

Welcome to the Parish Church of St Thomas of Canterbury, Thorverton

The largest and by far the oldest building in the parish, the Church overlooks the former Saxon 'burgh' and later market place now known as 'the Berry' or 'Bury'. The Church is dedicated to Thomas Becket, the 12th century archbishop who was murdered in his cathedral church.

Little is known of the early history of the Parish Church, dedicated to St Thomas a Becket, except that Henry II – in whose reign (1154-1189) Becket was murdered and later canonised – gave the church and the manor of Thorverton to St Martin's Abbey, Tours.

Built very largely of stone from the local Raddon Quarry, the church has undergone many restorations, the early medieval tower perhaps least of all. It now contains a ring of ten bells, the earliest dated 1662 and the two latest added in 1994. It houses a clock whose mechanism, still wound twice weekly by hand, dates from about 1750.

The porch is probably as old as the tower and has an upper chamber approached by a spiral stairway. The vaulted roof of the entry has some fine medieval carvings, the centre one of which is thought to represent the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Internally the unusually high Beer stone pillars give an impression of space and light. The pillars almost certainly date from c.1450 when Thorverton like so many Devon parishes, had a thriving woollen cloth industry.

A major transformation of the church took place between 1834 and 1840. The walls were raised three feet and the roof rebuilt with a single span covering the aisles and nave. The old pews were replaced but four can still be seen in the Lady Chapel. From this period dates the fine stained glass on the east wall behind the altar and the stone reredos.



A further restoration took place in 1864. The floor was relaid and the Chancel floor raised six inches. The North Transept was added at this time to provide extra seating. Early in the 20th century this was screened to provide space for meetings and has now been equipped as a kitchen.

The vestry was rebuilt in 1884 and dedicated to Archdeacon Freeman, who was the Vicar for sixteen years from 1858 to 1874. In 1886 the tile flooring in the porch and around the font (supplied by Messrs. Minton Holling & Co.) was given by the family of Mrs Hutchings of Court Barton farm.

Music plays an important part in church services and the present organ by Rest Cartwright was installed in 1912. The glazed screen to the ringing chamber was erected in 1966 as a memorial to Lt. Gen. Sir William Baker.

The beautifully carved screen and altar in the Lady Chapel came from the demolished St. Edmunds Church in Exeter and were given as a memorial to Wilfred Hare who was killed in the 1914-18 War.



The Altar and east window



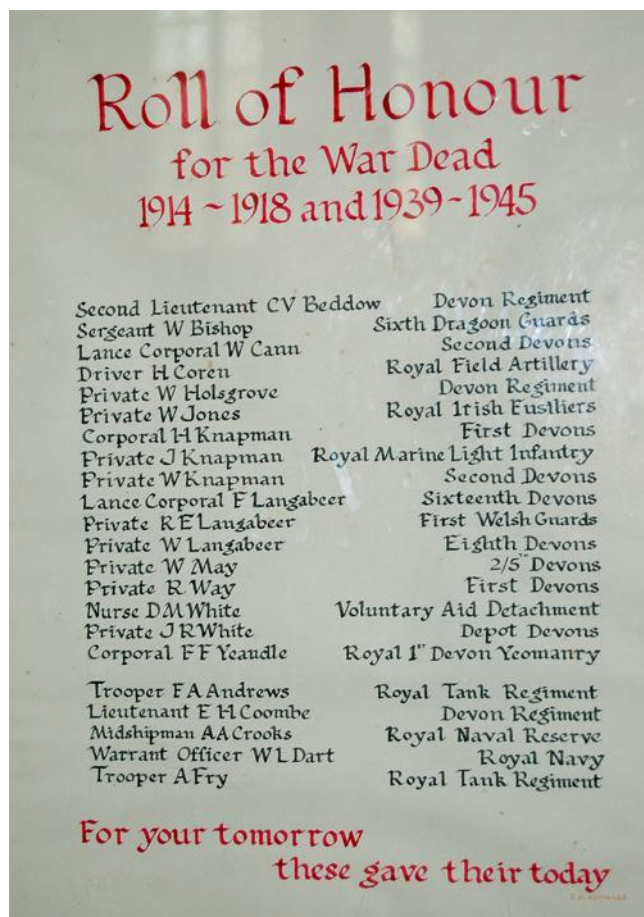
The nave, chancel and altar



The memorial window to Edwin Harry Coombe, Lieutenant, Devon Regiment, died on active service in Burma 20 November 1944.



One of the medieval carvings in the vaulted roof of the porch



The Thorverton Roll of honour



Detail from the east window