

Tiverton Almshouse Trust

John Waldron Chapel



Background

John Waldron was born in about 1520. His business was manufacturing and exporting woollen cloth to Spain from which he acquired a good fortune and towards the end of his lifetime he built the almshouses and chapel in Wellbrook Street, Tiverton.

On the outside of the chapel, Waldron wrote that to give to the poor is an act of praise of God. By deed poll of 1577 he directed the distribution of a weekly pension among the eight most needy local people in the town and provided the almshouses for them to live in. He also paid for the shrouds for their burial. The inscription under the gallery reads "Depart thy goods whyl thou has tyme, After thye deathe, they are not thyne. God save Queen Elizabeth".

John Waldron died in 1579 before the almshouses were finished and his widow Richard finished off the project. The almshouses and chapel walls were only 14' high. The chapel is small but is well built with good stone turrets and a bell to call the almsmen to daily prayers.

The chapel which measures 15 square feet, is not only an architectural gem but also a place of worship and quiet reflection used today by residents of Greenway Gardens. The walls of the chapel are built of volcanic and red sandstone rock whilst the richly carved dressings and mouldings to the windows, doorways and parapets are of limestone. The chapel was restored by Tiverton Almshouse Trust in 1990 and 2021.

The Bell

The bell in the bellcote is about 18" in diameter and weighs a little over one hundredweight (eight stone). It has decorative friezes above and below the inscription band and the inscription is in black gothic letters with various stops and a small relief Virgin & Child and a rose on the waist. The inscription in old Dutch translates: "In the year 1539 Aelbert Hackman cast me in Cleve. Jesus, Mary, Anne".

Cleve, the birthplace of Henry VIII's wife Anne of Cleves is now in West Germany near the Dutch border. Aelbert Hackman was a famous bellfounder. An example of his work is in the National Bell Museum at Asten in the Netherlands. No other example of his work in Britain is known.

The date 1539 makes this the oldest bell in Devon to bear a date in its inscription. There are many older bells but few medieval bells are dated. It is also 50 years older than the almshouses and so it has been suggested that John Waldron probably bought it second-hand on one of his business trips to the continent.

Tiverton Almshouse Trust

The origin of the Trust dates back to the 16th century and, in particular, to three benefactors who were all wealthy Tiverton Merchants (John Greenway, John Waldron and George Sleees).

Today, there are 40 almshouses on the site behind the chapel with a further 44 almshouses on two other sites in Tiverton. These are for people aged 60 years or over in a financial or housing need. The Trust also provides residential accommodation and has a number of commercial properties within the town including shops, offices and flats available to let on shorthold assured tenancies.

Visit

The Trust will hold open days throughout the year for the general public to be able to see this important historic chapel. If you would like to visit the chapel, please look at our website for dates or contact us below:

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