The Friends of Friendless Churches: Chapel of St Michael, Ayshford, Burlescombe, Devon

by

JEANNE JAMES *and* MATTHEW SAUNDERS

The Friends of Friendless Churches are now responsible for thirty-four former places of worship in England and Wales. One of our constitutional strengths is the ability to take into care former private chapels. Indeed, our two most recent vestings have both fallen into this category: the chapel of St John the Baptist at Matlock Bath in Derbyshire designed by Sir Guy Dawber, with glass by Louis Davis and plasterwork by George Bankart, conveyed in 2002; and the subject of this article, Ayshford Chapel in Devon. This passed to us on the basis of a 125 year lease on 1 February 2000. The chapel, listed Grade I, was rebuilt in the fifteenth century for the Ayshford family and it was their descendant, Mr E.W. Sanford of Chipley Park, Wellington in Somerset who, feeling unable to reverse its decay, passed the building to the Friends three years ago. Then in a programme of repairs finally completed by the addition of a notice board giving opening arrangements in 2003, the chapel was repaired under the supervision of the architect Louise Bainbridge of Seymour & Bainbridge, Winchester, and the contractors, Arnold & Lang of Cullompton to universal acclaim, particularly from English Heritage which generously provided 70% of the cost of repair.

The chapel has to be kept locked but is open to visitors, with keyholder details available on a notice board on the pier to the gates which lead into the field in which the chapel sits grouped with its former manor house.

The chapel is fairly easy to find. Those coming by car should leave the M5 at Junction 27, take the road to Barnstaple and then turn left in barely 100 yards. Those coming by rail can walk from Tiverton Parkway Station. It is to be found on the other side of the bridge over the Grand Western Canal, the towpath to which also allows walkers easy access.

We are greatly indebted to local people, particularly Mr and Mrs Kelland and Commander and Mrs Scott-Fox, for keeping the building looking tidy and loved.

The article that follows is a joint effort between Jeanne James, who is mostly responsible for the history, and Matthew Saunders who deals with practical details of access and ownership

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Jeanne James received an MPhil at Exeter University in 1997 for her research into the medieval chapels of Devon. Matthew Saunders is Honorary Director of the Friends of Friendless Churches.

and the conservation campaign. We are extremely grateful to Mrs James for sharing her findings with us and with Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries.

In summary, the interest of the chapel lies in its fifteenth-century oak screen, the contemporary roof with its animated bosses, a run of seventeenth-century family monuments to the Ayshfords, and the restoration campaign of 1847-8 which gave the present colour to the screen and, above all, provided the chapel with its extraordinary windows. These combine the mid-nineteenth-century fashion for all matters heraldic with a 'jazzy' outline that seems to leap forward to the next century and the language of Art Deco.

In over 1000 years, the spelling of the name of the hamlet, family and chapel has varied – for example Aysford, Ayschford, Ashford – but the current version, 'Ayshford', is used throughout this paper.

HISTORY

A chapel has existed at Ayshford since at least 1282. The present building, listed Grade I, is conventionally dated as fifteenth century[1], but it will be seen below that this is not a unanimous opinion. Richard Polwhele of Polwhele in Cornwall, clergyman and antiquarian, who provided the earliest known (but brief) description in the late eighteenth century, referred to Ayshford as a manor having one large street inhabited by serge-makers, trade at the time being not very considerable. The chapel stood in a spacious yard at the end of the hamlet, contiguous to Ayshford Court which was formerly one of the best houses in the west of England but by then was converted into a farm.[2] Ayshford Manor and its chapel, now standing in isolation apart from the farm, had evidently seen greater times. However the house is currently (2003) undergoing conservation and still contains much of interest. The oldest fabric appears to be late medieval, of *c.*1500, and there is a chimney dated 1607 and plaster friezes, one of which is inscribed '1631'.

A charter of 948 is the first known reference to the estate of Ayshford itself.[3] In 1066, Ayshford was held of Walter de Clavile, a large landowner, by Walter the house steward.[4] He may have been the founder of the family that took its name from the property and continued as tenants of the Claviles, but the first-named Ayshford to appear in records is one Stephen of Ayshford. He was a witness on the foundation charter of the priory of Augustinian Canons at Canonsleigh, founded in about 1160, as a dependency of Plympton Priory, by Walter de Clavile II lord of Burlescombe; Stephen also granted land at Ayshford to the priory. In 1284 the canons, whose numbers had fallen to seven, were evicted and the house was re-founded by Matilda de Clare, Countess of Gloucester and Hertford, as an abbey for Augustinian canonesses.[5]

The first documentation of Ayshford Chapel is in the cartulary of Canonsleigh Abbey, dated 19 October 1282, just two years before the change to canonesses. The Harleian MS 3660 that forms the cartulary was written in the early fourteenth century, and folios are missing for some of the earlier years. It seems likely that the entry in question represents the foundation document, since it was drawn up in the presence of the Bishop of Exeter at the 'greater church of Exeter', but it could be a new agreement for the staffing of an older chapel. The cartulary records a

