

# A BRIEF GUIDE TO ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, WALKHAMPTON

by Peter Hamilton-Leggett

**THE SITE:** The church lies half-a-mile north of the village and stands on a lofty elevation (700 feet) bordering Dartmoor. It occupies a very ancient site and was built long before the village of Walkhampton began in the river valley below; hence the unusual distance. Another curious feature is that it faces north-east, the point of sunrise on the longest day, rather than due east. This alignment also points exactly to Gipsy Rock, possibly the meeting place of the Walkhampton Hundred (administrative division) in Saxon times. Coincidence? A builder's error? One can only speculate.

**THE DEDICATION:** The dedication of the church was unknown and despite exhaustive searches no one has ever found one during the last 400 years. Indeed, most researchers doubted that it had ever been dedicated, not an unusual feature amongst westcountry churches. In 1985, after much debate, it was decided to dedicate the church to St Mary the Virgin. Recent searching has, however, unearthed the long lost secret. The 1531 coinage rolls for Tavistock have mention of "St Dionisius of Walkynton". Further research is now being carried out.



**EARLY HISTORY:** The first mention of a church at Walkhampton is the institution of Eylas de Hertforde as rector, 6 June 1259. Amicia, Countess of Devon, granted the Manor and advowson to her Cistercian foundation of Buckland in 1278. The Great Tithes, however, were still paid to the rector.

The Abbot of Buckland complained that silver mines in the area had damaged his woods and appealed to Bishop Byttan, of Exeter, to have the rectory appropriated to the Abbey. The silver mines were probably part of the Great Tithe and in 1311 the appropriation was completed, from which date the incumbents have been vicars. The 1311 document granted a piece of land to the north of the church to build a tithe barn but no remains of this building have been found. The first vicar, Sir Walter, received the Lesser Tithe, a tradition that eventually ended in the late nineteenth century.

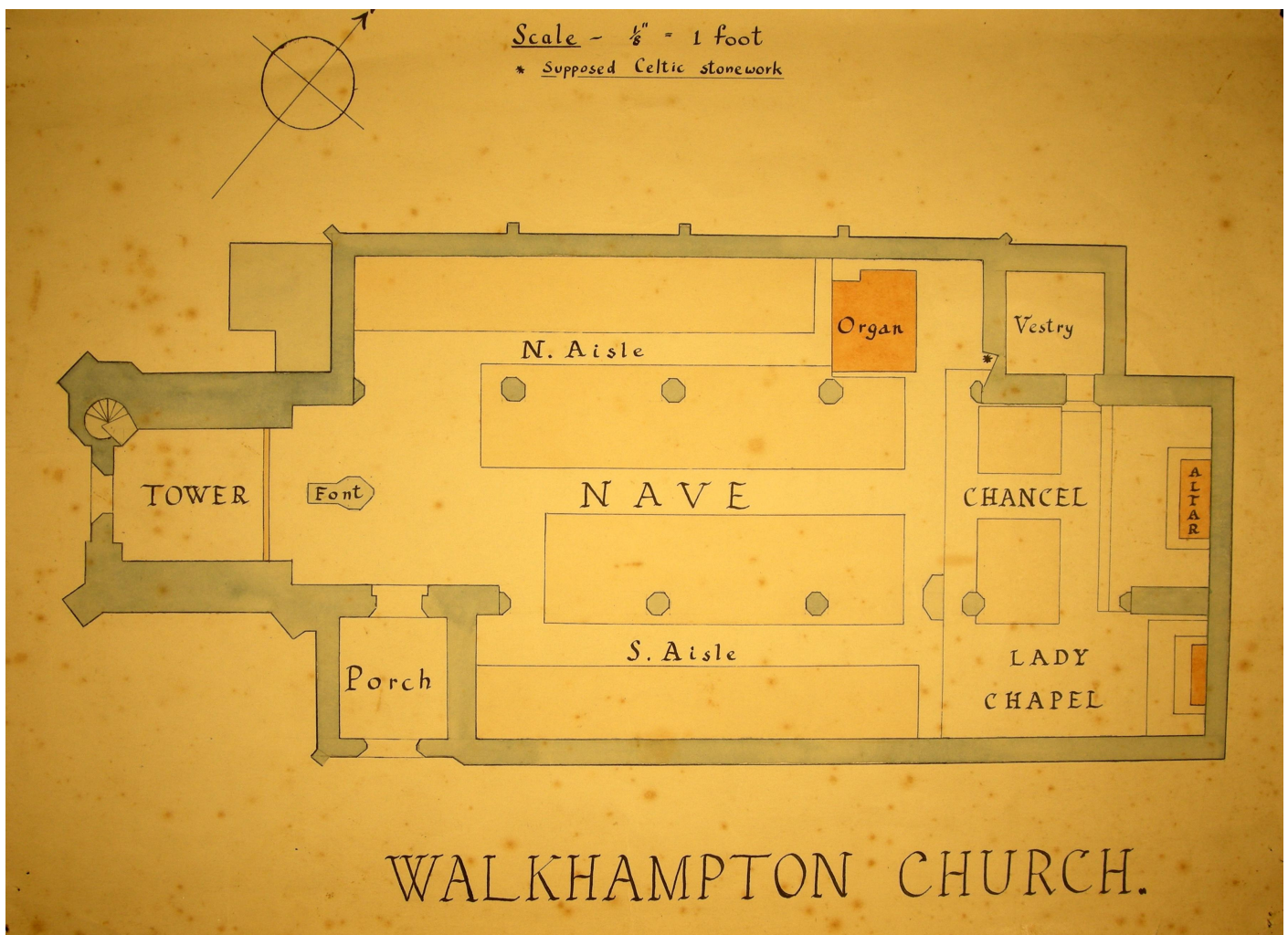
In 1342 the Visitation of the Archdeacon of Totnes notes that "The Matins books are incomplete and worn out. The chancel is mean and needs rebuilding". The abbots of Buckland remained the patrons until the dissolution of the larger monasteries in 1539. The church reverted to the Crown until 1546 when the manor and advowson were purchased by John Slanning of Plympton. Lady Modyford was the last of the Slanning family to inherit the manor, which passed on her death to her daughter Grace and hence to the Heywood family. In 1798 the estates were sold to Sir Manasseh Massey Lopes of Maristow, and by inheritance, passed to the present-day Roborough family.

