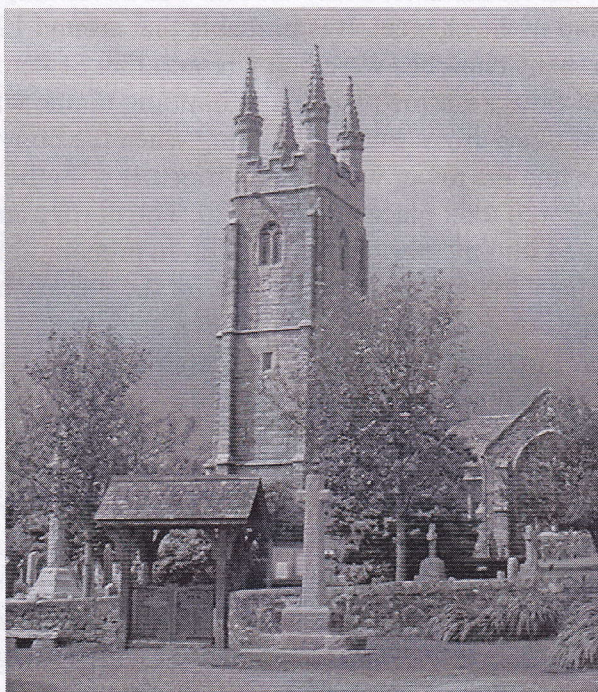




**A GUIDE TO
ST PETER'S CHURCH
PETER TAVY
DEVON**

The earliest record of a church at Peter Tavy is in 1185, but it is probable that a church existed on this site at an earlier date. Some evidence of a Norman building is found in the chancel. It is probable that around 1250-1300 when many churches were being rebuilt that St Peter's was altered from a simple rectangular building to one which was shaped like a cross. Further building when the body of the church and the tower were rebuilt together with the addition of the porch took place around 1520. The north transept was absorbed into the north aisle in 1692. In preparation for this, or perhaps to provide greater space for the weekly market, the churchyard on the north side had been enlarged six years earlier. Since that time there has been little change to the building of the church.

The earlier fabric of the church can be seen to have been built with stone of any shape and the cavity between the thick walls was filled with rubble. The carefully shaped stone of later buildings can be seen in the buttresses of the tower and the porch. The tower is particularly handsome and rather different from most Dartmoor churches with its larger than usual pinnacles allowing the north west pinnacle to contain a stairway giving access to the roof. Following a storm in 1803 when the church was struck by lightning, this pinnacle had to be rebuilt and the staircase was not included.

Immediately within the church at the west end of the nave is the **FONT**. It is stone, octagonal in shape and part decorated with keys in saltire in the east panel as a tribute to our patron St Peter. It is early English c.1250, but the modern oak cover is the work of Herbert Read of Exeter and was donated in 1955. Until the Victorian renovation the font stood in the west arch of the north aisle, where it had been placed when the aisle was built at the end of the 17th century.

The carved oak **WEST SCREEN** to the tower is also the work of Herbert Reed, and was installed in 1974 the gift of Mr Basil Drew-Wood. The carvings recall incidents from the donor's life.

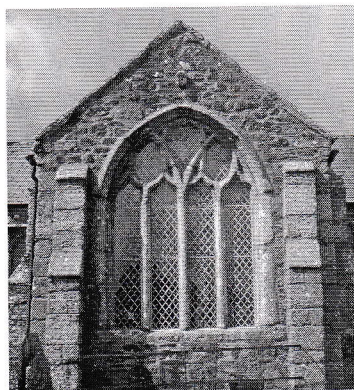
Between the middle of the 18th and the end of the 19th centuries there was a small **GALLERY** across the west end of the nave where the musicians played and the singers would stand. In 1820 a barrel organ partly replaced the local musicians in the gallery and in 1846 was itself replaced by a harmonium. Later a single manual organ with choir stalls was built at the east end of the church. The gallery was removed about 1870.