Fig. 1
The chapel sitting in its own field with Ayshford Manor just behind
Photo: Apex Photo Agency

memorandum of an agreement made in 1282 by John of Ayshford, lord of Ayshford, and the villeins of the place, all of them parishioners of the church of Burlescombe, with the canons. The latter were to celebrate in the chapel of Ayshford at least one mass every Sunday, on every sixth feast day (possibly a mistranslation of *sexta feria*, i.e. Friday), and at Christmas and Michaelmas. They were also to baptise there the lawful sons of the lords of Ayshford and to church their wives. In return, whoever held the manor of Ayshford was to pay the canons six shillings sterling annually at the four usual terms in equal portions, at the priory. If they should fail in payments then the canons were no longer bound to perform the services.[6]

The next mention of the chapel comes from an English translation of about 1500 of a memorandum of an agreement dated 1287. The agreement was between John of Ayshford, lord of Ayshford, and his men of the same town, parishioners of the mother church of Burlescombe, and the 'relygeus ladys abbas and convent' of Canonsleigh; it recited an action between them before the official of Bishop Peter Quinel of Exeter upon the chantry of the chapel of Ayshford in a cause (then withdrawn) of libel brought by John and his men, against the abbess and convent as to the chapel of Saint Michael of Ayshford.[7] The bishops' registers are the main source of information for many chapels but, in spite of this legal altercation, Ayshford

