



ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

LOWER BASILDON
BERKSHIRE



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

LONDON

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TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO
ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH
LOWER BASILDON, BERKSHIRE

Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.

Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 325 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.

Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH until 30 September 2002. We will be moving to new offices in the autumn of 2002, so please look out for announcements in our churches or visit our website www.visitchurches.org.uk for details of our new address.

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ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

LOWER BASILDON, BERKSHIRE

by CLIVE WILLIAMS

INTRODUCTION

The area now known as Lower Basildon has seen human activity since early prehistoric times. Flint tools from the Palaeolithic to Neolithic periods have been found in the vicinity and a Neolithic site was excavated by archaeologists in one of the 'Time Team' television archaeology programmes in March 2000. In the Bronze Age (c.2500–700 BC) Grims Ditch was constructed: two sections, each half a mile (0.8 km) long, survive in the parish. Grim was the Saxon name for the Devil and the enormous earthen rampart was considered by the Saxons to be the work of the Devil. During the Roman occupation of Britain, from the 1st to the 5th centuries AD, a villa was built on the earlier Neolithic site, but was destroyed in 1838 by Brunel's navvies when the Great Western Railway was being constructed. The 'Time Team' commissioned a reconstruction of part of the mosaic floor of the villa that had been sketched before its destruction in 1838; it can be seen at the Beale Trust, to the south of the church.

This part of Wessex was not converted to Christianity until St Birinus' arrival from Rome in AD 633; it is likely that the first church on the present site of St Bartholomew's was built shortly afterwards. Close to the Thames, it was vulnerable to flooding. One can only assume that the church was constructed on an earlier pagan site. This first church may have been destroyed by the Vikings in the 9th century during their campaigns against the Saxons at Englefield and Ashdown (Kingstanding Hill) in AD 871. The church may have suffered again at the hands of King Sweyn of Denmark in 1013 when he is recorded as having destroyed all the settlements and churches between Reading and Wallingford in his campaign to gain the English throne. His son Knut (Canute), a Christian, succeeded him in 1014 and rebuilt them. Basildon again (but probably not the church) was largely destroyed by Duke William of Normandy in 1066, when most of his army crossed the Thames upstream at Streatley, on the way to Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire, where London and the remaining Saxon aristocracy finally surrendered. After the Conquest the manor of Basildon, which included the

modern-day parishes of Basildon and Ashampstead, was granted to Henry of Newburgh, Earl of Warwick; his family retained an association with the manor over several centuries. Some time before 1154 his son, also Henry, gave the churches of Basildon and Ashampstead to the Abbey of Lyre or Lire in Normandy, the grant being confirmed by Henry II.

The 13th and 14th centuries were turbulent times in Basildon church life involving arson, adultery, illegitimacy and excommunication. In 1264 Stephen de la Wyle was instituted to Basildon with the chapel of Ashampstead. Henry Sampson is recorded as vicar in 1305 but he fell out with the abbot of Lyre over ownership of the tithes of Ashampstead. In the dispute Sampson was accused of arson and criminal damage and was dispossessed. Other vicars followed in quick succession until 1337 when King Edward III abolished the rights of foreign abbots over English churches. As a result the right to present to the living of Basildon was given to Sir William Trussell, to enable him to found a college of priests at Shottesbrooke, near White Waltham in East Berkshire. With the suppression of the college in 1547 the living of Basildon passed to Thomas and Edward Weldon as lay rectors.

Roger Yonge bought Basildon manor in 1543 and died here in 1589 aged 96. During the later 17th century and for most of the 18th the manor of Basildon was owned by the Fane family. Viscount Fane planted two yew trees at Christmas 1726 and was instrumental in raising money for the church tower. His wife, Lady Mary Fane, built a house and next to it a famous grotto. The grotto disappeared when the house was extended, but the house, now the headquarters of ILAM (Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management), is still known as the Grotto. In 1770 the Fanes sold the manor to Sir Francis Sykes; he, his son and grandson, owned it until 1838 when it was bought by James Morrison, a self-made man and Liberal MP. His grandson, Major James Archibald Morrison, sold it for £90,000 to the first Lord Iliffe. It was Major Morrison who coined the name *Basildon Bond* for a new brand of writing paper in 1911.

