

Key Historical Highlights

The Font

When entering the church through the main entrance (also known as the West Door), you can see an old Norman Font of local red sandstone on the Left, between a window and the red curtain. From the design of the font, there is a distinct "honeysuckle" ornamentation.

The history of the font starts in the 15th Century, as this font was replaced by a contemporary "Perpendicular" bowl, and this was buried in the churchyard as lumber. However, it was rediscovered 400 years, given various new occupations and also given away including functioning as an ornamental garden vase and later being installed in the daughter church of S. Andrew. Eventually in 1930, the font was restored to its ancient place, with the other font being given to St Andrews, Paignton.

Near the font by the red curtain which conceals the South Door (14th Century) there is a memorial brass to Robert Gee, the vicar of Paignton Parish between 1832 to 1861. When appointed, he was third on a 'short list', where the listing had been first offered to John Keble, hymn writer and leader of the Oxford Movement. Gee's son, Walter Mallock Gee, founded the Church Lads Brigade.

The North Door

The North Door, also known as the Wedding Door, is dated to the 14th Century. The door is designed with a little "door within a door" at the bottom for the purpose of ejecting unruly dogs and other animals. As this door was created in mediaeval times, the church held a range of functions within the life of the parish, using the space as a dual-purpose hall-church, which still occurs to this day.

Additionally, adjacent to the door is the ancient holy water stoup, a basin where the holy water was stored for passing individuals to use.

Arched Recess in in the North Isle

Continuing the walk around the church after the North Door, you can see an open grave with arched recesses next to the isle. This was probably the grave of a founder or early benefactor of the church. The grave cover on it has no connection was this particular recess; it is said to have been discovered in Well Street where it was in use as a drain cover, although it is thought by some authorities to have originally been intended for the grave of a Crusader's widow. Nearby is a tablet to Thomas Willes, Surgeon. This is almost certainly a relic of the Napoleonic Wars when hotels were used a naval hospital particularly the Goodrington Hotel.

The North Transept and Lady Chapel (Symons or All Souls Chapel)

Following this isle you will see a window on the left, which is the All Souls or Symons Chapel, also known as the North Transept. The North Transept or Symons Chapel - once known as the 'Eight Men's Aisle' - was, until 1870, separated from the nave by an oak screen. The "Eight Men" were in pre-Reformation times, the wardens of the property of the various parish guilds, which (inter alia) helped their members and their dependents when in trouble and were thus an early form of "Social Security". The Transept was restored as a Chapel in 1949 in memory of the Symons family, who were, for many years, active workers for the church. The reredos and altar are the work of Sir Ninian Comper. The mosaic of S. John Baptist, the parish patron saint, in the N.W. corner, was made by Jane Burton, a well-known photographer of wildlife.

Within the space there are also memorials to members of the old Paignton family of Belfield. Said to have been of Lancashire origin (Belfield is a suburb of Rochdale), the family produced the famous "Madame Gould" of Lew Trenchard (nee Margaret Belfield), whose brother Samuel was Vicar here for 60 years (1732-92). Samuel's daughter was married in this church to Admiral Sir Thomas Louis, who saved Nelson's life at the Battle of the Nile and was later the only Englishman to be Governor of Rome. Sabine Baring-Gould, hymn writer and novelist, was Madame Gould's great-great-grandson.

Next to the All-Souls Chapel and through the Wooden Screen also known as the Rood Screen is the Lady Chapel. With a beautiful stain glass window picturing the nativity scene, the Lady Chapel is dedicated to the mother of Jesus, Mary. The Lady Chapel was refurnished as a Chapel in 1907.

The Pulpit

Next to the Lady Chapel is a decorated stone pulpit. A raised platform historically used by the Vicar to deliver the sermon, the carved Beer stone late 15th Century pulpit is of special interest with its defaced nature and as pre-Reformation pulpits are not very common in England.

The Chancel – High Alter – Sedilia

Moving past the pulpit and looking through the wooden Rood Screen, you can see the high altar. Although not always accessible, this space could be said to provide a "thumbnail sketch" of English history. Underneath lie the remains of the old Saxon church, while the two side walls survive from the Norman Church. The perpendicular windows are the work of Edmund Lacy (Bishop of Exeter 1420-55), who attended the Battle of Agincourt as Chaplain to Henry V.