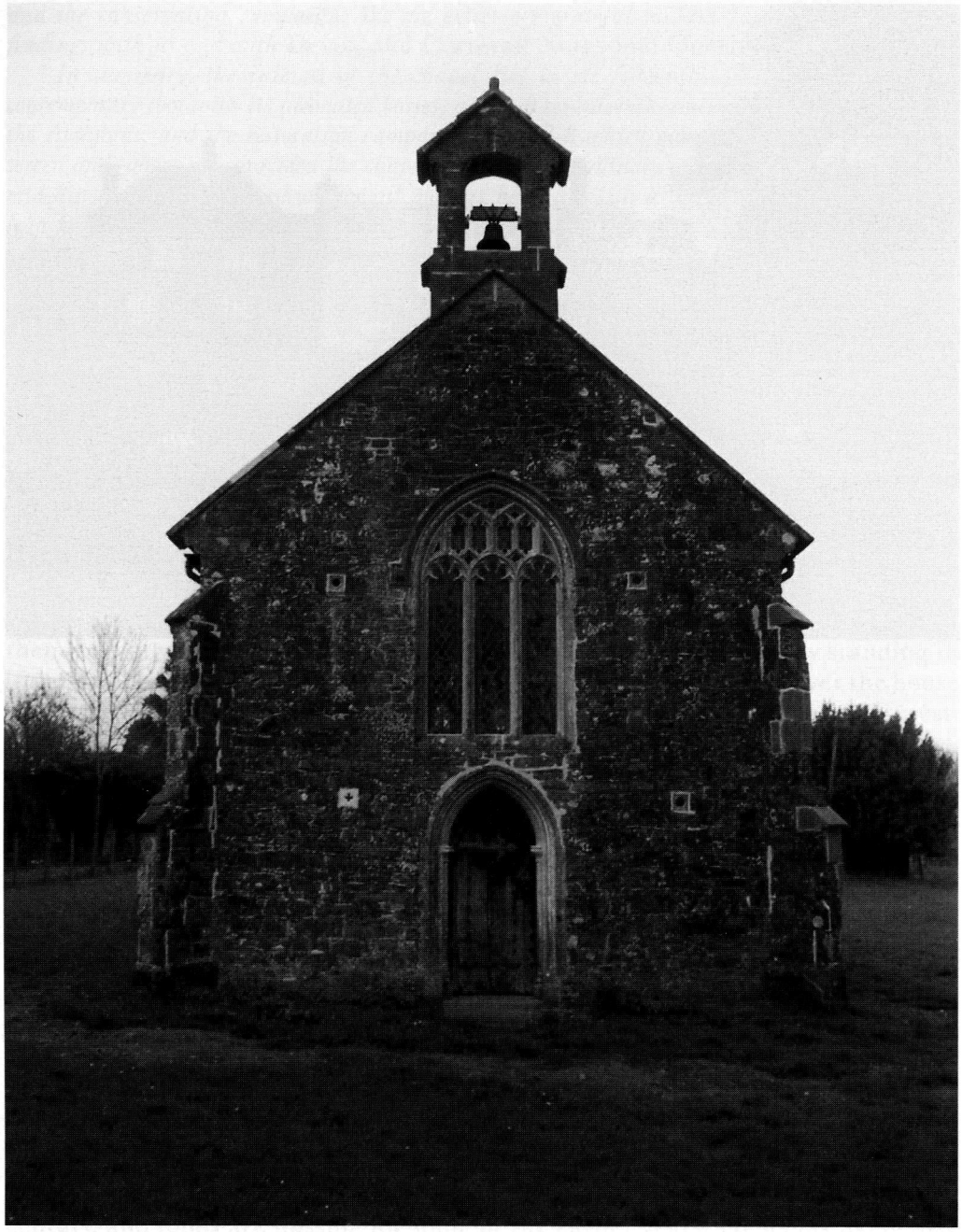


Fig. 2
The west end with its complete bellcote
Photo: Apex Photo Agency

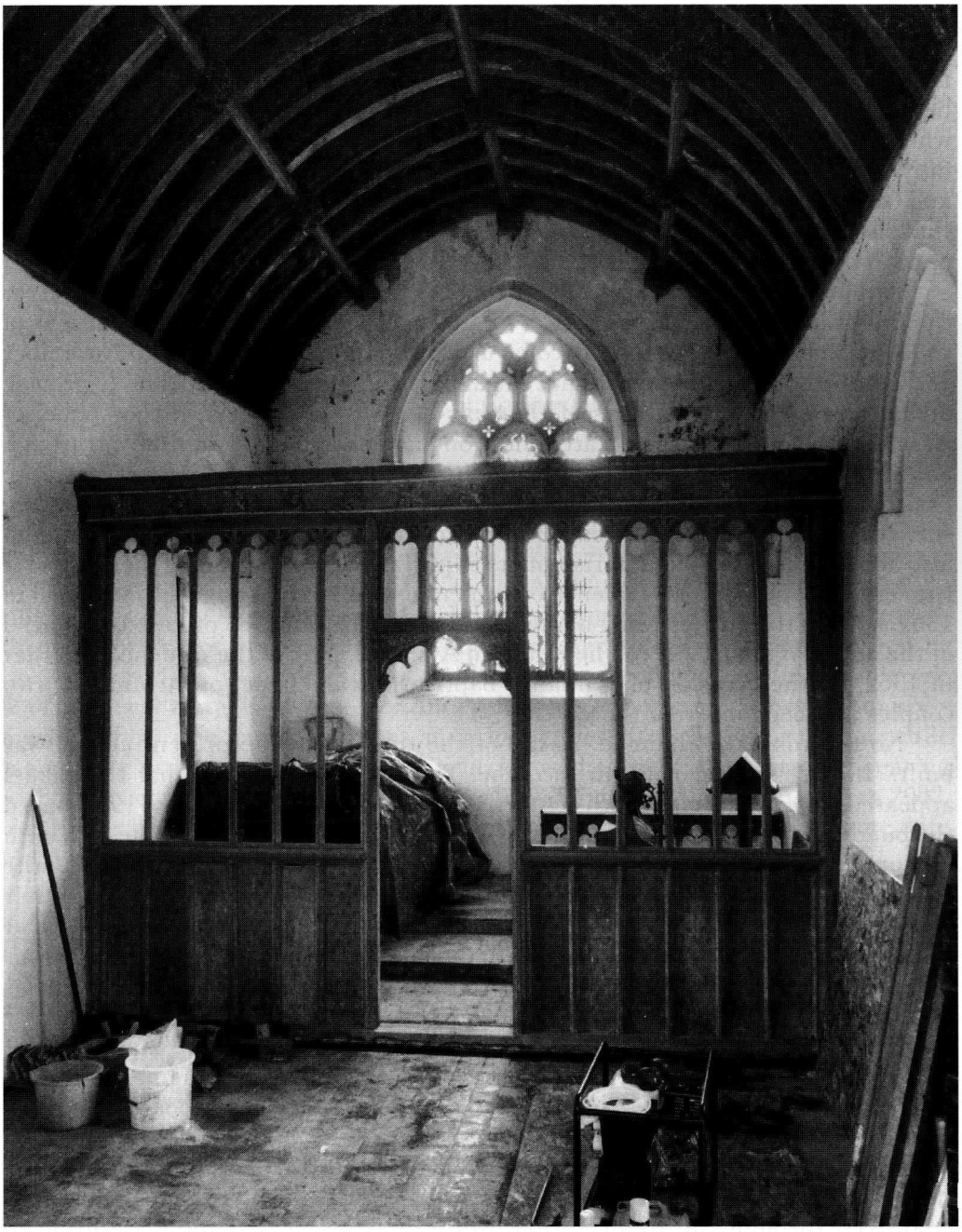


Fig. 3
The interior in 2001
Photo: Christopher Dalton

Chapel does not appear to have been recorded in these over the centuries. Bishop Quinel's register does record that the canons of the priory had not submitted quietly to the violent change to an abbey of canonesses, and that the matter was brought before the archbishop and the king.[8] The Clavile's patronage of Canonsleigh ceased when the canons were evicted in 1284, but there were Claviles at Burlescombe until 1374 when the male line failed.[9] The Ayshfords continued to be their tenants, and from the above-mentioned action against the abbess and convent we can infer that the Ayshford family disapproved of the change to canonesses and the change of patronage.

Although Ayshford chapel appears to have originated as a domestic chapel for the family and villeins of the place, with licence for baptism of only lawful sons of the lords, it seems also to have become used as a chapel of ease. On 20 November 1324 the bishop ordained that, since the abbess and convent were bound to provide divine service on certain days of the year by their own priest in the chapel of Ayshford, the priest who celebrated there on Easter Day should, himself or through another priest of the abbey, administer the sacrament of the eucharist to the parishioners of the church of Burlescombe, who 'by accepted custom' were hearing services in the chapel.[10] The bishop was thus conceding to 'accepted custom' and also allowing communicant parishioners to partake of the sacrament, not just hear the service. There is also evidence of a solemnisation of marriage in the chapel in 1362, none of the parties being named Ayshford. When in 1383 proof was required of the age of William son and heir of John Ayshford, part of the evidence was that in 1362, on the occasion of William's baptism in the chapel of St Michael, two couples had been married there.[11]

No records have emerged, so far, of the time when the present chapel was built. In 1828 the vicar of Burlescombe, Thomas Tanner, noted that the chapel appeared to be of the fourteenth century, whereas the list description of 1966 placed the building in the fifteenth century.[12] There is also an argument for the sixteenth century: the historian C. A. Ralegh Radford suggested that improvements to the house would have been made by Nicholas Ayshford, who succeeded his father William in 1508 and died in 1557. It is probable that the chapel was improved at the same time. By the sixteenth century the family was marrying into armigerous families and had established the right to bear arms. A tomb commemorates Nicholas and his two wives in the chancel of Burlescombe Church – a late Perpendicular tomb-chest with figures holding shields.[13] The architecture of the chapel cannot be relied on as throwing light on the present chapel's date of origin, but it does imply a considerable restoration or rebuilding in the fifteenth or early sixteenth century.

