

A SHORT HISTORY OF



SHIRENEWTON and MYNYDDBACH CHURCH and COMMUNITY

COMPILED BY

MR FRED DAVIES

AND SHIRENEWTON PCC

SOME SCENES FROM AROUND THE PARISH



The Lady Chapel in the Church and the Flower Festival in 2015



The 2014 fete – the Pimms Stall and Matt Smith with his helicopter



Bake and Rake – regular grounds maintenance in the Churchyard – and the Blue Plaque erected on the gate pillar of Shirenewton Hall

CONTENTS

The first part of this history was compiled in 1984 by Mr. Fred Davies, one of the Churchwardens and long-time village resident of Shirenewton as **The History of the Church of St. Thomas à Becket**. It represents his research over the years into the history of the Church and locality. This text was initially published in a booklet sold in aid of the Church, and is reproduced here with some minor revisions. The second part of this history was compiled by the Parochial Church Council to record later events; to include earlier events about which more recent evidence has come to light; and record more about the community which supports the Church.

PART ONE	page
Early History, The Church	3
The Church	4
Charities	7
Incumbents, Memorials, Notable Past Rectors	8
The Village and Parish	9
Notable Houses	10
Paper Mills, Manors	11
PART TWO	
Introduction to Part Two	12
Diocese of Llandaff and Bishop Bleddyn	14
Murder in the Cathedral, Research by Julian Mitchell MAA	15
Memories of Mynyddbach and Shirenewton	17
Parish Councils, Parochial Church Councils and Community Councils	21
Anita Kent's Memories	22
Faculties and Diocesan Bureaucracy	23
WWII War Memorial Tablet, Entries in the Terriers	24
The Church Organ	26
The Church Clock	27
The Church Bells and Bell Ringers	28
PCC Minutes	32
Shirenewton Sunday Club	33
Young Music Makers and Kids Ad Lib, The Recreation Field and the Beacon	34
The Millennium, The Saysell Centre	35
Visitations by the Bishop, The Royal Wedding, The Diamond Jubilee, Aumbrey	40
Centenaries of the First World War, Memorials, Gifts, Shirenewton 800	41

ANNEXES

Annex A – List of Incumbents from the wooden board in the Church porch	42
Annex B – List of Church Wardens from the Diocesan registers and PCC minutes	44
Annex C – Humphrey de Bohun and his Descendants	46
Annex D – The Liddell Family, John Aidan Liddell	50
Annex E – Memorials Tablets and Plaques in the Church	51
Annex F – Gifts donated to the Church	52
Annex G – Shirenewton Hall and the Murder in the Hall	54

PART ONE

Early History

Shirenewton was not mentioned as a settlement in the Domesday Book of 1086 but was added to the lands of Caldicot belonging to the Sheriffs of Gloucester between 1086 and 1127. The whole of this area was at that time part of the extensive forest of Wentwood, and Sheriff Durand caused a clearing to be made in the forest, for the purpose of cultivating the land. This work, begun by Durand, was probably continued by his nephew, Walter FitzRoger who succeeded him as Sheriff on his death in 1096.

The natural outcome was for a small hamlet to be built, in order to house the people who worked on the land thus cleared. This came to be known as the Sheriff's New Town, in time condensed into the name Shirenewton.



The Church of St Thomas à Becket from the South

Walter FitzRoger formed the manor of Caldecot-cum-Newton before retiring to become a monk at Llanthony Abbey in 1123. He was followed as Sheriff of Gloucester by his son, Milo Fitzwalter who was made Earl of Hereford, after a lapse of that title in 1141. Hence the name Earls Wood. When Milo was accidentally killed by an arrow while deer-hunting in the Forest of Dean in 1143, his eldest daughter, Margery, took this area as her share of the vast estates, securing the title of Earl of Hereford and Constable of England for her husband, Humphrey de Bohun.

The Church

Mention of the de Bohun family brings us to the Church. The first Humphrey de Bohun, known as "Humphrey with the long beard" came over from Normandy with William the Conqueror, his cousin. The Church was built by the fifth Humphrey de Bohun, called "The Good Earl" soon after he succeeded to the title and the lordship of the manor of Caldecot-cum-Newton on the death of his father in 1220. He also built a Rectory and endowed the Church with the village and 60 acres of land, arable, meadow and wood. The land was in various separate places, some still known as "The Churches" south of the village towards Runston, and "Parson's Grove" to the north near the village of Earlswood, thus creating the "Rectory Manor of Nova Villa", the rector holding the title of Lord of the Manor.

The Church has a solid square tower, placed between the chancel and the nave; the practice at this time being to build churches with a two-fold purpose, as places of defence as well as of worship, and this is a good example of a Norman fortified church tower. It has a battlemented top with a turret at the N.E. corner and slits in the sides, originally for defence purposes, although today they are used to hold the four spindles which operate the hands of the clock. The Church was dedicated to St. Thomas a Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered in his Cathedral in 1170.

Five bells were placed in the tower in 1746, all cast by William Evans who, with his two sons, had a flourishing business with the foundry in Welsh Street, Chepstow. Their work was of a very high standard, and they cast bells for many churches in South Wales as well as in the West Country. All the Shirenewton bells bear the inscriptions with what seems to have been the Evans' trademark, a bell in between the letters W and E, as follows: -

- 1st...W-E 1756. Come let us ring for Church and King.
- 2nd...W-E 1756. Peace and Good Neighbourhood.
- 3rd...a scroll. 1756. William Evans cast us all.
- 4th...W-E 1756. Christopher Howell and Robert Phillips, Churchwardens.
- 5th...W-E 1756. The Rev. Samuel Butcher, Rector, 1756.

A Sixth bell was added in 1918, given as a war memorial by Capt.C.O. Liddell of Shirenewton Hall. The bells have not been rung for 20 years¹, owing to the fact that the wooden framework on which the original bells were hung has become unsafe, due to the ravages of time, weather and woodworm. In 1964 the estimate for retuning and rehangng the bells was £1,400, well out of reach of funds available at the time. The latest estimate was around £16,600. A set of Ellacombe chimes is fitted to the bells; and these are what are heard on Sundays, calling the faithful to worship. I cannot refrain from commenting that the faithful have little need of such prompting, while the rest, far more numerous remain indifferent.

(Note: work was carried out on the bells and the bell-ringing room in more recent times and this will be covered later in this publication)

¹ This was accurate at the time this was written: but see Part Two for later developments

A marble tablet on the north chancel wall bears this inscription, "In affectionate remembrance of Edward Inwood Jones, M.A., for 8 years Rector of this parish, who died April 18th, 1856." To his exertions the parishioners owe the restoration and enlargement of their church, A.D. 1853

Evidently the parishioners were delighted with their rebuilt church, and obviously it was a remarkable achievement on the part of their Rector. It seems that the tower was the only part of the original building left intact, the chancel and the nave being completely rebuilt and the nave extended to form a North Aisle. This enlargement appears to have been necessary to contain the large congregations of that time. In his returns for the census of places of worship in 1851, the Rector had stated that services were held on Sunday mornings and afternoons, with average attendances of 80 each. There was also a Sunday school with 37 children in the morning and 24 in the afternoon.

Unfortunately, many things of historical and architectural interest, relics of former worship, seem to have been swept away in the process of this restoration, and later historians and others interested in the preservation of ancient architecture have been scathing in their remarks on the way in which the restoration was carried out. Sir Joseph Bradney, the well-known historian, said, "Much was done to detract from the ancient character of the edifice."

This was not an isolated case, as the same thing happened in other parts of the country in the 19th century. There seemed to be a wave of resentment against the past, and some people wanted to obliterate all that reminded them of former religious practices and forms of worship, rather than being content to repair and restore what was already there.



The Bishop's Visitation, circa 1962

There had obviously been a Rood Screen and Loft in the original building, as the blocked-up doorway high up in the wall to the left of the arch, which led to the loft from the tower staircase, is still plainly visible. A large Holy Water stoup, probably removed at the time, now stands in a corner of the porch.

At the top of the north and south walls of the chancel are six corbels stones, which jut out from the wall and act as supports for the roof timbers. They are carved in the shape of human heads, one of the Archbishop Becket, one of the Bishop William Blethin of Llandaff, and others of local squires and their ladies.

Above the porch is a priest's room or parvis, in which, possibly visiting clergy rested between services, and the Rector sat to receive the tithes brought in by local landowners.

A manuscript of the time of Charles II states:- "In the wainscot of the (chancel) ceiling is carved the name David Patnod, probably a benefactor." He was the last Roman Catholic Rector, and possibly the chancel roof was renewed by him. There was a figure of him praying in one of the earlier stained glass windows of the chancel, with the arms of France and England and the inscription in Latin:- *Orate Pro Anima David Paynod*. This disappeared at the restoration.

A pipe organ was presented to the church in 1908 by Captain C.O. Liddell of Shirenewton Hall. Until 1974 it was situated at the foot of the tower, but was then renovated and removed to its present position at the west end of the Lady Chapel in a space which had previously been partitioned off as a choir vestry. This gave more space under the tower, and improved the view of the chancel from the nave.

In 1966 a large area of ground adjoining the churchyard was given to the church by Mr. P.W.O. Liddell of Shirenewton Hall as an extension, there being no more room left for burials.

The North Aisle was converted to a lady Chapel in 1967 at the instigation of the Rector, the Reverend (later Canon) G.F.L. Riggs; the necessary furniture, in the shape of an Altar with riddle posts and curtains and an oak housling bench were provided by the Liddell family in memory of Capt. C.O. Liddell. An oak lectern was given by Mr. Sleeman of Mynyddbach, in memory of his wife, and a lectern Bible, in memory of Mr. F.C. Price of Weyloed, a former treasurer, P.C.C. secretary and churchwarden, was given by Mrs. Price and her family.

In 1968, an oak reredos, redundant from St. Woolos Cathedral and offered free of charge to any church wishing to make use of it, was accepted on behalf of the P.C.C. by the Rector, the Rev. G.F.L. Riggs and installed below the East window. At the same time, a new alter rail was given, also by the Liddell family, in memory of Mr. P.W.O. Liddell, his son, Capt. Ian Liddell, V.C., killed in action shortly after winning the V.C. in the second world war, and his daughter Mrs. Jenny Bourne.

An oak panelled screen with door, matching the organ panelling and connecting it to the west wall, was erected in 1981, as a memorial to Mr. G. Cornaby, organist from 1962 to 1978, the gift of Mrs. P. Cornaby.

The Processional Cross for use in the church was provided by the P.C.C. in 1972 as a memorial to our late rector, Canon G.F.L. Riggs, who died shortly after retiring through ill health in 1971.

The church registers, dating from 1730, were deposited at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, in 1960; now at the County Record Office, Cwmbran.

The clock, paid for by public subscription, was installed in the tower as a war memorial after the First World War.



This sketch of the church was made on 31st July 1840 by an unknown visiting artist. It is from a sketchbook in the Chepstow Museum. The pond in front of the Church could be as a result of artistic licence or romanticism, but there is a sealed well inside the gates of Stoneycroft House roughly where the artist would have been positioned, and a substantial stone culvert with a slate bottom runs there through the front garden of the Lodge of what is now Shirenewton Hall. This suggest that here may have been water about, though not necessarily on the scale shown.

Charities

A sheet metal plaque on the wall of the porch, dated 1862, records details of three charities for the use of the poor in the parish:

1. Timothy Blethin of Dinham.

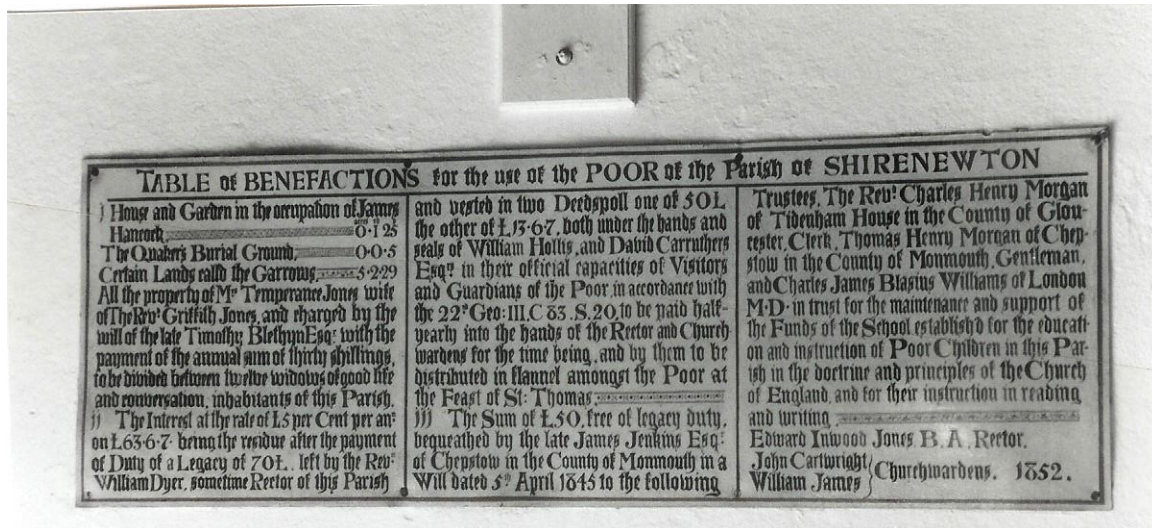
"The annual sum of thirty shillings, to be divided between 12 widows of good life and conversation, inhabitants of the parish."

2. Rev. William Dyer.

"To be paid half-yearly into the hands of the Rector and churchwardens for the time being, and by them laid in flannel amongst the poor at the feast of St. Thomas." (Dec. 29th)

3. William Jenkins

"In trust for the maintenance and support of the funds of the school established for the education and instruction of poor children in this parish in the doctrine and principles of the Church of England, and for their instruction in reading and writing.



The Benefaction Board in the Church Porch

Incumbents

A large wooden board in the Church lists the incumbents of the Church since 1287 and this list is reproduced as an annex at the end of this leaflet.

Memorials

Some earlier Rectors and others were buried in the chancel, but their memorial stones, if not their remains, were removed during the restoration and placed outside the church. Some stones still remain inside, built into the tower wall behind the choir stall and set in the floor near the lectern, partly covered by the front pew. Outside, near the Priest's door in the chancel is a stone, which has aroused much interest. The inscription reads: "Here lyeth ye body of Henry Morgan of this parish, who departed this life the 11th day of June in the year 1731, aged 56." At the top, on the left hand side is engraved a cherub's head, and on the right, a skull and crossed bones. This has led to some people to believe that it is the grave of Sir Henry Morgan, the former pirate, but he died in Jamaica in 1688. Another likely theory is that people who died of the plague sometimes had their tombstones marked in this way.

At one time a very small headstone near the porch bore what must be the shortest epitaph in the churchyard: "E.W. dyed in 1712."

Another tombstone, so far undiscovered, recorded the death of the Rev. Richard Williams, Rector, in 1674. He died, it said, on the 29th May, and was buried the following day, the 30th May. There appears to be no explanation for this unusual haste.

Notable Past Rectors

Adam of Usk (1399) whose autobiography has been published and who exchanged livings with his cousin, Thomas ap Adam, Vicar of Panteg, whom he called "Thomas ap William of Weloc", in the same year.

David Paynod, last Roman Catholic Rector, who died in 1543 and is buried in the Churchyard. He was called "Sir David Paynod" after a strange custom of his time his will stated: "To be buried in the Chancel at Newton. To Llandaff, 8d. To Jenkin ap John, my russet coat; to my wife, a cow and a calf, 2 platters and a tablecloth; to the wife of Howell

Wrono, a calf and 2 platters. I have more silver spoons, and I give the same to Sir Roger Lawrence, Vicar of Caerwent, Sir William Cheltnam, Vicar of Caldecote, and David Etkyns and the other six to the said vicars to sing for my soul. My books I give to the Vicar of Caerwent and a pewter pottel pot and my little coffer. To David Morgan a jerkin, and to my Clerk, my black coat.

Francis Godwin, (1603-1613) son of the Bishop of Bath and Wells, was at the same time Bishop of Llandaff. He was transferred to the Bishopric of Hereford in 1617. At that time, the Diocese of Llandaff was very poor, and its Bishops were allowed to take livings to compensate for their low income as Bishop. This area was in the Diocese of Llandaff until the Diocese of Monmouth was created in 1921.

