

KINGS CAPLE was given its name to distinguish it from the other two Caples, How Caple and Caplefore (Brockhampton) which both belonged to the Canons of the Cathedral of Hereford at the time of the Norman Conquest and were both occupied by English people.

At that time the inhabitants of Kings Caple were Welsh speaking people because it formed part of the Welsh land of Ergyng which the English called Archenfield. Together with the rest of Archenfield, the people kept their own laws and customs but owed allegiance directly to English kings. For that reason it was called Kings Caple.

The churchyard occupies part of what was once the bailey of a Norman castle whose motte, known as Caple Tump, stands across the road. The road was part of a Roman road known until this century as Caple Street.

The oldest parts of the present church are the nave and the chancel arch which were built in the 13th century. The tower was added early in the 14th century and the chancel was rebuilt later in the same century when the top stage of the tower was added. The last additions were the porch and the Lady chapel in about 1400.

The six windows in the south side of the church are all different. The high window in the nave above the tomb recess is the oldest and dates from the mid to late 13th century. It has two trefoiled lights with a quatrefoil in the spandrel.

The tomb recess contains a coffin slab with tapering sides, said to be late 13th century but difficult to date as it is uncarved and perfectly plain.

Before the Lady chapel was built, the altar for the service of Our Lady stood to the south of the chancel arch lit by the long 14th century window, the head of which carries up above the level of the eaves and is set in a gable. The quatrefoil piscina can be seen in the sill of this window. To its right is the now doorless aumbry - the cupboard where the chalice and the holy oils used for baptism, confirmation and for anointing the dying were kept.

The Lady Chapel and South porch were both built in the late 14th or early 15th century. Both have stone vaulting with ridge and diagonal ribs meeting at a central panel filled with a rose.

In the Lady Chapel the diagonal ribs spring from moulded corbels one of which is carved with a head, now badly worn. The ridge ribs spring from the bosses which are also carved with heads. A king and bishop on the East wall; a man on the North wall; and on the West wall and over the South arch are two pagan surrounded with leaves. These are an interesting reminder that the pagan Celtic deities were far from forgotten when the Lady Chapel was built.

The projecting semi-octagonal piscina can be seen in the corner of the chapel

nearest to the pulpit. The altar formerly stood to its left. In the North wall of the chapel the extensively restored window of four cinquefoiled lights carries at the top some of the original medieval glass. This shows Christ's head crowned with thorns and some fragments from the original border of golden crowns. The late Victorian glass below was made by John Hardman & Co. of Birmingham.

The tall pulpit and sounding board are Jacobean. The pews were installed in 1638. At that time there was no vestry and there were 17 seats on the north side of the aisle which was the women's side. The men all sat on the south side and in the Lady chapel. The six seats nearest to the back of the north side and the two rearmost seat on the men's side were for 'younger people and servants'. An unusual custom was reservation of the sixth seat on the north side for 'mens daughters of better rank that are unmarried for the present'.

The Gallery was put up in the early 18th century. In the 1850's the first organ was housed in the Gallery.

A fine Benefactions board on the west wall of the church can only be seen from the Gallery. The board was put up in 1796 and shows that Kings Caple was fortunate in having six charities for the Poor and for the repair of the church. It also lists a most unusual charity called Cake Money:

*Cake Money 'Lady Skidmore paid by Mr Robinson of Baysham 5s 10d yearly.
So called Thomas Lucas paid by John Silvester of Sellick 10d'*

The people named were the owners and tenants of the land from which the total of 6s 8d was paid.

Cake Money originated in 1484 under the will of Thomas More, a vicar of Sellack and Kings Caple who died on or within a day or two of Palm Sunday 1484. His will says:

'I will that bread and ale to the value of 6s 8d be distributed to all and singular in the aforesaid churches for the good of my soul'.

The churches being Sellack, Kings Caple and Hentland.

The unique custom of PAX cakes to all the people in the congregations of the three churches on Palm Sunday with the greeting of 'Peace and Good Neighbourhood' is still continued.

As you leave the church through the stone vaulted porch you can see the small niche over the arch which would formerly have housed a stone figure, perhaps of the patron saint - St. John the Baptist. The traceried spandrels within the square head enclosing the arch contain two shields, now blank.

