

# THE CHURCH OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AT BOXWELL

*Visitors so often ask me about the history of this Church that I have written what I have been able to find out.*

The Manor of Boxwell belonged to the Abbey of St. Peter, Gloucester, when Domesday Book was compiled (1087) and also so belonged in the time of Edward the Confessor. The Church is not mentioned, but in Gloucestershire few churches are mentioned. Deerhurst isn't, for instance, so this doesn't prove that it did not exist.

There is a legend, mentioned as such by *Leland*, that there was once a Nunnery at Boxwell and that it was sacked by the Danes in the period 600 – 800 A.D. I believe that this legend may be true and that the Nuns may have lived beneath the Boxwood (near the Kitchen Garden of today) where old maps show the Holy Well and the Fish Pond. For Catholics, fish on Friday so far from the sea must have necessitated fish farming. When I was a boy, people came fairly often to collect water from the Holy Well, which was thought to cure diseases of the eyes. The practice ceased about 1920: I have wondered if it dated from the Nuns, who were the only Doctors and Nurses of their day.

To come back to the Church, the Cartulary of St. Peter's Abbey mentions a Johannes Clericus at Boxwell in 1266 and in 1270 the Bishop of Worcester gives a Dispensary to John of Hama, Rector of Boxwelle, to study Theology and Canon Law in parts beyond the Sea, for three years. The Taxation of Pope Nicholas IV (1291) was the basis of the Papal "Tenth" and "first fruits" paid to Rome during the Middle Ages. Boxwell Church was assessed at an annual value of Five Pounds.

These mentions of the Church agree with the Architectural Evidence, which dates the Font as about 1200 and the West Window as about 1315. The Church was thatched at one time and the East End was reconstructed possibly after damage by fire. Boxwell was in the

Diocese of Worcester until 1541 when the Bishopric of Gloucester was created, after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. There is a window at Elderfield (Wrocs.) very similar to the West Window at Boxwell.

The Bell Turret is unusual. Miss Evans – sister of the discoverer of Knossos – hazards a guess that it might have been originally the chimney of a Saxon Farm House, moved to the Church when the house was rebuilt, with the bell added. This is pure speculation. There is a similar turret at great Chalfield (Wilts.).

The Chancel Rail is 17<sup>th</sup> Century and was moved to its current position in 1900. Previously it was the Altar Rail. The Royal Arms, in spite of A.R. 1702, are in fact the Arms of William after the death of Mary, and close inspection reveals 1692 under the 1702. They were cleaned in 1965 by Mr. Rouse who found at least two previous paintings beneath. The display of Royal Arms in churches was ordered by Henry VIII when he split the Church of England from the Church of Rome. Mr. Rouse left his Rose enclosed in a “U” near the left foot of the Unicorn. As he has spent almost all his life cleaning Church Murals, you may see it elsewhere.

The Huntley family vault was sealed about 1859 and at the same time the soil was dug away from the S.E. side of the Chancel to cure dampness. The old Pews were removed in 1900 because they were full of worm rot, with the exception of the three you can see. The Huntley Pew was used to form a Vestry. Also in 1900 the blue cloth Hangings on either side of the Altar were obtained, almost certainly from William Morris at Kelmscott, who was an Oxford contemporary of Rev. O.C. Huntley.

In the course of my research I discovered that in September, 1304, the Bishop of Worcester gives a License to John, rector of Boxwell, Priest, “to let his Church to the Farm and to go to Rome from this date for one year in order to further his affairs in the Roman Court before the Feast of St. Michael, 1305”. It would be interesting to know what happened in Rome!

In 1441, Thomas Beke, late of Boxwell, Clerk, was accused of stealing a grey horse value 40 shillings and a sword value six shillings and eightpence from John Walkyington, clerk, at Boxwell. He was found not guilty, however.

In 1541, there was a Petition in Chancery by John Mason, Parson of Boxwell, accusing John Huntley of Standish, the Lessee of the Parsonage, of cutting down trees on the Glebe Land “which standeth in Cotteswolde where there is very little wood growing and yill to come by.” This John Huntley of Standish was tenant of Standish Court, his elder son was at Frocester Court and his younger son at Boxwell Court shortly before the Dissolution of the Monasteries. This took place in two parts. First the foreign owned Monasteries were dissolved and Henry found that this had been done without too much outcry, the British owned Monasteries were dissolved, four years later.

It is believed that the Abbot of Gloucester installed tenants whom he could trust in the hope that he might get his land back when Queen Mary came to the Throne. Standish and Frocester were both Abbessy Estates, as well as Boxwell.

A Huntley daughter was married here in 1554.

Boxwell Rectory used to stand some 300 yards W.N.W. of the Church. When the Parish was amalgamated with Leighterton it was pulled down and the stone used to build the Royal Oak at Leighterton. This was about 200 years ago.

The cost of the upkeep of this 700 year old Church is not enormous, but the Parish has two Churches to maintain and our population is 180. Any contributions you may care to give will be a real help in keeping it as God’s House should be kept, and in the hope that you have enjoyed your visit and may return and join us in our Worship, our service times are:

1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays in the Month ..... 8-30 a.m.

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays in the Month ..... 11-15 a.m.

J.F.B. HUNTLEY

1970