

**THE PARISH CHURCH OF  
THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
CHILTHORNE DOMER**

# The Reredos



Many visitors to St Mary's Church comment upon the carved reredos behind the altar at the east end of the church.

The reredos was the gift of the Rev'd Henry Elliott Dixon and his sisters, Elizabeth and Isabella. It was given in memory of their parents the Rev'd W. Dixon (Rector of Chilthorne Domer, 1860-1884) and his wife Jane. It was placed in the church in 1889 following a major restoration of the church by the Rev'd Dixon, completed in 1883.

On June 14<sup>th</sup> 1889 the *Western Gazette* published a report of the service held to celebrate its installation, which includes this description of the reredos.

Chilthorne Church has been presented with one of the most magnificent specimens of wood-carving, in the form of a new reredos, to be found in the county. It is no secret that when the church was restored several years ago, it was contemplated by the then rector, the Rev. W. T. Dixon (father of the present rector), to add to the chancel, at his own expense, some embellishment worthy of the sacred edifice. The hand of death prevented the realisation of his intentions, and it was thus left to his children not only to complete the unfinished work, but to erect at the same time a memorial to a departed friend. The reredos, which has been given to the church by the Rev. Henry Elliott Dixon, M.A., Elizabeth Frances Dixon, and Isabella Mary Smith (son and daughters respectively of the late rector), is a marvel of skilful work, displaying in the highest degree the carver's skill, and all who love art would be amply repaid by a visit to the church. The reredos has been executed by Mary R. Pinwill and her two sisters, daughters of the Rev. E. Pinwill, of Ermington Vicarage, Devon, who have adopted carving as their profession. Their work is of the first order, and entitles them to be classed amongst the finest wood-carvers in the country. The reredos stretches across the whole width of the east end of the

church. The centre is divided into three panels, representative of the Nativity, the Ascension, and the Lord's Supper. Each panel is two feet wide, and the centre one three feet six inches high. The carving, cut out of a solid block six inches thick, is five inches deep. The different figures and groups are beautifully arranged and very delicately carved, the utmost care and finish having been bestowed on every detail of figure and drapery. The ascending Saviour, as represented in the centre panel, passing through a cloud of descending angels, is executed with remarkable skill. The double canopies are wonderful specimens of art. They are surmounted by beautiful finials, while on the four columns stand angels with upturned wings, each playing a musical instrument. The sides of the reredos, which stretch to each wall of the chancel, are one mass of carving from top to bottom. An exquisite cresting is followed by a superb bordering of vine leaves. Then are emblems of the evangelists and of the Passion; underneath, fine diaper work, and on the styles and rails many beautiful patterns are carved. On either side are engraved the initials of the late Rector and his wife - "W.T.D. Vicar, 1860-1884. Ob. 6 July, 1884," and "J.I.D. Ob. 4 April, 1884," respectively. An adequate idea of the exquisite beauty and richness of the work can only be gained by an inspection, and the parishioners of Chilthorne may well be congratulated on possessing in their church this remarkably beautiful work of art. [There follows an account of the service held for the dedication of the reredos.]

The full text of the *Western Gazette* report, and the text of another report about the restoration carried out in 1883 can be seen on our website.

The reredos was designed by Edmund H. Sedding and carved by Mary Pinwill and her sisters Ethel and Violet. They set up their company, Rashleigh, Pinwill & Co in 1889 and the Chilthorne reredos is one of their earliest works. They are responsible for many carved church furnishings throughout Devon and Cornwall (including a number of carvings for Truro Cathedral), with a number elsewhere throughout the country.



*The Pinwill Sisters and Edmund Sedding with the reredos panels prior to installation*

More about the work of the Pinwill sisters can be found at this website, [www.pinwillwoodcarving.org.uk](http://www.pinwillwoodcarving.org.uk) .