

A History of the Church of The Blessed Virgin Mary



The present church preserves its early plan and may well have been built in the late-Norman period. An early west tower, nave with north and south aisles, south porch, north and south transepts, chancel with narrower north and south chapels, sanctuary and vestry, make up the cruciform design. Three building periods can be traced.

The font, nave, chancel and sanctuary are believed to date from the 12th century; the tower, narrow aisles and probably the transepts were added in about the 13th century, the chancel chapels are 15th century, and the spire too could have been built around this time. The external walls of the church were roughcast in 1823.

The sgraffito is a complete system of internal plasterwork, which was applied in 1874. It consists of a base coat which is dark red, and two further coats of blue and a top coat of yellow ochre, which must have looked spectacular when it was first applied, and quite gaudy. This would have presented quite a departure from the plain walls which probably preceded it. In 1909 a portion of the sgraffitto was recoloured and redecorated.



We presume that there were originally benches for worshippers to sit on and at some stage box seating was installed, but by 1870 the Rural Dean the Revd. R. Champernowne had recommended that the square box seats be removed, with open ones substituted to increase accommodation, and that the unsightly gallery might also be taken out and the church opened to the west end. This was again mentioned in 1871, the Rural Dean stating that the west gallery was the 'greatest eyesore'. Work was carried out in 1874, and in 1876 the Rural Dean, the Revd, R. Bartholemew, pronounced the restored church to be in excellent order. The 1874 restoration included the sgraffitto decoration of the walls, and he noted that it had been thoroughly and tastefully restored.



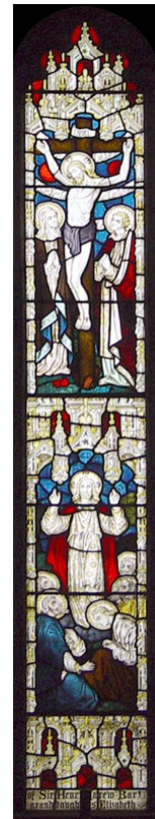
The font, one of three of its kind in Devon, the others being at South Pool and Dittisham, is of great antiquity and much interest, and its origin is certainly Norman. The bowl and stem are of red sandstone and the base of grey sandstone. The cup shaped bowl is surrounded by shallow flutings. In Transactions of the Devonshire Association for 1916 the loss of the font's round rim was lamented and comment

passed that: 'No doubt it was in bad condition as the ring often is, in the cast of soft stone, but the appearance of the font is affected very injuriously'. There is an apocryphal story that a jobbing Norman carver came up the River Dart, offering his services to churches, and that he was invited to carve our font.

It seems fairly certain that there were walls on each side of the nave before the addition of the aisles in the 13th century. The arcades are of three bays each with pointed arches. The east bay, which is opposite the transept, is virtually a three quarter arch without any trace of a point. The building seems to owe this irregularity to a widening of the transepts when the chancel chapels were added. There is no structural arch between the nave and the chancel; but across this space is the restored rood-screen.



The east window is a very large and particularly fine one, inserted probably in the 15th century, and the lovely stained glass later still, towards the end of the 19th century. The paintings are incidents from the Gospels. There is a sedilla (group of three seats) in the south wall of the sanctuary where sat (and still do!) the assistant(s) at celebrations of the Holy Communion.



The tower is essentially of the 13th century and the rather large west window was probably inserted in the late 14th century, certainly not earlier. The arch into the nave is acutely pointed and at the apex is slightly out of true! Most windows of the aisle were characteristic of the late 13th century, displaying a plain, simple form of tracery. A glorious example of modern design is expressed in the two windows in the north aisle, given in the memory of the Carew sisters. In each end wall of the transepts is a very large

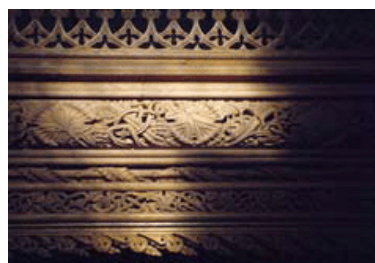


window and these, like those in the aisles, date from the 13th century. The east wall of the south transept retains an original 15th century perpendicular window.

