

WELCOME IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST TO THE PARISH CHURCH
OF ST.MARGARET OF ANTIOCH. NORTHAM



We welcome you to this ancient Church and hope that you will find the Peace of God to refresh your soul. and plenty to interest your mind.

People ask us. 'How old is your church " We can only guess at an answer. We believe in the story that Joseph of Arimathaea came with missionaries to this part of the West Country and settled at Glastonbury where they founded the first church in Britain. St. Mary the Mother of God. From that centre the Christian message was spread out. Lands near here remained in the control of Glastonbury Abbey up until the Reformation. The Church in Britain developed and from Glastonbury centres sprang up in Ireland and Wales. These were centres of learning and the monks from the Celtic monasteries travelled far and wide preaching and teaching. In the 500's St. Brannick came to Braunton. over the estuary from Northam. St. Petrock came from Wales to Padstow and travelled all over Cornwall and Devon (we call him the saint of Devon) and many others worked to found the Faith in these parts. So, our first Christian point of history must be in the Ages of the Celtic Saints. Beside our present church is a farm. now converted into homes. There is a spring that rises here and it is called 'Holy Well'. We like to think that this is the place where the missionary saints preached. taught and baptised.

As time went on a church must have been built on the higher ground to the east of the Holy Well. We know that the Celtic people built churches and so did the invading Saxons in the 8 and 900's. Perhaps Northam had a cobb or stone church at the time of the great invasion of 1066. We have evidence that a church was here from the Norman period onwards.

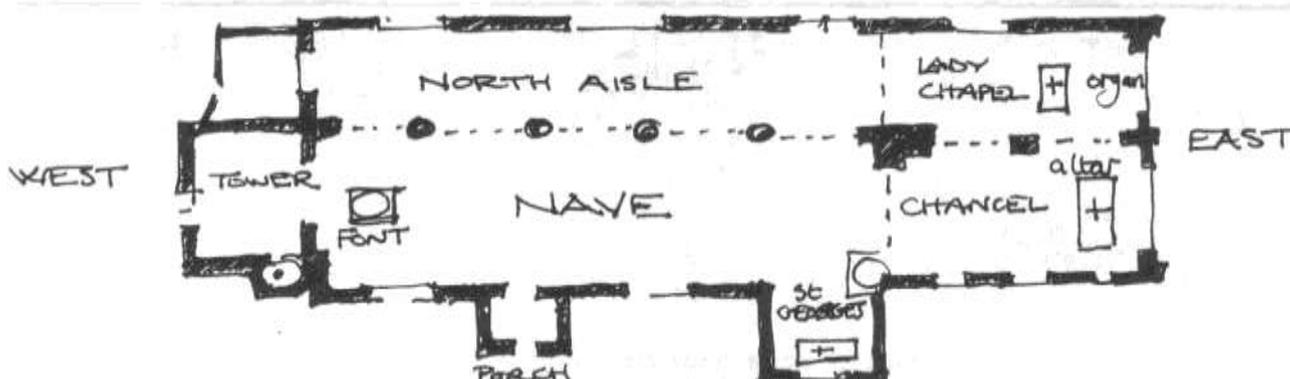
It is best to start your tour of the church outside. Stand in the churchyard looking up at the great tower and the long, uninterrupted nave and chancel. Then step back a little further so you can see the bay and the church starts to fit in with the surrounding area. It stands like a great sentinel overlooking the Bideford Bay and of course, can be seen for miles around. The tower has been used as a guide to shipping in the Bristol Channel for centuries. In fact the seaward side used to be whitewashed. As you look at the church you see the nave and that is the oldest standing part dating from the high Middle Ages. c.1200-1300. You will notice a chapel standing out. The original floor plan was cruciform and this chapel is the south wing of the cross. The north wing was lost when the church was enlarged in Elizabethan times. The tower was added in the late Middle Ages. c. 1400. Notice the lovely belfry openings and the slender buttresses. The stonemason's skills are very fine considering the tough nature of the local slate stone. All the windows that you see are Victorian copies of what was thought to exist before.