DESCRIPTION

St Bartholomew's church consists of a chancel, nave, small north aisle, south porch and west tower. The walls are built of flint except for the tower which is of brick. The nave and inner south doorway are of the early-13th century, when the Abbot of Lyre undertook the reconstruction of the church. In 1280 the tall chancel with its fine windows was rebuilt; its south wall has an original priest's doorway facing Church Farm, formerly Basildon Court,

One of the south chancel windows
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)



and likely to have been used originally for housing the vicar. In the 14th century the chancel was described as ruinous and the churchyard enclosure defective. Also of the 14th century is the canopied chest tomb originally erected inside the church, possibly for the lord of the manor at the time. This was moved outside the church and re-erected on the south wall to serve as a memorial to Sir Francis Sykes Bt (1732–1804) who made his fortune in India with the East India Company, returned to England and bought the Basildon Manor Estate from the Fane family and then built Basildon Park between 1776–83. There is a family vault outside the church but Sir Francis is believed to have been buried in a vault under the church, now sealed. There is also a monument to Sir Francis on the north wall of the chancel. Executed by John Flaxman (1755–1826) it portrays a mourning female figure, her head in her hands, beside an urn and a medallion. Flaxman is now best known for his designs on Wedgwood china.



Interior looking east (ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND)

Berkshire and Basildon enjoyed considerable prosperity in the 15th century thanks to the wool and corn trade; the fine timber-framed roofs over the nave and chancel with their tie-beams, upper-collar beams and arched braces are of this date.

In 1734 money was raised by public subscription to add a tower to the church. This was built of brick with three stages divided by projecting string-courses and topped with battlements and four corner pinnacles, each with a weathervane. It contains four bells. The tenor bell was presented in 1621 by Lady Lytcott, daughter-in-law of Roger Yonge who had acquired Basildon manor in 1543; it is inscribed:

IN TRUE DESIER FOR TO DO WELL
THE LADY LITCOT GAVE THIS BELL

It was cast by Henry Knight I of Reading, who had cast an older bell in 1611. A third bell was cast by Henry Knight II in 1665 and the treble by Thomas Dicker, a Reading clockmaker, in 1734, when the present tower was built. The 1611 and 1734 bells were recast by Mears & Stainbank of London in 1876. The sanctus bell was removed to St Stephen's church, Upper Basildon, after the new church there was built in 1964.

The short north aisle is built of flint with some brick. It appears to be 19th century and may date from a restoration of the church carried out in 1846. The Revd Dr George Bellas, vicar for 34 years (he died 24 January 1802) left some notes in the parish register 'for the amusement of his successor'. He records the following:

- The West Gallery was built by Francis Sykes by 1772.
- The North Gallery by subscription to make room 1773.
- In the year 1774 March 10 the River was 4 inches deep in the house, 6 inches in the church.
- The font was given by me Geo Bellas Vicar 1774.
- The design was mine own. The marble Cross and Basin were executed by the ingenious Mr Hill of Reading at a cost of £1 16s.
- Copy of an epitaph on an Altar monument on the north side of the church already very much mutilated which will soon cease to be legible.

*Sub hoc marmore – Deposita sunt exuvio
Iohannis Okes AM – Hujus Ecclesiae nuper Vicarii
Suavesque mores (ut necquid decoris sibi proprii)
Dealiis virtutibus memorabilia
Obit 19 Julia anno Dom 1728 Aetat 51*

The transcription of the epitaph on John Okes' monument is clearly inaccurate and several of the Latin words are meaningless. The following is suggested as an approximate translation:

*Beneath this marble lie the remains
of John Okes MA late Vicar of this Church
Memorable among his other virtues for his sweet nature (not to mention his
personal charm)
He died on 19 July 1728 aged 51*

Vicar Okes had previously married Dorothy Fane, the sister of Viscount Fane.

The parish records also record that in 1825 the seats appropriated to the poor were in a dilapidated state and the Vestry resolved that they should be repaired and that a new Gothic stone window frame should be fixed near the pulpit in place of the wooden one which was old and much decayed. In addition it was resolved to wash and paint the church at a cost of £48: this was paid for by donations from Sir Francis Sykes, Revd RB Fisher (vicar), William Stone, William Stone Jnr, Revd George Ogle, Revd William Marsh and Capt. Valpy. The Stones were major landowners in Lower Basildon. Their family tomb, now much overgrown, stands just outside the east window of the church.