**THE EXTERIOR:** Built mainly of granite, the church is wholly Perpendicular in style. The 85 feet high embattled tower is large and out of all proportion to the rest of the church. It rises in three stages with buttresses set square, and is completed by four crocketed pinnacles on octagonal bases, surmounted by crosses. The tower forms one of a group of three very similar in style, the others being Bickleigh and Buckland Monachorum, the connecting factor being the common patronage of Buckland Abbey. The west door and window are worthy of note, as is a gargoyle spout-head above, just below the parapet table. Its long neck ensures that those underneath get a good drenching in wet weather. The large amount of dressed granite, especially in the lower stage and the upper corners, is thought to be early 19th century, as a "begging letter" of 1813 speaks of its ruinous, even dangerous condition. A 1541 shilling was found under the west door slab in 1907 and may indicate the date of completion of the present tower. The NE pinnacle was destroyed by lightning in April 1889 and the roof of the west end of the nave was entirely demolished by the fall. A new pinnacle was commissioned and the damage was soon repaired. The tower was re-pointed and treated with water repellent in 1965 and steel bracing added to strengthen the pinnacles.

Of the present building the oldest parts are the chancel and inner wall of the porch which are thought to be 14th century. Little evidence now remains of the earlier churches, the first, possibly founded by the year 1000, was

probably built of wood. The north aisle and porch date from 1450 and the tower a little later. By 1550 the south aisle had been added, along with a second row of pillars. The parish church account book shows that £238 was spent in 1819 on repairs and a further £100 for "un-roofing and new timbering the south aisle". The vestry was built in 1832. In 1860 a major restoration took place, costing over £750, under the watchful eye of Thomas May of Stonehouse (who was "Superintendent of all the works"). Messrs William Fuge and James Chapple were the masons and John Cowling the carpenter. The church was completely re-roofed with Delabole slate in 1930.

The outer doorway of the south porch is square headed. Inside is a pointed arch above which are traces of the earlier 14th century archway. The porch has a cradle roof with plaster and purloins. Earlier this century, during restoration work to the porch, a stove and flue was found. This stove was most likely used for kindling the Easter light on Holy Saturday. Sadly it has now been blocked up again. Note the oil burning lantern that has now been converted to electricity.



**THE INTERIOR:** In 1755 Dean Milles wrote, "There is nothing observable on ye inside of the church". Since then the interior has become even plainer, for gone are the plaster coverings to the walls, with sentences from the Scriptures painted on them, the Royal Coat of Arms and the Ten Commandments painted on a wooden board. Gone also is the singing gallery for the choir and orchestra (consisting of flute, violin, base viol and clarinet), a sounding board over the pulpit and, according to a document of 1727, "The passage into the chancel". Most of these went in the 1860 restoration. Evidence suggests that the church also had a rood-screen, common to most Devonshire churches. Electricity was installed in 1934 and the church was re-wired in 1962.