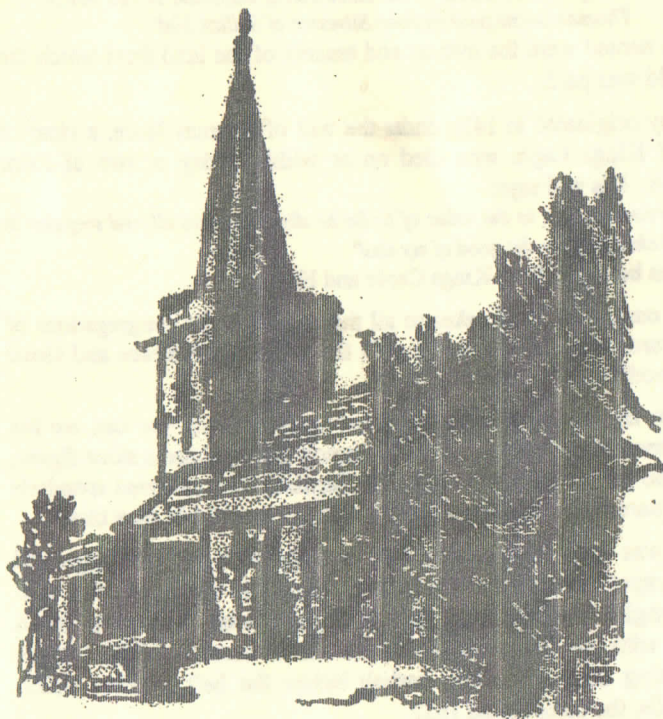
The Tower was built in the early 14th century with the top stage and embattled parapet added in the late 14th century. The octagonal spire with rolls at the angles is of the same date or slightly later. The tower has a string-course with ball flower ornament between the second and third stages and a projecting band with stone corbels below the bell chamber which houses six bells, the oldest dated 1632.

The three octagonal steps and the square base of the Churchyard Cross can be seen to the east of the path. The head of the cross was smashed by a falling tree during a gale in 1947. The war memorial was relocated in 2005 and occupies the space where this large tree once stood. It was one of the very few remaining cross heads of its type, having a gabled head with a carving of Christ on the Cross on one side and the seated figure of the Virgin and Child on the other.

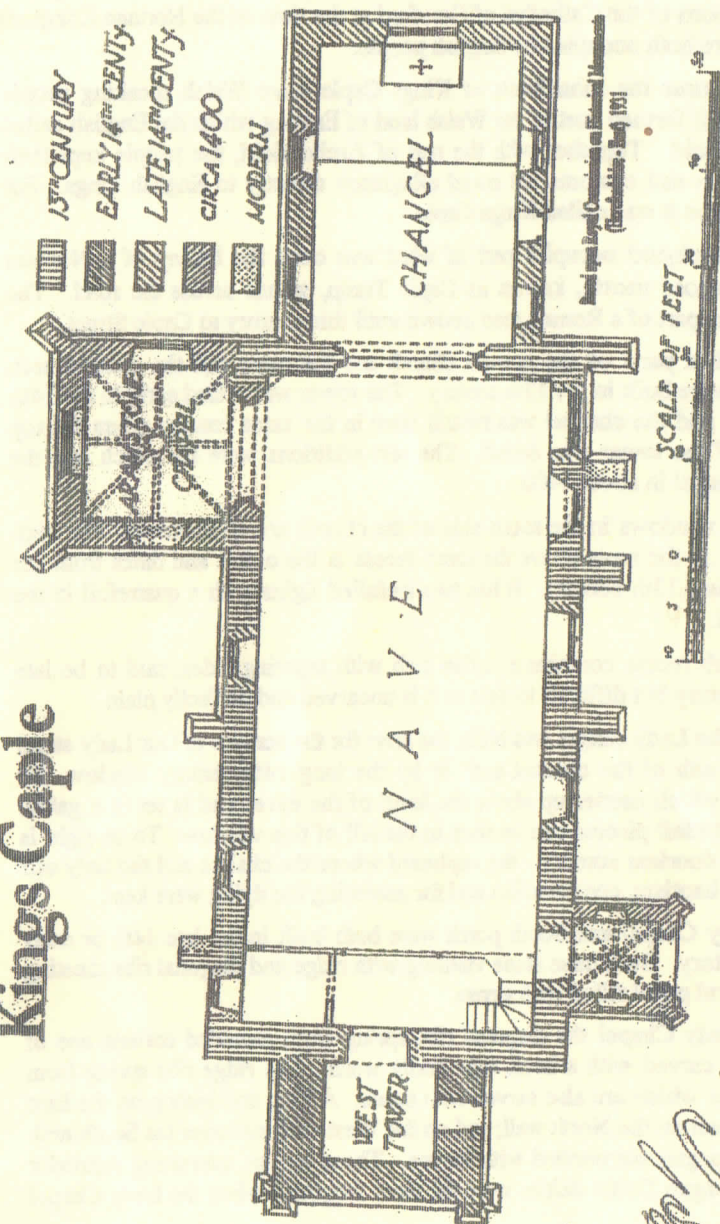
It has always been known in Kings Capse as the Plague Cross and the reason for this became apparent some 30 odd years ago when work on the path cut through the edge of a Plague Pit near the Cross. At least 25 people and probably many more had been buried. During the Plague years of the 17th century Kings Capse had been unaffected with no more than average number of deaths recorded in the Register. The Plague Pit probably contains the victims of the Black Death of 1348. The Cross was already standing before that catastrophe and probably became known as the Plague Cross from that time.

There was a stone sundial on top of the wall facing the road (stolen in 1996). The mounting block outside the churchyard gates was put there in 1784.

We hope you have enjoyed your visit.



Church of St. John, Baptist Kings Capse



Visitors Guide