

## Churston Court – A Brief History

### Pre 13<sup>th</sup> Century

The Churston Court seems to have no definitive build date; it does predate the neighboring church and also appears in the Domesday Book, which was compiled in 1086. Churston was then known as Ceretone, a Saxon phrase meaning 'the Farm' by, or belonging to the church'.

### 13<sup>th</sup> Century

During the reign of Roger de Nonant, Lord of Totnes, the Churston was used as a dower house. Between 1207 and 1299 both the Church and Court were used as dower homes. This began with the earliest record of a family name of Bozun; two recorded law cases testify this. The Bozun's were tenants to the de Valletort family, who in turn were connected to the Lordship of Churston Manor. Churston Court was used as the home of the widows of the Bozun's, and with Brixham's constantly changing lordship it was very unlikely to have had any major changes to either the manor house or church.

### 14<sup>th</sup> Century

In 1303 Alice Bozun, the only child of the last male Bozun wed Hugo de Ferrers, the third son of Sir William Ferrers of Bere Ferrers near Plymouth. Hugh was a middle aged knight in the service of King Edward I and had been a Member of Parliament for Devon the year prior. It is therefore not surprising that the name of the village had the surname Ferrers added to it. By 1310 Sir Hugh was dead, succeeded by his son John who seized the manor in 1324.

For the remainder of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century the Ferrers were Lords at Churston, although little is known about any individual. The Ferrers Coat of Arms can be seen at the neighboring church on the North East and South East piers, clearly visible in the stained glass and pale wise (vertically) carved on a bench end in the choir stalls.

During the time of the Ferrers the little chapel it seems was greatly extended. By 1348 the hideous epidemic of bubonic plague had reached Churston, with a quick succession of Reverends at the neighboring church. 1383/84 following the upheaval of the peasant's revolt in 1381 saw King Richard II taxing England. It seemed that Churston was recovering well from the plague at this time and after a century the Ferrers had left their mark on the village now bearing their name.

### 15<sup>th</sup> Century

The new century saw the Yarde family bringing their influence in the place of the Ferrers. It seemed that the descendants of Joan Ferrers and Richard Yarde of Bradley Manor were to occupy the Churston Court for more than three and a half centuries. It is believed that Richard swept his wife off to the Bradley where he rebuilt a manor and chapel and also built an aisle onto the High Week Church. During this it seems that it is unlikely that the couple spent much time or money at the Churston Court or the church. Richard however rose to become High Sheriff of Devon in the mid 1440's; meanwhile the church did acquire bells for its tower. Which were either brought during the lifetime of Richard Yarde or as a lasting memory.

Since the oldest bell bears only the Ferrers coat of arms it may have been ordered by William Ferrers as it was cast in 1440 by Richard Norton of Exeter.

As with the Ferrers, the Yarde's occupations had greatly enhanced Churston Court and Church.

## 16<sup>th</sup> Century

1509-1547, the reign of Henry VIII brought with it much change and religious turmoil to the Church of England.

It is not verified but it is thought that Sir Humphrey Gilbert was baptized at Churston Church, being born at nearby Greenway; he learnt his seamanship skills on the River Dart. He is well known to have taken possession of Newfoundland in the name of Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup> in 1583. He had been knighted in 1577 and on another expedition had taken a vessel named "Hope of Greenway". Sir Humphrey Gilbert was lost at sea in 1583, observed from the Golden Hind holding a bible, calling cheer to his crew and reassuring them "we are as near heaven by the sea as by land".

## 18<sup>th</sup> Century

1788 and the Churston Court was inherited by Susanne Yarde, the only child to Francis Yarde. Susanne married a Francis Buller, who had entered the Inner Temple to study law in 1763 leaving as a recognized Judge.

Churston Court came to be used by the eldest sons of the Buller family, perhaps in accordance with the wishes of the last Yarde male.

Francis advanced rapidly through his law career taking silk in 1777, appointed Puisne Judge of the Kings Bench in 1778, created a Baronet in 1790 for his services to law and ended his career as a Judge in the Court of Pleas, he died in 1800.

## 19<sup>th</sup> Century

Judge Buller's only son and heir Francis took the name Yarde, apparently in pursuance of the will to his maternal uncle. As a result the family became known as Buller Yarde Bullers.

1858 saw Sir John (Grandson to Judge Buller) made Baron Churston of Churston Ferrers. Lupton House was his real residence, while his son John lived at the Churston Court.

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century and Present Day

As a close friend and having a holiday home at Greenway (now open by the National Trust) Dame Agatha Christie was a regular visitor when the property was owned by the Lord and Lady Churston. Donating a stained glass window to the neighboring church of which she was quite fond and she is also believed to have been inspired to write Death on the Links whilst at the Churston Court.

Lord Churston sold the property in 1967 as it was a remnant to his local estate which had been sold in 1960. It was sold to the then owner of the Grand Hotel in Torquay. Lord Churston moved to Guernsey, thus severing close ties with Churston Ferrers.

Bruce Reynolds, leader of the Great Train Robbery, reportedly hid at the Churston Court prior to his arrest in Torquay in 1968.

Since its sale, it has been slowly restored to reflect its original image.

Although some alterations have been made to the structure of the building, most notably an extension to the side and rear of the building it has been adapted to house and Inn, Restaurant and Hotel.