

WEST HEREFORD TEAM MINISTRY

St. Michael's Breinton



A short History and Guide

Compiled by Nichola Geeson

This Guide is a compilation of information in previous guide books, combined with notes and recollections from other sources. Although care has been taken to verify this text as far as possible, some further corrections may still come to light!

Further information can be found on the website: www.westherefordteam.org.uk/stmichaels/

History of the site of St. Michael's Church

St. Michael's Church is located in a prominent location above the River Wye. There may have been pre-Christian worship here, but the first building we can be sure of is a Norman church, built around 1200AD. A moated building on a mound on the river cliff close to the church was being used by the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral around 1150AD, but might also have had an earlier origin. Nearby, there is undulating ground in the orchard by the church. Was this a former vicarage, or something older? Although Breinton was not specifically identified in the Domesday Survey (as was Warham), land at Breinton (Breynton) was recorded and held by Hereford Cathedral Chapter by 1201.

A new chancel was built in the 14th century. By 1520 Charles Booth was Bishop of Hereford and members of the Booth family came to live in Breinton for five generations.

In the 1720s the antiquary James Hill visited a number of Herefordshire churches, including St. Michael's Breinton. His sketch at "Brainton" shows the south door in its present place, with two buttresses on the west side, and a smaller south door to the chancel. There was no spire, but bells were housed in a wooden tower at the west end.



Small Norman west window and top of door have been incorporated into the 1867 rebuild

In 1866, at the time of the Rev. Edmund du Buisson (Rector of Breinton 1854-1875), James Cranston (an architect) proposed that the church be restored using the plans and supervision of F. R. Kempson. He also proposed that the work, paid for by voluntary subscription, should not be started until the target sum was reached. Work began a year later, so the need for restoration must have been urgent. F. R. Kempson was responsible for the rebuilding of a number of small churches in Herefordshire. A north aisle parallel to the nave was also added. James Cranston was grandson of John Cranston from Glasgow who founded nurseries at Kings Acre, Hereford.

The only parts of the Norman exterior to survive are semi-circular tops to the west door and a west window and some masonry, including two buttresses, on the south side. The walls are of local sandstone rubble with dressings of the same material. The roof is slate-covered. Today there is a short octagonal spire and there is a recurring trefoil theme.



Older masonry re-used around the windows on the south side

One of the children of Edmund Du Buisson wrote in their diary:

"19th April 1870. Church re-opened. Went to church early to finish arranging primroses on the font. Mr. Cranston has sent over such lovely azaleas, roses and beautiful cut flowers besides. Service at 11.00, Holy Communion after. The Bishop preached such a beautiful sermon. Luncheon, about 50 altogether. Bishop went away after. Afternoon service at 4.00. Lord Saye and Sele preached." [Lord Saye and Sele was Achdeacon of Hereford.]

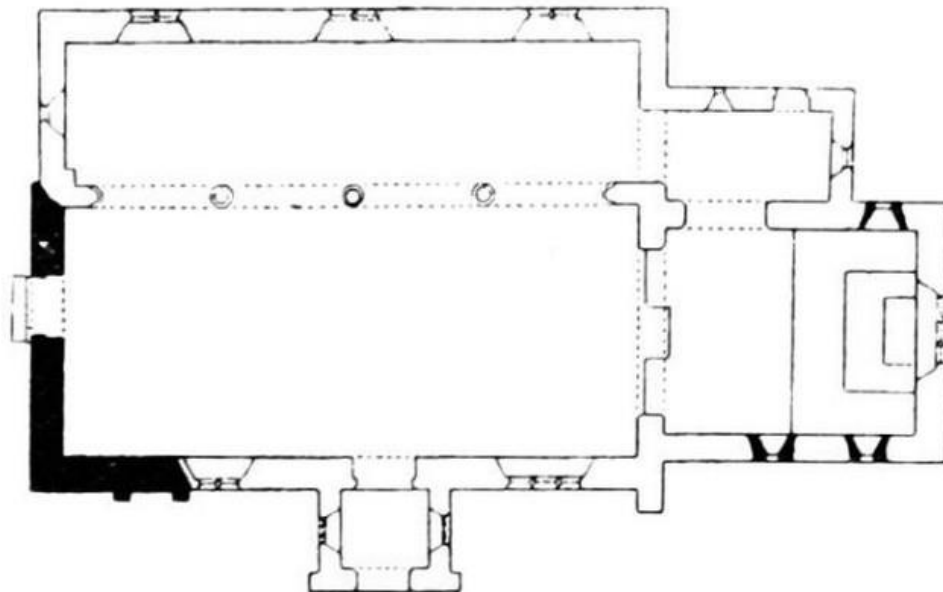
The door to the north wall of the present vestry (originally a chamber for organ pipes) is flanked by stone carvings of heads, reputed to be of Rev. Edmund Du Buisson and his wife Charlotte. Or maybe, as the facial features are so similar, they could be memorials to Edmund (d. 1875) and daughter Lucy (d. 1878).