The chancel chapels are wider than the aisles. Each chapel is separated from the chancel by a single granite arch – these having been added in the 15th century. The windows are of the same period, but the painting, of course, is much later, about 1850. The brownish, porous looking stone used in the arches is called honeycomb dun', and is only found on four farms in the parish – Willing, Brownstone, Bulkamore and Torne. Stripping off the old slates from the North Chapel in 1962 for a new roof, a forgotten iron circular stair-turret to the rood-loft revealed itself in the west corner behind the organ. It is concealed on the inside by a wall. The staircase and rood probably came under the Reformation axe. The South Chapel is the Chapel of Our Lady and has a very expressive window. An original parclose (screen) divides the chapels from the chancel.



The rood-screen extends right across the nave and is of nine bays originally carved in the 15th century. Either on the way to or in



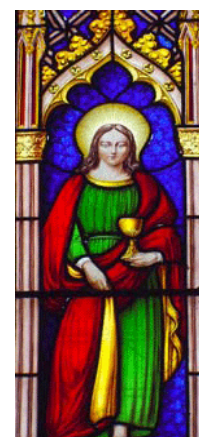
Exeter for repair, fire ruined the upper part of this ancient screen. Scorch marks can still be seen at the back of the screen near the Vicar's stall – silent reminders of the fire. A brass plate near the pulpit is witness to the

restoration in 1911.

On one's way into the church it is easy to miss a pointed niche over the porch, which doubtless housed an image of St. Mary the Patron Saint. On the gable is an 1803 slate sundial.



The east window of the church is a typical example of the Victorian period, during which canopy work and a painted ground were popular features. There is fine line work in the painting which was given in memory of Elizabeth Carew, one time patron of the living. The Lady Chapel's east window contains a beautiful picture of Our Lady painted between 1800 and 1870.



Relatively dark in tone, the window incorporates many pure blues, yellow, red and green glass, with less emphasis on line work that is seen in the east window of the main building.



The south window of the lady Chapel contains the figure of St. Peter. The east window of the south transept shows St. James in a rather cruder type of painting, dating from the period 1850-90. The north aisle window is of a relatively modern style with white glass playing a far more prominent role and the colours being somewhat subdued, with the result that more use is made of the window to let in natural light. The north window of the Organ Chapel is a good example of the use of acid, enamels and stains and embodies something of the German and Flemish style, dating from 1850-80. The large plain windows in the church include and embossed in ruby – an old and effective process.

Electricity and electric light did not arrive in St. Mary's until 1949, when the South Western Electricity Company floodlit the outside of the church for a week of celebration. Electricity revolutionised various aspects of church life; before its arrival paraffin lamps were used to light the church, and Mr. John Eales was the organ blower (the electric pump was installed in 1951), earning 13 shillings (65p) a quarter, for three services on Sunday and choir practice on Friday nights.

One of the churchwardens, Valerie Wakeham, was the moving force behind installing permanent floodlighting to celebrate the millennium, and through fundraising and donations, generated the necessary funds to install two floodlights. A third light was donated by the millennium committee.



In 1896 the hot-air heating system became ineffective, and was replaced by a system of hot water radiators. A furnace chamber was added outside the church, and this meant that a great deal of earth and solid rock had to be excavated and deposited in the adjoining Glebe Field. The installation was carried out by Longbottom & Co of Leeds. In 1953 the heating boiler was renewed, and in 1966 a new heating system was installed.

The Bells

St. Mary's has a ring of five bells housed in the tower where there has probably been one or more bells installed since the 13th century, from which the tower itself is thought to date. The earliest record of bells in the church is on 14th February 1763, when the churchwardens and principle inhabitants of the parish petitioned Fredrick, Lord Bishop of Exeter, as follows:

Humbly herewith.

That whereas there are now four bells in the Tower of the said Parish Church of Rattery, two whereof are rendered useless, and incapable of being rung, and whereas by proper notice being given in the Church for parishioners of the said Parish to meet in the vestry to consult and consider of a proper method for the new casting the said bells, it was then unanimously agreed the said four bells cast into five and hang them up in a strong and substantial frame for the sum of sixty pounds. Wherefore we pray an Intimation to Issue forth under the Seals of his said Lordship's Court to be read in the said Parish Church of Rattery, in order to intimate to all Person's who shall or may have any objections thereto; to appear on the day of the return of the said Intimation at his said Lordship's Court to make their objections thereto, otherwise to let them know that a Faculty will pass under his said Lordship's seal for casting and hanging the bells as aforesaid.