Now go inside. The main door leads you into the middle of the nave so you get an unusual view of everything and you are confronted by a row of arches that are an architect's nightmare. The Medieval cruciform church had no aisles so there were no arches. We think that 'because of the troubles that the Tudors had with their European neighbours large naval fleets were constructed in the West Country to protect the nation. Of course Appledore was one of those centres of construction, as it has remained to this day. Appledore was a part of Northam Parish for most of its history and so anyone who lived there was expected to come to church at Northam. Remember that the Elizabethan government enforced churchgoing by law and you were fined one shilling if you did not attend. Up until the wartime the population of Appledore has been much greater than Northam so Northam church had to be enlarged to accommodate the Appledore shipbuilders who were flooding in from the country to build the Ships that were going to be used against the Armada of 1588. The new arches have a date 1593 with the words, 'This yele' meaning 'this aisle'. The arches and pillars are crudely constructed and just notice how out of line they are. The capitals at the tops of the pillars are a mixture of whatever was to hand and it looks as though a granite Norman capital has come from somewhere. We still have among the parish records the builders estimate for the construction of this aisle. He was a builder from nearby Abbotsham.

Then look up at the roof. This is our pride and joy. We know that in late Elizabethan times there was considerable unemployment. We like to think that the redundant Appledore shipbuilders used their skills in building our roof. It is a very fine barrel vault with superb bosses. The bosses are carved with the Twier rose, many plant forms, the cross of S. George and the signs of the Passion of Jesus (which are over the chancel step and may tell us that there was a Rood Screen here - a beam which carried a crucifix with Our Lady and St. John).



As you walk in the nave you will get little views of other parts of the church. To the west is the tower arch with the font, rediscovered in Victorian times. It is interesting for its crack and the places on the lip where the locks went to prevent anyone stealing the Holy Water. To the north there is the new aisle. It seems like a church within a church. To the east is the high altar within the choir and sanctuary, and to the south the transept chapel of S. George.



S. George's Chapel has been recently made into a chapel for weekday services, especially the Holy Eucharist. The perpetual light burns to tell that Christ is risen and lives with his people for all time. The consecrated bread of the Holy Communion is kept here and it is good to stop here a moment to be still or say your prayers because the Real Presence of Jesus is with you. This chapel is thought to have been the Guild Chapel of the Guild of S. John and George which existed to help the poor in the Middle Ages. Notice the glass in the window - it is telling us about all the gardens of the Bible, from Eden to the Easter Garden.

The pulpit is of Devon marbles and replaces a Georgian three decker pulpit. Together with the windows and chancel area we now see the results of the restoration which Parson Isaac Gossett undertook in the 1850's and '60's. He was a man of means and imagination and must have had a fine social conscience. His building work included rebuilding the Vicarage (the large white house to the south of the church) the building of the Holy Trinity Church at Westward Ho! in 1866 (for which he paid one third from his own pocket!) a working men's club in Northam. he helped to found the N. Devon Golf Club. * mortuary for shipwrecked sailors and a massive church restoration. All the windows were renewed. The chancel roof and arch and east wall constructed. in the nave the west gallery and pews were demolished along with the pulpit and Georgian chandeliers. It must have been a great revolution for Northam and a social one at that because he battled successfully against pew rents. at a time when many wealthy Indian Army soldiers were settling here and building their mansions and putting their memorial plaques up in church. We have done very well from the Victorians for Gossett's restoration has lasted and together with the magnificent East window and organ we have some real treasures to help our worship.

While you are in the chancel be sure to look at the two little windows on the south wall. The first is a children's window with Jesus the Good Shepherd at the top. Eli and Samuel on the left and Jesus with the children on the right.