Stone heads each side of the vestry door

The Church Interior

As described in an inventory of Historical Monuments in Herefordshire, 1932, (reproduced by British History Online) the chancel (21 ¼ ft. by 17 ¼ ft.) has a modern east window. In the north wall is a modern arch (now closed off), and further east a 14th century window of one trefoiled ogee light. In the south wall are two 14th century windows each of one trefoiled ogee light. The chancel arch is modern.



The Church, Plan

The nave (48 ½ ft. by 21 ft.) has a north arcade and in the south wall there are two windows and a doorway, all modern. In the west wall, north of the axis, is a late 12th century doorway with toll-moulded jambs, round head and moulded label. Above it is a round-headed window of unknown date, and a small modern opening still higher up. Above the west end is a modern timber bell-cote with an octagonal broach spirelet.

There are two bells: one inscribed (in Lombardic capitals) "*Ave Maria gratia*," (probably 14th century) and the other, inscribed in Lombardic capitals "*Ave Maria grasia plenas*," (Hail Mary Full of Grace, probably 15th century). Presumably these are the same bells as shown in the wooden bell tower in the sketch by James Hill in the 1720s.

The stained glass windows

The memorial windows include Bible stories chosen by the du Buisson family and other parishioners. It is interesting how many biblical women are depicted. Starting from the west side of the south door and moving towards the west door:

1. Our Lord at Bethany, with Mary and Martha. In memory of Ann Proctor, (died 1893), a member of one of Breinton's wealthier families.
2. Patterned lancet window with cherub in memory of Frederick Eckersall, died 1865 aged 31 after "long and patient suffering" according to his gravestone. He was the

only son of the Rev. Charles and Mrs Mary Anne Eckersall. In this tragic family his sister Catherine Anne died in 1849 aged 18 and his sister Agnes died aged 5. Although there are so many Eckersall dedications, the Rev. Eckersall does not seem to have been an incumbent at St. Michael's.

3. Catherine Eckersall and her mother (died 1814) are remembered on the windows thought through tradition to show a) the daughter of Herod, Salome and her mother; and b) Salome (having danced to gain his favour) asking her step-father Herod for the head of John the Baptist. An alternative theory is that these figures are a) Potiphar's wife attempting to seduce Joseph; and b) Potiphar's wife and Potiphar. Neither story seems appropriate for St. Michael's!
4. "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former" refers to the restoration of the church 1866-70. This unusual window is in memory of James Cranston, the architect who worked on the restoration of the church and died soon after it was completed, on 7th December 1871. We believe that James is depicted as Solomon, directing the rebuilding of the Temple, in the presence of F.R. Kempson the architect, and four builders. James was grandson of John Cranston, who founded the famous nurseries at Kings Acre, and probably son of Thomas Cranston. There are three James Cranstons mentioned on tombstones beneath this window, but they all appear to have died earlier than 1871.