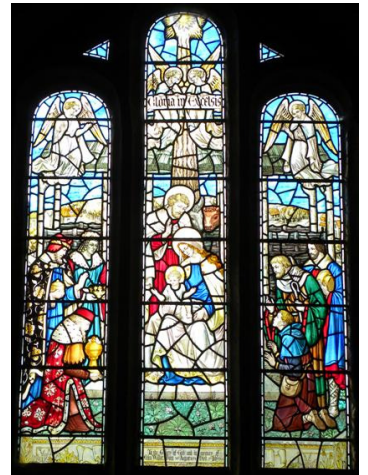
The north and south aisles vary widely in detail, and as is very common on the moor, the details of the capitals and bases of the piers supporting the arcades also differ. The southern half of the church is better built, in finer material and with more attention to detail, than the northern half. The north aisle pillars are made from Roborough Stone while those in the south aisle are of granite save for the easternmost arch which is also of Roborough Stone. Was a north pillar moved during rebuilding? The wagon roofs are very plain and date from the late nineteenth century. The chancel was 'embellished' in memory of Lady Lopes in 1872.



**FONT:** Perpendicular in style, the octagonal font is made from Roborough stone. The shields carved on the panels of the bowl are similar to those found at Sampford Spiney and Sheepstor. The shaft is decorated with niches, and after being repaired at some time in the past, has been replaced upside-down so that the trefoil heads are now reversed.

**FURNITURE:** The pews all date from the restoration of 1860. The font cover, pulpit (1903-5), reredos, reading desk and choir stalls were all made by the Rev. Charles H. Walker who was our longest serving vicar from 1863 until his death in 1909.

**STAINED GLASS:** The window behind the altar is dedicated to the Rev Charles Walker and his wife, Emily Jane. It was completed in 1921 at a cost of £300 by H. Hughes of London. The window in the Lady Chapel, dedicated to the memory of Charlotte Anne Slessor (1794-1871), is also by Hughes and was moved from its original place in the East window. Next is the Erica Walker window (1874-1946) made by an unknown hand in 1950. The



fourth window is a fine example of James Paterson's work, commissioned in 1954, to the memory of William Thomas Down. The theme is "*Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden*". All the other windows are filled with "tinted Cathedral glass" paid for by Sir Massey Lopes in 1890.



**THE ORGAN:** Dated 1875, the organ was made by Hele & Co, Plymouth. It was enlarged in 1897 and again in 1914 when a dulcimer stop was added. It once stood where the Lady Chapel is but was moved to its present position in April 1922.

**SQUINT:** Behind the organ is a niche which is thought to have been a squint (an opening through which the altar could be seen) although it has also been suggested that it might well have been part of a staircase leading to the rood-loft. Beneath it is a 15th century piscina (sink or drain), beside which are two supposedly ancient stones, whose purpose is uncertain.

**HEATING SYSTEM:** In 1892 "*new apparatus for heating the church by hot water*" was installed at a cost of £50. The original Late Victorian central heating radiators may still be seen. Over the years various boilers have been used and today oil is used.

**IRON CHEST:** Dated 1842, it stands at the west end of the nave, by the bell tower. It once housed numerous church records including nearly 200 Apprentice Indentures. These are now all safely protected in the West Devon Record Office.

**LADY CHAPEL:** Dedicated in 1921. Some of the original 18th century plaster can still be seen.

**KNEELERS:** Starting in 1993, new kneelers are being made by the parishioners using local themes in their designs.



**TOWER ARCH:** The tower-arch is lofty, resting upon brackets that are ornamented with corbelled heads of a king and queen, the former with parted beard, characteristic (it is said) of King Henry IV (1399-1413) but the dates seem a little too early for the tower. Other suggestions have included Amicia, Countess of Devon,, and the Slanning family who became patrons of the church in 1545. The small wooden doorway leads to the top of the tower.



**CHURCH PLATE:** Now kept in a bank vault, the earliest pieces are an Elizabethan paten and a baluster stem chalice cup inscribed "Walkhampton Bole 1670". Sir Massey Lopes presented a chalice, paten and flagon in 1844, and in 1962 a chalice was presented by E.J. Pizey and a chalice and paten by the Rev G. Braund (the vicar's son).

The brass candlesticks on the altar were given in 1901. The oak processional cross, made by Jim Andrews of Huckworthy Bridge, was acquired in 1954.



**VESTRY:** Added in 1832, it was designed and built by Mr D.A. Alexander, the architect of the original Princetown Prison, in memory of his son William Alexander.

**THE BELLS:** The bells are first mentioned in 1553. There are six bells in total, numbers 1 to 4 dated 1764 and numbers 5 and 6 1769. All were cast by Pennington of Stoke Climsland. A visiting ringer cracked the number 2 bell in 1957 and this had to be recast. The total weight of the bells is 30.5 cwt.