Turn now towards the east. There is little **STAINED GLASS** in the church and none of great antiquity. Regrettably what little existed in the north aisle windows depicting 'the evangelists' was removed during the renovations of the 1870s. There is no record of any stained glass in the south windows of the church but these may have been removed at the same time.

The **EAST WINDOW** depicts 'the good shepherd' and is a memorial to The Rev Thomas Gibbons a Rector of the Parish (1855-97). The left panel shows a meeting between Mary and her cousin Elizabeth with Jesus and John the Baptist as children. The right panel depicts Mary giving Jesus instruction at evening prayer, and the central panel 'the good shepherd', unusual for the palm tree in the background. The smaller of the two windows in the north aisle shows Mary the Virgin and Mary Magdalene and is a tribute to Mrs Collins of Redruth, raised by her family in 1900.

The larger window was presented by the widow of Charles Nicholls in 1961. The figures in the window are St Nicolas, a play on the name Nicholls, and the patron saint of mariners – neatly linking to Peter the fisherman – the cross keys of St Peter and a smaller scene of Jesus giving Simon-bar-Jonah his new name of Peter. The right hand panel shows Bishop Bronescombe of Exeter during whose period in office (1258-1280) many churches in Devon, including St Peter's were rebuilt or renewed.

The **SOUTH TRANSEPT** together with the chancel is the oldest part of the church and still retains its decorated style window. In 1991 the transept was renovated by the removal of plaster revealing the entrance to the **ROOD LOFT**, staircase and hagioscope or '**SQUINT**'. The presence of the latter suggests that the transept was used as a chapel in pre-Reformation days.

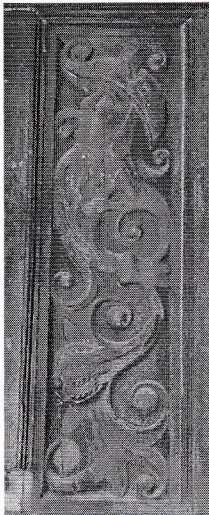


The south transept window with the Norman face mask above

The squint provided the means by which the Chaplain in the transept could see to which stage the service in the chancel had progressed. The staircase, lit by a small slit light, best seen from outside, gave access to the loft where the cross or rood stood over the screen which enclosed the chancel and separated it from the nave where the congregation gathered. The congregation took little part in the service until after the Reformation (c.1540). It is likely that the Parish Clerk would have led the congregation from the loft whilst the Priest

conducted the service in the chancel. It seems probable that the staircase was shut at the latest by the Commonwealth (1648-1660) however the bowl of a clay pipe found in the squint when it was opened has been dated to 1620-1640 suggesting an earlier closure.

On the west wall of the transept are a number of **CARVED OAK PANELS** (one of which is pictured left). In 1840 they



were described as forming the pew ends, but were subsequently mounted and fixed together with a door fashioned in them to form a screen at the base of the tower. When the new screen was replaced in the tower the carved panels were removed to the transept. The carvings are of Tudor date (c.1500) and may have been pew ends for the Drake or Cole families living in Peter Tavy. When the floor of the transept was renovated in 1965 – it had been an earthen floor until then – a figurine of a soldier was discovered. It has been identified as part of a

NOTTINGHAM ALABASTER PLAQUE of the 14th century. It is illustrated by a drawing on the wall as the original is now held in the Plymouth Museum. During the work of 1991 part of a carved stone lock of gilded hair was found amongst the masonry, suggesting the disposal of perhaps a small statue of a saint following the Reformation.