Philemon Blethin (1613-1618) son of William Blethin, Bishop of Llandaff.

William Murray (1633- 1640) Bishop of Llandaff 1647-1640.

Morgan Owen (1640-1645) Also Bishop of Llandaff 1640-1645.

Edward Williams (1680- 1692) Also Vicar of Chepstow, where he lived.

Edward Inward Jones (1847- 1857) Mentioned elsewhere as being responsible for the restoration of 1853.

Charles Ranken Hall (1856-1884) Brother of Home Secretary, Sir Benjamin Hall, of "Big Ben" fame.

G.F.L. Riggs (1962- 1971) Much loved and respected by his parishioners. Beautified and enriched our Church. Appointed Canon of St. Woolos in 1969. Carefully researched the history of the Church and Parish, and made copious handwritten notes, fortunately still in our possession, and from which much of the information contained in this article were taken.

A full list of Rectors is shown on a board in the church porch, and is reproduced at Annex A. A list of recent Church Wardens is at Annex B.

The Village and Parish

The Village stands 500 ft. above sea level, with a good view of the Severn Estuary and the Bristol Channel. At the 1851 census the population was given as 933, compared with the population of Caldicot at 661. It has expanded considerably in the second half of this century, with several new small housing estates being built. This increase, may I add, is not reflected in the size of church congregations.

The name Shirenewton has had several variations over the years, such as "Sheref Newton", "Neweton Nether Went", "Nova Villa", etc., and even has a Welsh name, "Trenwydd Gelli Fach", which means "The New Town in the Little Grove".

In the last couple of centuries there has been a number of licensed premises in and around the village. The earliest, the Five Bells, held from 1767, now a private house, and for some years the village shop, in the centre of the village. The Tan House, near the site of the former tannery (1713). The King's Head (1822), reputed to have been a coaching inn, now the Old Rectory on the road to Crick. Upper House (1847), now also a private house, near the present recreation centre. The Butcher's Arms (1851 -1876), now disappeared. The Engineer's Arms (1861-1876), now a private house. The Tredegar Arms (1861), still

licensed, and the Carpenter's Arms (1860), and the Cross Hands (now the Huntsman Hotel), both still licensed, on the Chepstow- Usk, road.

One of Shirenewton's most famous sons, Bill Benjamin, was, in his youth, trained as a prizefighter by James Carruthers of the Grondra. He twice fought Tom Sayers, the English champion; Dick Shon Shamus, and after retiring kept the Cross Hands Inn for some years. He died in 1906 and is buried in the churchyard.

Notable Houses

One of the oldest houses in the parish, called the Grondra, is built on a round hill, called Dagers Hill, south of the village. The name is said to have come from the Welsh "Cron-Dre", meaning round homestead. Another spelling, "Greneraye" suggests that it might have originally been a granary, built to hold corn grown on the land first cleared for that purpose. Certainly there has been a building on the site for at least 500 years.

On or near the site of the present Shirenewton Hall was a house occupied by William Blathin, Bishop of Llandaff, 1575-1590. His son Philemon, Rector 1613-1618, bought Dinham House where the family lived for some years. Other members of the family lived at Llanmelin, and a Major William Blethin lived in Magor. Although well-to-do, the family later seems to have descended in the social scale, as the last one recorded, Timothy, was a carpenter. William Hollis, a paper-maker, lived at Shirenewton House as it was then called, until 1848, having moved from Mounton. He was High Sheriff of Monmouthshire in 1831. There is more information about Shirenewton Hall in Annex D.

The family of Lowe, one a botanist and one a genealogist lived there later. They changed the name to Shire Newton Hall. In 2013 a blue plaque was erected by the main gate to commemorate Edward Lowe's work in meteorology.

It was then bought, with the estate, in 1900, by Captain C.O. Liddell, who extended it and created the remarkable Japanese water garden in the park below. The family remained there until comparatively recently. There is more about the Liddell family at Annex D.

Newton Lodge, the large house in the village square, was at one time the village post office.



The Church circa 1907

The house near the S.W. corner of the churchyard known as Caepwcella was, in its original form, built as the Rectory when the Church was built. It remained so until the last century. During the Second World War the owners moved to Scotland and it was used as a nursing home and a maternity home – several Shirenewton residents attest to being born there – but it may also have been used for wounded servicemen.

Paper Mills

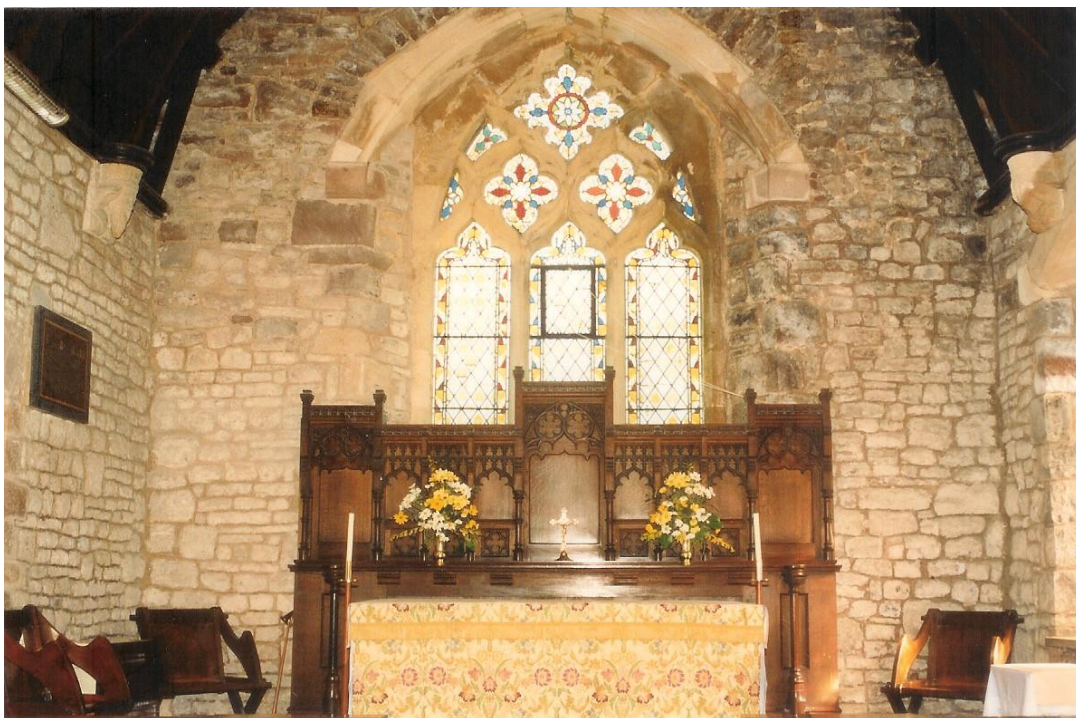
There was a flourishing paper-making industry, with mills along the Mouton Brook in the 18th and 19th centuries, the brook supplying the necessary water for pulp making, as well as power via water-wheels. There were six mills near Shirenewton. The uppermost was called Little Mill, and then came White Mill, where white paper was made. Some ruins of it can still be seen, just below the present water treatment works, also called White Mill. This mill had existed for around 200 years previously, as a corn mill called Curbehind, the name being changed when it was converted into a paper mill around 1730. Nearby were Tuck Mill, a fulling mill, then Dyer's Mill, Itton Court Mill, and Pandy Mill, where brown paper was made. This industry brought much employment and prosperity to the area.

Manors

The area below Gaerllwyd between the Chepstow-Usk road and the Mouton Brook belonged to the manor of Caldicott-West End. It was sometimes known as Gamaged Land, after the first holder of the lordship.

The lower part of Shirenewton with Mynyddbach and the Cwm valley was in the manor of Caldicot-Cum-Newton.

There was a small manor composed of the Argoed farms and the Cribba Mill, towards Earlswood, called Argoed Manor. It was divided into three parts called Butler'shold, Hentsfoothold, and Parker'shold.



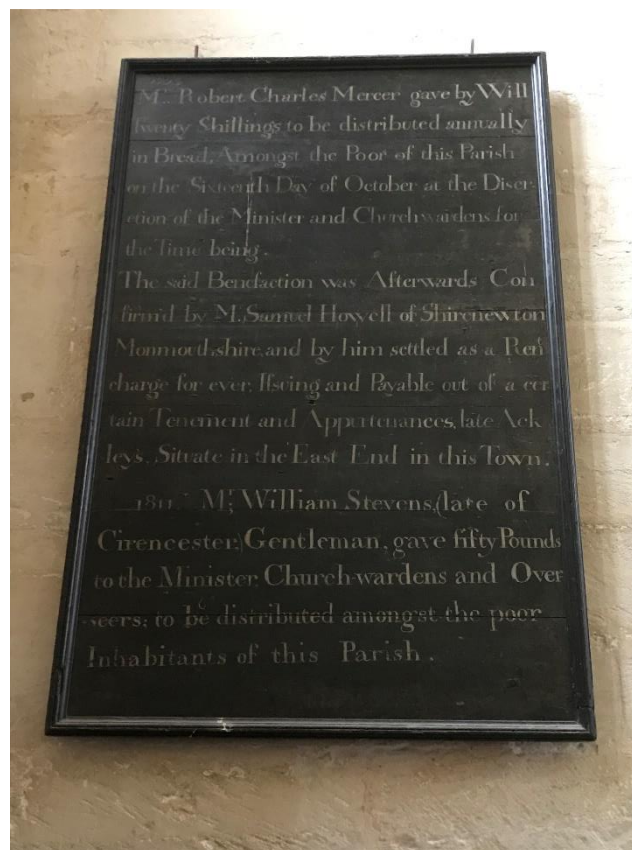
The stained-glass windows in the East of the Chancel

The rest of Shirenewton and Earlswood was in the Rectory Manor of Nova Villa, and the rector was Lord of the Manor. It was a copyfold manor, with the property let out by copy of Court Roll, for one, two or three lives at the will of the rector. There was no Manor House as such, but the business of the manor was transacted and Courts Leet held at the Rectory.

The Society of Friends, or Quakers, was active in Shirenewton from the 17th Century. George Fox, their founder, stayed here and preached at a meeting before continuing on his journey through South Wales. A Meeting House was built in 1730 in the centre of the village, and was used until it was closed in 1853. It was later taken over by the Methodists, and has had various uses since. Now part of a private house, it is still known as The Old Meeting House. There is a very small burial ground with a wall around it and a few graves, just behind the Post Office, and the iron gate bears the inscription: Friends Burial Ground 1700.

Friendly Societies were strong in the village in the latter half of the last century; no less than seven of them altogether. They held a combined parade and church service on Whit-Monday, 1890, followed by a dinner at the Five Bells, with rustic sports afterwards. Tintern Works Band provided music.

FS Davis



This benefaction board in Northleach Church, Gloucestershire, references Mr Samuel Howell of Shirenewton Monmouthshire who confirmed the earlier benefaction of Mr Robert Charles Mercer who bequeathed twenty shillings to be distributed annually in bread amongst the parish poor

PART TWO

Introduction to Part Two

In Part One, Fred Davis correctly records that Shirenewton is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, confirming that no significant settlement had been established at the time that it was written – 1086. However, there are several disparate pieces of evidence that suggest that there may have been some sort of human habitation in the area before the settlement we know today.

These pieces of evidence include the circular churchyard boundary which is typical of those used for early ecclesiastical buildings (or for a watch tower); the location, which at 159.64 metres above sea level is at the highest point of the road that goes north from the North Gate of Caerwent on north to Port Faen and beyond; and from this position there would have been clear views over to Roman Caerwent and across the river, where all the river traffic would have been under observation.



The Cake Stall at the Fete – 1992
Barbara Hopkins, Bernice Bowen, Vi Knowles, Barbara Davies

Further pointers can be found in the Welsh name, Trenwydd Gelli Fach, or Drenwydd Gelli Fach. It is generally agreed that this is a fabricated name based on a translation from the English of The New Town in the Little Grove. Ivor Cavill, the President of the Shirenewton Local History Society, has pointed out that more recent research proposes the theory that the Welsh name may have been misspelt, and could be Trenwydd Gelli Farch, which means The New Town in the Stallion Grove, which would link in with a sacred grove to the Mabiogion earth Goddess Rhiannon, represented by a mare; or the Gallo-Roman Goddess of horses, Epona. Another theory suggests that it was Trenwydd Gelli Fachog, meaning The New Town in the Knightly Grove, which would resonate with the aristocratic connections of the founders of the settlement. According to the 1901 Kelly's

Directory "the Welsh name appears to have been but seldom used." Shirenewton has had several variations over the years, such as Sheref Newton, Neweton Nether Went, and Nova Villa. The present name means "Sheriff's New Tun"; tun is the old word for a homestead.

Keith Tayton reports that the Book Of Llandaff, or Liber Landavensis, was written at the same time as the Domesday Book covering land ownership in Gwent between 600 and 1050 AD. In 925 AD the son of the local king murdered his brother and handed over to the Bishop the lands and the village of Stifilot as a penance, along with the church of Lannmihacgell Lichrit. Stifilot is probably a corruption of Ystyffylod meaning stumps of trees and refers to an area of cleared woodland. It would appear that this land includes the current Shirenewton and West End. Keith records that Roger FitzOsbern needed a plentiful supply of charcoal for smelting iron and so he organised men from Caldicot to cut down trees and manufacture it. Around 1100 the men asked if they could build a village on the site for their families and this was agreed, and they named the village Shire Reeve's New Town. In 1123 when a new Sheriff of Gloucester was appointed, the scope of his domain includes Shirenewton in the official records.

Diocese of Llandaff and Bishop Bleddyn

Shirenewton was in the diocese of Llandaff, which included all of Monmouthshire, in the early 16th century. It was not until 1920 that the diocese of Monmouth was created from the eastern part of the former diocese of Llandaff (more or less the area that had previously been the archdeaconry of Monmouth). Although its cathedral, the Cathedral Church of St Woolas, is in Newport, the name of Newport was avoided for the new diocese to avoid confusion with the Catholic Bishopric of Newport which existed until 1916.

William Bleddyn (Blethyn) was born in Shirenewton around 1530 and was the first Gwent man to be appointed Bishop of Llandaff. He was Rector of Rogiet in 1560 but did not live there because he was studying at Oxford. When he obtained his degree in 1562, he became resident in Rogiet, whilst also holding the positions of Rector of Sunningwell in Berkshire, Archdeacon of Brecon and cathedral appointments at York and Llandaff. When the bishopric of Llandaff fell vacant in 1574, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, sought a Welsh-speaking candidate for the post. William Bleddyn was consecrated Bishop of Llandaff in 1575 and died in office fifteen years later. The Archbishop allowed Bleddyn to retain his additional Church offices, and the additional income these appointments attracted became important to him because his bishop's stipend was severely curtailed by the poor state of the diocesan finances.

Bleddyn would have known that the diocesan finances were in a parlous state from his previous experience in the diocese. Llandaff cathedral had fallen into an appalling state: the building was derelict, and its resources had been dissipated. Treasures had been lost. In an attempt to rectify matters, Bishop Bleddyn reduced the number of clergy, insisted that clergy lived in the accommodation provided for them, fined clergymen who absented themselves from services, and introduced more methodical systems for collecting and deploying cathedral revenues. Despite his valiant efforts he was unable to balance the books. It was too large a task for one man, however committed he might be; the inefficiency of officials hindered him; his attention was diverted by recusants who refused to attend services of the established church; and his own position became ambiguous with a suggestion of self-interest when he promoted two of his sons to Llandaff prebendaries, purchased the manor of Dinham, and enjoyed a useful connection to the Archbishop of York through his first marriage to the Archbishop's niece. However, he was one of the most dynamic of the late Elizabethan Welsh Bishops.

Anthony Kitchin was appointed Bishop of Llandaff in 1590, after William Blethyn. The Archbishop asked him to compile an inventory of the diocese listing every parish with the names of the clergy and other relevant information. He carried out this task so diligently

that it took up all his time, to the neglect of his other diocesan duties. When his successor Francis Goodwin was appointed in 1601, he also found the diocese was unable to pay him the level of stipend he would normally expect. He, too, was allowed to take on the incumbency of several parishes so when he collected the tithes, they would help meet the shortfall in his remuneration. He opted for some wealthy parishes, including Shirenewton, but needed a curate to carry out the duties.