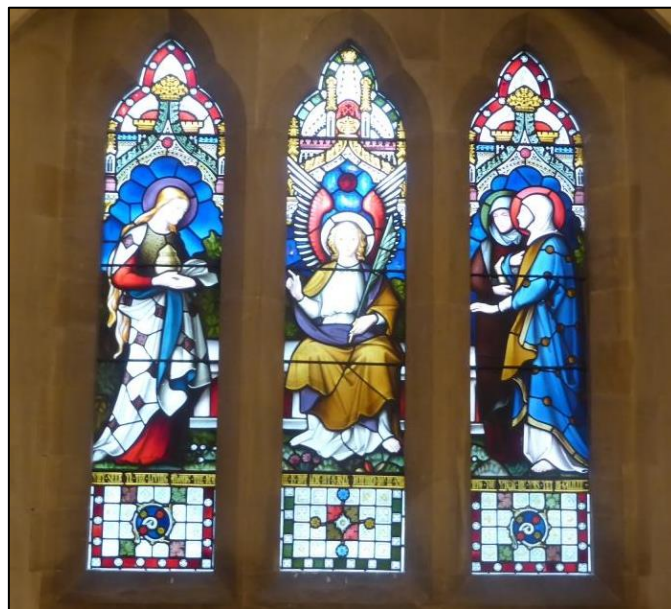


5. a) The Good Shepherd; b) Our Lord with a child. In memory of Rev. Edmund Du Buisson, who instigated the rebuilding of St. Michael's and died in 1875.
6. Roundel: The Lamb of God. Given by Grace Gwynne James. (Gates to the churchyard from the car park were in memory of Philip Gwynne James.)
7. There are three Fleur de Lys and vine pattern windows in the chancel.
8. Crucifixion with the Virgin and St. John. Altar window, installed November 1914 to replace another window that was also dedicated to the du Buisson family. The glass from the original window was removed and given to a South African church by a

member of the same family. This window is in memory of Edmund Du Buisson, died 1875 and his wife Charlotte, died 1913.



9. Angel with three women at the Tomb (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome; Mark 16:1). In memory of a second Frederick Eckersall, died 1874.



At least one windows seems to have been crafted by Nathaniel Wood Lavers, Francis Philip Barraud and Nathaniel Westlake who were well-known designers of stained glass in London, part of the Victorian Gothic Revival. In the north aisle the stained glass was by "Powell", in 1874. Lavers and Barraud were originally employed at the workshops of James Powell and Sons.

The Organ

The present organ was installed between the windows of the north aisle in 1967. Back in 1867 Lucy Du Buisson played a harmonium for services, and an American organ was installed in 1871. In 1920 a new organ commemorated soldiers in the 1st World War. It was brought from Credenhill and placed first in the vestry and then to the right of the Chancel steps.

Monuments, Memorials and ancient furnishings

The earliest monument is a painted and framed oak panel referring to Captain Rudhall Booth, 1685 (descendent of Bishop Charles Booth of Hereford, 1516-1535). Following action in the English Civil Wars Rudhall died whilst commanding the Holy Island Garrison, in Berwick upon Tweed, and around the same time his brother Charles, who was exiled with King James II, died in France. Charles had a son, also called Charles, who having renounced the English Government was unable to return to Breinton to claim his estate. He secretly, with the help of a friend, leased the land to the Dean of Hereford, but when the friend died, his housekeeper Alice Shaw (possibly a relative) inherited the land.



Eventually the whole estate was gifted to Thomas Cooke of Kinnersley who had built up a thriving tannery in Weobley, and his wife Susanne. Thomas passed on the land to his brother James Cooke who was a bookseller at the British Museum in London, and James returned to Herefordshire. James Cooke had one son, Thomas, who after going to Eton and Oxford became a barrister at Gray's Inn, and on the Oxford circuit, then later a Lieutenant Colonel in the Hereford County Militia. There is a memorial to him and his wife Helen. Their son, William Symonds Cooke, was a surgeon in the service of the East India Company. He died in camp near Visapour in December 1821 aged 25. Another Thomas Cooke, an auctioneer, may have been William's brother.

It is thought that members of the Booth and Badham families are buried under the Chancel, and were not disturbed when the Church was rebuilt.

Little is known of Elizabeth Harris, or William and Sarah Jones. Behind a white marble tablet fixed in the wall above the west door are the remains of Thomas Davies (d. 1741).

Edward Charles Bulmer was in the RAF during the 2nd World War and was killed by a returning bomber plane. He was guiding the plane in on a difficult landing and was hit by the wing tip.

A boarded elm chest with iron bands and straps, iron extensions as legs and two carrying rings, dates to the 17th century, and a communion table with carved legs (with Ionic capitals, carved upper rails, moulded lower rails on feet) is thought to be late 16th century. A communion cup of 1641 has a baluster stem.