For whatever reason, they only proceeded with part of this undertaking. They recast four bells and three of the 1763 bells remain in place. The other was probably used to recast the fourth bell, which was undertaken in 1901, and it was not until 1911 that a fifth, treble bell was installed at a cost of £55 12s. 6d. The cost was funded by subscriptions of £31 18s. 9d., a jumble sale raised £30 16s. 0d., the profit from a sports day was £5, whilst a collection at the service of dedication brought in £3. These amounts may seem insignificant by today's standards, but this was at a time when it was possible to buy a cottage in the village for £100.



All five bells were remounted on ball bearings in 1929, and a chiming mechanism was installed in the memory of David Woodley in 1982. In 1991 the bells were restored, and the third bell was sent to Cambridge for sealing a crack in the crown. Beams, pulleys, wheels and stays were renewed at a cost – this time of £7200.

The treble bell is 30 inches in diameter, and inscribed 'Mears and Stainbank, Founders, London. George V Rex. Coronation 1911. Bernard Packer Vicar, John Wakeham, Cecil Coker, Churchwardens.' The second bell is 31 inches diameter, and inscribed 'Pennington – Fecit. God preserve the Church 1763.'

The third bell is 33 inches diameter, and inscribed as the second bell. The fourth bell is 36 inches in diameter, and inscribed 'Aggett and Sons, Bellhangers, Chagford, Devon. Hear me when I call, Henry Carew, Vicar, John Hoare, John Coker Churchwardens, Recast March 1901.' The tenor bell is 41 inches diameter, and weighs 13 cwt. It is F sharp, and inscribed 'Pennington Fecit PL IC CW, Robert Savery, Vicar.' It has three impressions of gold coins; a George II guinea, and both sides of a John V Portuguese coin, dated 1743.

The Churchyard



The churchyard is just over an acre in size and is more or less divided into two. The upper churchyard is original, and the lower was given by the Misses Carew. The land was consecrated by the Bishop of Crediton on 5 May 1899. The churchyard is planted with snowdrops, primroses, daffodils,

shrubs and trees, and is maintained by a band of volunteers, who cut the grass and tend the boundary hedges.

There are two gravestones in the churchyard that are a little unusual. The first is a delightful memorial at the back of the east window, on which is written:

Sacred to the memory of Elizabeth Randel of Berry

Pomery who having discharged the duties of a servant in the family of John Lyde of Loventor, Gent, for the space of fifty years, with fidelity and integrity, died at Marley House on the 7th day of August 1791, aged 84. Beloved by her master's descendents.



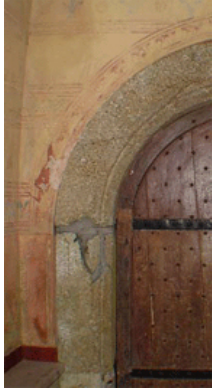
The second is modern, and is the gravestone of Victor Coker, who died in 1996, and his wife Pam. Victor was a well-regarded local farmer, and his family erected a gravestone, made out of a fine granite gatepost, complete with the metal gate-hangers. Parishioners who remember Victor can picture him leaning on such a gatepost having a chat. One of the oldest gravestones is near the south door and is dated 20 November 1689.

Vicars

Jeffrey Hurning (c. 1199) was the first recorded priest, but there were almost others appointed by the lord of the manor before this. Several Rattery priests were very long serving, with Walter Cuillebole and John Jago serving 54 years, and Henry Martyn 53. In

1650, the Puritans ousted James Bampffield and one wonders how he fared, until he was restored in 1660.

Attendances have varied over the years, and to a great extent have depended on the personality of the priest or the determination of the major landowner and employer. If the Misses Elizabeth Anne and Beatrix Carew noticed any of their estate workers missing from the service, they would be informed that their presence would be



expected the following week. There were 96 names (a record) on the electoral role in 1926, whereas in 1937, the vicar, Reverend Morse, complained of the slackness of the men's attendance in church – on more than one occasion the vicar's warden being the only one present. Towards the end of his ministry, Gurney Ryott had only two or three worshippers attending his morning service, but his successor, Harold Patrick, was able to build the congregation back up to a healthy number, and he re-formed the choir, and introduced nativity plays.