The second shows the price of sacrifice - the pelican feeding her young from the blood of her breast. Moses in the wilderness and Christ on the Cross. The East window is a Resurrection window. with side panels of Jesus raising to new life the widow of Nain's son and Jairus' daughter. In the middle an angel sits on the empty tomb with the Marys gathered around - Our Lady in blue. Mary Magdalene in red. Above them is the Risen. Ascended and glorified Lord receiving the worship of the saints and martyrs and in the lights above, angels are carrying incense symbolising the worship of the heavenly hosts. The whole picture makes a fine backdrop to the high altar which is the focus of our church and of all that the church stands for - the worshipping people of God gathered around his altar to receive his life in the Blessed Sacrament and to offer him worship and honour.

The High Altar stands on a new floor of Cornish slate and the peoples' kneeler takes designs from the roof bosses and combines them with S. Margaret's flower - the white marguerite. In the chancel roof are Victorian carvings of the kings and queens of history - all looking very Victorian! As you pass into the Lady Chapel look at the fine stone arches. so different from those in the nave.

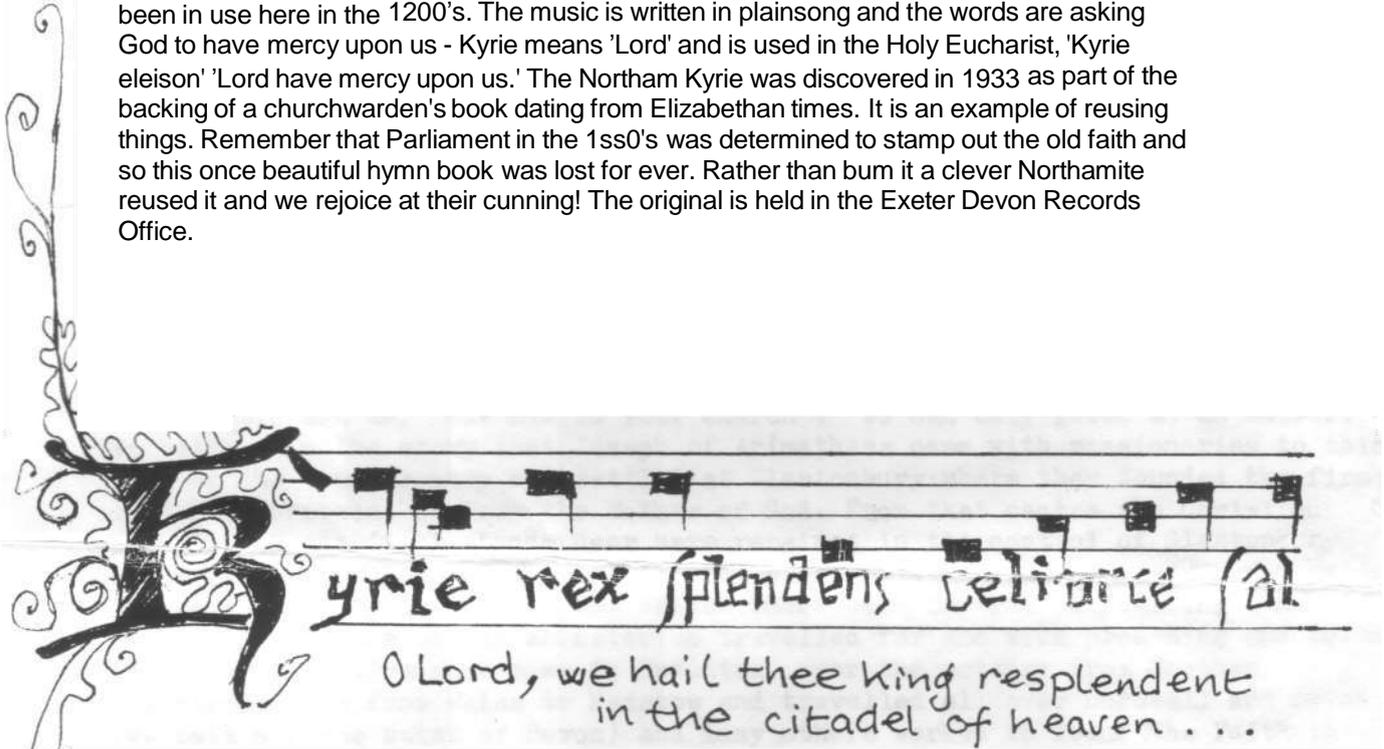


The Lady Chapel is very large. Together with the north aisle it replaces the north transept. This part was added in 1623. It now houses the organ and altar. The organ is a Walker built in 1866 at a cost of £564. Its outer pipe work was printed by a clergyman and his daughter. The Lady Chapel altar is a memorial to those who died in the Great War. Its wood work and riddle posts are very fine. Inset in the altar a marble slab with the consecration crosses. A new addition is the statue of the Suffering Madonna and Christ Child carved by Mr. Eric Collingwood of this congregation. More of his work can be seen in the Upper Room. The Departed of War are remembered here. The chapel is used for weekday and children's services. Stay here a moment and pray for your family.

Perhaps you would like to give thanks for your family. or to pray for someone here in the Lady Chapel. Mary the Mother of the Lord is a great help to us in all our life. Her example shines to encourage us and her prayers are to help us.

As you return to the entrance down the north aisle please have a look at the Book Stall and library. There may be something there that God is wanting you to see.