The above-mentioned tomb of Nicholas Ayshford is the earliest surviving monument of the family in either Burlescombe church or Ayshford chapel. Nicholas, who lived through the Reformation, would have witnessed the dissolution of Canonsleigh Abbey, and the subsequent change of staffing at Ayshford Chapel. Professor Nicholas Orme, who has studied medieval church history including the dissolution of chantries in Devon between 1546 and 1548, has pointed out that the

duty set out in 1282 – for the canons or canonesses to provide a priest to celebrate divine service in the chapel – was discharged up to the Reformation; by then it had turned into an arrangement by which a priest was paid £5 6s. 8d. annually to do the job. As that is the kind of stipend usually paid to a full-time priest, presumably his services at that time were also daily.

A chantry in the chapel in 1287 has been mentioned above; a chantry was an endowment for a priest to pray for the souls of named people at an altar in a named church or chapel. It is questionable whether the priest of Ayshford should be called a chantry priest, and his benefice a chantry, since clearly his chapel was partly a public chapel of ease, and his position as parish chaplain therefore recognised within Burlescombe parish. The survey of chantries in Devon carried out for Henry VIII in 1546 calls him a 'stipendiary' not a chantry priest, although it states that his duty was to pray for one of the Ayshfords. Payment for a priest was withheld by John St Leger on buying the manor of Canonsleigh *c.* 1543. It is not mentioned in the 1548 certificate, and the history of the endowment during these years is not clear. However, the Crown, in the sixteenth century, must have regarded the chapel as primarily a chapel of ease rather than a chantry – the latter of which it would certainly have seized and suppressed.[14] By the late seventeenth century, as indicated below, the head of the Ayshford family was taking responsibility for the livelihood of the chaplain; it is probable that Nicholas Ayshford, who died in 1557, took on this responsibility from the time that John St Leger withheld payment. Indeed, the very survival of the chapel was no doubt assisted by the interest taken in it by the Ayshford family. As a result of the Reformation, only a handful out of some 300 medieval chapels of ease continued in use for services. Fewer than sixty eventually became parish churches at various times after the Reformation, while many were either put to secular uses or allowed to decay – most disappearing without record.[15] One such, recently recognised and protected by listing in 2002, was the nearby chapel at Fenacre Farm at Burlescombe of roughly the same date as Ayshford and also on a manor granted to Canonsleigh Abbey in 1177. The building was greatly altered in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and is now a farm outbuilding. Its significantly compromised state means that it is only Grade II.

Along with the tomb of Nicholas Ayshford in the parish church of Burlescombe are monuments to Roger Ayshford (1610), Arthur Ayshford and his first wife, Elizabeth, daughter of Charles, Lord Wilmott and Viscount Athlone, General of the Kings Forces in Ireland and a Privy Councillor (1630) and Henry Ayshford (1660).[16] In Ayshford Chapel, however, there is a floor stone in front of the altar to Henry Ayshford (1640) and his wife Anna (1659); an altar tomb to Henry, son of Arthur Ayshford, who died in infancy (1666);[17] and a mural monument to John Ayshford (1689) and his wife Susannah (1688), showing that the chapel was of recognised status a century after the Reformation. Ralegh Radford noted that the Henry (who died in 1660) was a minor on the death of his grandfather (Henry who had married Anna Bluett) and by the time he died was in an impoverished state and with no direct heirs; the property passed to his cousin Arthur, who had

no surviving male heir, so it descended through the female line to the Sanfords of Nynehead, in Somerset.[18] A post-nuptial settlement was made in 1637 between Henry Sanford and Mary (née Ayshford); a pedigree of the Ayshford family gives the direct line only with some twenty-eight generations up to about 1670.[19] It seems that the Ayshford Sanfords continued to use the name of Ayshford.

John Ayshford of Ayshford, whose will is dated 31 January 1689, ensured that the fabric of the chapel was kept in good order and that services continued. He bequeathed a yearly sum of £15 – payable out of the barton and demesne of Ayshford by the respective owners and proprietors for ever – towards the repair of Ayshford Chapel; and for the better maintenance and livelihood of the chaplain and his successors who should 'from time to time minister there'.[20] We do not know how the sum was apportioned, but since the usual annual stipend for a full-time priest at the Reformation was £5 6s. 8d., the bequest must surely have covered the apparently part-time chaplain's stipend and not been an addition to it. A similar bequest was repeated in the will of a John Ayshford of Ayshford dated 9 March 1702. Since there is no reference to Ayshford chapel in John Ecton's *Thesaurus Rerum Ecclesiasticarum* of 1742, it is most likely that full responsibility for the chapel and its staffing was shouldered by the Ayshford family.[21] With regard to the fabric, there is a reference to timber in the chapel yard in 1734, but we do not know whether it was meant for use in the chapel, or whether the yard was used for storage.[22] However, Polwhele reported at the end of the eighteenth century that there was a very handsome monument in memory of John and Susannah Ayshford, 'the last of that family', and that the chapel was in good repair, supported and endowed by the Ayshford estate, then in possession of Sanford of Nynehead Court. There was a small yearly stipend 'issuing out of the exchequer', and a monthly service.[23] But services were to decline over the next two centuries. In the early nineteenth century, the Lysons brothers, of whom Daniel was a clergyman and Samuel a former Keeper of the King's Records in the Tower of London, recorded that, by 1822, divine service was performed only nine times a year. William Ayshford Sanford was impropriator of the great tithes that belonged formerly to the abbey of Canonsleigh, and patron of the vicarage.[24] It transpired later that the vicar of Burlescombe was also the curate of Ayshford chapel, so it seems that the above-mentioned stipend continued under the control of the Ayshford family; it appears from subsequent references to have remained fixed, which could explain the decline in numbers of services.