Some of our other Rectors have also been Bishops: William Murray in 1633 and Morgan Owen in 1640, presumably for the same reasons as Bishop Kitchen and Bishop Goodwin. It is also recorded that William Johns, rector around 1550, was at the same time rector of Llanfihangel-juxta-Usk, where he lived. Philemon Blethin, son of the Bishop, was rector of Shirenewton from 1613-1618 whilst also vicar of Caerwent. Edward Williams, the rector from 1680, was at the same time vicar of Chepstow, where he lived. The services of a curate in the parish were therefore most useful. The names of the curates have not all been recorded, but it is known that John Beaven in 1693, Samuel Redmond in 1734, Edward Thomas in 1754 and Sandra Howells in 1993 have fulfilled this role.

Keith Tayton speculates about the need for such a large church with a huge tower which could be considered out of proportion with the building or the village. He reasons that it was built as a magnificent watchtower, possibly to replace a previous viewing point with good views across to the Tut at Tutshill and the tower at Itton Court, which in turn has clear views across to Chepstow Castle, providing plenty of early warning for Chepstow in the event of attack by the local Silures or invasion by Vikings from the south west coast of Ireland. The Vikings were known to have a liking for Welsh and English sheep because of the quality of their fleeces.

Murder in the Cathedral

We all know that Archbishop Thomas à Becket was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral when Henry the Second demanded "Who will rid me of this troublesome priest?" Whether this was an intentional call to murder, or the outburst of an angry king frustrated in his will, we do not know for sure. But Becket was murdered, the King was made to do penance, and the Archbishop was made a saint.

The names of the four knights who killed Thomas à Becket were Reginald FitzUrse, William de Tracey, Hugh de Morville, and Richard le Breton. The murder took place on the 29th of December 1170, when the knights came barging into Canterbury Cathedral. They stuck three swords into the Archbishop, and with the fourth they cut off his head. And, as gruesome as it is, they scattered his brains around the cathedral. There is no record of any connection between any of these knights or their descendants with the founding of this Church, or any of the churches that are dedicated to St Thomas.

Research by Julian Mitchell, Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association

Shirenewton was a well-endowed living for a clergyman. The rector in 1843, James Ashe Gabb, had 125 acres and lived in the recently built Caepwcella, then the Rectory, which he may have built himself. He was a member of a well-known Monmouthshire family and a busy man about the county. He was Portreeve of Usk twice, in 1830 and 1835, and he was a trustee of Mynnyddbach School (established 1829) and Abergavenny Grammar School (where his son was briefly headmaster in the 1830s). He was also secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), a vigorous collector for the Church missionary Society and a strong supporter of the Devauden schoolmaster, James Davies, about whom he wrote a popular memoir which raised over £1,400 towards the church which started life in Devauden school in 1814 and was consecrated in 1838.

Though the rector may have been comfortable, many of his parishioners, especially those in Earlswood, were not. JT Barber, writing in 1803, described Shirenewton as a decayed town, "a mere collection of cottages", and Gabb's memoir says that the whole district – "a wild heath" – had been "notorious in former times for highway robberies", and was now inhabited by cottagers who subsisted "chiefly on potatoes and the coarsest kind of bread." "The materials of much wickedness existed"; the inhabitants had minds "as uncultivated as their barren hills"; they suffered "almost total destitution of every outward means of religious improvement." But with the arrival of James Davies, familiar with the area and its poverty from the days when he was a pedlar selling rags to the paper-mills, things had looked up. "Their wretched huts have gradually been superseded by stone-built cottages" and they "are an improved race of beings."

Gabb died in 1844, and his successor James Davies, in 1847. The next rector, Edward Inwood Jones, a descendant of the Joneses of Usk Priory, was not a well man and did not apply to the Incorporated Church Building Society (ICBS) for a grant to repair the church until 1852. In support of the application, Archdeacon William Crawley described Shirenewton as lying "upon the same wild hills as Devauden Green." The population (895 in the 1841 census, 933 in 1851) was "generally of the like scattered and very poor description, who live in cottages built...generally upon the wasteland and surrounded by a few perches of unproductive land which has been reclaimed by their industry from the surrounding commons."



Shirenewton in the 1930s

Inwood Jones described the parish as "the poorest, and the most overburdened with a pauper population, in the Chepstow district – the exposed situation, and shallow soil afford no encouragement to Wealthy Occupiers. The Ratepayers generally are small Tenant Occupiers, a class quite unable to bear any heavy expenditure." There had been "heavy Parochial involvements", and charges in the Poor Rates to the amount of several hundred pounds. There were only two large landed proprietors, and though one of them had been munificent in contributing to the restoration, from the other "we have no hope of obtaining

assistance. I do not think he will offer any serious opposition, but he will do nothing to forward the work." This must have been John Cartwright, a farmer and merchant, living in what is now Shirenewton Hall in 1851. He had 350 acres and employed seventeen labourers. Perhaps he was a non-conformist: there were five chapels in Shirenewton at this time.

In 1843 the large landowners were William Hollis of Shirenewton Court and David Carruthers of the Grondre. The families appear to have been closely connected. Hollis, the third in a row to be named William, came from Mounon where his family had been paper-millers for at least ninety years, but his father had died when he was a child. His widowed mother then married John Proctor, a Chepstow banker, who lived at the Grondre. They had one daughter Sarah who inherited the Grondre and married David Carruthers. Once he had come into his inheritance, it would appear that Hollis lived in Mounon and ran various mills. Later he moved back to Shirenewton, rebuilding the Court on the site of a much older house. He was Sheriff in 1831 and married James Ashe Gabb's daughter Annette. He left the village for Bristol in 1848 and when he died in 1865 he was buried in Cheltenham. Sarah Carruthers died in 1845 and like her husband has a memorial in Shirenewton Church. It is likely that Carruthers was the munificent contributor to Mrs Inwood Jones's fund.

Memories of Mynyddbach and Shirenewton

In 1851 the national census gave the population of Shirenewton as 993. Both the 1892 Chepstow Directory and the 1901 Kelly's Directory of Monmouthshire have entries for Shirenewton, showing that there were around 650 inhabitants, growing "mainly grain and turnips". In 1995, Winifred Jones, Betty Knox, Thelma Moore and Ivy Wells produced a booklet called "Memories of Mynyddbach and Shirenewton", in which William Bryant recalls doing piecework cutting out swedes at the age of twelve in 1917. The information in the rest of this section comes from this booklet. In 1914, Mynyddbach School had 75 pupils; and people thought nothing of cycling a 40-mile round trip to get to work and back. For the less fortunate, there was Regent House, the Poor House in Chepstow, known as the workhouse, and the Parish Council ran a Poor House Farm in Earlswood (near Caerhyddy) for the homeless and less fortunate, and girls in distress.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, Mrs Ridler kept the Tredegar Arms. The shop man came out from Chepstow once a week and took orders from customers which he delivered at the weekend by cart. Supplies of paraffin, candles and hardware were delivered in the same way. Coal came by truck through Mullins Stores, later Chepstow Farmers, to Chepstow Station, where it was collected by a horse-drawn wagon. In 1911 the Coronation of George V was celebrated in the gardens of Shirenewton Hall and the children were all given a Coronation Mug, an orange, and a packet of sweets. Ivor Jones remembers 1920 as the wettest summer, and 1921 as the driest summer, because he had just left school and the farmers had to cut the hay crop one day and haul it in the next day. Ivor's father would not work on Sundays, even if it looked like rain, but he was up at 4.00 a.m. on Monday to harvest the corn and have three loads of corn on the wagons before the farm labourers arrived at 6 a.m. In those days it was the custom to cut thistles growing in crops by hand, often using children for this work.

Most houses in Shirenewton belonged to the estate but some people in Mynyddbach owned their own cottages. Tenants of the Curre Estate were given their houses for a rent of 1s. 6d. (7½ pence in modern money) a year if they were unable to work through ill health or age. This was in the days when skilled workers earned 7½ old pence an hour, and unskilled workers earned 4½ old pence an hour. During the First World War soldiers were billeted in the club room of the Five Bells. The family continued to live there, with a white line drawn across the kitchen floor, one side for the soldiers and the other side for the family.

The Women's Institute was in the barn next to the Old Rectory. They put on many plays, concerts and dances, and held weekly Whist Drives. They held eliminating rounds for both whist players and dancers and the finals for the area took place in the Public Hall in Chepstow. The Village Produce Association was always well supported in the grounds of Shirenewton Hall. In 1914, most village children attended Mynyddbach School and then went in to the nearest secondary school in Lydney.

Mavis Bryant remembers a violent storm one night in 1935, which smashed the glass in many windows. The Cwm Road was broken up, split down the middle, and some of the holes were deep enough for a man to stand in. At the racecourse there were piles of enormous hailstones.

Mr Benjamin ran the butcher's shop in Shirenewton, helped by Mavis Bryant (nee Pendry). In 1936, Mavis also worked for Mrs Jack Spence Thomas in Caepwcella. She married Bill in 1937 but continued working at Caepwcella and in the butcher's shop. There were three indoor staff and a gardener at Caepwcella. Tom Richards was a carpenter and coffin maker and lived at Triangle Cottage (now Ashfield Cottage). He died in 1936 and was the last person to be buried in the Quaker Burial ground. The Quakers were tanners and kept what is now called the Tan house and had a flourishing business there. In the field below was a cider mill. Cider was made there and sold at the Engineers' Arms, now a private house, further up the road. A farmer, Mr Scott, kept the Post Office. Mr Spence Thomas owned steelworks in Wolverhampton. Both Mr and Mrs Spence Thomas served as Churchwardens (at different times).



An interior picture from the early 1970s

Gwilym Cule, born in 1898, remembered cycling to Chepstow in 1920 to fetch the doctor for his grandmother. To save time, he waited whilst the doctor prescribed the medicine and then returned but sadly his grandmother had passed away in his absence. He asked Tom Richards to make a coffin and contacted the gravedigger (Bill Elliott) and the rector (Frank Walters) to arrange a suitable day for the funeral.

Reg Dickman began his working life as a shepherd at Home Farm for the Liddells until they gave up keeping sheep. He then worked for Mr Cowell as a herdsman looking after the Aberdeen Angus cattle on 90 acres of land that Mr Liddell let to Mr Cowell. By 1945-50 Reg was working on a poultry farm of 3-4 acres looking after 1,000 chickens. Over Christmas they would kill and pluck over 100 chickens by hand. Later, Reg's father bought a market garden at Itton, and both Reg and his father worked there, walking there and back daily, and selling tomatoes and rhubarb in Newport. In January 1978 Mr Dickman received the Imperial Service Medal from Her Majesty The Queen, "In recognition of the Meritorious Services which you have rendered". This medal was awarded to civil servants with over 25 years' service on their retirement.

The village shop used to be in the dining room of the Tredegar Arms. The Five Bells was a public house and on the end of the Five Bells there was a blacksmith's shop where Ned Packer used to shoe horses. Outside the shop was a big iron ring where Ned used to put the bands on the wagon wheels. Opposite the Five Bells was a Coach shed and rough land where he kept all his wheels, wrenches and tools. The rough land was called The Pound. A few yards from Newton Lodge (the Post Office until 1914) was a butcher's shop (this is now the garage for Newton Lodge) and also a Police Station opposite the church (Wycliffe View, now Barley Hill). At the cottage next to where Mrs Noble now lives (Barn Cottage), Mr Stephens used to carry on a business as a boot repairer.

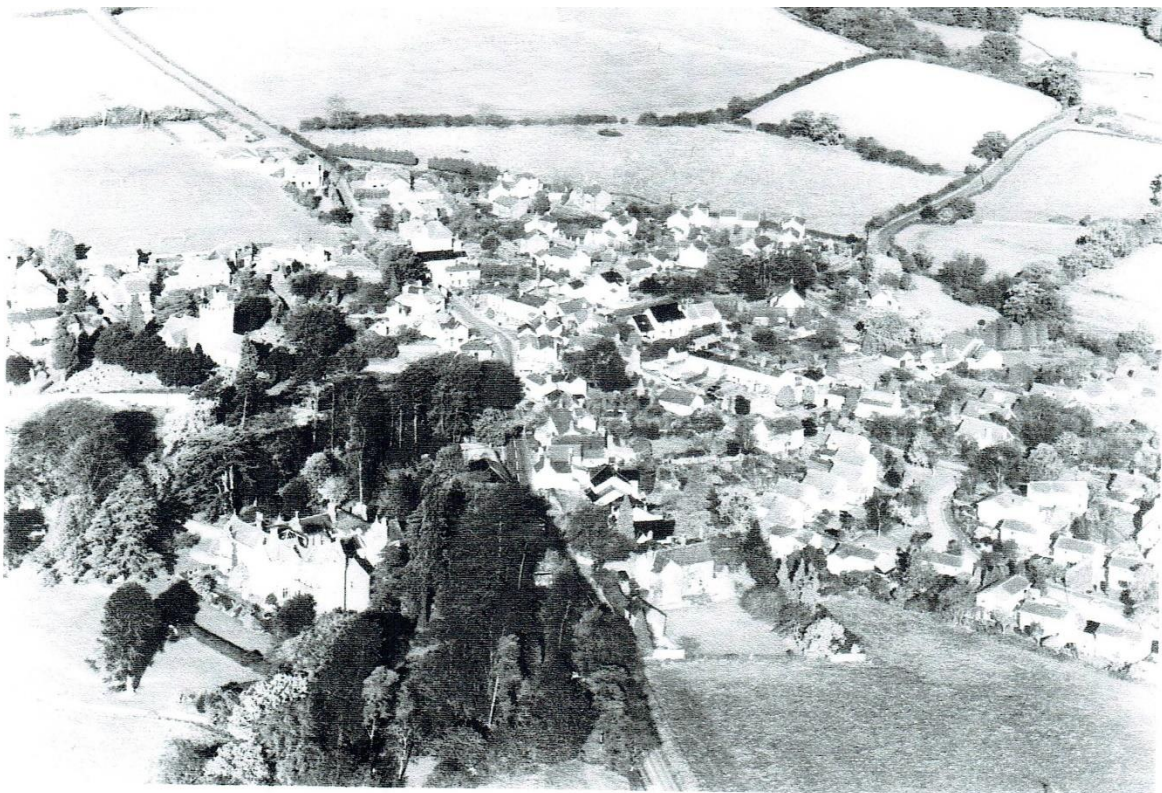
Bill Elliott was the Road Sweeper and Grave Digger for Shirenewton. He was 91 years old when he died. His wife worked in Caepwcella. When they were young, they played in the Square; football in winter, using the opening of "The Barn" as a goal; cricket in summer, with the wicket marked on the wall of "The Barn". Shirenewton always had well-supported football and cricket teams, and a tennis club. Many years ago, "Barn Cottage" was a Fever Hospital. When people came to see their relatives, they could only look through the windows at them, and food was left on the doorstep. In the early 1990s, when the cottage was empty, the floor was taken up and an open drain was found where dirty water could be sluiced away.

During the Second World War, soldiers were stationed at a gun site near The Mynders Farm. Two soldiers from the station were wonderful pianists and often played the organ in Shirenewton Church. An unexploded bomb was found in the back garden of Newton Brae; and Caepwcella was converted into a Maternity Hospital. When the war ended in 1945, a big show was put on at the Institute. The highlight was a football match, in which a women's team played against a men's team. [A similar women's team versus men's team football match is recalled taking place for the Queen's Coronation in 1953.] In the terrible winter of 1947 most farms were unworkable for a month and people could walk on the top of the hedges, because the snow was so deep.

