

St. Milburga's Church  
Beckbury

We hope you have enjoyed your visit to our church.  
Details of current events and services are in the newsletter  
and on the notice boards.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Please pray ...**  
for the people who worship in this church  
for all who live in Beckbury  
for the clergy and all who minister here  
for all who visit this place.



**Six Parishes' Web Site:**  
[www.churches.lichfield.anglican.org/shifnal/beckbury/](http://www.churches.lichfield.anglican.org/shifnal/beckbury/)

A Brief Guide



## **The parish of Beckbury**

In the Domesday Book of 1085, there is a short entry about Beckbury under the spelling *Becheberie* originally *Beocca's Burg* meaning a fortified place. It states that Beckbury was held by Azor as tenant of Roger the Earl of Shrewsbury. There is also mention of a knight, (only nine are mentioned throughout Shropshire) no doubt a fighting man connected in some way with defence against raids from over the Welsh border.

Beckbury is now in the diocese of Lichfield but before 1905 it was in the diocese of Hereford. This rather anomalous position of Beckbury and the neighbouring parish of Badger, forming as they did a kind of appendix of Hereford diocese surrounded on three sides by the diocese of Lichfield, most probably goes back to the time when they were part of the Kingdom of the West Hecani, a sub-kingdom of Mercia. In the 7th century, West Mercia was ruled by Merewald, son of Penda, King of Mercia.

One of Merewald's daughters was Milburga, Abbess of Wenlock from about 680 to 727 AD. It is possible that Beckbury and Badger were amongst the first possessions of Wenlock Priory. Neither appear among the possessions of the priory in Domesday Book but the dedication of Beckbury church to St. Milburga seems to confirm the suspicion that the church at Wenlock had had some interest here, lost before 1066, which led to the village becoming a detached part of the Saxon hundred of Patton and in the diocese of Hereford.

The connection between Beckbury and Wenlock continued until the Priory was dissolved in the reign of Henry VIII.

While priests from Wenlock made occasional visits to Beckbury, baptisms, marriages and burials took place at Wenlock with a very few exceptions. Bodies were taken over the River Severn on the Apley ferry for burial at Wenlock. Even in villages where there was a priest and a church, this arrangement continued for many centuries and churchyards were not consecrated for burials. As late as the middle of the 16th century, after Wenlock priory had been dissolved by Henry VIII and all its villages had passed into the care of Holy Trinity Church, Wenlock, the vicar of Wenlock jealously guarded his

rights – and income. In the Register of Thomas Butler, vicar of Holy Trinity between 1538 and 1558, there are several references to his refusal to dedicate and consecrate the churchyards of various places.

Beckbury churchyard was very small and the remains of a wall can still be located a few feet east of the church. It was only removed in 1893 when the churchyard was enlarged

The rectors of Beckbury were nominated by the Lord of the Manor, but the Prior of Wenlock then presented the nominee to the Bishop of Hereford who instituted him as rector of Beckbury. The rector paid the Prior an annual fee of 3 shillings on the feast of St. Milburga, 23<sup>rd</sup> February. This arrangement continued until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII when the right of presentation passed to the King. The crown still appoints rectors of Beckbury.

When the first national census was taken in 1801 the population of Beckbury was 231, rising to 312 in 1841. The population in 1931 was 265. In the 1970s it was about 400 as more houses were built, and now is about 370.

In 1953, Beckbury ceased to be an independent parish, and was united with the neighbouring parishes of Badger and Ryton, to form a united benefice of three parishes (one of the first in the country). In 1989 Beckbury, Badger and Ryton were linked with the neighbouring benefice of Kemberton, Stockton and Sutton Maddock.

The village Methodist chapel built in 1866 closed in 1966, The school was built in 1852 and the building is still used as a hall, though extra classrooms were erected in 1976.

## **Churchwardens' Accounts**

The Beckbury churchwardens' accounts, which begin in 1768, give some insight into church activities.

Until 1829 the bells were rung every 5th November in thanksgiving for the preservation of Parliament from the Gunpowder Plotters, and the ringers were paid one shilling. On several

occasions there were purchases of forms of prayers, thanksgivings or proclamations of a fast. Sometimes the reason is given: in 1831 prayers for the pestilence; more specifically in 1833 prayers for the cholera; a special form of prayer for the Prince Regent was bought in 1812. Forms of thanksgiving were bought in 1802 (probably because of the Treaty of Amiens which brought about a temporary lull in the war with France). A proclamation and form of thanksgiving for the King's recovery was bought in 1788 and another one in 1812.

Other recurring items were the clerk's pay; coal and lugging coal from Broseley; whitewashing the walls of the church; repairs to the windows; cleaning the church; clearing snow out of the church; washing and mending the rector's Sunday surplice. A robed choir with surplices seems to have been an innovation in 1883.