Much information is available about the fabric and furnishings of the chapel before its restoration in the mid-nineteenth century. The earliest description dates from 1828, in notes by Revd Thomas Tanner, then vicar of Burlescombe, transcribed by J. B. Davidson. He described the timbers of the roof as ponderous, the twenty-three arched principals giving the impression of a vessel, keel upwards. Formerly, within memory, there had been five bells in the wooden cupola, but at the time, one. The screen was plain, but surmounted by quatrefoils and oak leaves, carved and gilded. There were some remains of painted glass; only two pieces could be distinguished as armorial devices, but not Ayshford arms; these had been said to

Fig. 4
The medieval barrel roof in 2001
Photo: Christopher Dalton

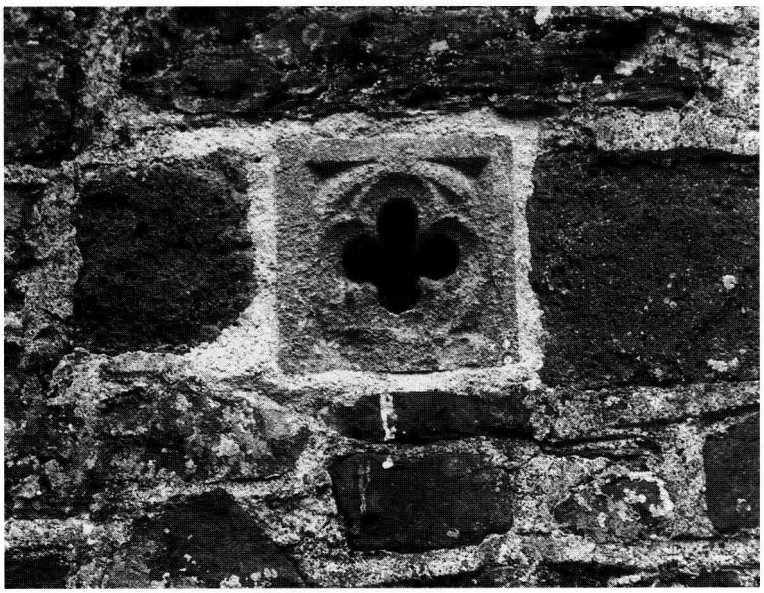


Fig. 5
One of the delicacies of the exterior is the way that in the 1848 rebuilding the putlog holes were filled with decorative quatrefoils
Photo: Apex Photo Agency

have been removed long ago to the painted window in the Sanford pew at Nynehead church. There was a plain oak communion table within strong oak rails; on the north side of the table was a stone bracket affixed to the wall, on which presumably a basin of holy water had been kept. A large font with a vent at the bottom had the previous summer been fixed in the chancel; it was restored to the chapel after lying in the farmyard for about twenty years. The pulpit was 'modern' in 1828, of wainscot oak, but the old one was said to have been rich with carved work; its location was not known. There were what he called six 'priests' with wings affixed to the arches of the roof within the chancel, but only four remained. He suggested, although no further evidence is available, that there was a piscina behind the main wall monument, but to have such a feature there would be highly eccentric. There were signs of 'papism'; a crucifix of iron was on top of the east wall, and it seemed that the image was once affixed to it; and some 'Catholic' tiles remained on the floor. The communion plate was missing, but a flagon in Burlescombe church having the Ayshford arms was believed to have belonged to the chapel. In 1828, divine service was performed on Sunday evenings during the summer, the vicar of Burlescombe being chaplain.[25]

MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY RESTORATION

Restoration of Ayshford chapel began in the Victorian period, as in the case of many parish churches, including Burlescombe in 1844.[26] In July 1847 Davidson reported that the chapel was in the course of repair and restoration at the cost of Ayshford Sanford, Esq. New stone windows in Perpendicular style were formed in two or three lights with cinquefoil heads. The font was an ancient large circular stone basin without ornament. The monuments were all removed for a time. But in August 1850, the chapel was left in an unfinished state without doors or floor and the new windows without glass. The ancient font lay neglected on the ground amidst unfinished stonework. Cattle and sheep sheltered in the building. Against the north east corner stood the altar tomb to Henry son of Arthur Ayshford, who died on 17 January 1666, aged one year and nine months (Davidson gave the year as 1636, but the inscription is clearly 1666). There was no other monument in the chapel; fragments of the mural monument (John and Susannah) were stored in a room over an old gateway among outbuildings. Among the fragments preserved in the same chamber was a bell of small size inscribed *This Bell is Henry Ayshford's. T.P. 1657* (T.P. stands for Thomas Petherington, an Exeter bell founder).[27] The visiting committee of Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society also reported on the chapel in 1847, finding it in a dilapidated state but about to be restored. The committee added to the above descriptions that there were plain open seats all of oak; in the flooring were numerous tiles with a glazed cross on them; and that some small bits of stained glass showed that the chapel was once richly adorned. The building was described as Perpendicular. The font was mentioned for the last time. The committee reported that services were held eight times a year, commencing the first week in May and continuing once a fortnight till all were completed.[28]