When Mr Fred Davis came to Shirenewton in 1955 to work for Mr Liddell as a gardener, he lived in Church Cottage. At that time Mr Liddell owned most of the cottages in the village. Captain Liddell had 15 or 16 men working for him, but the staffing in the Hall was modest. The butler and his wife, who was the cook, lived in the Lodge. There was a daily help, two gardeners and an Estate carpenter. There were two wells in the Kitchen Garden and another just inside the wall. A spring on the side of the Earlswood Road ran into a water tower and then underground to Shirenewton Hall, to a large underground water tank just below the Kitchen Garden. The water was then pumped up to tanks in the roof of the Hall. In due course the old ram pump, which wasted a lot of water (although the waste was diverted to the Japanese Garden) was replaced by an electric pump. The Kitchen Garden was used as a Market Garden. In the summer, people in the village bought vegetables, tomatoes and flowers. In 1974, Shirenewton Hall Estate and all the associated properties were sold. At this point, the old way of life ended in Shirenewton and a new community emerged as newcomers found that the Severn Bridge made access to South Wales easier.

Electricity and mains water came to Shirenewton between 1953 and 1955. Until then oil lamps were used after dark, and central heating came from open fires, and hot water bottles were widely used in bed at night. Water for drinking and cooking had to be collected from one of the many wells in the area, such as Horsemeadow Field, Cox's Well, the Spout or Webb's Well just beyond Mynyddbach Green, and then carried home. The Spout was considered to be the best water, partly because it kept flowing in winter when the public taps sometimes froze solid. There were public taps in Shirenewton and Mynyddbach. The Liddells installed one in The Square and sold keys for 2s. 6d. (12½ pence). When the taps were no longer needed, a key was given to the landlord of the Tredegar Arms to display in the bar. During the Second World War, or just afterwards, Mr Liddell from Shirenewton Hall brought the water down Weyloed Lane from his own private water supply, for which the residents were very grateful. Mains gas reached Shirenewton in the 1970s. Many residents used cess pits until 1975 when mains drainage was more universally available for sewerage.

During the 1962/63 blizzards, the village was completely snowbound and cut off from Chepstow and the outside world. With the onset of the bad weather the baker, old Joe from the Co-op Shop, made a delivery of bread and prompted customers to accept extra loaves in case conditions became worse. He took no payment, but his customers ensured he was fully recompensed later. Mr Dan Prince, formerly of Earlswood, turned up with his pony, covered in icicles and with milk churns strapped around her. He took armfuls of loaves and set off across the fields, as the roads were impassable, delivering bread to farms and cottages on the way. A great community spirit prevailed in these adverse conditions. A Spar shop opened in purpose-built premises off Spout Hill lane and operated well for many years before closing in 2008. Although various attempts were made to open a shop either in the original premises or elsewhere in the village, they lacked sufficient support to be successful and many felt there was no point when Budgens opened by the Racecourse Garage in 2015.



Shirenewton in 1997

Parish Councils, Parochial Church Councils and Community Councils

Civil parish councils were formed in England under the reforming Local Government Act 1894 to take over local oversight of civic duties in rural towns and villages with more than 300 inhabitants: towns have town councils and cities have city councils, but they all have the same powers as the lowest tier of civic government. The earlier 1888 Act had set up electoral boards to run the counties and turn the cities into boroughs. The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is elected by the members of the congregation on the electoral roll and is the executive committee which is responsible for the financial affairs of the church and the maintenance of its assets (church fabric, fixtures, fittings and the churchyard), and for promoting the mission of the Church. Welsh Community Councils (or town councils) are a direct replacement, under the Local Government Act 1972, for the previously existing parish councils and are identical in terms of their powers and the way in which they operate. It is easy to confuse these bodies and even easier to confuse their responsibilities.

In September 1915 the Parish Council discussed the Rector's right to charge for tombstones erected in the churchyard, but the matter was deferred, then allowed to drop, resurrected and then decided to do nothing unless the Home Secretary directed otherwise. They also discussed the £60 a year payment to a teacher, instructing standards I and II in the Mynyddbach School which they wished to protest against with the Education Authority as a waste of money.

In June 1924 the Parish Council made reference to a letter from the Welsh Church Commissioners referring to the transference of control of the Churchyard from the 'present authorities' (the PCC) to the Council; the clerk wrote to the authorities for further guidance. Widening the road at Tan house corner was raised, and the clerk was instructed to write to the Rural District council on the matter. The Parish Council received a document from the 'Commissioners of Church Temporalities in Wales with reference to the tithe of the Parish, but no information as how the money collected was disposed of'.

In March 1934 the recently formed Parish Council (the fore-runner of the current Community Council) contacted the postmaster at Newport about the provision of 'a private box for telephones' in the village. The postmaster replied that the business done at Shirenewton Post Office did not justify the extra expense. At a similar time, it was reported that the church clock 'had now been repaired' after the hands had been affected by the weather; the County Surveyor was asked to remove the refuse from against the wall of the Quaker's Burial ground, below the Post Office; and to look at the state of the Church path by the Blacksmiths Shop. It would appear that the Parish Council met in the Earlswood Schoolroom.

Since the end of Fred Davies' narrative in 1984, the village and the Church have developed. Not only have new houses been built in Clearview, Newton Manor and Redde Lands, but there have been a number of smaller developments by in-filling new houses in the gardens of existing properties. Works have also been carried out on the Church to maintain it. John Nicholas was responsible for the fabric of the Church for some years and ensured that the pews were dipped to remove the very dark stain and varnish and create a lighter atmosphere in the Church, work which started in 1998. Charles Eickhoff, an active bell-ringer, took responsibility for the repair of the Church clock and then took over from John Nicholas the responsibility for the Church fabric. The quinquennial review in July 2015 recommended a significant number of maintenance tasks.

The War Memorial Trust was established to provide advice and grants to support repairs to war memorials and they were approached for assistance with the cost of repairs to the clock. Understandably their first question was to establish that the clock was a War Memorial. After a number of frenzied enquiries to the older members of the Parish, the answer was looking everyone in the face. The War Memorial itself states in clear letters:

THE CLOCK IN CHURCH TOWER AND THIS TABLET WERE ERECTED IN MEMORY OF THE MEN OF THIS PARISH WHO FOUGHT AND FELL IN THE GREAT WAR 1914-1918

The War Memorial Trust were generous in their assistance with the cost of clock repairs.

Anita Kent's Memories

In an interview with Anita Kent, who was born in the village in 1926 and has lived in Shirenewton ever since, she tells us about life in Shirenewton as a child and as she grew up. She also served as churchwarden from 1986 to 1992 and was a regular flower arranger in the Church for many years.

We lived in a bungalow next to the Old Police Station, until I met my husband who was a butcher in Caldicot and lived in Undy; but we decided to live in Shirenewton. Mr Spence-Thomas, who then lived in Caepwcella, sold us the top half of his field in 1956 and we built Hightrees, which I think was the first new house in the village. Some years later my husband decided we had too large a garden, so he sold two plots for houses – and then we had to rent a field for my daughter's horse!

I remember the early days of the fete and carnival in the village. One year there were 98 children in the carnival. The notice in the Parish magazine for 1976 reads:

Preparations for this popular event in the life of the Parish – which will be held on Saturday 12th June in the delightful grounds of Shirenewton Hall – are proceeding satisfactorily. The Queen of the Carnival and her retinue were chosen at a well attended Social Evening held in Earlswood Memorial Hall on April 23rd, and we are most grateful to Mrs R Bowen who organised it, to Mrs Madge of Broakweir the judge, and to the ladies and gentlemen who served the refreshments, acted as stewards and supervised the raffle.

From the 65 entrants Julie Kent (Shirenewton) was chosen as the Queen, with Beverley Barnes and Shirley Waters (Mynyddbach) as her Court Ladies. Nairn Attfield (Mynyddbach) was selected to be the Princess, and Wendy Cleal (Catbrook), Susan Morris (Earlswood), Kerry Powell (Caldicot) and Fiona Smith (Mynyddbach) as her attendants. Completing the Court as Flower Girls and Page Boys will be Angela Cooke, Rachel Attfield (Mynyddbach), Angela Martin (Llanarth), Hayley Ostler (Usk Road), Kevin Hunt (Usk Road), Robert and Stephen Morgan (Shirenewton) and Stephen Ostler (Usk Road).

There was a Girl's Friendly Society in the village run by one of the teachers from the school. Amongst many other activities, we used to pick primroses from the Golden Valley and put them round the top of the organ; and we made a moss wreath and placed it on the pulpit and put primroses in it.

I was involved with the activities of the Church from the start. I became a Church warden in 1986. Initially Mr Leighton Boyd was the other warden, but there was a kerfuffle and they stopped him being warden, and so I was the only warden for a while. There was also a long interregnum without a rector. It was a very friendly village, and everyone liked to help, and everyone offered to help. I think the village has altered now. I have a note from the parish magazine in 1992 when I stepped down as churchwarden:

This Easter sees the close of Nita Kent's period of office as churchwarden. She has discharged her duties in an exemplary manner, with great faithfulness and diligence. The parish of Shirenewton has been blessed with a fine Churchwarden whose regularity in worship, together with a high degree of responsibility for even the

smallest detail, have been an example to all. She has had much to cope with, especially during a long interregnum, and we are much in her debt. The present Rector (Canon Peter Woodman) has especial cause to bless God for her help and unflinching kindness and sound advice. Thank you, Nita!

I ran the senior citizens club in the village for 20 years. We met once a week in the recreation hall. There are only two of them left now, but I keep in contact.

The Liddell family at Shirenewton Hall were regular attenders in the congregation until they requested to erect a plaque in the Church to commemorate the VC won by their son, Ian Liddell. The application for a faculty was refused on the grounds that there were to be no more plaques in the Church. We all felt bad about this, because the family had done so much for the village, and the Church: so that is why the plaque is now in Mounton Church.

The fete was held at Shirenewton Hall in the days of the Liddells. Later it moved to Caepwcella, then one year it was held on the lawn at the Rectory (now the Old Rectory), and then it moved to the recreation field a year or two before I stepped down as churchwarden. They always had two floats – one for the Queen and one for the Princess.

Faculties and Diocesan Bureaucracy

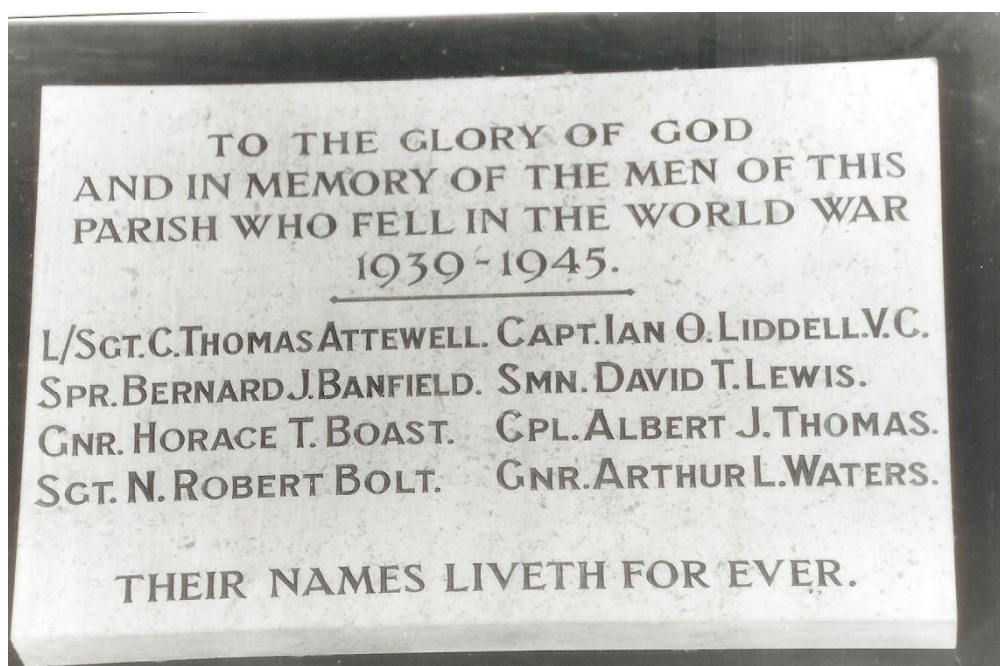
It is interesting to note that the descendants of the Liddell family produced a hand carved wooden plaque in 2012 and requested that it be erected in the Church. The PCC applied for a faculty and it was refused by the diocese on similar grounds to their refusal to allow the VC plaque in Anita's day. The wooden plaque now hangs in the Saysell Centre. These decisions were particularly unfortunate given all the support the Liddell family have provided to the Church over the years. There were other themes Nita mentioned during the interview that resound today, such as maintenance of the churchyard and cleaning the Church.



The Five Bells public house (date unknown), now a private house

The World War Two War Memorial Tablet

The War Memorial tablet commemorating those who died in the Second World War was unveiled in the Church on Sunday 2nd September 1946. According to press reports at the time, Shirenewton was one of the first places in the country to erect a permanent memorial to the men who laid down their lives in the 1939-1945 conflict. The memorial is a Hopton Wood tablet on a polished black slate slab placed on the south wall of the Church and bears the names of the eight men who died. This type of stone was used for many war memorials commemorating both World Wars. "Every available seat in Shirenewton's ancient, candle-lit church, with its surpliced choir, was occupied for the consecration service." The service lasted forty minutes and relatives of the eight men sat together. The tablet was unveiled by Major DO Liddell by releasing a Union Jack, and the consecration service was performed by the Bishop of Monmouth. Lessons were read by the rector, Reverend A Swan Morgan and Mr WJ Padfield (the village schoolmaster). The organist was Mr Davies from Chepstow.



The War Memorial Tablet

Entries in the Terriers

The Terrier is the inventory of the church fabric and contents held by the churchwardens, and there are three volumes for our Church covering 1994 to the present. They include photographs of plaques and property and brief descriptions of the church and its contents; and quinquennial reports on the church and fabric. For example, in December 1995 a new red altar frontal was made out of the panels of the old one stitched on to new red brocade backing with ivory silk lining and calico backdrop. The materials and work were provided by Barbara Davies, the churchwarden. Sadly, this altar frontal was taken from the Church in 2017 and never recovered. We were very fortunate that a parishioner, Claire Lewis, volunteered to create a new one which was dedicated in the Church in January 2018 by Bishop Richard, the Bishop of Monmouth.

In 1993 the west wall was renovated to solve problems with damp, and all the plaster was removed. Pews were removed to gain access to the floor so new floor boards could be laid. It may be that this was the occasion when the replacement plaster proved so effective in the short term but has sadly caused problems today.

The Church has organised the village fete for many years, as Anita Kent and the photographs in the terrier testify. This is a community effort which involves many people in the village and other villages in the area, and it brings in much needed funds to maintain the Church. It contains all the traditional elements: a carnival and a carnival queen; arena displays; games and challenges, including since 2012 the Welsh Welly-Wanging competition (courtesy of Dave Cornwell); stalls and stands selling flowers, plants, beer, Pimms, white elephants, bottle stalls; the cake stand has gained a reputation for being the best in Monmouth, and probably Wales.



Sally Saysell and Ruth Savagar on the Cake Stall at the fete - 2014

In May 1995 the churchwarden, Barbara Davies, painted a wooden plaque with the coat of arms of Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford, the founder of St Thomas à Becket Church. It was used to commemorate VE Day at the village recreation centre on 8th May (the fiftieth anniversary). There is more about the extraordinary de Bohun family at Annex B.



A picture of an early fete, date unknown - and a new venture by Dave Cornwell

In February 1996 new woollen tapestry kneelers were presented to the Church by the people of the parish on Rogation Sunday, along with four cushion pads donated by Barbara Davies. A new nave altar was presented in January 1997 made from chestnut wood by Mr Andrew Pyke who also designed it. In the same month new pulpit falls were designed, crafted and donated by Barbara Davies.

A flower festival was held in 1997; and another in 2015 and 2018, which are mentioned later.

The Church held an open day in 2001 with trips up the tower, visits to the ringing floor, displays by the Women's Institute and many other attractions.

In October 2003 Mrs June Jorgansen presented an altar frontal and accessories in memory of her husband, the late Peter Jorgansen. In June 2004 Mrs Dorothy Brabon presented a linen and lace altar cloth in memory of her mother, the late Mrs Eleanor Evans, worked by Eleanor Trot. In 2006 John Nicholas presented a metal stand and sand-trap to hold lighted prayer candles and prayer cards.