A board gives details of donations to the parish of Breinton. William Vorse of Warham was deceased by 1816, and Thomas Pritchard died in 1811, so this board appears to date back to around that time.

Ornaments and furnishings inside the Church since 1870

The reredos at the east end of the Church behind the altar was a memorial to Rev. John Lomax M.A. who had been Vicar between 1875 and 1888. In 1905 it was enriched with five panels of mosaic by Powell of Whitefriars, London.

Between 1871 and 1913 Edmund du Buisson's children gave the oak pulpit showing the four gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) in memory of Arthur Thompson (d. 1879), the oak lectern in memory of George Proctor, and a crucifix in memory of Lionel Thomas Ricketts. Originally the spaces between the figures on the pulpit were open, but they have been filled in, perhaps because of parishioner objections to the view of clergy feet?

The crucifix above the pulpit is in memory of Lionel Thomas Ricketts (d. 1992). The font may have been kept from the earlier building.

Furnishings from the Mission hall in Breinton Common came to St. Michael's when it closed in 1990. These included altar rails, kneelers, communion cruet and a small table put in a tiny chapel in the north aisle. This was dedicated by the Bishop of Ludlow, Ian Griggs, in September 1990.

A modern patronal statue of St. Michael was created by Emma Richards-Ward, a local artist. The plaque was given by Wardie Strange in memory of her husband Dr. Freddie Strange.

A statue of the Virgin Mary (also by Emma Richards-Ward) was given by Beate Teal in memory of her husband Michael, churchwarden at the time of his death in 1991.

A wooden board tells us that the Incorporated Society for Building and Churches granted £25 in the 1880s to ensure seating for at least 220 people! At that time the organ, kitchen, toilet and store cupboards did not take up space in the main body of the Church, as they do now. Another board shows donations of Breinton Charities in the 18th/19th centuries.

In the Sanctuary (by the altar) an aumbry (a recess to hold the sacrament) was installed in 1992. The marble shelf with wrought iron brackets below was erected by Ray Norton. Decorated candlesticks and two statues of the Virgin Mary were given by the Rev. Barry Irons, Rector between 1991 and 1994.



Patronal statue of St. Michael, by Emma Richards-Ward

Incumbents since the rebuilt St. Michael's was opened in 1870

The Du Buisson family lived at Breinton Court, and built a house for a Curate (now Breinton Grange) on the east side of the church. Edmund and Charlotte had five children. Sarah Lucy married her cousin Augustine Ley, brother of the Curate, Clement Ley. They honeymooned on the French Riviera but on her return she contracted pneumonia and despite the ministrations of Dr. Henry Graves Bull, she died. It had also been Lucy who with her brother had been driven into the pond near their home while returning from a party in the middle of winter. It seems that the coachman was drunk.

Between 1875 and 1888 the Rev. Lomax was Rector, and unfortunately he was responsible for all the parish registers up to 1662 being burned. He used an old railway saloon in the rectory garden as a study, and when it was destroyed by fire the registers went with it. He, with Thomas Probert (Parish Clerk) and Whaley Armitage (Churchwarden), did manage to renovate the ancient Register Chest that had been used since before 1812.

Henry North, Rector 1888-1897 was a graduate of Clare College, Cambridge. He later lived and was buried in Milan. The prayer desk (prie-dieu) is dedicated to him.

The Rev. C. H. Binstead (1873-1941), was Rector of the parish 1897 -1906 and noted that the chancel which had been painted red, was very dark. In 1914 the Rev. Arkwright arranged for the chancel to be painted white.

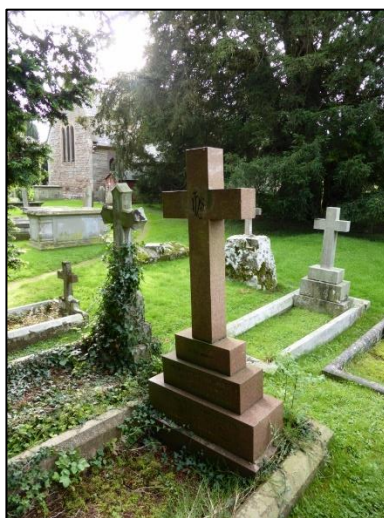
Churchyard, stones, and monuments

The old traditional path to the Church was from the west side, past the moated mound to the lychgate. The current roofed lychgate built in 1873 was where the coffin for burial was set down to await the arrival of the Vicar. Since then the Churchyard has been extended on the north side (in 1948, with land gifted by George Marshall of Breinton Manor), and a new drier path was made for the approach, with car park beyond.