The first two chroniclers to capture the building after its extensive mid-nineteenth century reconstruction were two directories issued by Kelly and Billing respectively.[29,30] According to Billing who was writing in 1857 the chapel had lately been restored with great taste. It was he who referred expressly to the 'touching up anew' of the old screen and the introduction of the windows inscribed with the words of the *Te Deum*, the hymn of praise beginning – 'We praise Thee O God: We acknowledge Thee to be the Lord' and ending 'O Lord in Thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded'. Figure 11 shows the rebus or monogram of the designer of the windows which survives in the glazing on the north wall of the chancel. It had been thought until recently that this was the work of Thomas Willement (1786-1871), an artist of considerable distinction with royal patronage, with a particular interest in heraldry. His work survives in St George's Chapel, Windsor and because of his passion for armorial bearings, in a number of country house, including Penryn Castle in Caernarvonshire. However Jeanne James's researches have more recently diverted attention onto the lesser known but in his way just as interesting, John Toms. Toms, who lived from 1813 to 1867, was a stained glass artist of Wellington in Somerset, who stained his own glass and fired it himself in a primitive glass furnace, using gold, silver, cobart (*sic*, perhaps cobalt

Fig. 6
This vertiginous view of the door shows the robustness of the door furniture of 1848
Photo: Apex Photo Agency

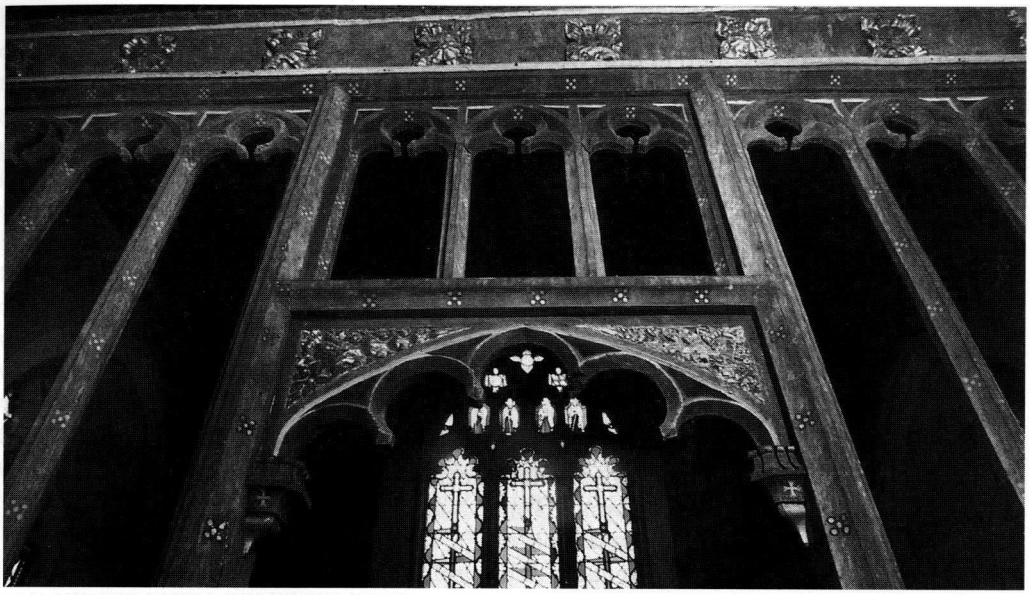


Fig. 7
The screen with its polychromatic subtlety of red and gold on a predominantly blue background
Photo: Apex Photo Agency

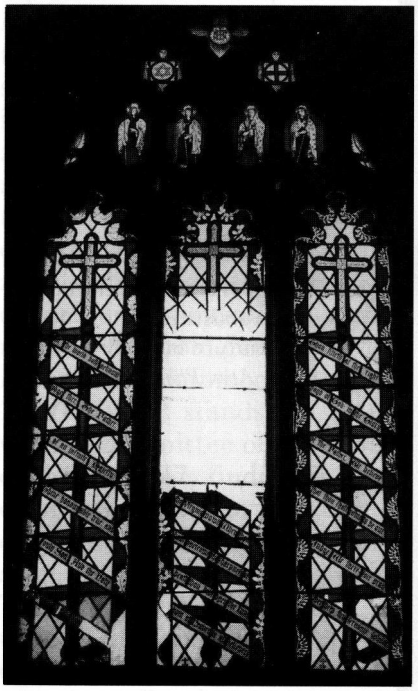
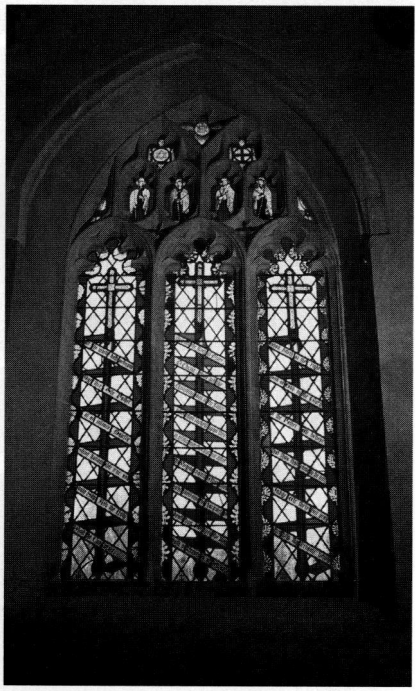