The Church Organ

The organ was built by Percy George Phipps of Gloucester Green, Oxford, and was donated to the Church by Capt CO Liddell of Shirenewton Hall on 27th June 1908. The organ case is made of oak and has French Mouths to the front pipes. The inscription on the brass plate records the gift from Capt Liddell and names the Rector, Rev G Platt Dew BA; the Churchwardens, JW Scott and Aubrey Edwards; and the organist Mrs G Platt Dew. An electric blower was added in 1957. The organ was originally fitted in the chancel, but was moved to the west end of the North aisle: this work was completed in March 1974.



The Church Organ

Karen Millar recalls that in 2008 our organ celebrated its centenary in style, with a concert featuring items from many local groups. Amidst songs from the church choir; primary school; Sunday club and guides and brownies, local organists put the organ through its paces. (Indeed, it is still reeling slightly from the astounding performance of Benedict Todd and claims to have a headache whenever the word 'Widor' is mentioned in its vicinity). Following the concert 100 candles were lit upon the organ's cake – these were blown out enthusiastically by the children (the organ being rather overwhelmed by all the fuss).

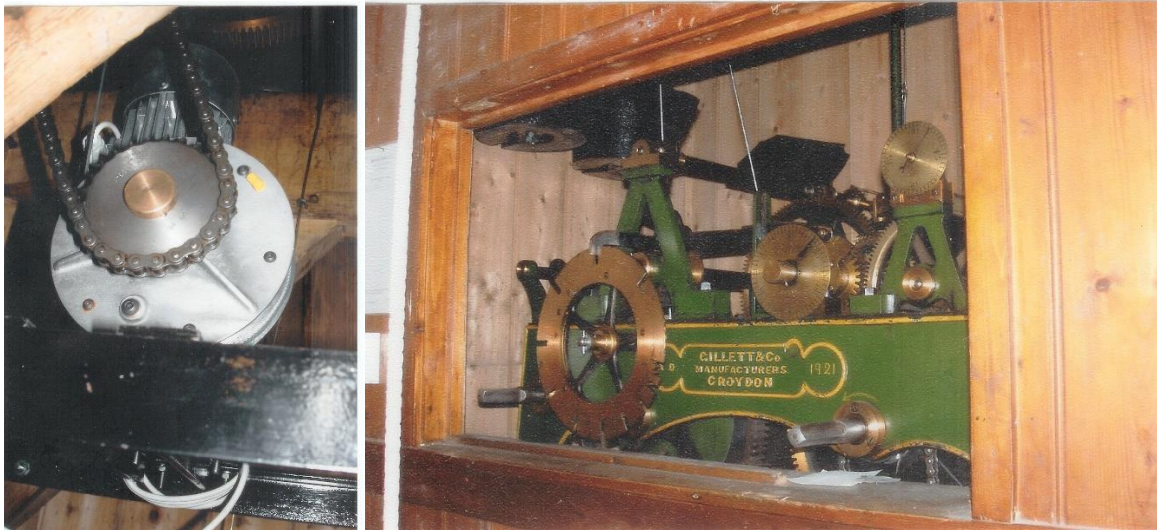
At the time of writing, Shirenewton is fortunate in having three organists: Karen Millar, James Leney and Ruth Savager – ensuring that its jubilant voice is heard at every service. Sadly, the winter cold and dampness in the church do not suit this elderly instrument, and it is prone to developing cyphers and tuning malfunctions. The mouse nest discovered behind the case in 2017 probably didn't do the instrument an awful lot of good either. Church organs typically cost around the same price as a semi-detached house to purchase (though thankfully they are cheaper to maintain, and the neighbours give no trouble at all). It is to be hoped that this wonderful instrument will continue to be played and enjoyed by many, and that its 200th birthday party will be thoroughly splendid.

The Church Clock

As previously noted in Part I, the clock was paid for by public subscription and installed in the tower as a war memorial after the First World War. It was manufactured by Gillett and Company and provides a gear train to the four dials on each aspect of the tower. It chimes the hour throughout every 24 hours using the tenor bell of the ring of six. Gillett and Company became Gillett and Johnson in 1887, so the clock must have been purchased second hand or assembled from old stock. The painted date on the clock main chassis overwrites a previous cast-in date that had been removed. From 1921 until 2003 the clock was powered by two large weights which were manually wound three times a week by volunteers. The weight pulley system was electrified in 2003 which allowed a lighter weight system with a short travel to be used, all contained within the clock case.



One of the four clock faces on the Tower



One of the four clock driving motors and the main clock mechanism

The Church Bells and Bell Ringers

For many years the bells remained silent, but they were restored for the Millennium and a nascent group of bell-ringers was trained and encouraged by the Mathern bell-ringers. They have gone from strength to strength under the Tower Captain Mike Penney and the extraordinary training skills of his wife Pip Penney and the bell ringers continue to enjoy a close relationship with the Mathern ringers.

In March 2018 Mike kindly produced the following history of the Bells and Bell-Ringers, and the accompanying pictures. Some of his story repeats the earlier contribution from Fred Davis, but Mike's history gives a more rounded story.

Early History

During the first part of the 18th century the antiquarian Browne Willis noted that there were 3 bells in the tower at Shirenewton. The exact date of this examination is uncertain, but he appears to have been collecting information on the bells in South Wales during the period 1710 to 1740. There is no documented information earlier than this time and no information as to whether these bells were chimed or rung full circle.

In 1756 William Evans of Chepstow was commissioned to cast 5 bells for the church and it is presumed that the 3 bells were scrapped, and the metal reused. It is also likely that at this time the bells were hung for full circle ringing. However, a written record of activity remains absent until 1895 when, on the 26th of January, a visiting band of ringers from Chepstow came to Shirenewton but found the bells in a deplorable condition and needed to make running repairs before the bells could be rung. After a number of attempts a touch of 120 Bob Doubles was rung (this would normally be considered a simple 5-minute exercise) after which one of the band remarked it was one of the biggest jobs they had ever experienced. It was also suggested that the ring would benefit from augmentation to 6 bells.

Evidently the remarks of the Chepstow ringers were at least partially heeded and during the full restoration of the fabric of the church occurring around this time work on the bells proceeded so that by 28th January 1899 a second band of ringers from Chepstow found the ring much improved – the frame had been put level and strengthened with bolts, and the treble and second bells had been fitted with new headstocks. Augmentation to 6 bells, however, had to wait until 1918 when a treble was given to the church by Captain C O Liddell J,P, - a member of a prominent local family living in Shirenewton Hall. At the same time the original treble of the 5 bells cast by William Evans was recast to become the

second bell of the 6. In order to accommodate the new treble bell a new bell pit was formed by installing two cast iron frame sides at the north west corner of the frame. The work was completed on 26th October 1918 and at a meeting of the Llandaff Diocesan Association of Church Bell Ringers the following day several new members of the Association were elected from Shirenewton. It is presumed that the church now had an established local band of ringers and indeed it is known that one ringer had lost his life in the Great War in 1917 – Frederick Stevens.

Prior to augmentation the bells were rung from the ground floor. However, the additional bell's rope would have fallen too close to where the organ was then sited. The decision was made, therefore, to create a new ringing room in the clock room. Inspection of the current ringing room floor from the nave beneath the tower reveals the original rope holes for ground floor ringing.

Of note is that in 1931 on 28th February a peal of 5040 changes of Grandsire Doubles was rung on the bells by the local band, the first peal on the bells and also the first peal by all the band. This would indicate that a competent band then existed at Shirenewton. A peal board currently placed on the north wall at the base of the tower records this achievement. A second peal board positioned next to this, records the second peal rung also of Grandsire Doubles which was rung on 29th January 1934.

After the Second World War it is unlikely that much if any ringing was done on the bells and they became derelict as a full circle ring. It is recorded that in 1964 an estimate for tuning and rehanging the bells was £1400, well out of reach of the funds available at that time. In 1984 it was recorded that the latest estimate for the work was £16,600. At some time after the war a set of Ellacombe chimes were fitted (this allows the bells to be chimed with sprung hammers but is a poor substitute for full circle ringing) and the vestiges of this apparatus are still to be seen on the north west corner of the tower base – a wooden board to which the chiming ropes had been attached. The skills required to ring the bells were lost to the village and the millennium approached

Details of the bells in 1918

Bell	Inscription	Diameter (ins)
Treble	MEARS & STAINBANK, FOUNDERS, LONDON./ (Mark) "PRAISE TO THE HOLIEST IN THE HEIGHT" DONOR: - CAPTAIN C.O. LIDDELL, J.P. L.E. RICHARDSON, RECTOR. C.O. LIDDELL } CHURCHWARDENS J.W.SCOTT } A.D. 1918	24
2	COME LET US RING FOR CHURCH AND KING W(Bell) E 1756 RECAST A.D. 1918 (Mark) MEARS & STAINBANK, LONDON.	25¼
3	PEACE AND GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD W(Bell) E 1756	26½
4	(Scroll) WM EVANS CAST US ALL 1756	27½
5	CHRIS'R HOWEL & ROB'T PHILLIPS CH: WARDENS W(Bell) E 1756	29¼
Tenor	THE REV,ND SAM,L BUTCHER RECT,R W (Bell)E 1756	33¼

More Recent Events

The project to restore the bells was commenced in 1995 led by Mr Martin Cole, and serious fund raising began at this time. In 1997 a report was produced by Dr J C Eisel (a research specialist on the development of bell frames) for The Millennium Fund commissioned by Shirenewton Parochial Church Council. The decision to commence the restoration project around this time proved to be most fortuitous because A "Ring in the Millennium Fund" established through The Heritage Lottery Fund had been established to enable churches within the UK with un-ringable bells to apply for grants to restore the bells so that they could be rung for the millennium celebrations. A subsequent formal application to this fund resulted in the first such grant in Wales being awarded to Shirenewton. Local fund raising and a grant from The Llandaff and Monmouth Diocesan Association of Church Bell Ringers' Bell Restoration Fund allowed the project to proceed.

Bell hangers Earye and Smith were appointed to carry out the restoration and two new trebles were ordered from Whitechapel Bell Foundry to replace the 1918 bells.

The original William Evans bells were retained. The decision was made at this time to revert to ringing from the ground floor with provision for additional rope guides positioned below the original ringing room floor, although these guides were never fitted. Thus the upstairs ringing room remained unrestored; indeed the original ringing room ceiling that had been removed during restoration to permit removal and re-instatement of the bells, frame and fittings was not re-instated. The project was completed by November 1997 with a dedication service taking place on Saturday 22nd November, led by the Archdeacon of Monmouth and the vicar, respectively Ven. Peter Woodman and Rev. Hugh Trenchard. Mr Dudley Surman, the tower captain at Mathern had, with colleagues, been instrumental in training volunteers from Shirenewton in elementary ringing and the first ring following the dedication was performed by this local band. This event was recorded in the Ringing World a few weeks later under an article entitled "Shirenewton - a ring reborn".



Casting the new bells at Whitechapel Bell Foundry, London 1997

However, training a band of ringers to be competent in the art of change ringing is a long drawn out process and as luck would have it Dr Mike Penney had heard about the restoration and decided to return to ringing. He had learnt to ring as a child at Christ Church, Swindon – a very fine ring of ten bells – and had achieved a high standard of ringing before going to university when other interests had replaced ringing. So, after a sojourn of 31 years he returned and almost immediately took over as tower captain and commenced a programme of recruitment and training. He was soon joined by his wife Pip, a physiotherapist, who had never rung before and whose experience of learning to ring led her to invoke her knowledge of physical movement re-training and learning theory into a formal training scheme for ringing which has now received national and international recognition – Learning the Ropes. Pip was a founder member of The Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) and was its first Chairman.

In 2003 it was decided to re-establish the upstairs ringing room. Ringing from the base of the tower had proved difficult even for some very experienced ringers largely due to the mass of the ropes in comparison to the bell weights and the lack of rope guides, thus very difficult for novice ringers. In addition, the books and the paraphernalia of teaching, and the desire to introduce a computer bell simulator for training made using the ground floor impracticable. Practising in an unheated church on a winter's Friday evening practice was also uninviting. The ringers raised the necessary funds, the ceiling was re-instated, the woodwork re-varnished, the walls repainted, and the floor carpeted resulting in one of the most luxurious appointed ringing rooms in Wales.



A bell hanger and two views of the refurbished ringing room

Provision, however, was retained to allow the bells to be rung from the ground floor at Christmas, New Year and at Easter.

The social side of ringing was developed with regular weekly practice nights followed by team building in the local pub. There are two annual ringing tours organised which have travelled as far north as Yorkshire, east as Lincolnshire, south as Kent and west as Cornwall, with some notable rings visited including Lincoln and Canterbury Cathedrals. The number of ringers has grown to such an extent that there are approximately 3 times as many ringers as bells which means that the majority of church services are preceded by ringing even in peak holiday seasons, and that weddings and other special occasions can be catered for.

Details of the two new bells in 1997

Bell	Inscription	Diameter (ins)
1	The Millennium Commission (Symbol) A MILLENIUM PROJECT SUPPORTED BY FUNDS FROM THE NATIONAL LOTTERY DONATED BY PHILIP COLVILE IN MEMORY OF HIS MOTHER NORAH EILEEN COLVILE 1890 - 1975 19(Mark)97 WHITECHAPEL	24
2	The Millennium Commission (Symbol) A MILLENIUM PROJECT SUPPORTED BY FUNDS FROM THE NATIONAL LOTTERY HUGH TRENCHARD RECTOR JEAN JONES CYNTHIA SMITH } CHURCHWARDENS MARTIN COLE RESTORATION COORDINATOR 19(Mark)97 WHITECHAPEL	25.75

PCC Minutes

The minutes of the PCC meetings at the time of the bell restoration project show that the project was forecast to finish at the end of 1996; and this was achieved. Lord Rees was invited to open the fete in 1996 and the proceeds of the fete were donated to the bell restoration fund. A letter on file shows that Philip Colvile donated a large sum in order to have the second bell inscribed with the name of his mother, Norah Eileen Colvile. Other fundraising ideas include appeal envelopes, a flower festival, and open garden events. BBC Wales wanted to film a costume drama in the Church and offered £50 to do so; the rector (Peter Woodman) said he would ask for an additional donation to the bell fund. He managed to get £100 from them, even though in the end they did not use the Church! The rector reminded the PCC that they should not rely on fundraising to pay the quota, which should be met by weekly collections and other income. The rural dean reminded the PCC that all members were trustees of the church for Charity Commission purposes.

Before the Church extension was built, the PCC used to meet in the houses of the members of the PCC in the centre of the village. From 1983 the Church was part of the Caerwent group, along with Newchurch and Llanfair Discoed. There were various schemes over the years to re-arrange the parishes in the Deanery, but it was not until 2012 that Shirenewton was combined with Mathern, Mounton and St Pierre under the rector, the Reverend Julian White. In 2017 the Church in Wales began to introduce larger groupings of parishes called Ministry Areas. Shirenewton and the rest of the churches in the Group are now part of the Chepstow Ministry Area which includes St Arvans with Penterry, Itton, Devauden, Kilgwrrwg and Chepstow. It was noted that there was an inter regnum of some months when the Rector, Peter Woodman, moved to a new living in September 1996, and again when Hugh Trenchard retired early on health grounds. It is worth recording that The Venerable Peter Woodman was not only our Rector but also an Archdeacon; there is no evidence to show that any other rector has had this distinction. In 1996 the altar in the nave, which had been used for a trial period, was deemed a great success and it was decided to continue with its use.

The Shirenewton Sunday Club

In February 2018 Jane Smith-Haddon provided the following information about the Shirenewton Sunday Club.

I first became involved with Shirenewton Sunday Club, or rather, Shirenewton Sunday School, as it was then known, in the early 1980s. I helped out with some music for the Christmas Nativity play, and shortly after that, dear Bernice Bowen decided to retire from running the Sunday School and asked me if I would take over, which I did... for the next thirty years or so!

In those early days I relied heavily on Grace Wells who had been helping Bernice for several years. Grace was a sweet, elderly lady who taught the youngest class, pre-school and reception children. The little children loved gentle, soft spoken Grace. I took over the middle class, upper infants and lower juniors. They consisted of about a dozen - how shall I put it? - 'lively' children!