A print of 1810 by Charles Tomkins shows the church with a classical porch, probably erected by Sir Francis Sykes. However Charles Morrison (1818–1909) favoured the Gothic style – the former school in Lower Basildon is Gothic – and it seems likely that he caused the present porch to be erected in 1875–76. Built into its east wall is part of a 12th-century stone arch or doorway.

George Bellas' font, referred to above, was replaced in 1846 by the present one of stone. At the same time the oak pulpit, made in Munich, was given by Mrs Morrison whose husband James met the full cost of restoring the church in 1846 – at his death in 1857 he was reputedly the wealthiest commoner in the United Kingdom; a further restoration was paid for by his son Charles in 1875–76. The stained glass in the north and south chancel windows by William Wailes was installed in memory of two of James and Mary Morrison's 11 children. Another window in the south wall of the nave was given in memory of Sir Francis Sykes, 4th baronet, 1866. The small altar table is of 17th-century date. The communion rails probably date from the restoration of 1875–76. The organ, by Bishop & Son, formerly in the church was transferred to the new church of St Stephen, Upper Basildon, in the 1970s.



Brass to John Clerk (1497) and his wife, in nave floor

(RCHME)

A small brass in the centre aisle dating from 1497 shows John Clerk and his wife Lucie – two small figures in mediaeval costume. They appear to have been a well-to-do couple; possibly he was a merchant. Beneath the south window beside the chancel arch is a brass to Roger Yonge, a Bristol merchant who bought Basildon manor in 1543 and died here in 1589 aged 96. His son, William (d.1584, aged 26) is also commemorated. In the centre of the chancel floor is a large ledger stone to Richard Cobb 1689 and his relict (widow) Joan Kent, 1737. Another stone is inscribed to Henry Hood, 1680.

On 30 March 1674 Jethro Tull, probably the most celebrated Basildonian, was baptised. Known as the father of the Agrarian Revolution, he experimented in drilling, hoeing and devising new implements to improved crop fertility. He published *An Essay in Horse Hoeing Husbandry* in 1733. Though he spent most of his life at Prosperous Farm, Shalbourne, then in Berkshire but now in Wiltshire, he stipulated that he should be buried at Basildon

and this happened on 9 March 1741. There is no known grave and it seems likely that his coffin was placed in a vault beneath the church, now sealed. His memorial in the churchyard near the south wall of the church was erected by the late Mr Gilbert Beale in 1941. Beale and his brother founded Carters' Seeds and laid out the land south of the church as pleasure grounds (now the Beale Trust). Another curiosity dating from the 17th century is Nobes tomb, the remains of a mausoleum at Tomb Farm, Hook End Lane, Upper Basildon and built by Thomas Nobes, a Quaker. The flyleaf of the parish register records *Thomas Nobes died ye 13th day of April 1699 and was not buried. Joane Nobes died accidentally on the 16th day of August 1704 and not buried.* Thus it seems that Thomas and Joane Nobes were interred in their mausoleum rather than the churchyard.

In the churchyard is a striking marble monument commemorating the death of two brothers, Harold and Ernest Deverell, in 1886. They lived at nearby Church Farm and attended Newbury Grammar School. With a friend they were paddling in a cut of the Thames, not knowing it had been deepened to aid sheep dipping. One brother got into difficulties and the other went to his aid; sadly both drowned. The churchyard also contains the graves of well-known Basildon families such as the Higgs and the Hansons. The Morrison family tomb stands to the south of the church.

LATER HISTORY

With the majority of the population of the parish living at Upper Basildon, a corrugated iron church was erected in that part of the parish in 1895, near the Recreation Ground. A new church, dedicated to St Stephen, was built in 1964–65 to the designs of architect Peter Noel Perkins on a different site and the iron church demolished. In 1973 St Bartholomew's was declared redundant and five years later was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust. Since then repairs have been carried out under the supervision of Carden & Godfrey Architects. Four or five services are normally held in the church each year.

The parish registers date from 1538 and are deposited in the Berkshire Record Office, Reading.

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View of the church from the north (RCHME)

Front cover: View of the church from the south-east (RCHME).

Back cover: View from the chancel looking west (RCHME).

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