Walk on now to the **CHANCEL**. The Rector's stall and the choir stalls are modern, as is the communion rail (1970). Look carefully at the carving by Herbert Read, and see if you

can see the butterfly, the snail and the fish and perhaps the caterpillar. They symbolise the valley of the Tavy and commemorate Nancy Drew-Wood. Just past the stalls on the south side is the ancient priest's door, considered to be of Norman age and giving access for the priest when the chancel was enclosed by the rood screen. The **ALTAR REREDOS**, again by Herbert Read was erected in 1926. On the left or north wall of the sanctuary is a particularly fine memorial to The Rev. Thomas Pocock a past Rector who died in 1772.

The entrance to the rather cramped **VESTRY** lies between the sanctuary and the organ. On the east wall of the vestry is the oldest memorial in the church, this time to the sad loss of five daughters by the Rector Richard Eveleigh and his wife, in 1632.

In 1907 the present two manual **ORGAN** replaced a single manual organ, which had been the first to be installed in the east end of the church in 1859. The new organ had its back to the vestry and the organist facing away from the congregation. In 1923 the organ was overhauled and rotated through 90°. This provided extra space in the vestry though the rather cramped result at the east end of the north aisle was the cost.

The **PULPIT** is a small example of the work of Miss Pinwill who was a famous lady carver in Devon and Cornwall around the first half of the 20th century. The pulpit was installed in 1926 and is inscribed in Latin to the memory of The Rev F J Bryant Rector from 1879-1907.

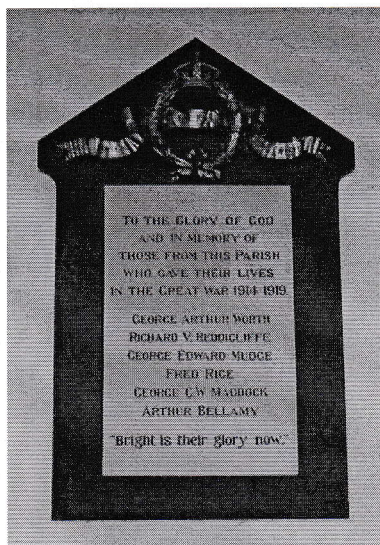
The **LECTERN** on the other side of the aisle is also inscribed in Latin and dated 1926 and was donated by the

boys and girls of the Parish. A **PLAQUE** on the north wall of the north aisle commemorates those from the village who died in the 1914-1918 war.

On the west wall of the north aisle are the two remaining sections of the **MEDIAEVAL CHANCEL SCREEN**

which has been restored and mounted. This lower part of the screen stood at the top of the chancel steps, the rest of the screen above extended to the top of the pillars where the rood loft would have crossed the aisle

and held the rood or cross. It would have been in full view of the congregation. Damage to the paintings may have been inflicted when they were cut down, or simply from wear and tear of people touching the figure of the saint in passing. The saints portrayed are Saints Simon, Matthias, Jude, Andrew, Thomas, John the Evangelist, Paul and Philip.



The tower contains **SIX BELLS**. There have been bells at Peter Tavy since at least 1553 when three were recorded by the Church Commissioners. The earliest of the present bells was hung in 1720 with four more hung between 1720 and 1790. All of those were cast in the grounds of the church by Penningtons of Lezant, Cornwall. The sixth bell was added in 1882. They have been rung regularly through their history, and still today command a team of ringers.

As you leave the church spare a moment or two for the **CHURCHYARD**. The records show that over 2,000 people are buried here with some 600 memorials. In the spring the churchyard is spread with primroses, crocus and snowdrops. The grass is cut regularly and very many of the graves here bear witness to 'memories not forgotten'. Some are very old, the earliest in the churchyard is that to Roger Cole who died in 1663. This can be seen at the left of the path as you face the lych gate in the form of a large granite table. Two graves at the east end of the church however, may well be those of the children referred to in the memorial of 1632 mentioned in the vestry.

Thank you for your interest in
St Peter's Church.
We hope it has brought you peace and
understanding.



**THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THIS LEAFLET,
BUT WE TRUST YOU WILL FEEL ABLE TO
MAKE A DONATION TOWARDS THE UPKEEP
OF THE CHURCH.**