvements, new gates and railings were added, and they were almost certainly re-used for the new church since there was so little money available. More railings had to be added where the old market house had stood, and these have the date 1761 worked into them and the initials GO for George Onslow, who was elected MP in 1761. Perhaps he offered a gift to the town, and paid for the new steps and railings. When the new Rye Market house was demolished in 1813 more railings had to be added, and these are dated 1813, with the initials of the rector and churchwardens: Henry Parr Beloe, Edmund Upton and Samuel Russell.

The steps at the west end were not added until a hundred years later, probably in 1868 or 1869, along with steps at the east which have been replaced by the ramp. There had been talk in the 1860s of moving the central steps back into the churchyard for highway improvements, but this did not happen. The west steps are within the churchyard. It was said that the central steps were awkward for carrying coffins into the church. The paving at the west end relates to the west steps, but might have been altered to include them. It contains at least four types of stone, some of which might have come for the medieval church.

The work on the steps will not only restore them to use but archaeologists who will be watching the work may find exciting information about what is under the steps: a Saxon land surface, an Elizabethan market house, who knows?

Mary Alexander



Holy Trinity's North Gates

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The gates at the top of the curved steps at Holy Trinity are a fine example of wrought iron gates. We take them for granted, but there was a time when they were unusual and fashionable. It was Inigo Jones who introduced wrought iron balconies and balustrades into his Palladian buildings in the early seventeenth century, but it was seventy years before gates became a craze, and the new occupation of 'gate smith' was invented. Gate smiths were blacksmiths, but specialised in decorative wrought iron, particularly for gates. Any blacksmith could make a gate but a Frenchman, Jean Tijou, who came to England in 1687, revolutionised the style of decoration. He left England in 1712 which is exactly when the Holy Trinity gates and some of the railings were made. So our gates are part of an explosion of wrought iron gates, balustrades – such as on the Guildhall facade of 1683 – altar rails and screens.

Our gates were made by Mr. Fullgar who was paid £19-2-6 for the gates and £16-6-3 for railings. He does not seem to have been a Guildford man – or at least, no-one of that name is in the parish registers. His name was probably 'Fullager' which is found mainly in Kent, so he might have been from there. The fact that he is called 'Mr.' shows that he was well-established in his trade, probably running a business rather than making the gates himself. He would certainly have trained as a blacksmith, and he may have made some of the more elaborate parts himself. He was presumably well-known at the time. There were other blacksmiths in Guildford in 1712 so there must have been a particular reason for choosing him. Sixteen shillings was paid for the carriage of the ironwork which suggests it came from outside Guildford.

The gates were probably not black when new and the gates will be examined to see if there are traces of the original colour. Black became common later, in the Victorian period.

The 1712 gates were almost certainly used for the new church as money for the re-building was so short. In 1749 they were mended and painted, which suggests that they were to be re-used. It also suggests that the entrance at the top of the steps was the same width as the old one.

Mary Alexander



Holy Trinity's Mound

The mound in the centre of the churchyard is intriguing. There are many theories about it but actually it's just a pile of earth and rubble. Not any old rubble though – it is the

soil removed when the church was extended in 1888. We know this because when Philip Palmer, master of Abbot's Hospital, drew a plan of the gravestones in 1891 he labelled the mound as the soil excavated for the extension.

By the 1880s the 1750s church had become too small. Not only had the population increased, but services had changed. Communion was far more frequent and more space was needed, and there was a choir which sat at the east end, not in the west gallery as in the old church. The organ had also been moved from the gallery. The architect Arthur Blomfield drew up plans for a new church stretching from one side of the churchyard to the other, using as much space as possible. Money was raised and work began on the east end. This was part of the churchyard and presumably the soil was kept on site because it was consecrated ground. Gravestones were moved to the west wall to create space for the rubble, and other gravestones were placed at the foot of the mound. The churchyard had been closed for burials for thirty years at this point.

When the tiny 1750s chancel was demolished parts of the medieval church were found used as building rubble. Some pieces were kept in the porch but have now gone, and others may still be in the mound. A Purbeck marble slab was used for a dais for the altar in the Queen's chapel, and was revealed recently when the carpet was removed. So although the mound is only spoil from building work it may contain clues to the history of the church.

Mary Alexander



Holy Trinity's Clock

There has been a clock on Holy Trinity's tower since at least the seventeenth century. In 1695 the churchwardens paid Henry White £3 12s 6d for looking after the clock and chimes and for mending them. This suggests that the clock struck

the hours and the quarters. He continued to be paid a similar sum annually, which included winding the chimes, and presumably the clock. The bells had been increased from four to six in 1689 which perhaps made chiming the quarters easier (or more musical). This clock can be seen in the only view of the medieval church published in 1739, with a round face set in a square frame set diamond-wise.