Photo: Matthew Saunders

Figs. 8a & b
The west window, shown here before and after repair, was particularly damaged by neglect and vandalism. The Friends felt strongly that to leave the centre blank would be too much of a visual disappointment so a painstaking reconstruction of the lost glazing was carried out



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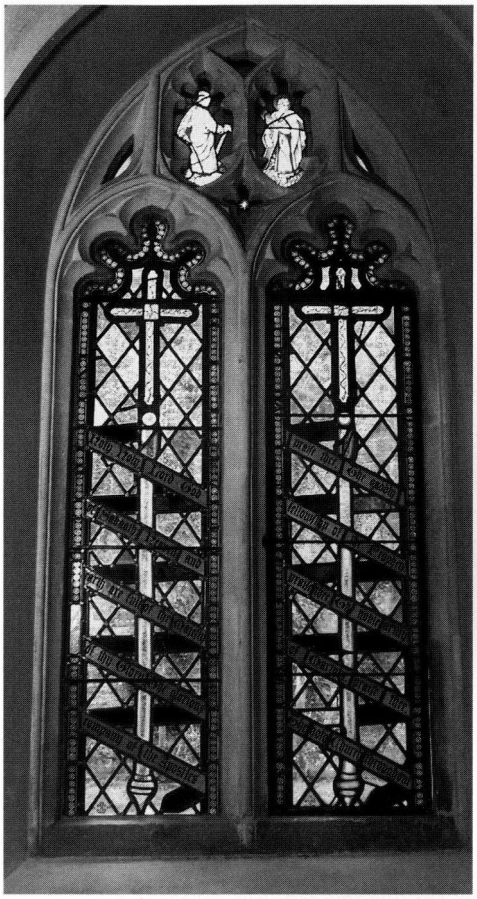

Fig. 10 *above*
An impression is created of peering through a Gothic squint to glimpse these saintly figures going about their business
Photo: Matthew Saunders

Fig. 9 *left*
One of the two-light windows by John Toms. Note the restlessness of the figures at the top and the way that the ribbons with the writing are wrapped around the processional cross and hung from the top of the stave by the delicate bands of material
Photo: Apex Photo Agency

is meant) and other minerals to give the requisite colours.[31] Wellington is the nearest town to both Ayshford and Nynehead and it would have been logical for the family to employ a local craftsman for ease of arrangements and transportation. This is an ascription recently validated by Martin Harrison the acknowledged authority on Victorian stained glass.

It was E. Bligh Bond [32] reporting in 1912 who was the first to draw attention to a large number of minute perforated quatrefoils built into the exterior walls. These appear to be decorative work of the 1848-50 restoration, presumably filling the apertures left by former putlog holes of the fifteenth century. (These were apertures normally filled in with stones that are sometimes unmortared and have fallen out into which the scaffolding poles were slotted whilst the wall was under construction.) He also drew attention to the presence of ancient stones, some of which he surmised were Norman, on both the east and west walls, survivors perhaps either from the lost medieval chapel or Canonsleigh Abbey, retrieved by the Revd Thomas Tanner. The 1848 rebuild left its own distinctive carving – the four-petalled flowers serving

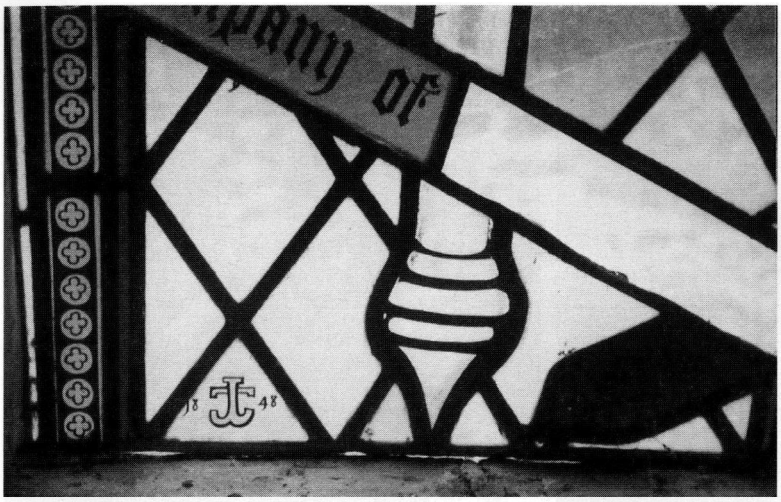

Fig. 11
The distinctive John Toms monogram
Photo: Matthew Saunders

as stops on the hoodmould of the west window, the door surrounds to the west and to the east and the corbelled heads either side of the east window which seem to juxtapose Queen Victoria and a divine in wig and bands, no doubt intended to be Thomas Tanner himself.