400 years later, another great churchman, Edward Bouverie Pusey, one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement (whose early adherents were nicknamed "Puseyites"), whilst on holiday in Paignton, caused the altar (there was then only one) to be restored and the chancel to be redecorated. Within this chancel, you can also see the organ on the right-hand side, which was presented in 1889 by Paris Singer, of the Sewing Machine manufacturing family, who built and for three-quarters of a century resided at, Oldway. The choir now occupy the chancel (they are first mentioned - as "ye clerkes; of Payngton" - in 1539 in the churchwardens accounts of S. Saviour's Dartmouth). Sir Edwin Deller (1883 - 1935), Principal of London University, was a boy chorister here.

Before 1740, the choir occupied the rood loft on the mediaeval screen, but as this was removed, the choir was moved to the West Gallery. However, further vandalism occurred in 1870 when the lower part of the screen was removed. The present screen which reproduces the main features of the original was executed by Herbert Read of Exeter and presented in 1906 by Mr. A. T Barton of Pembroke College, Oxford. The Rood was erected in 1923 in memory of the Paignton men who gave their lives in the first World War. An earlier and unsuccessful attempt, in 1880, to place one there sparked off controversy that aroused worldwide interest. Note the stair way to the old rood loft rising from the Lady Chapel. The sedilia (seats for the clergy) in the south wall of the sanctuary, was restored in 1870, being designed after an old pattern and constructed partly of ancient fragments.

The North Chancel Door

By the high altar, on the left-hand side you can see the North Chancel Door, which has scratches around the door said to have been made by archers (who practiced in Coverdale Tower the churchyard) sharpening their arrows. Thanks are due to Professor M. D. Anderson for permission to quote comments from "History by the Highway".

The Sacristy and the Choir Vestries

On the opposite side of the High altar from the North Chancel Door is the entrance to the Choir Vestries and Sacristy. Presented by Sir Mortimer Singer in 1914, the Sacristy and Choir Vestries are integral spaces within the life of the Church.

The South Transept – Kirkham Chantry (St Michael's Chapel)

Separate from the nave by a stone screen and an entranced doorway, the Kirkham chantry also known as St Michael's Chapel is a great place for contemplation and currently holds our prayer candles which anyone is welcome to light.

The recumbent figures on the stone screen, which divides the main body of the church from the Kirkham Chantry probably represents Nicholas Kirkham (1434-1516) of Blagdon, his wife

Jane, and his parents Robert and Elizabeth Kirkham. Additionally, the screen is covered with images and ornamentation of male figures on the outside of the screen. However, these figures have been damaged making certain identification impossible in many cases although the figurines around the door of the stone are obviously the Twelve Apostles, with S. Paul (not S. Matthias) replacing Judas Iscariot. Various other saints appear, as do also twelve mourners in contemporary costume.

Twelve female mourners occupy corresponding positions inside, while twelve female saints correspond to the Apostles. The flat sculptured panels at the head and feet of the effigies are particularly interesting. The western most depicts the Visitation, while facing it is a panel of the "Holy Family" showing Our Lord's earthly relatives and also the Holy Trinity subjects, according to one writer (M. D. Anderson in 'History by the Highway') rarely, if ever, depicted in chantries. The eastern tomb contains panels of S. Roche and S. Anthony of Egypt, popular in the 15th century as protectors against untimely death. Facing it is the panel of the "Mass of S. Gregory" showing our Lord appearing to the Saint as he was celebrating the Holy Communion, thereby converting a person who doubted Christ's Presence in the Sacrament.

The Recess in the South Aisle Wall

Continuing along the aisle from the Kirkham Chantry, there is a recess in the south aisle wall, which contains a "Cadaver" monument showing a decaying corpse. It is thought to be of a 15th century Irish Bishop who also acted as a Suffragan Bishop of Exeter and died in Paignton. It probably once occupied its own chantry chapel, now swept away. The recess, like its fellow opposite, leads to a vault below.