And then there were a few older ones in the top class, and at that time, no one to teach them. As is often the case, God came to the rescue and sent us Cynthia Smith. I knew Cynthia slightly, both from church and also Chepstow swimming pool of all places. One day I bumped into Cynthia (not literally) at the pool, and she said she felt called to do something more at church and wondered if I needed help at Sunday School. So that was the top class sorted out, and Cynthia and I have been firm friends ever since, in fact she is God Mother to both my sons.

At that time, we held Sunday School at 11 o'clock immediately after church. During the winter months we teachers were frozen to the bone, having been in our old church for an hour's service, and still having another hour to go! A church chock full of immovable pews, and carpets where paint, glue and glitter are not allowed to be spilt upon, is not an easy space to give free reign to a bunch of 'lively' kids, but we managed with trestle boards balanced across the pews and newspaper on the carpets.

We always began singing choruses accompanied on the organ by Mansell, one of the church organists. The children would race to climb up onto the organ bench to sit alongside him. It was a wonder that he had any room to play at all. We would sing loudly and raucously, and I was reminded of the Psalm that says, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise" ...Well, we certainly made a loud noise!

Several of the children were the sons and daughters of local farmers, and this showed in their art work. Jesus would often be portrayed healing or teaching people from a tractor. There was one lad in particular, who was tractor-crazy, every picture he ever made, from Noah to Bethlehem, from Moses to the Resurrection, had at its centre, a bright red Massey-Ferguson.

As time went on, our teaching staff changed, both Grace and Cynthia retired. And then Glynis MacDonald moved into the village with her three children - another Godsend. Not only did her children boost our falling numbers, but Glynis brought her many creative gifts to the Sunday School table. Glynis also offered her house as the Sunday School venue. This was wonderful, we were warm, we had room for art, acting and cooking. The family dog was a large, scruffy lurcher called Ellie, she had the loveliest temperament and was often called upon to take the part of the donkey in various Bible stories that we acted out.

During the 1990s we had a long interregnum (in other words, we didn't have a Vicar) and Glynis and I were asked if we would lead Family Services in church now and again, of course, we involved the children. Each Christmas we presented (and still do present) a Nativity and Christingle service on Christmas Eve. As you can imagine, it becomes difficult

to tell the same story in a different way year on year. Published scripts don't always suit the children available. But for several years from the late 1990s we were blessed with lots of children who excelled at music and/or loved acting. So we began writing our own Nativity scripts. Once more we were hampered by the limitations of a Medieval church and Victorian pews, but we rose to the challenge and over the years we turned the pulpit into a Star Wars space ship for the Alleluia Angels; a helicopter for a Bethlehem Press Team; and Dr Who's Tardis.

This group of children stayed with us into their teens and for a few years we ran a youth group for them. Today they are grown up and working away from the village, but every year several of them come back, dress up in the old Biblical costumes and help us in the annual Nativity play.

Glynis and I passed the Sunday Club teaching to the very safe hands of Kerry Baker and Lynn Morecombe a few years ago. They now meet in the Church Room and it's lovely to see the Sunday Club come into church for the final hymn, clutching whatever they have made or drawn, ready to show to the congregation. Though it seems that red tractors aren't such prominent features these days...!

Young Music Makers and Kids Ad Lib

There were other initiatives to involve young people in the Church. The Young Music Makers performed in the Church and elsewhere to amuse themselves, further their musical talent and raise funds for the Church. Some of the young people who took part were also involved in the pantomime or other village activities. Kids Ad Lib was started by Karen Millar to provide a musical and drama outlet for young people, with great success, and also provided young talent for other village activities.

The Recreation Field and The Beacon

In 1946, Percy Liddell donated some of his estate land on the Earlswood Road to Shirenewton Parish Council by deed of gift "for the purpose of providing a recreation ground for the said Parish of Shirenewton in memory of his Father Captain Charles Oswald Liddell who for many years resided at Shirenewton Hall...". A Village Playing Fields Association was formed, and the field was used for football, cricket and tennis under their auspices, even though the land was very rough and uneven in many places. Later the land was brought under the responsibility of the community council and so the village football club obtained permission from them to use the land. As the football club became better established it found itself in a position to arrange for the field to be levelled and created the opportunity for the cricket square to be much enhanced. This was achieved largely through voluntary effort and support with earth-moving equipment from local farmers and businesses. The recreation hall was built in 1972 with a grant from Monmouthshire County Council and the Recreation Association was formed to manage it. On completion of the new hall, the old Shirenewton Institute building next to the Old Rectory was no longer required, and the Liddell family took it back into their ownership (and subsequently sold it). Today there are two play areas and a tennis court, and the main part of the land is used as a cricket pitch and occasionally put to other public uses.

As part of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War on 8th May 1995, the Community Council arranged for a beacon to be erected on the Recreation Field and set alight as the sun went down. In addition, they arranged a hog roast dinner which took place on the field.

The Millennium

The beacon was used again to celebrate the millennium and lit by the Scouts. It formed part of the chain of beacons lit across the country to mark this significant event.

As part of the Millennium celebrations it was decided to arrange a pantomime. This was so successful that the Shirenewton Operatic and Dramatic Society (SODS) remained in existence and continued to perform a pantomime every year, usually in late January. The Parochial Church Council has arranged to beat the bounds annually on Rogation Sunday for many years. There are detailed records of who was involved in this tradition from 1745, and 1819, and more recently from 1997. In recent years the Shirenewton Local History Society has arranged to beat the bounds followed by tea and cake in the Saysell Centre; this is another event which brings the church and community together, and indeed visitors from other parishes who wish to take part.



Photograph titled 'An Unknown Horseman at the Top of the Row' dated 1907, showing the old Post Office, now a private house

The Saysell Centre (formerly the Church Room)

Perhaps the most impressive feat was the major fundraising exercise to raise £250,000 to build a Church Room by the side the Church. This was built by a local builder, John Saysell, and opened in 2008. It was cared for and maintained by Alan Saysell, a distant cousin of John and husband of Churchwarden Sally Saysell, and when he sadly died in 2015 it was decided to rename the Church Room after the two people who had done the most to create this facility and it is now called the Saysell Centre. The fundraising committee set up to achieve this arranged sponsored bicycle rides, golf matches, a formal ball and a hike up Kilimanjaro, to name but a few events; and the fundraising committee continues to raise funds through community events.

In January 2018 John Nicholas produced his recollections of the design and build project.

In 2003 the PCC and church members agreed to form a fundraising committee to build an extension to St Thomas à Becket Church in Shirenewton. The project would provide a meeting room, a kitchen, toilet facilities and storage to bring the building up to 21st century standards. The extension would be built on the northern aspect over a grass area without headstones to indicate the presence of burials. This could have created a major problem because further faculties would have to be obtained as well as additional planning consent. This informed the decision to construct a building with suspended foundations involving a beam and block structure on concrete pads – probably the first of its type in Wales.

An archaeologist was employed to determine the position of the burials using the latest sophisticated equipment (ground-penetrating radar) and as a result the contents of only one grave had to be moved to a different site in the graveyard. The majority of the foundation work was carried out by hand as access for large mechanical equipment was limited. Work on the project was expertly carried out by a local builder, John Saysell, in conjunction with the architect Richard Lamb of Hook Mason.



John Saysell pointing the stonework and a stone cutter making sure the angles are right

The extension was opened and dedicated by Bishop Dominic, Bishop of Monmouth, in October 2008. The total cost of the project was met by the fundraising team, a small grant and generous individual donations and loans. Since completion, the extension has been used by local organisations as well as for church functions. It has proved to be an asset to the local community as well as the church. Any revenue from renting out the building is used for general maintenance of the Centre and the Church.



The partly constructed building covered in scaffolding and the finished extension

Kevin Bounds provided this background to the fundraising efforts in January 2018.

When the PCC decided to build a church extension it was nervous about the prospect of raising sufficient funds to deliver the project. After much consideration it was decided to set up a separate group, the Shirenewton Charity Committee, to handle the fund-raising aspects of the project, allowing John Nicholas to lead the design and build effort.

Kevin Bounds, as church treasurer, took on the role of chairman of the SCC and with a team of talented individuals from both inside and outside the church raised what turned out to be over £300,000 – roughly fifteen times the annual income of the church at the time. The team set out on a journey that took them across Wales, to Ireland, to Africa and ended with a magnificent Ryder Cup ball.

The journey started locally, asking for donations from local individuals; and whilst this produced good results it was quickly realised that to raise the sums required they needed to tap into corporate networks. This sparked the idea of the Shirenewton Church Golf classic – which became a regular event at St Pierre attended by many from here and afar – particularly using the corporate connections of Mike Peirce and Kevin Bounds. The event became a regular feature and social occasion and one year it took place in Cork in Ireland. The team also launched another regular village event – The Call my Bluff wine tasting. This is not a huge fundraiser but is always an enjoyable occasion.

Other innovative ideas in seeking sources of funding included becoming the beneficiary of landfill tax credits by registering the charity as an environmental body. An online shopping portal was also created through Dave Cornwell's expertise, which continues to generate income and featured on Radio Wales and Radio Ireland. Wider support from the community usage will generate even more funds through this initiative.

Corporate and social networks were persuaded to support other events as horizons broadened and the team undertook two sponsored bike rides: one across Wales from St Davids to Chepstow; and another following the line of Offa's Dyke from Prestatyn to Chepstow. Mark Broughton organised and led both expeditions and is to be commended for turning a bunch of overweight, middle aged men in Lycra into supreme athletes – well almost! 80 miles on off-road bikes carrying one's own luggage is no mean feat and the team got to go to parts of Monmouthshire and beyond during the training weekends which many had not seen before.

The aim was to garner support for the project as well as raising funds so something extra was needed, and Dave Cornwell suggested that if the team had a mountain to climb, then they ought to do just that: and so, a year later seven of the team ended up at the top of Kilimanjaro, a memorable event for all of them. On their return they gave a talk titled "Tales from Kili" in the church room, now completed but still with debts to pay off. But one last event was needed to pay off the outstanding debt and Mike Peirce proposed holding a Ryder Cup Ball in the garden of Caepwcella on the Saturday of the Ryder Cup golf championship at the Celtic Manor in 2010. This was a splendid affair and the auction raised enough funds to pay off the debt.



Apart from raising the £300,000 necessary for the construction the team created a £50,000 maintenance fund to ensure that it remains viable for the foreseeable future.



The Thornbury Clarinet Choir outside the Saysell Centre before their concert – June 2017

The Saysell Centre is regularly used by voluntary groups and associations, such as the U3A art group and yoga and fitness classes. It is also well used for fundraising activities and for social evenings and other events. In 2015 the Gwent travelling World War One exhibition was on display for several days, accompanied by a World War One-themed flower festival in the Church. There have been Bring and Share evenings, often with a speaker; Call My Bluff wine-tasting evenings; Six Nation Kick-Off events, concerts and other entertainments, and in 2018 the Monmouthshire Antiquarian Society based their visit to Shirenewton for their annual away day in the room.



World War One travelling exhibition and the flower festival - 2015

Visitations by the Bishop

The records show that the Bishop of Monmouth has visited Shirenewton several times in the last few decades. Bishop Edwin (Archbishop of Wales 1957-1967) in the 1960s; Bishop Rowan (Archbishop of Wales 1999-2002; Archbishop of Canterbury December 2002-2012) visited Shirenewton in 1997 and 2002; Bishop Dominic visited in 2007 and 2008; and Bishop Richard visited in January 2018 to consecrate the new red altar frontal made by Claire Lewis to replace the one that went missing in the summer of the previous year. Interestingly, both Bishop Edwin and Bishop Rowan continued as Bishops of Monmouth after their election as Archbishop of Wales, but presumably not for the reasons that prompted earlier Bishops to retain other ecclesiastical positions!



Visitation of Bishop Edwin (later Archbishop of Wales) circa 1960

The Royal Wedding

On 29th April 2011 Prince William married Kate Middleton and the Queen bestowed the titles Their Royal Highnesses The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on them. This was another occasion for a public celebration on the Recreation Field and the Church took an active part.

The Diamond Jubilee

In 2012 Her Majesty The Queen celebrated her diamond jubilee after 60 years on the throne. The Community Council arranged a party on the Recreation Field on the Public Holiday on Monday 4th June and the Millennium beacon was lit.

Aumbrey

The Aumbrey was presented to the Church by the Worshipful Company of Woolmen to mark their visit to the village in September 2013. The copper front depicts a sword piercing a mitre – the symbol for St Thomas à Becket – flanked by two Welsh archbishop's crooks. Above the central motif is the crest of the Worshipful Company of Woolmen and

below is a plaque flanked by two sheep inscribed with the details of the presentation. It was installed by John Saysell and the curtain was made by Claire Lewis.

The Centenary of the start of the First World War

To commemorate the centenary of the start of First World War in August 1914, as has been mentioned, the PCC organised a flower festival in the Church, and the Local History Society arranged for the Gwent World War One travelling exhibition to be displayed in the Saysell Centre.

The Centenary of the end of the First World War

To commemorate the centenary of the end of First World War in November 1918, Glynis MacDonald organised another flower festival in the Church, and the Local History Society arranged another World War One display in the Saysell Centre. Local volunteers also stage an old Time Music Hall event at Earlswood Hall.

Memorial Tablets and Plaques in the Church

The Church is not only a memorial to God erected and maintained by faithful parishioners but it is also a memorial to all those buried in the Churchyard or remembered by the erection of memorial tablets and plaques. Not all these have been mentioned in these pages, so they are listed chronologically at Annex E.

Gifts to the Church

Many people have been generous with gifts to the Church over the years. Those that have been recorded are listed at Annex F.

Shirenewton 800

In 2020 the Church and the village will be 800 years old, and this brief history has been collated to celebrate this anniversary – and significant milestone. There are a number of events being planned by a group formed from the Community Council, the Shirenewton Local History Society, the PCC and others in the community who have volunteered to help. These will take place between June 2019 and June 2020. We hope you enjoy this special year.

Annex A: List of Incumbents from the wooden board in the Church porch

1287 Richard de Bures
1323 William Seaward
1396 John Kirketon
1399 Adam de Usk
1399 Thomas ap Adam
 ? Ranulph Brid
1438 William Colle
1438 Richard Spicer
 ? William
 ? David Paynod
1543 William Johns
1593 John Morgan
1596 Morgan Roberts
1597 Edward James M.A.
1603 Francis Godwin D.D.
1613 Philemon Blethin M.A.
1618 Thomas Williams
1633 William Murray
1640 Morgan Owen M.A.
1646 Richard Williams
1674 Marmaduke Hopkins M.A.
1675 Joshua Hotchkiss M.A.
1680 Edward Williams
1693 John Beaven
1727 Josias Prosser
1733 Lacun Lambe M.A.
1738 Westcott Littleton M.A.
1743 James Birt M.A.
1750 Samuel Butcher
1760 John Parsons M.A.
1773 Jeremiah Davies
 ? William Dyer
1816 James Ashe Gabbe M.A.
1844 James Davies B.A.
1847 Edward Inwood Jones M.A.
1856 Charles Ranken Hall M.A.
1884 Daniel George Davies
1891 George Platt Dew
1913 L.E. Richardson
1919 Frank Earnest Walters M.A.
1931 W.E.H. Williams
1933 Arther Swan Morgan M.A.
1956 Basil G. Williams BSc
1962 G.F.L. Riggs B.A.
1972 Wynne V. Lake B.A.
1977 L.C.J.G. Jones B.A.
1983 Richard William James
1985 Lawford Idwal Davies
1986 Lawrence William Way
1990 Canon Peter Wilfred Woodman BA Archdeacon
1996 Hugh Trenchard BD
2008 William Clarke Ingle-Gillis PhD Priest in Charge
2012 Nansi Davies CBE
2013 Julian E LL White BA CPS



The World War One War (1914-1918) Memorial with World War Two (1939-1945) tablet added

Annex B: Recent Church Wardens – taken from the Diocesan Registers

The Rector's Warden is chosen by the Rector, and their term of office runs from Annual Vestry Meeting to Annual Vestry meeting until they step down by mutual consent with the Rector; the People's Warden is elected every year at the Annual Vestry Meeting. These names are taken from the Monmouth Diocesan registers over the years. Sadly, it is not complete, but the table below faithfully reflects the entries in the registers.