Henry White was born in 1658, the eldest son of John White who is referred to in documents as a locksmith and a whitesmith (someone working in other metals than iron). John was supplying nails to the church in the 1690s and may have worked on the clock, but it is Henry who is in the churchwardens' accounts. In 1726 Henry and his son were paid for mending the chimes on two occasions, for a total of 3s 3½d. The annual payment is comparatively large and must represent a lot of work, probably winding the clock and chimes weekly and doing other routine work on them.

Henry had married Mary Downer in 1690 and they had five children between 1691 and 1701. The son who helped Henry was David, who was paid £3 10s in 1725 for his work on the chimes. John White, locksmith, was also paid for some work that same year, and David was paid for ironwork in the two eastern chapels in 1736 when alterations were being made to the church. John was David's brother: like so many sons, they followed their father's trade. That same year Henry's brother's widow was paid for a bill owing to her late husband who had died the previous year.

After the collapse of the church in 1740 the accounts say very little about the clock. Presumably there had to be a new one, but in the clergy vestry there is a brass clock face with a long inscription engraved on it giving the history of the clock and chimes. (I am indebted to Maureen Wright for this). It begins 'this clock with chimes on six bells was in the old spire which fell down'. It was repaired at the cost of Lord Onslow in 1791. It seems unlikely that the clock would have survived, unless it was removed before the collapse along with three of the bells, but this is not recorded. The clock face in the vestry, which is marked in minutes, was probably part of the pre-1740 clock mechanism. The clock itself was extensively repaired in 1845 when new chimes composed by George Wilkins, the organist of St. Nicholas, were installed. A new clock using the old chimes was installed in 1900 and the chimes were restored in 1953 to mark the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

However, the clock face seems to be the original one given by Lord Onslow. It was re-painted and restored recently with the previous HLF grant for the roof. The Onslow crest of an eagle attacking a partridge is on top of the face, with the family motto *Festina lente* – 'on slow'. Below is another Latin phrase *Fugimus et imputamur* meaning something like 'the hours fly and are reckoned to your account' meaning use your time on earth well.

Mary Alexander



The Rye Market House

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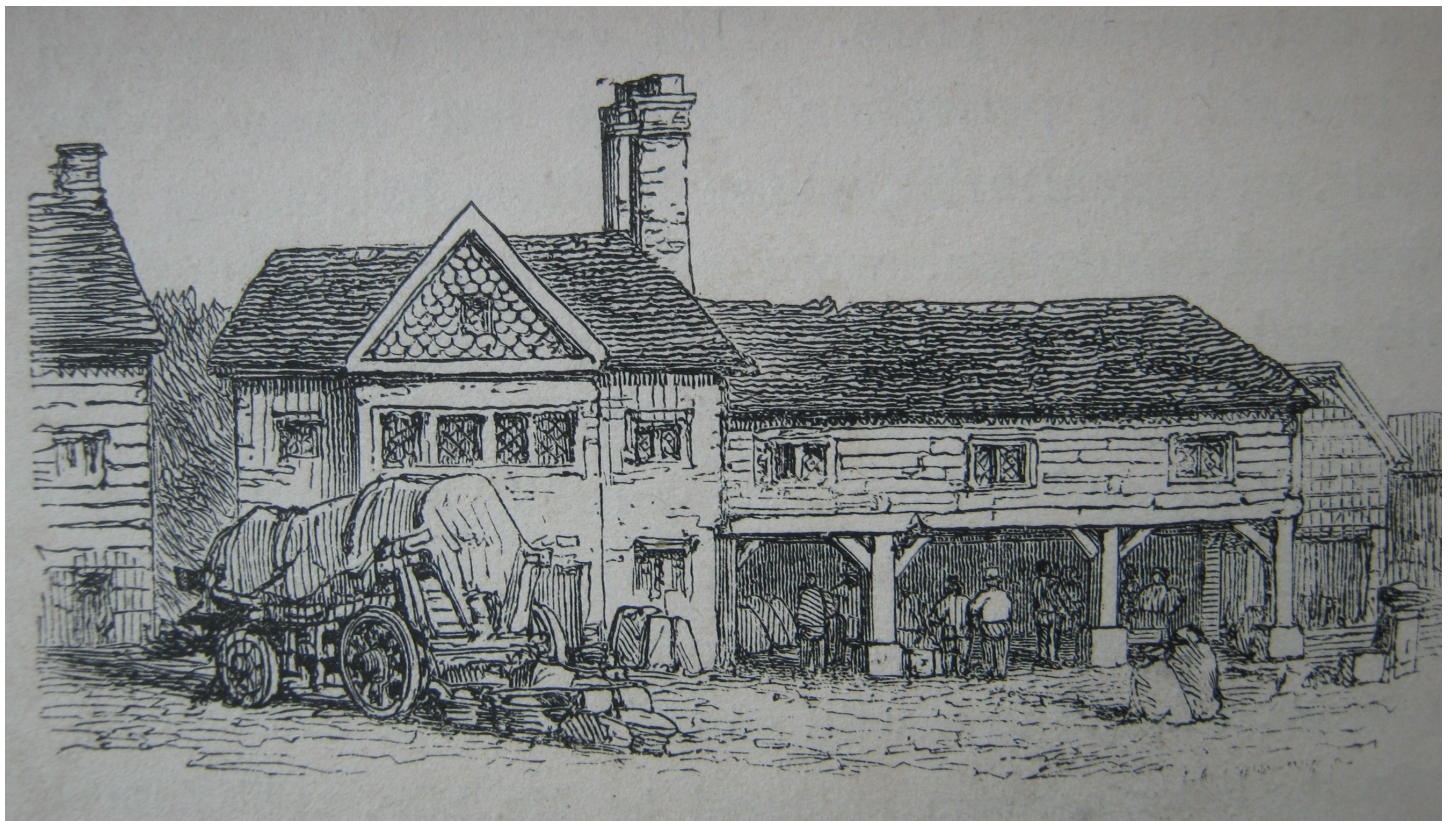
In 1579 a Rye Market House was built in front of Holy Trinity between the gate and the east end of the church. It was built by a local cloth merchant, Thomas Baker, who made an agreement with the mayor and corporation to build the