Either side of the lychgate are the remains of two ancient small-leaved lime trees, symbols of fertility for each newly-married bride and bridegroom. The two yew trees, sometimes known as “Adam and Eve”, on the north side date back to the early days of the church. A James Cranston (possibly not the architect) planted specimen trees in the churchyard including hemlocks from Canada, Lawson cypresses from California around 1871. A Cedar of Lebanon was planted on the south side, but as it was becoming dangerous it was cut down in 1937. In 1947 eight trees were blown down in a gale and damaged a number of grave stones.

The Churchyard on the south and west sides is bordered by an ancient ha-ha, a ditch to prevent large animals getting in. When the Du Buisson family built a school by the Church and a new Rectory in 1866 (now Breinton Grange) the original east side of the Churchyard was taken and flattened for a garden croquet lawn!

The Thornycroft family of Wyevale House left a bequest of £800 for the continuing upkeep of the Churchyard, in memory of two sons lost in the second World War.



Plans of gravestones and lists of the deceased were compiled by Gill Wall of Breinton Manor in 1993, and are available in church and on the Breinton Parish Council website. Of particular interest are:

- To the east of the vestry there are stones for Katherin, wife of Major John Booth 16[9]3, and to John Booth, 1690.
- A Grade II listed chest tomb in a railed enclosure close to the South Door commemorates Thomas Pritchard, died 1811, and further members of Pritchard

family. Was this the same Thomas Pritchard who was Chief Constable of Hereford in the 1770s-90s?

- A second Grade II listed tomb stands nearby, a pedestal with a stone urn on top, but it has no remaining inscription.
- Henry Graves Bull (1818-1885) is remembered for founding the British Mycological Society (for the scientific study of fungi), and the Woolhope Field Naturalist's Club. As a medical doctor he pioneered the use of anaesthetic and worked to improve health and sanitation in Herefordshire. He also studied orchards and cider-making with his friends the Reverend Charles Bulmer of Credenhill, and Robert Hogg, which resulted in their book, the "Herefordshire Pomona".
- The Du Buisson family, including Edmund (1821-1875), daughter Sarah Lucy Ley (d. 1878), and grandson Henry Victor (1882-1949) who was Bishop of Lebombo Land (South Africa) and has a Bishop's crozier carved on his stone.
- Charles Vincent Gorton (1854-1912), Rector of Morecambe and Canon of Manchester, drowned in mysterious circumstances in the River Wye. Note the short line of music from his friend Edward Elgar's composition "The Apostles".
- Charles Hassard Wilfred Dodgson (1876-1941) buried by the West Door, lived at Breinton House and seems to have been a relative of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson alias Lewis Carroll. The daughter of Charles H. W. Dodgson was Antoinette Carroll Dodgson (1924-1976).
- Rev. Herbert E.C. Gatliff (1898-1977) was the son of a Rector of Breinton who became a top civil servant at the Treasury in London. He loved long-distance walking between youth hostels. He went to the Outer Hebrides with John Cadbury, chairman of the Youth Hostel Association, but there were no hostels, – so he helped to fund some. The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust is still in operation today.

A Selection of Further Reading

West Hereford Team website: <http://www.westherefordteam.org.uk/stmichaels/>

History synopsis: <http://herefordshirepast.co.uk/churches/st-michaels-church/>

Breinton and Warham in 1868: <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/HEF/Breinton/Gaz1868>

Extract from Littlebury's Directory and Gazetteer of Herefordshire, 1876-7:
<http://texts.wishful-thinking.org.uk/Littlebury1876/Breinton.html>

Notes about the Du Buisson family: <http://herefordshirepast.co.uk/people/the-du-buisson-family/>

For lists and maps of gravestones in the Churchyard see:
<https://breintonparish.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Churchyard-St-Michaels-Breinton-GW-short.pdf>