## **St. Milburga's Church**

One might expect that a village belonging to Wenlock Priory would have had a place of worship from an early date, but there is no information about one. It is known that the 12th century saw a considerable spread of daughter churches. The process of chapel building was sometimes the work of the monasteries; sometimes it was the work of large and wealthy mother churches of the great parishes which had been created in the previous centuries. The first reference to a rector is in 1279 (the title of rector or vicar depended on the source of their income).

### **The Mediaeval Church**

Beckbury church was built of local sandstone probably during the latter half of the 13th century.

#### **The Chancel**

The chancel of the present church is all that survives of that original building. Two features are observable from the outside;

an arched recess in the north wall,

- probably a door before the floor was raised in 1884;

a pair of narrow windows which may have been "leper windows" to allow lepers to see the consecration of communion bread and wine but without coming into contact with those inside the church.

Originally both chancel and nave were on the same level but in 1884 the chancel floor was raised four feet, in accordance with Victorian views of church architecture. This explains the odd recess in the south chancel wall (behind the radiator) which was a mediaeval piscina (wash basin) originally at normal height.

On the north wall of the chancel is a memorial slab. This was the top of a tomb in the church and commemorates Richard and Margaret Haughton and their family. He died on November 1<sup>st</sup> 1505.

This slab was inserted in the wall during the restoration of the chancel in 1856.

### **The Georgian Church**

In 1731 permission was granted for money to be raised for the rebuilding of the church which was "*very ruinous in the roofe, walls and steeple*" The work consisted of building a new nave and tower. The tower has remained intact to this day. The main entrance to the church was through the door in the west side of the tower.

It seems that during the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the church again fell into some disrepair. In 1811 three people were paid 4s.6d. to clear snow out of the church. The same occurs in 1813, 1815 and 1816. Finally repairs were done to the roof in 1816.

### **19<sup>th</sup> Century Victorian Alterations**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a nationwide enthusiasm for church building and improvement. The appearance of Beckbury Church was considerably altered in the latter half of the century. In 1856 an aisle was added on the south side of the nave. The present north aisle dates from about 1880. The chancel was also restored (see below).

## The Reverend J.J. Daniels

In spite of all this work, it would seem that everything was by no means satisfactory. After having had a non-resident rector for the most part of the century, Beckbury got a new rector in 1882 Revd J.J. Daniels who quite clearly intended to stay in the parish. He remained as rector of Beckbury until 1910, and did much to create the present appearance of the interior of the church.

In May 1883 he called a meeting of the parish *“to discuss the matter of the church restoration, the building being quite unworthy of the worship of the Lord.”* Only a few people attended. One of the farmers said that he had always considered the church to be quite sufficient for the purpose; and the meeting saw no need of it being restored. *“The Rector at the conclusion of the meeting stated that, having consulted the parish in the matter, and the principal inhabitants being indisposed to help him in any way, as he considered it his duty to endeavour to restore the church, he would be obliged to go his own way, as he would not be contented until a building more worthy of the worship of the Almighty had been completed.”*

In November 1884 the chancel was re-opened with its new east window. A new stone arch between nave and chancel replaced the previous double plaster arch. The chancel floor was raised four feet with steps from the nave and the low stone screen built to divide nave from chancel. The walls were refaced and the Haughton slab replaced where it had been in the chancel.

Mr. Daniels was particularly contemptuous of the previous furnishings. He wrote: *“Originally there were ... unseemly school forms (benches) for the choir, tin candlesticks stuck against the walls, no hangings, an unworthy altar, bricks for pavement.”*

## The Nave

During the years 1887 and 1888 the nave was restored. A new stone arch at the west end was built, *“the old low arch and unsightly staircase and gallery being removed.”* A ceiling was also removed, thus uncovering the old oak roof. New seats of pitch pine were put in the nave.

The vestry under the tower was also refitted at this time with a new wood block floor, oak panelled roof and a cupboard for cassocks. The old oak from the benches in the nave was used for the purpose. The Pulpit, erected in 1867, cost £25. The Porch and Lectern date from 1888

## The Windows

There is some old glass in the most easterly window in the south side. It was found by the rector who it put together to make a window in 1893. Some of this glass is mediaeval. The east window was installed in 1884.

## Recent Changes

A fine new organ, built by Reeves and Merner, was given to the church in 1972 and dedicated by the Bishop of Lichfield. The building was completely rewired in 1990, and new lighting was installed. At the same time the inside of the church was completely repainted and the floor was sanded and sealed.

So the church continues to be a place of regular worship on Sundays with communion at the altar, bible readings at the lectern and hymns of praise accompanied by the organ.

The church is also used by the local school and community for special occasions and events.

Mothering Sunday Harvest Thanksgiving Remembrance Sunday  
Easter and Christmas continue to be popular.

There are also the more personal family occasions of baptism, wedding and funeral.

Church buildings have traditionally been special places for local people and visitors, and even if less so now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the symbols and atmosphere of a church can remind people of God and his good purposes for us and his creation through Jesus Christ.