



Saint Buryan, Cornwall

ecclesia Sancte Beriane

Church of St Buryan

Possible church fabric

Grid ref SW 409 255

Date

Blocked arches in North wall of chancel (possibly with through stones). Quoins do not appear to be Anglo-Saxon. Anglo-Saxon tombstones inside church.

The Saint

Of St Buryan, the Saint to whom this Church and Parish are dedicated, very little is known. She has been identified with one Bruniec, a King's daughter of Ireland, who was thought to have come over to Cornwall with S. Piran and others about AD 400. Lyson says that S. Buryan was a friend of S. Patrick's; if so, it was about AD 464 that she "came into Cornwall and landed as Pendinas, a peninsula and stony rok, wher now the ton of S. Ives standeth." (Leland, 1534). The Exeter Martyrology (C12) says "By the merits of St Beriona the Virgin, a son of King Gerontius was healed of paralysis".

Her Feast Day in the Exeter Martyrology is 1 May, and is now kept in the Parish on the Sunday nearest to 13 May (old May Day). In the Roman Calendar she is now commemorated on 4 June, and in the Irish Calendar St Bruniec Feast is kept on 29 May.

There are only three other dedications to St Buryan: Veryann, near Falmouth; St Berrien, Brittany, near Finesterre (Land's End); and Lanverrien, near Carhaix.

A Short Parish History

According to tradition, King Athelstan rested the night in the cell attached to the small Oratory of St Buryan, the night before he sailed to conquer the Isles of Scilly. The next morning he made his communion and vowed that if he were successful he would found and endow a Church. The expedition was successful and by a Charter dated 6 October 932, signed by the King and witnessed by three Archbishops, Bishop Donan of St Germans and many other court officials "in villa que dicitur Kyngestone", the King gave lands to the Parish "ea videlicet condicione ut libera sit illa prefata terra ab omni mundiali censu nisi oracione quam Clerici michi promisuerunt". (From a copy of the Charter made in 1238 and now in the *Exeter Episc. Registry*.) ...

The Charter of King Athelstan

There are only two copies of this Charter extant, one made in 1238, at the orders of Bishop Briwire and now in the Exeter Episcopal Registry, and the other given by Dean Knollys in his "Register of St Buryan College" (1473), in a very much shorter form, and now in the Cambridge University Library. The original Charter was destroyed in a fire that burnt out the Deanery House in 1287. Doubt has been thrown in the copy of 1238; it is said to be a mediæval forgery and that there was no earlier copy. Many difficulties and errors are produced as evidence of forgery, and these do exist, but the majority of them are mistakes that no forger would make and other could easily be the result of copyists' errors. The following is the short form of the Charter, from Dean Knollys Register:-

Ego Ethelstanus rex anglorum etc., pro petitione nobilium meorum dedi quandam particulam terre ecclesie sancte Berine ea videlicet condicione ut libera sit ab omni censu nisi ab oratione quam clerici michi Promiserunt id est centum missas et centum psalteria et quotidianas oraciones. Ego Athelstanus rex totius Britannie hoc cirographum cum signo sancte crucis X corroboravi. Ego Huselmus archiepiscopus consensi et subscripsi. Et Ego Ecketset archiepiscopus affirmavi et subscripsi cum pluribus aliis. Et Ego Ethelstanus dux testis. Et Ego Elsihe dux testis cum pluribus aliis.

The very much longer form in the Exeter Episcopal Register gives the boundaries of the property given to the Church and many of the names can be found today, one of them being spelt letter for letter the same. There are also the names of one more Bishop, Donanus of St Germans, and fourteen court officials as witnesses and of these thirteen names are found as witnesses to documents about AD 932. The longer form is also dated very carefully to the regnal year, the year of our Lord, the lunar year, the epact and the cyclical year, but it is almost impossible to make them agree.

The Church

Of the Oratory of St Buryan, in which King Athelstan worshipped, nothing now remains to be seen. In AD 931, on the site of this Oratory was built the Church of King Athelstan, and experts have

Saint Buryan, Cornwall

expressed the opinion that the building on the north side of the Chancel is the only remaining piece of this work. It seems to have been quite a small building, the west wall being just east of the present screen. In the C13 a larger Church was erected ...In the middle of the C18 the whole of the north wall of the Church had to be pulled down and re-built and at the same time the small leanto Chapel on the north wall of the Chancel was pulled down and the arch built up.

Stone Crosses

The Church possesses two Celtic Crosses. One stands in the Churchyard just outside the South Porch and is thought by some to be of C8 workmanship. It does not look as though it ever had a long shaft. The steps on which it stands are C18. One side of the Cross shows the Crucifixion and the reverse shows five hemispheres, a

common simple for the five Wounds of our Lord. It is a very fine example of the Churchyard Cross.

Standing in the road, just outside the south gateway, is a C11 Cross on a solid base of granite ...

Many more Crosses will be noticed on the road sides. St Buryan is said to possess more than any other Parish in Cornwall, but many are out of place. Also several still stand in the fields and many fields in all parts of the Parish still retain the name of "Cross Field".

For a fuller account of these Crosses see: Hencken's *Cornwall and Scilly*; Langdon's *Cornish Crosses*; and the note by the late Charles Henderson in the *Cornish Church Guide*.

*From Reverend C. B. Crofts, M.A.,
Rector of St Buryan from 1926 to 1955:
St Buryan, reprinted from his earlier leaflet*

