



**Holy Trinity**  
Combe Down

## Did you know?

### The surprising history of the grounds of Holy Trinity Church, Combe Down

#### **'Chapel of Ease'**

A growing population, and an Act of Parliament passed during the reign of George IV for the building of new churches, prompted several householders in Combe Down to petition the Bishop of Bath and Wells for a 'Chapel of Ease', namely a church building other than the parish church which at the time was St James in Southstoke. Money for the land and building was raised mostly through subscription, and the finding of a Gregory Cross linked the church to Augustine's mission to Britain. The foundation stone was laid in 1832, the church consecrated in June 1835, and in 1854 it became the parish church of Combe Down.

#### **The grounds of the church grounds**

Waste from the substantial quarrying in the area left the land rough and uneven. For a time, it was used to dry washing taken in by quarrymen's wives living in the cottages opposite, built in 1729 by the entrepreneur Ralph Allen for his labourers. The land for the church, its grounds and the adjacent vicarage, was purchased from a Mr B Bartrum for £200.00 in 1831.

#### **Unfit for burial?**

Contrary to popular opinion that the rocky subsoil meant a churchyard was not practical, the real reason was the reputation of Combe Down as a 'pleasant and healthful place of resort' where invalids came to convalesce. In April 1837 the church grounds were designated 'Ornamental Gardens', the responsibility of a locally elected body including the vicar and churchwardens. Burials would take place in Monkton Combe graveyard and money was raised to purchase more land to accommodate this.

#### **'Quiet, shady retreat'**

A subscription was payable to enter the grounds and a deposit required for the key, according to the Trust Deed. This also stipulated that both church and village participate in looking after the grounds and enjoy them 'after the manner of a private garden'. Any games that might damage the church were prohibited, and defacement of trees or shrubs would incur the cost of putting it right.

### **Ancient and modern**

Many of the 50 or so trees in the grounds may date back to the early days of planting, according to the latest survey conducted in 2013. This particularly applies to the Sycamore and Beech trees. Careful maintenance ensures the garden is still a place of enjoyment, where children play, adults socialise or take time to reflect quietly, and visitors pass through on their way to and from the surrounding area. QR codes provide a different route to prayer, benches offer a moment of rest, lights illumine the main pathways in winter.

### **A place of welcome**

How might the church grounds be maintained for the future? A place of welcome continues to be a priority, alongside responsible practices so the garden is friendly to wildlife as well as to people. No harmful chemicals are used, wildflowers are being planted, leaves are mulched and used for compost and care is taken about the long-term health of the garden. Volunteers work hard alongside the church team. Wildlife surveys are encouraged and a tree trail is under consideration.

Any further ideas or practical contributions are warmly welcomed, so God's creation can continue to be celebrated and enjoyed to the full in this place of peace.

### **Sources (with grateful thanks to Alan Hodges)**

Exploring Combe Down by Keith Dallimore, Millstream Books, Bath, 1988

Combe Down History, Townswomen's Guild, Lonsdale Universal Printing Ltd, 1965 reprinted 1973

Holy Trinity Church Combe Down 1835-1985, A History by Elizabeth Perrott & Kathie Botley, Acorn, Bath, 1985

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