There have, of course, been characters amongst the priests. The Church Plate Committee of the Devonshire Association reported in 1913 that in one parish, Rattery, the incumbent, Revd. Bernard Packer, would neither furnish any particulars, nor answer any letters, and was absent when called upon. The committee were not permitted to see the plate. The Rural Dean supplied the deficiency (and also reported that Rattery was one of several parishes which possessed nothing 'really ancient'. 'It frequently happens', he noted, 'that parishes where there was a wealthy resident squire, a tasteless modern plate has been substituted for ancient vessels.')



Reverend Gurney Ryott used to dash off to Torquay after evening service, to play in a string quartet; and Reverend Herbert Knights was instrumental in launching a very successful appeal on the radio, for the 'Weeks Good Cause' in aid of the church roof, which was in danger of collapsing at the time. Many still remember Tom Taylor who,

on a voluntary basis, used to collect glasses in the Church House Inn, and on occasion would serve drinks.

Vicar	Period	Donor of the Living
1. Jeffrey Hurning	c. 1199	The Abbot and Convent of St. Mary & St. Dogmael Cardinganshire
2. Walter de Pembroke	In 1238	
3. Thomas Ballard	1260 - 1284	
4. Walter Cuillebole	1284 - 1338	
5. John Lambrith	1338 – 1349	
6. Sir William Budd (Priest)	1349 – 1354	
7. Sir Ralph Pataleke (Priest)	1354 – 1364	
8. Thomas de Northwode (Priest)	in 1364	
9. Sir William Blackhall (Priest)	1364 – 1376	
10. Sir Lawrence Buscoveleke	1376 – 1391	
11. Sir John Thomas	1391 – 1417	
12. Sir John Colyn	1417 – 1472	
13. Sir John ate Wylle	1472 - 1453	
14. John Groove STP	1453 - 1455	Archbishop Bonchier
15. Sir John Hylle (Carmelite Chaplin)	1455 - 1490	St Mary & St Dogmael
16. John Henrys	1490 – 1514	
17. Thomas Lloyde LLB	1514 - 1524	
18. Jeffrey Johns (Chaplin)	1524 - 1565	
19. Matthew Preston	1565 -1567	Richard Savery esq. of Willing
20. Henry Martyn (Scholar)	1567 - 1620	
21. William Hele MA	1620 – 1628	Richard Savery esq. of Totnes
22. Michael Thompson	1628 - 1634	
23. James Bampfield MA (Restored)	1634 - 1650	
24. David Mole (Puritan Minister)	c. 1650	Intruded Ministers who may have been appointed by Richard Savery esq. of Willing
25. Ambrose Rouse (Curate)	died 1654	
26. John Searle MA	1656 - 1660	
27. James Bampfield MA (Restored)	1660 - 1663	Richard Savery esq. of Willing
28. Samuel Cory	1663 – 1711	William Savery Esq. of Slade
29. John Doidge	1711 – 1721	Waltham Savery Esq. of Slade
30. Robert Savery LLB	1721 – 1767	Samuel Pierce Esq. of Hendacott
31. William Savery	1767 – 1781	John Herring Esq. of W. Langston
32. John Jago DD	1781 – 1835	Dame Elizabeth Carew of Marley
33. Joshua Reynolds Johnson MA	1836 – 1841	
34. Arthur Dene	1841 – 1844	
35. Fitzwilliam John Taylor BA	1844 – 1845	
36. Robert Palk Carew BA	1845 - 1875	
37. Henry William Carew	1875 – 1902	
38. Bernard Packer BA	1902 – 1913	The Misses E. and A. Carew

39. Ernest Craven Grimaldi	1913 – 1919	
40. Percy Earle Barnes	1919 – 1927	Sir H. Palk Carew of Haccombe
41. John William Storey	1927 – 1930	
42. Edward Eld Jackson	1930 – 1935	
43. David Patrick Lloyd Morse	1935 – 1940	
44. Robert Gurney Ryott	1940 - 1949	Sir Thomas Palk Carew
45. Harold Stanley Patrick MA	1949 - 1960	Bishop Robert Mortimore
46. John Thompson (Licensed to officiate)	1960 – 1961	Sir Thomas Palk Carew
47. Herbert Knights (Priest in charge)	1961 - 1969	Bishop Mortimore Sir Rivers Carew
48. Thomas F. Taylor MA	1969 – 1979	Hon. Ass.
49. John Graham Bishop MA, PHD, BD	1979 - 1988	
50. John Hugh Harper	1979 – 1989	
51. David Winnington-Ingram MA	1991 – 1999 2000 -	