market house on land belonging to the corporation in front of the church. There is no similar agreement with the parish surviving, but a map of 1739 shows the market house overlapping the churchyard, and the excavations for the ramp in 2010 found a wall which may have been part of the market just inside the churchyard.

The market in corn was important for Guildford. The corn market building was in front of the Guildhall at this date and perhaps mainly for wheat and barley, leading Baker to build another market for rye, malt and oats. It isn't clear why a cloth merchant should be doing this, but Baker was wealthy and childless, and clearly wanted to help the people of Guildford. The profits from the market house were to be used to pay a schoolmaster to teach thirty poor boys to read, write and do accounts. This was training for work in trade which could lift the boys out of a life of manual work. The school was probably held in the master's house, but in 1712 it was moved into rooms in the Rye Market House. When the new church was being planned in the 1740s it was obvious that the Rye Market would have to go, and it was rebuilt on a smaller scale at the east end of the churchyard. This octagonal building was demolished in 1813 and new railings were added to the churchyard wall, with the date 1813 and the initials of the rector and churchwardens of the time.

In 1762, before the church opened for worship in 1763, Baker's school moved into the tower room. In 1856 the school was amalgamated with another charity to form Archbishop Abbot's School, in the Old Cloth Hall, which lasted until 1933.

Mary Alexander



The Holy Trinity Reredos

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The reredos is the panel behind the high altar – or any altar. It's one of those medieval words the Victorians loved to resurrect when they were reviving ancient practices, to add colour and decoration to churches. It comes from words simply meaning 'behind' and 'back'. They were common in medieval churches but were removed by the Puritans.

When the east end of Holy Trinity was extended in 1888 the wall of the new apse was divided into three sections. The upper two were painted, as now, and the lower part was lined all round with a curtain (as now) and a textile hanging behind the altar. At first it was a hanging with the words 'HOLY HOLY HOLY' at the top, a large Alpha and Omega and a central cross. At some point this was replaced with another hanging which was much plainer, consisting of panels of plain and patterned cloth. The altar was also covered with a fabric frontal.

The present reredos was installed in 1948 as a memorial to Canon Ernest Kirwan, rector from 1907 to 1936. The twelve year gap may have been caused by the war. The reredos is of oak, in a style which is difficult to define. It is restrained, yet dignified, and makes subtle references to the altar. It was designed by John Macgregor (1890-1984) architect for the two churches. The oak came from the Cranleigh area and the reredos was made by four men from T. Swayne & Sons, the builders, of Stoke Road.

Macgregor specialised in the conservation of old buildings, especially with the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. He lived in London but was linked with the Guildford area from at least 1931 when he surveyed Shalford Mill. After repairing the mill he rented half of it as a holiday home.

He had many interesting ideas for St. Mary's after the war, such as building a circular baptistry, like a chapter house, but they were never carried out.

Mary Alexander



Holy Trinity old rectory

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A year after the battle of Agincourt, in the winter of 1416, some oak trees were cut down near Guildford to build an addition to the rectory in 1417. That addition is now the Royal Oak pub. The timber-framed cottages next to it were the original rectory. In August all three buildings had samples taken for tree-ring dating. This was paid for by a grant from the Surrey Archaeological Society. Sadly, the timbers from the other buildings could not be dated, but they must be earlier than the Royal Oak.

The rectory probably went out of use in 1715 when the 1699 union of the two benefices came into effect. The rector St. Mary's, Michael Woodward, took over both parishes. He presumably continued to live in St. Mary's rectory, opposite the church in Quarry Street. In 1806 Holy Trinity rectory was sold, and then or earlier was divided into three. The 1417 addition became a pub in about 1870.

Mary Alexander