By the Font is a statue of S. Francis of Assisi. It is a copy of Mother Mirabell's original. She was a famous Anglican nun at the Convent at Wantage. Beside this statue is a copy of and translation of the Northam Kyries. It is a page from a Medieval hymn book that would have been in use here in the 1200's. The music is written in plainsong and the words are asking God to have mercy upon us - Kyrie means 'Lord' and is used in the Holy Eucharist, 'Kyrie eleison' 'Lord have mercy upon us.' The Northam Kyrie was discovered in 1933 as part of the backing of a churchwarden's book dating from Elizabethan times. It is an example of reusing things. Remember that Parliament in the 1530's was determined to stamp out the old faith and so this once beautiful hymn book was lost for ever. Rather than burn it a clever Northamite reused it and we rejoice at their cunning! The original is held in the Exeter Devon Records Office.



The lists of priests of the Parish begins with the institution of Martin de Littlebiri in 1261. You will notice that the patronage fell in with the Dean and Canons of the College of St. George at Windsor Castle. In Norman times we were given to one of the Abbeys of Caen. Normandy. now we are handed over to Windsor. One reason for this was to do with taxation. Monies collected here were sent to Windsor to help pay for the new King's chapel which was completed by Henry 8th. We now rejoice to have our Windsor link. The clergy visit Windsor regularly for refresher courses and the Dean made a historic visit here in 1983.-

Under the tower are slate boards giving details of the parish charities. Especially noteworthy are those concerned with education. We can trace our first educational charity to a will of 1440. By the 1660s there was a charity school here. Our church schools have been a part of parish life for centuries and we now have a Church Aided Infant and Junior school ('aided*' means an independent school aided by the State). In the tower are eight fine bells. Four were cast in 1553. These were recast in 1770s. On one is the name 'S. Mary's Northam' indicating that up until Victorian times the dedication of this church was 'S. Mary'. We do not yet know how the change to S. Margaret of Antioch came about.

In the churchyard are many old graves. One is supposed to be of Salvation Yeo. Another is a soldier of the Napoleonic wars who fought Napoleon in seven battles and then guarded him as a prisoner on S. Helena. Benjamin Rogers returned home to Northam and died at 90. You will notice the sailors' graves and the Mortuary now used as a church meeting room.

We hope that God has spoken to you through his Church here. May he bless you on your journey. Please remember us in your prayers.

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