Church Lands

As evidenced by the [Rattery entry](#) in the Episcopal Registers, 1257 – 1307, the church was endowed with land. In more recent times, an inquiry in the parish on 7 November 1911 reported ownership of:

...a messuage (dwelling house with outbuildings) called the Church House of Rattery, with a little parcel of land thereunto adjoining, containing, by estimation, half an acre, and a close of land, situate within the parish of Rattery, containing by estimation one acre, and the almshouses on the south west side of the said close, in trust, to permit the churchwardens and sidesmen of the said parish, to receive rents and profits of the said premises, and, yearly, to render an account, to use of the parish and parishioners, to the intent that the same should be wholly converted and justly employed, towards better maintaining and setting forth God's divine service within the said church, the relief of the poor and needy people of the said parish, and all other necessary uses, and most convenient and meet to be employed at the will and discretion of them, and the greatest number of the sufficientist of the said parishioners, as in time past had been used and accustomed; and also on trust, to let the premises for the term of life or lives or years, to such persons as the said sidesmen and greater number of sufficientist of the said parishioners should appoint, with a power to appoint new trustees, to be nominated by the sidesmen when the trustees should be reduced to three.

These premises consist of a house called the Church House, with a garden adjoining, and a field on part of which the almshouses are standing. The church-house and field are in the occupancy of George Stevenson, as a yearly tenant, at a rent of £8 per annum. They were let to him at a parish meeting, and the rent is considered fair. The said almshouses consist of six rooms, occupied by six of the poorest families of the parish, placed there by parish officers. There is also a house built some years ago for a schoolhouse, partly by subscription, and partly at the expense of the parish. The school, which was unsupported by any funds, except voluntary contributions, has ceased to exist, and the house is let to William Gidley, as yearly tenant, at a fair rent of £5 per annum. The rent of the above mentioned premises are received by the churchwarden and carried in his general account with the parish, in aid of church-rates.

The old schoolhouse was then used as a bakehouse and is currently a private dwelling, Sadly, the church is no longer in possession of any land or property; the Church House Inn and the bakehouse having long since been sold.

Charities

There were four old charities administered by the church: Goulds Gift, Dorothy Savery's Charity, Richard Browne's Charity and a lost charity. In his will, dated 3 June 1648, Thomas Gould gave to the poor of the parish 20 shillings per annum, to be paid on Easter day; the money to be raised for the rents of North Hood. The rent charge of £2 was paid on behalf of John Savery of Bulkamore, as owner of Lincombe Farm, South Brent, and it was to be expended of bread to the poor on Good Friday, by the vicar and churchwardens. Richard Browne directed that after his death in 1853, part of the estate should be invested to provide an annual income amounting to £8.9s. 4d., to be paid to the poor of Rattery by the minister, churchwarden and overseer. (In 1911, there were 41 recipients of sums ranging between 6s. 0d. and 1s. 6d. according to the number of children in the family.)

In the Parliamentary Returns of 1786, a legacy of £1 is mentioned as being given by Mary Martin to the poor of the parish, and to have been lost 40 years before. It has not been possible to obtain any further account of this charity, but there is a tradition in the parish that the church was robbed of a sum of money from some charities. The church still receives the £2 a year from the Dorothy Savery Charity, as well as £50 per annum from Church Lands, and a small sum from the Wakeham Trust.

It is interesting to compare these accounts with those of today. Most of the work undertaken on the church in the 21st century is voluntary, and we have a rota of generous parishioners who give up their spare time to clean the church and cut the grass. In 1906 cleaning cost 5 shillings per annum (25p) and grass cutting 15 shillings, with the clearing of paths costed at 10 shillings. We no longer have a mole catcher, and, fortunately, we no longer have to blow the organ, clean and trim lamps, or light fires.

Taken from The Book of Rattery – a portrait in words and pictures – compiled by the people of Rattery. Chapter 2 – The Church and its Community by Stephen Driscoll and Peter Wakeham. (Halsgrove 2001).