THE MONUMENTS

Perhaps the most unexpected element of the interior, alongside the glass, are the monuments. By far the most splendid, dominating the view of everybody entering by the south door, is that to John Ayshford. The inscription reads:

> *Near this place lies interred the body of John Ayshford of Ayshford in the county of Devon, who departed this life the 24th day of February 1689, in the 49th year of his age. As also the body of Susanna Ayshford, his wife daughter of Lucy Knightley of London, merchant, the youngest son of Ritchard Knightley of Fausley in the county of Northampton, Esq., who departed this life 6th day of December 1688, in the 24th year of her age.*

Corinthian columns carry a moulded entablature surmounted by the Ayshford arms flanked by carved flaming urns. The columns themselves sit on a shelf supported on consoles carved as cherubs heads. The apron is then carved with swags, a further version of the Ayshford arms and little putti, playing as it were with the wings of the central cherub and sitting, as one would in a hammock, on the swags themselves. It is hard not to escape the feeling that this is mourning with a lively face (Fig. 12). Located near it on a windowsill are two surviving elements from a lost monument (Fig. 14), two headless figures, one with an hourglass, the other with a skull.

The much worn gravestone of Sir Henry Ayshford of 1659 survives within the sanctuary and to one side of it, rather squeezed against the wall, is a chest tomb in

Fig. 12
The best monument in the building; that to John Ayshford of 1689
Photo: Apex Photo Agency

Figs. 13a & b
The chest tomb in black marble to Henry Ayshford after its transformational conservation by Nimbus
Photos: Apex Photo Agency

Fig. 14
This headless figure holding a skull is a loose fragment from what seems to have been a lost monument
Photo: Matthew Saunders

Fig. 15
Another almost miraculous transformation was that effected by Conway Conservation to the nineteenth-century painted lamp which began as a heap of rusting metal but is now once again the chief source of light in the chapel
Photo: Apex Photo Agency

black marble to another Henry Ayshford (son of Arthur) who died on 17 January 1666 at the age of one year nine months. A tragically short life still deserved appropriate commemoration and once again the lid has the incised family crest and shield. It was this monument, greatly damaged by lamination and cracking from damp, which presented the greatest conservation challenge. This was met admirably by Nimbus (David Odgers) who cleaned and conserved it to an exemplary standard.

Even more of a conservation challenge was the nineteenth-century oil lamp which we found shoved into a corner wrapped in 1971 newspaper. It is hard to imagine that a rusty lump of metal has emerged in the expert hands of Conway Conservation as the tripartite corona shown in Figure 15. Under the years of grime a rather delicate polychromatic stencilled effect was found on the outer rim.

The lamp now joins the two mid-nineteenth-century sconces on the medieval screen as providing the main light to the interior. Fortunately the wooden collecting plate inscribed in wry humour 'God Loveth a Cheerful Giver' did not require conserving.

CONSERVATION CAMPAIGN

The Sanford family continued to maintain interest in the chapel and there were occasional services for all family members, one particular one in 1986. However in the 1990s it became clear that they were fighting a losing battle against the effect of dilapidation. Some unfortunate cement repointing was having its inevitably deleterious effect on the local Chert stone rubble used for the shell as well as the volcanic stone on the buttresses and the Beer stone used for the dressings. It seems certain that the Delabole slate roof had not been renewed since it was first applied in 1848 and it still retained most unusually a continuous ridge in Ham stone (which of course we have kept). The nineteenth-century soil plate to the medieval screen was gently rotting and, perhaps most alarming of all, the fabulous windows of 1848 had become holed and bowed over the years with 'make do and mend' repairs,

Fig. 16
The successful conclusion to a conservation campaign.
On the left Graeme Arnold and a colleague from Arnold & Lang, the contractors,
Matthew Saunders, Honorary Director of the Friends, and on the right,
the Friends' architect for the campaign, Louise Bainbridge

some of it in tape. The archaeological excavation in the grounds by Jane Harcourt helped to uncover some pieces of the glass which had fallen out and become buried. Some complete elements were missing but we took the philosophical decision to reinstate where there was clear evidence, helped by the fact that the wording of the *Te Deum* was easily copiable as it had been consistent since 1662. As a private chapel, Ayshford could not have been passed to the Churches Conservation Trust. English Heritage was approached but declined to accept it into guardianship. It became quite clear that only the Friends could take on the building. This was the decision of Trustees when formally approached by Edward Sanford. We allocated a proportion of a legacy towards the cost but certainly could not have faced the challenge of a project which cost £88,000 (excluding the work to the Henry Ayshford monument) unless English Heritage had offered a 70% grant towards the costs. Buoyed up with this generous expression of support we commissioned Louise Bainbridge as architect and Arnold & Lang as principal contractor to embark upon the repair campaign before fabric was lost. One of the major transformations of the interior was the reapplication of the salmon pink limewash which we had ascertained to have been the rather striking colour chosen in 1848. At the time of writing the effect is still rather blotchy but this will improve over time.

Unlike others, the contract was relatively trouble-free and the totally unexpected hiccup was from Mother Nature. The building has bats and we tried to avoid the breeding season for the building work. But, it was the rather more aggressive bees which proved the problem. We had to call in members of the Devon Beekeepers Association when the builder removed the quatrefoil decoration within the putlog holes to secure their repair and a number of combs with many angry bees were discovered. The Association provided the men and equipment to pull out the combs into brood boxes to allow the whole colony to be resited.[33]

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