The South Porch (14 Cent)

The South Porch is another entrance into the church which has been used in the path. Often a space which holds the statues of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus during Christmas, the South Porch can be seen by passers-by who use the shortcut by the church building.

The Organ

The first organ in the Parish Church was built in 1830 by a parishioner named Waycott, who was subsequently the first organist at the Church, the music having previously been supplied by the church band. Its replacement was built in 1858 by Waycott's son who, unfortunately, drowned just before the opening ceremony. In April 1877 Henry Speechly of London completed a new two-manual organ for the Church, the 1858 Waycott instrument being moved to Broadhempston Church.

In 1889, to celebrate his coming of age, Paris Singer donated funds for a new three-manual organ which was built under the tower by Charles Martin of Oxford. It cost £2,020 which included a gas engine, fixed in the ringing chamber, to provide the bellows with wind. The magnificent case was designed by Mardon Mowbray and built by Messrs. Thompson of Peterborough. The Speechly organ went into storage and was later erected in the newly built daughter church of St. Andrew, which has now become the Bay Church in Paignton. In 1896, the organ was moved to its present position in the south aisle chapel, necessitating alteration to the case, and the pneumatic action was renewed. In 1906 the organ was rebuilt by Forster & Andrews of Hull, and in 1930 by Hele & Co. of Plymouth.

In 1967, the overhaul by Henry Willis IV brought the tonal scheme more into line with contemporary fashion. George Osmond & Co. of Taunton converted the key and pedal action to electro-pneumatic in 1980 and made some other alterations, and further alterations were carried out in 1985 by the Deane Organ Builders of Taunton. In 1998, the organ was fully renovated and improved by Deane Organ Builders. The instrument consists of three manuals and pedals with 54 speaking stops, 17 couplers, 2 tremulants, and a full complement of registration aids which includes a 64-level piston capture system. The organ has approximately 2,500 pipes and is one of the West Country's finest parish church organs, capable of supporting all the demands of service work, and the performance of organ works from all periods and schools.

Reference: Gareth L. Perkins, M.A., F.R.S.M., F.T.C.L., F.L.C.M., A.R.C.M. Organist & Choirmaster 1997- 2010.

The Tower

The tower of Paignton Parish Church is often one of the most prominent elements which can be seen from outside of the church. The lower half was built by Bishop Grandisson (c. 1327) and the top part by Bishop Lacy (probably 1438 et seq.), causing the Paignton landscape to be dominated ever since by a noble memorial to two of the great names in the story of the church in Devon. Note the West Doorway (removed from an earlier building) and the slots in the portals, thought to be intended to support beams for a stage for "Miracle Plays" or public proclamations.

The Bells

You may have heard the Bells at various points on the week including Tuesday night Rehearsals, before Sunday Services or for a range of celebrations. Situated in the Paignton Parish Church, the bells were last tuned and rehung by John Taylor & Co. of Loughborough in 1963. A list of the different bells can be seen below:

	Cwts	Weight Qrs	Lbs	Note	Founder	Date
Treble	5	3	24	E	M&S	1902
2nd	6	1	8	D sharp	- " -	
3rd	6	3	20	C sharp	Blews	1871
4th	7	3	4	B	Bilbie	1805
5th	9	1	25	A	Wroth	1748
6	11	0	14	G sharp	- " -	- " -
7	13	2	16	F sharp	M&S	1902
Tenor	21	3	5	E	Pennington	1641

The Churchyard Cross

The base of the Churchyard Cross is mediaeval, with the head and arms being a modern replica erected in 1895, from a fund subscribed by local children, after the original had been damaged.

The Coverdale Tower and Bishops Palace

When walking up to the church and opposite the church you can see the stone wall and towers which belong to the Coverdale Tower. In Saxon Times until the 1549, Paignton was an Episcopal manor which belonged to the Bishops of Exeter. Today, the Palace has disappeared, but its outer fortifications remain; the Vicarage (1910) and parish hall (1951) are in the grounds. The name 'Coverdale Tower' recalls an erroneous tradition that Miles Coverdale, Bishop of Exeter 1551-3, translated the Bible in it, but his translation was published 16 years before he became Bishop.