Register	Rector's Warden	People's Warden
1924	CO Liddell	JW Scott
1925	CO Liddell	JW Scott
1926	CO Liddell	JW Scott
1931	Maj S Reynolds	JW Scott
1932	JW Scott	
1933	Lt Col Lister Sinclair-Thomson	TW Marsh
1934	Lt Col Lister Sinclair-Thomson	TW Marsh
1935	Mrs HA Cottrell	TW Marsh
1940	FC Price	RG Benjamin
1942	FC Price	RG Benjamin
1943	FC Price	RG Benjamin
1945	FC Price	RG Benjamin
1946	FC Price	RG Benjamin
1947	FC Price	PWO Liddell
1948	FC Price	J Spencer Thomas
1949	FC Price	J Spencer Thomas
1950	FC Price	J Spencer Thomas
1952	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1953	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1954	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1955	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1956	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1957	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1958	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1959	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1960	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1961	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1962	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1963	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1964	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1965	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1966	WJ Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1967	EM Davies	
1968	Mrs G Spence Thomas	EM Davies
1969-70	Mrs G Spence-Thomas	EM Davies
1970-71	Mrs G Spence-Thomas	EM Davies
1971-72	Mrs G Spence-Thomas	EM Davies
1972-73	Mrs G Spence-Thomas	RH Bowen
1973-74	Mrs G Spence-Thomas	RH Bowen
1974-75	Mrs G Spence-Thomas	RH Bowen
1975-76	Mrs G Spence-Thomas	RH Bowen
1976-77	FS Davies	RH Bowen
1979-80	FS Davies	CM Willmott Jenkins
1982	FS Davies	CM Willmott Jenkins
1984	Fred Davies	Mrs D Remnant
1986	Fred Davies	Mrs D Remnant
1989	Mr DL Bowen	Mrs A Kent
1990-91	Mrs B Davies	Mrs A Kent

1994	Mrs BC Davies	Mr DJ Hopkins
1995	Mrs BC Davies	Mr DJ Hopkins
1996	Mrs BE Bowen	Mrs BC Davies
1997	Mrs J Jones	Mrs CM Smith
1998	Mrs J Jones	Mrs CM Smith
1999	Mrs J Jones	Mrs CM Smith
2000	Mrs J Jones	Mrs CM Smith
2001	Mrs J Jones	Mrs CM Smith
2002	Mrs S Saysell	Mrs A Horton
2003	Mrs S Saysell	Mrs A Horton
2004	Mrs S Saysell	Mrs A Horton
2005-06	Mrs S Saysell	Mrs A Horton
2006-07	Mrs S Saysell	Mr A Saysell
2007-08	Mrs S Saysell	Dr A Baker
2008-09	Mrs S Saysell	Dr A Baker

The Diocesan Register will not be published in the future because of the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulations (2018).

The following entries are taken from the minutes of the Annual Vestry Meetings:

2009	Sally Saysell	Andrew Baker
2010	Sally Saysell	Andrew Baker
2011	Sally Saysell	Andrew Baker
2012	Sally Saysell	Andrew Baker
2013	Sally Saysell	Andrew Baker
2014	Sally Saysell	Andrew Baker
2015	Sally Saysell	Andrew Baker
2016	Sally Saysell	Paul Morcombe
2017	Sally Saysell	Andrew Baker
2018	Sally Saysell	Andrew Baker
2019	Sally Saysell	Andrew Baker

Annex C: Humphrey de Bohun and his Descendants

The de Bohuns were a powerful family from the eleventh through to the fourteenth centuries in the history of England and Wales. They were connected to Shirenewton, Caldicot, Llanthony, St Briavels, Monmouth and the City of London. They were present at many of the defining moments in the histories of both countries.

The first Humphrey de Bohun, Humphrey with the Long Beard, was a cousin of William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy. He accompanied William the Conqueror on his invasion of England in 1066. His son was also called Humphrey de Bohun, or Humphrey the Great, and he became steward to William Rufus (King William the Second).

Humphrey de Bohun (the Third) was a loyal supporter of Henry the Second after his coronation in 1154 (although he had been linked with the rebel cause of Matilda when she tried to wrest the throne from King Stephen during the civil war of 1139-1147). He was steward to the King in 1158. When the King's three sons rebelled against him in 1173, Humphrey de Bohun supported the King and fought with a detachment of mercenary cavalry and chased the Scots (who were supporting the insurgents) across the border and burnt Berwick. Humphrey died in 1182.

This Humphrey (the Third) married Margaret, daughter of Henry, Earl of Northumberland, and when she died in 1187 she was buried in the Chapter House at Llanthony. Her son, Humphrey de Bohun (the Fourth) was also buried there following his death in 1197 fighting in France. He had married Margaret, daughter of the Earl of Huntingdon, who died in 1201, and they had a son, Henry.

Henry de Bohun (not a Humphrey!) succeeded his father in 1197. He was additionally granted the Earldom of Hereford by King John in 1200. He married Maud, daughter of Geoffrey St Piers, Earl of Essex. Henry was a steadfast opponent of the King and one of twenty-five earls who undertook to compel King John to observe Magna Carta and was excommunicated by the Pope. He was part of the army besieging Lincoln in 1216 when the Earl Marshal routed the rebels and he was captured. He was released in 1217 and his possessions restored. He started on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem but died on the way on 1st June 1220. He is also buried at Llanthony, along with his wife, Maud.

Henry's son was Humphrey de Bohun (the Fifth). Henry the Third granted him the Earldom of Hereford and the Constablership of England. He married Maud, the daughter of the Earl of Eu. In 1235 he became Marshal of the King's Household at the coronation of Henry's Queen, Eleanor of Provence. He was also appointed Constable of Dover Castle and Sheriff of Kent, and godfather of young Prince Edward who was born in 1239. In 1242 he was blamed for the Welsh uprising because he had kept for himself the inheritance of the sister of Llewellyn, the Prince of Wales. He was one of twenty-four councillors who forced King Henry to submit to the Provisions of Oxford. In the struggle of 1263 Humphrey de Bohun took the side of the King whilst his son Humphrey (the Sixth) was with the rebels led by de Montfort and the barons (he was pardoned when de Montfort was defeated). In 1265 Humphrey (the Fifth) was one of the keepers of the City of London. Maud died in 1241 and is buried at Llanthony. Humphrey married a second wife, Maud of Avenbury, and she died in Gascony in 1273. Humphrey died in 1275. He was called the Good Earl for his endeavours to curb the power of the Crown and strive for the liberties of the people. His son Humphrey (the Sixth) predeceased him in 1265.

It was Humphrey de Bohun (the Fifth), who founded the Church of St Thomas à Becket in Shirenewton in 1220 – the year of his father's death. This may be the reason he founded our Church, although it was not the only church he founded. John Stow's Survey of London, first published in 1588, records: 'Then next you have the Augustine Friars Church and Churchyard: then entering thereunto by a south gate to the west porch, a large church, having a most fine spired steeple, small, high and straight, I have not seen the

like: founded by Humphrey Bohun, Earl of Hereford and Essex, in the year 1253. ... Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford and Essex, re-edified this church in the year 1354, whose body was there buried in the choir.' [It would have been Humphrey de Bohun (the Ninth) who carried out the re-edification.]

The Rest of the Descendants of the de Bohun Family

The rest of the line of the de Bohuns is of no relevance to the history of the Church and Community of Shirenewton and Mynyddbach. It is only included here to satisfy the curiosity and interest of those who wish to know what became of this extraordinary family and their impact on our island's history.

Humphrey de Bohun (the Seventh) was born in 1249 and became Constable of England and in 1275 he married Maud de Fiennes who was a cousin of Queen Eleanor and they had a son. Stowe records: 'Elizabeth the kings daughter of England, Countesse of Holand, and Zealand, was joined in marriage to Humfrey de Bohun, earle of Hereford, and Offer, son and niece to Humfrey Bohun, late deceased'. Shortly after the coronation of King Edward the First, Llewelyn ap Gruffyd refused to pay homage to the new King and a guerrilla war ensued in the de Bohun lands at Brecknock. The final battle with Llewelyn was at Builth and Gruffyd and Llewelyn Vychan surrendered. In 1287 Humphrey was commissioned by the King to see peace was kept in the land beyond Brecknock border towards Camarthen. Humphrey died in 1298.

Humphrey de Bohun (the Eighth), the son of Humphrey de Bohun (the Seventh) was born about 1276 and succeeded his father. He had livery of his father's lands, including Caldicot, and attended the marriage of Edward the First to Queen Margaret at Canterbury in 1299. He was present at the siege of Carlaverock in the campaign against the Scots in 1300. The King decided to bring the Earldom of Hereford more under his control and he married Humphrey to his seventh daughter Elizabeth Plantagenet, widow of John, Count of Holland in 1302, and then compelled Humphrey to surrender his lands and Constablership of England to the Crown. Humphrey carried the sceptre with cross at the coronation of Edward the Second.

The first son of Humphrey de Bohun (the Eighth) was also Humphrey, born in 1304 but died in infancy so the second son, John, born in 1306 became heir when his father died in 1321. His father's death occurred during the reign of Edward the Second (1307-1327) at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. Humfrey de Bohun was taken prisoner by the Scots, but presumably he was not kept prisoner long, because shortly after: 'Mortimer sent to the Tower about the latter end of February the king gathered an hoste & went against the rebels, and at Burton upon Trent put them to flight. The king pursuing them the 16 of March, the hostes met againe at Borowbridge, where Humfrey de Bohune (by a certaine Welchman, who stode under the bridge) being thrust into the fundament with a speare, died'.

The estates were in the King's hands and it was not until Edward the Third became King in 1327 that John was granted his inheritance. He married Alice, the daughter of the Earl of Arundel. John became infirm in 1330 and at his request the King substituted his younger brother Edward as his deputy to carry out the duties of the Constable of England. During the reign of Edward the Third (1327-1377): 'About the feast of St Martine, Edward Bohune a noble man, was drowned in the Marches of Scotland: for as he was drinking a bottle of Cattell over a river, he felt himself in daunger, causing his guide to ride before him through the water, where through the smoothnesse of the stone whereon the water ran, his guide not being able to take sure footing fell downe, with his master being armed, and before any helpe could come, they were drowned in the bottome of the channel.' Edward the Third added the Earldom of Northampton to the titles of his son, William de Bohun.

John de Bohun died in 1336; his wife Alice had pre-deceased him and he had married a second wife, Margaret. His lands were taken in to the King's hands.

John de Bohun had been ably supported by his brothers. The eldest brother, Humphrey (the Ninth) was born in 1309, and his younger twin brothers William and Edward in 1312. William married Elizabeth, the daughter of Bartholomew de Bladesmere, and widow of Edmund Mortimer. All three brothers were fiercely loyal to King Edward the Third. They were part of the group that captured Mortimer (Queen Isabelle's paramour) and the Bishop of Lincoln at Nottingham Castle and took them to the Tower of London for execution. William de Bohun escorted Queen Isabelle back to the King. William and Edward accompanied the King's expedition into Scotland when Edward unfortunately lost his life. In 1338 the King sent William as a commissioner with the Earls of Northampton and Suffolk with 10,000 sacks of wool to sell in Brabant; and to treat with the Duke of Brabant as to the marriage of Prince Edward (the Black Prince). William became Constable of England by grant of his brother Humphrey and confirmed by the King.

The de Bohuns distinguished themselves during a naval battle (the Battle of Sluys) off Blankenburg (Flanders) in 1340 when the French were defeated. After a short spell of service in Scotland in 1341, William de Bohun was appointed lieutenant in Brittany in 1342. When the French fleet attempted to intercept the English fleet they were separated by a storm and William landed his forces near Vannes. He relieved Brest and defeated the French general Charles of Blois at Morlaix. A personal combat took place between Charles de Blois and William de Bohun. "(They)...fought so long with hand strokes that day that no man but a liar could give more praise to one than the other. Three times being weary they withdrew to take breath and then fell to it again, with spear and shield, sword and target but the French being routed, the right worthy and stout Charles de Blois was forced to fly."

Humphrey de Bohun and his household spent the whole year from September 1344 to October 1345 at Caldicot. Matthew Owens stated that the burgesses of Brecon must have had cause to hate the memory of the ninth Humphrey de Bohun because he deprived them of their old rights and revoked grants and charities given by his ancestors. King Edward commissioned William de Bohun to assist in the defence of Brittany, then he returned briefly to England before returning to Normandy in 1346. They pillaged Caen, returned to England with a spoil laden fleet and then prepared for the Battle of Crecy. Edward divided his army into three divisions: the first under the Black Prince with Humphrey de Bohun at his side; the second under William de Bohun; and the third under the King himself. The red dragon of Wales floated on the banner in front of the Welshmen from Caldicot. Calais surrendered to King Edward later that year. At the end of 1349 William de Bohun was created a Knight of the Garter (the Order had been founded by the King the year before).

In 1350 William was made Warden of the Scottish Marches, and in 1351 Admiral of the Fleet of the North. In 1356 he negotiated a truce with the Scots at Carlisle. He was a witness to the treaty of Bretagne in 1360 but died on his return to England shortly afterwards at the age of 48. He was the most outstanding de Bohun. The following year Humphrey de Bohun died unmarried and without issue.

William de Bohun's heir as his son Humphrey de Bohun (the Tenth). He was born in 1342. He succeeded to his uncle's titles and estates as well as those of his father and became one of the greatest landowners and wealthiest men in the country. He was created Constable of England and in 1365 was nominated a Knight of the Garter. He married Joan, daughter of Richard Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel. In 1366 he was appointed ambassador to arrange a marriage between the King's son, Prince Lionel, and the daughter of the Lord of Milan. He joined the English army to threaten Calais in 1369. In 1371 the King sent him to the continent, accompanied by the King's sixteen-year-old son Thomas of Woodstock, to confer with the Duke of Bretagne. They were attacked by the Flemings on the way but defeated them and captured a Flemish admiral. Humphrey retired to his estates and died at Pleshy in 1373 aged thirty-one years. Matthew Owens records that Humphrey restored

to the people of Brecon the rights which his uncle had taken away from them. Humphrey's co-heirs were his two daughters, Alianore or Eleanor, aged seven and Mary aged three or four (also referred to as Maria).

This was effectively the end of the de Bohun family line, but not the end of the influence of the de Bohun family. Alianore married Thomas Woodstock, the sixth and youngest surviving son of the King by Queen Philippa. King Edward the Third gave Thomas many of the de Bohun estates and his successor, King Richard II, made him Constable of England, and later General of the Forces of England at sea. He was created Duke of Buckingham in 1377 and Duke of Gloucester in 1385. Thomas's brother, the Duke of Lancaster, married his son Henry (Henry of Bolingbroke) to Maria. Thomas is believed to have had some sympathy with the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 and so he retired for a time to Caldicot Castle. Thomas led an expedition against the Scots in 1383, and in 1384 the King granted him St Briavels Castle for life. Thomas took sides against the King in 1387, imprisoning the King in the Tower of London, until 1389 when the King again secured control of the administration of the country and removed Thomas and the Duke of Warwick from office. In the same year Thomas had the honour of composing the differences between the English and Welsh scholars at Oxford.

When the King's wife died, Thomas informed the King that he had a marriageable daughter and it would, give him great pleasure if the King would marry her but the King considered they were too closely related. When the Duke of Lancaster married his mistress, Catherine Swynford, many nobles, including Thomas, resented the affront to the nobility. At some stage he was suspected of plotting to overthrow the King and a trap was set to capture him in 1397 and he was murdered with the King's connivance. Historians portray him as a patriot who undertook the greatest dangers where his own honour and the public good were concerned. He was much honoured and loved by the people because he stood up for their liberties. In Henry the Fourth's first Parliament an inquisition was made into the Duke's death and it was found that he had been smothered on the King's orders.

Mary de Bohun (1368-1394) was the younger daughter of the last Humphrey de Bohun. Through her mother, Mary was descended from Llewelyn the Great. Mary was the first wife of Henry the Fourth (1461-1470 and 1471-1483) and mother of King Henry the Fifth. Mary was never queen, as she died before her husband came to the throne. It was at Monmouth Castle, one of her husband's possessions, that Mary gave birth to her first two children, both boys. Henry, the surviving son, was later to become Prince of Wales when his father seized the throne from Richard II in 1399. On the death of his father in 1413, he became King of England as Henry the Fifth. Mary de Bohun died at Peterborough Castle, giving birth to her last child, a daughter, Philippa of England.