**CHURCH REGISTER:** Baptisms 1674-1857; Marriages 1675-1983; Burials 1676-1894. Now kept in the West Devon Record Office, Clare Place, Coxside, Plymouth, PL4 0JW.



**GRAVEYARD:** The original graveyard was small, stretching from the Church-House to the path in front of the bell tower. In 1873 it was extended and in 1898 sixty trees were planted round the church-yard in commemoration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. It was extended again in 1927 by a gift of land from Mr T. Gill of Ward House. £70 was raised for walling it. In 1994 further land was purchased to extend the graveyard southwards. There are over 700 people buried in 400 graves. The oldest memorial stone is dated 1652. The most common names are Creber (51), Giles (38), Pearse (19) and Worth (18). 18 people are aged 90 and over while 102 are aged between 80 and 89. The youngest to be buried was only one day old and 18 were under one year of age. The oldest person was 99.

**ELBOW LANE:** Probably constructed in 1683 by the parson, Thomas Bowen, whose initials can be seen carved on a stone now set into the wall but once part of the stile by Church steps. Even in 1840 this "dog leg" path was still known as "the New Church Road".

## LIST OF INCUMBENTS

### RECTORS

1258	Elyas de Hertforde
1276	James de Mohun
1297	William de Ayleston
130?	Sir Walter

### VICARS

1311	Sir Walter
1328	Sir Umfrey de Piltone
1328	Sir Simon Germyans ( <i>died</i> )
1334	Sir Jordan de Trevelyn (died of the plague?)
1349	Sir Ralph Sema ( <i>to Buckland Monachorum</i> )
1349	Sir Adam Thome
1361	Sir Robert Sampson ( <i>died</i> )
1374	John Lange ( <i>died</i> )
1406	William Tregodok
14??	Richard Stote ( <i>died</i> )
1470	John Billock or Byllek
1???	John Osbourne ( <i>died</i> )
1514	John Jordayn ( <i>died</i> )
1516	William Colles ( <i>died</i> )
1546	Thomas Harris
1554	John Rogers
1556	John Berry ( <i>died</i> )
1596	Gregory Newman ( <i>died</i> )
1625	John Cowbridge ( <i>died</i> )
1642	Hugh Elford ( <i>died</i> )
1644	Charles Meeth
1659	John May ( <i>resigned</i> )
1662	Thomas Hake ( <i>died</i> )
1675	Charles Pyper ( <i>resigned</i> )
1683	Thomas Bowen ( <i>died</i> )
1697	Thomas Preston ( <i>died</i> )
1713	William Gee
1739	Edmund Herring ( <i>died</i> )
1766	John Marshall ( <i>resigned</i> )
1774	Amos Crymes, junior ( <i>died</i> )
1781	George Jope ( <i>resigned</i> )

1792	Richard Hughes ( <i>died</i> )	
[later Sir Richard Hughes, Bart]		
1833	George Richards ( <i>resigned</i> )	
[Curate 1829-1842 Daniel Alexander]		
1842	David Smith Stone ( <i>resigned</i> )	
1863	Charles Henry Walker ( <i>died</i> )	VICAR FOR 45

### YEARS

1909	Robert H. Lucas ( <i>resigned</i> )	
1925	William Gabriel Harris ( <i>resigned</i> )	
1927	Herbert Moyle Harvey ( <i>resigned</i> )	
1931	Edward John Pizey ( <i>resigned</i> )	
1946	Sidney Richards ( <i>resigned</i> )	
1950	Basil Kelly Braund	
<b>1970</b>	<b>Edwin Adrian Barrell (<i>resigned</i>)</b>	<b>THE LAST</b>

### VICAR

### PRIESTS IN CHARGE

1979	Rev C. Warland
1983	Julian Metherell Davey (with Meavy & Sheepstor)
1986	George Smith (vicar of Milton Abbot)
1986	Terry Freeman (vicar of Horrabridge)

In September 1987 Walkhampton became part of The United Benefice of Yelverton, Meavy, Sheepstor and Walkhampton

### TEAM RECTORS AND VICARS

1987	John Ellis (team rector) ( <i>retired</i> )
1987	Geoffrey Ball (team vicar)
1989 Nov	Graham Witts (team rector)
	Geoffrey Ball (team vicar)
1992 Mar	Michael Leverton (team vicar)
1994 Mar	Richard Tebbs (team rector) ( <i>moved 2008</i> )
	Michael Leverton (team vicar)
1994	Rev Nick Shutt (curate)
2008 Aug	Interregnum
2009	Rev'd Preb Nick Shutt (team rector)