Annex D: The Liddell Family

There is much mention of the Liddell family in this history because of their generosity to the Church. Percy Liddell and his wife Gwendoline moved into Shirenewton Hall in 1929, but because of his position as Chairman of Liddell Brothers, a family Merchant Trading firm in China, at that stage they did not stay there very long. During the war, the local Home Guard trained in the grounds and the Hall was used as a hospital for convalescing servicemen. It is understood that the family moved out at some time after 1940 and then returned to Shirenewton Hall in 1945, and the family continued to live there until 1976, when they sold it and largely moved away from the area. Percy had died in 1967, and Gwendoline survived him until 1978. They are both buried in the Shirenewton Churchyard in a double grave, next to the grave of one of their sons. There is another family grave in the Churchyard.

Their second son, Ian Liddell, was commissioned into the Coldstream Guards during the Second World War and took part in the liberation of Europe from the first day and was among the first to enter Germany. He showed amazing courage and was blessed with unbelievable good luck when he saved a strategic bridge from destruction. The bridge was heavily defended and prepared for demolition, but Captain Liddell ran forward alone to neutralise the charges. Unprotected and at all times under intense enemy fire, he crossed and re-crossed the whole length of the bridge, disconnecting the charges at both ends and underneath it. The bridge was captured intact, and the way cleared for the advance over the river. For his outstanding gallantry and superb example of courage, Captain Liddell was awarded the Victoria Cross. He later died of wounds subsequently received in action when he was shot by a sniper and he died on the way to hospital.

Another son, David, was commissioned into the Cameronians on the outbreak of war and was awarded the Military Cross for outstanding bravery in Italy. During the advance through Italy, his company came under severe enemy fire, so he charged a machine-gun post single-handed, knocked it out with hand grenades, and enabled his men to continue their advance. Previously, while training at the depot at Hamilton racecourse he assisted in the detention of Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess, who had landed nearby. Hess was escorted to the Tower of London by David where his brother, Ian, as commander of the Tower Guard, relieved him of his prisoner! In 1968 David inherited the Shirenewton estate from his father and embarked on a new career as a farmer and breeder of Friesian cattle. David lived to the ripe old age of 91.

There are seven surviving grandchildren of Percy and Gwendoline, who are all now in their sixties and seventies. They still take an interest in the Church, the village and the Hall. It is believed that Eric Liddell, the famous Scottish Olympic gold medallist sprinter in the 1924 Paris Olympics, and Christian missionary, was related to the family.

John Aidan Liddell VC MC

By coincidence, another Liddell was awarded the VC for gallantry in the First World War. John Aidan Liddell served with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders on the Western Front. He was born in 1888, educated at Stonyhurst College and Balliol College, Oxford. He spent 43 days in the trenches in command of the machine gun section before being awarded the Military Cross at Le Maisnil, France, and then training as a pilot and joining No 7 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps. While flying a reconnaissance mission over Belgium, his aircraft was raked by machine gun fire and he was severely wounded in the right thigh. This caused momentary unconsciousness, but by great effort he recovered partial control of his plane when it had dropped nearly 3,000 feet and succeeded, under fire, in completing his mission and returned to Allied lines, saving the life of his observer. He was awarded the VC for this action. He is not believed to be related to the Liddells who lived in Shirenewton Hall.

Annex E: Memorial Tablets and Plaques in the Church

In Memory of John Reece of the Parish of Mounton who died May 19th 1839, aged 60 years. South wall nave, marble tablet.

In affectionate memory of Edward Inwood Jones MA for eight years Rector of this Parish, who died April 18th AD 1856. Aged 43 years. To his exertions the Parishioners owe the Restoration and Enlargement of their Church. AD 1853. His remains are interred in the Churchyard of St Pauls, Chichester. North wall of chancel, marble tablet.

In the Churchyard rest the remains of Lt Colonel Alfred Lawson Lowe, 4th Battn The Sherwood Foresters (Derbyshire Regiment) one of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Monmouth and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Born at Beeston Lodge in Nottinghamshire Novr the 2nd 1849, died May the 29th 1888.

Looking for the Resurrection of the dead and the Life of the World to Come. Placed in Loving Memory by Gertrude Emily his wife. South wall of chancel, brass tablet.

"By the Cross and Passion Good Lord Deliver Us."

Marianne Gertrude Perez died 10 April 1867 aged 25. South wall sanctuary, window ledge.

In memory of Charles Ranken Hall MA 28 years Rector of this Parish from 1856 to 1884. Who died at Weston Super Mare on the 5th day of June 1890. North wall of chancel, brass tablet.

"Make him to be numbered with thy Saints in Glory Everlasting."

To the Glory of God and in Honoured Memory of George Platt Dew BA Cantab. Rector of this Parish from 1891 to 1913. This tablet is erected by his young friends Percy, Kenneth and Norman Liddell as a token of affection and esteem. South wall of chancel, marble tablet.

"Peace Perfect Peace."

Sacred to the Memory of Horace Boast killed in action on the Anzio Beach-head, Italy, 3rd April 1944. Aged 33 years. South wall, nave, marble tablet

"Faithful unto Death"

To the Glory of God and in Memory of the men of the Parish who fell in the World War 1939 - 1945.

L/Sgt C Thomas Attewell
Capt Ian O Liddell VC
Spr Bernard J Banfield
Smn David T Lewis
Gnr Horace T Boast
Cpl Albert J Thomas
Sgt N Robert Bolt
Gnr Arthur L Waters

South wall, marble tablet

In Memory of Edward Joseph Lowe FRS FRHS FRAS FMS ETC DC of Shirenewton Hall and Highfields House, Notts. Born Nov 11th 1825 died March 10th 1890. Also Annie his wife, died March 12th 1915, aged 86. Also Hugh LEEPeyton, their son, born Oct 27th 1857, died May 2nd 1933 whose remains are in the Churchyard. Also Emily Glover, faithful friend of the family of Lowe, died March 17th 1896, aged 90. South wall of chancel, brass tablet.

Annex F: Gifts donated to the Church

1880 Large silver paten: "Edwardi Josephi Lowe Armigeri AD MDCCCLXXX"

1881 A sold silver chalice with paten cover: given in 1881 by then Rector, the Rev Charles Ranken Hall to mark his 25th year as Rector.

1887 Brass lectern: "DG Davies, MS Rector, AE Lawson-Lowe BP, John Williams Churchwarden; the gift of the parishioners of Shirenewton; Victoria Jubilee 1887"

1896 Brass crucifix in memory of S Kirke Swan, CONTD CLERIC AM OB 1896.

1908 Organ donated by CO Liddell Esq JP 27th June 1908

1918 Bell donated by Capt CO Liddell, Shirenewton Hall in 1918

1934 Oak Glastonbury Chairs: "AMDG Presented to Shirenewton Parish Church, September 1934 by Mrs Cottrell, Rector's Warden"

1939 Oak Credence table presented to the Rev AS Morgan MA, Rector of Shirenewton, by the Members of the Monmouth Clerical Association 1939 for service rendered 1928-1938.

1941 Brass collection plate: "Edward Rice Swan Morgan, died at Shirenewton rectory 1935, aged 65. Also Mary Kathleen Morgan, his only sister, died 1940 aged 75. Presented by their brothers, John and Arthur, Rector of Shirenewton 1941".

1942 Brass collection plate stand, in memory of Thomas Bernard Humphries, died 1942.

1945 Brass vases (matching pair): The Rev John Percy Morgan 1945

1967 Oak Housling bench with padded kneeler: "This chapel was erected to the Glory of God and in Loving Memory of Charles Oswald Liddell DL JP of Shirenewton Hall and of his wife Bessie by their family April 1967"

1967 Portable Light Oak Lectern: "This Lectern was given to the Glory of God and in Memory of Lillian Sleeman. The Gift of her Husband, April 1967".

1969 Oak altar rail (left side): "To the Glory of God and in Loving Memory of Percy Williams Oswald Liddell JP, of Shirenewton Hall. This Altar Rail was the gift of his wife, 1969".

1969 Oak altar rail (right side): "To the Glory of God and in Loving Memory of Ian Oswald Liddell and Jenny Bourne (nee Liddell). This Altar Rail was given by their brother and sisters 1969".

1969 Solid silver chalice and paten in red velvet lined box, gift of Mrs G Spence-Thomas in memory of her husband: "AMDG William James Spence-Thomas, Rector's warden 1947-1966".

1971 Processional Cross: "In Memory of Canon F Riggs, Rector of Shirenewton, 1963-1971".

1973 Octagonal limestone font with lead lining mounted on a round stone base flat oak carved cover: "1900 William Coakham 1973".

1974 Two Standard candle holders with brass tops: "Margaret Utting 1914-1974".

1978 Light oak screen on south side of organ: "In memory of a devoted husband Geoffrey Cornaby, organist 1962-1978".

1982 Brass ewer: "In loving memory of Gladys Carr Young. 1888-1982".

1990 Plated silver Ciborium with lid: "In fond memory of David Leighton Bowen 1925-1990 RIP".

1992 Solid silver square bread box: "In fond memory of Edwin Michael Davis and Dorcas May Davies RIP – August 1992".

1995 New woollen tapestry kneelers donated by the people of the parish 21st May 1995.

1995 Wooden shield depicting the coat of arms of Humphrey de Bohun presented by Barbara Davies to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Victory in Europe on 8th May.

1996 Four tapestry cushion pads donated by Barbara Davies – Feb 1996.

1997 New altar table for use in the nave presented in January 1997.

1997 Pulpit falls donated by Barbara Davies in January 1997.

2003 Altar frontal and accessories presented by Mrs June Jorgansen in memory of her husband, the late Peter Jorgansen in October 2003

2004 Linen and lace cloth presented by Mrs Dorothy Brabon in June 2004 and worked by Eleanor Trot in memory of Mrs Brabon's mother, the late Mrs Eleanor Evans.

2005 Tapestry in the style of a stained glass window, worked on by Barbara Davies, Betty Knox, Claire Lewis and Auriol Horton; sponsored by Bernice Bowen, Beryl Bartlett, Bobbie J Bounds, Wendy Baker, Thelma Blackman, Kevin Bounds, Joanna Daisy Bounds, Mavis Cristobel Bryant, Rose Bowen, Claire Marina Beckett, Pauline Dutton, Barbara Davies, Anthony Davies, Fred S Davies, Barbara Hopkins, Dennis Hopkins, Josephine Betty Hayward, Auriol Horton, Winifred Jones, Jean Jones, Betty Knox, Claire Lewis, Gladys Dorian Lloyd, Ann Llewellyn, Glynis Margaret MacDonald, Marion McAdam, Thelma Moore, Monty Moore, Beverley Moore, Maureen Gillian Moody, I Norton, Vyvyan Charles Noakes, Diane Nicholas, Margaret Sankey, Emily Seawright, June Stait, Lynn Thomas, Ivy Wells and Nancy M Wicks. Presented in September 2005

2006 Candle stand for offertory candles presented by John Nichola

2017 Red altar frontal donated by Claire Lewis

Undated gifts

Solid silver fluted chalice cup, JAMAG (Rev James Ashe Gabb and May Anne his wife, daughter of William Hollis of Shirenewton Hall

Brass vases (matching pair): Ethel Russell

Brass vases (matching pair) in Lady Chapel – in memory of Lily Green

2 Oak Glastonbury Chairs – Rec C Ranken Hall, Rector

Wooden memorial bookcase – Presented to the Church of St Thomas a Becket, Shirenewton, in memory of Mary Hannah Phelps by her family.

Annex G: Shirenewton Hall and the Murder in the Hall

Shirenewton Hall, originally Shirenewton House, and then Shirenewton Court, is a country house and estate adjoining the village of Shirenewton, Monmouthshire. The 29.5 acre (11.9 hectares) estate is located on the hillside, and commands views across the "Golden Valley" to the west and the Severn estuary in the south. The main building was constructed around 1830, and partly rebuilt around 1900–1910, on the site of an earlier house which was the birthplace of William Blethyn, Bishop of Llandaff. The house is now a Grade II listed building, and the tea house in the adjoining Japanese garden is listed as Grade II*. The estate is not currently open to the public, but some charities have been allowed to visit the house and gardens by arrangement.

Prior to the construction of Shirenewton Court, an earlier building was occupied since the Middle Ages by the Blethyn (or Bleddyn) family. It was William Blethyn's birthplace, probably around 1520; he died in 1590. Shirenewton Court was built around 1830 in an Italianate style on or near the site of the older building. It was built for William Hollis by an unknown architect. Hollis, a descendent from an industrialist family who developed paper mills at nearby Moun-ton, was the Sheriff of Monmouthshire in 1831.

About fifty years after Shirenewton Hall's construction, when it was no longer known as Shirenewton Court, the Blethyn family had "descended in the social scale" and sold the property to Edward Joseph Lowe. He was a botanist, horticulturalist, meteorologist and writer who was largely responsible for designing and planting the surrounding gardens. Lowe added two open pavilions, the larger being of sandstone with a glazed tile roof, while the smaller had a copper roof. He also added a summer house with a marble sundial. Lowe wrote many books on the cultivation of woodland ferns and some species of these grow around the churchyard walls at Shirenewton Church.

After Lowe's death in 1900, the estate was sold to Charles Oswald Liddell, a wealthy shipping merchant who traded with China and Japan and who became Sheriff of Monmouthshire in 1918. Liddell's renovations including exchanging the Italianate facade with a Jacobean style in 1901. An east wing, added in 1909, was designed by Chepstow architect Norman Evill, a pupil of Edwin Lutyens; it included a billiard room, loggia, and belvedere tower. The north end of the house was also remodelled. Various stones were used during the renovation, including mauve Old Red Sandstone and yellow Bath stone.

Murder in the Hall

On 6th December 1897 a boy named Albert Harrisfield, a stable boy at Shirenewton Hall, was found dead in the harness room, shot through the heart. He was found by the head groom. A double-barrelled gun was lying against the corner wall of the room, two yards from the deceased. The discharged shot had passed through his body causing instantaneous death and many pieces of lead shot were lodged in the ceiling.

The inquest took place on 8th December at the Five Bells Inn, Shirenewton. The jury returned a verdict to the effect that the deceased did not shoot himself – the weapon was too far from the body. There was no evidence to show how the shooting took place, so it may have been an accident or murder. The body appeared to have been laid out 'peacefully and decently'. The empty cartridge and all trace of the wads had been removed from the gun. Clearly someone had found the body without reporting the murder.

Police Sergeant Lewis and Police Constable Foxall investigated the affair. It was established that the gun belonged to PEH Lowe, an Army Officer, grandson of Mr Edward Lowe, the owner of the Hall. He had been in the Rectory when the shooting took place, sometime between three and four o'clock in the afternoon.

At the close of the evidence, Captain Parker, the police superintendent asked for an adjournment for more time to investigate. The Coroner, Mr M Roberts-Jones, did not think this would serve any useful purpose. The Jury, unusually chaired by the Rector, came to a verdict of accidental death. In January 1898 Mr Edward Lowe offered a £20 reward to anyone with information about the case.

In 1896 PC Foxall had been involved in an affray whilst apprehending a poacher and suffered injuries to the head, causing a noticeable change in his demeanour. In February 1898 Harrisfield's sister wrote to the Home Secretary asking him to take up the case. It appears that Police Constable Foxall "lost the support of his superintendent" and was posted to a Sergeant's station at Blaenavon in 1898 "as a result of one of his cases being dismissed earlier that year at Shirenewton". By Christmas 1898 he had been moved on again to Ponytpool Police Station; he resigned on 30th June 1899 having been admitted to Abergavenny Asylum, where he died on 27th October 1899.



Ordnance Survey map of 1887

It is perhaps unusual that this History of Shirenewton and Mynyddbach Church and Community, which was inspired by the murder of St Thomas à Becket in 1170 in Canterbury Cathedral, should end with a murder in Shirenewton Hall seven hundred years later.

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A photograph of a picture of the Church from Lambeth Palace library
date unknown

Previous page – details of some of the carved corbel stones in the Church